DIAGNOSTIC TOOLS FOR IMPROVING EDUCATION POLICY PLANNING:
A CASE STUDY ON DROPOUTS IN EARLY SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CAMBODIA

Chankoulika Bo, Dara Kim,
Chetra Khieu, Sophal Souk,
Linda Seang, Huyteang Meng,
Rano Koembo
ABOUT NORRAG

NORRAG is a global membership-based network of international policies and cooperation in education and training. In 1977 the Research Review and Advisory Group (RRAG) was established, which then founded several regional RRAGs, one of which became NORRAG in 1986. NORRAG’s core mandate and strength are to produce, disseminate and broker critical knowledge and to build capacity for and with academia, governments, NGOs, international organizations, foundations and the private sector who inform and shape education policies and practice, at national and international levels. By doing so, NORRAG contributes to creating the conditions for more participatory, evidence-informed decisions that improve equal access to and quality of education and training.

NORRAG is an associate programme of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva. More information about NORRAG, including its scope of work and thematic areas, is available at www.norrag.org

ABOUT THE KIX EAP HUB

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) is a joint endeavour with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to connect expertise, innovation, and knowledge to help GPE partner countries build stronger education systems and accelerate progress toward SDG 4. There are globally four KIX hubs or Regional Learning Partners, overseen by IDRC. The hub functions as a regional forum within KIX. NORRAG (Network for International Policies and Cooperation in Education and Training) is the Regional Learning Partner for the KIX Europe Asia Pacific (EAP) hub.

The KIX EAP hub facilitates cross-country knowledge and innovation exchange and mobilisation, learning synthesis, and collaboration among national education stakeholders in 21 GPE partner countries in the EAP region. The hub also offers opportunities for peer learning and exchange by means of professional development and inter-country visits.

ABOUT UNESCO INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING (IIEP)

Established in 1963 within UNESCO, the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) develops and strengthens the capacities of educational planners and managers through professional development programmes, technical cooperation, policy research, and knowledge sharing. IIEP’s vision is rooted in the understanding that education is a basic human right and thus, its mission consists of contributing to the expansion of quality education, to provide equitable and relevant learning opportunities to all.

ABOUT THE KIX EAP LEARNING CYCLES

The KIX EAP Learning Cycles are professional development courses offered to national education experts from 21 GPE partner countries in the Europe | Asia | Pacific (EAP) region. Teams of national experts analyse, contextualise, and produce new knowledge on policy analysis and innovations. These professional development courses allow participants to share experiences, exchange knowledge, and contribute to the strengthening of their national education systems. The learning cycles are also an opportunity for national experts to publish their studies and findings internationally, and disseminate them on diverse online platforms, with support from the KIX EAP hub.

ABOUT THE LEARNING CYCLE ON DIAGNOSTIC TOOLS FOR IMPROVING EDUCATION POLICY PLANNING

This case study is a result of the KIX EAP Learning Cycle “Diagnostic tools for improving education policy planning”. Facilitated by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), this professional development course ran from 20 September to 11 November 2022. Across 8 weeks, this Learning Cycle enabled participants to identify system bottlenecks for improving education policy planning, with a special focus on the use of diagnostic tools for system performance analysis. 14 national teams from 13 countries took part in this Learning Cycle: Cambodia, Georgia, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Maldives, Moldova, Mongolia, Pakistan (Balochistan), Pakistan (Sindh), Papua New Guinea, Sudan, Tajikistan, Timor Leste and Yemen.
A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON THE AUTHORS

Dr BO Chankoulika is the Director of the Policy Department, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of Cambodia. She earned her PhD in Education from Flinders University in Australia. As the director, she leads and manages educational research projects and turns research results to inform education policies. She has successfully led the formulation of critical education policies for improving education quality in Cambodia. She is actively involved in the process of transforming Cambodia’s education system. Currently, she is leading the development process of a Digital Education Strategy for schools to build a next-generation technology-enhanced learning ecosystem for Cambodia. She has also led and managed Cambodian Education Review (CER), a journal by the Education Research Council (ERC), MoEYS. She has been a researcher and lecturer of various subjects such as public policy, education policy, public administrative reform and research.

Mr Kim Dara has over two decades of experience in Cambodia’s education sector. In 2010, he became a senior technical advisor for the leadership and management component of the US government-funded Improved Basic Education in Cambodia (IBEC) project. He provided leadership and management training to more than 500 school administrators, specifically to build their skills in and knowledge on instructional leadership, school governance and change management practices. From 2012, Dara has held a country director position to oversee the general operations of World Education Cambodia. He has an MA in educational administration from Michigan State University and an MBA from a university in Cambodia.

Mr Khieu Chetra is currently Executive Director of the NGO Education Partnership (NEP), a coalition of 144 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the education sector. He holds a master’s degree in Development Management in Phnom Penh. He is a programme management professional with a project portfolio of nearly two decades of extensive experience in child protection, disability and education. He was the Operation Director of a local NGO in which he managed non-formal education, disability, safe migration and child protection projects. He also worked as the Coordinator of the Partnership Program for the Protection of Children (3PC), empowered by Friends-International and supported by UNICEF. He believes in strong collaborative work to achieve the ultimate goal.

Ms Souk Sophal is a deputy at the head office of Research and Policy Analysis of the Policy Department of MoEYS. She is also a PhD student in Economics at Delhi University. She earned a master’s degree in Mathematics from the Royal University of Phnom Penh in 2009 and one in Economic Development from Ho Chi Minh City University in 2014. She was a junior researcher at the Education Research Council from 2017 to 2019. Her latest research is the under-representation of women in leadership and management in upper secondary schools in Cambodia and a review of the local life skill programme and the role of student councils in programme implementation.

Ms Seang Linda is currently an official of the Department of Policy, MoEYS. In her role, she is responsible for conducting research in gender and STEM in general education. She is also involved in other research projects related to teaching and learning. Recently, she has been involved in the research project on “Teacher Professional Identity: What Makes a Good Teacher?” She also works as an associate editor of the peer review journal Cambodia Education Review (CER), which is run by MoEYS. She facilitates and edits the research manuscripts submitted for publishing in CER.
Ms Meng Huyteang is the Deputy Head of the Office of Strategic Planning, Department of Planning, MoEYS. She was the master scholarship winner from the Republic of Korea, and currently, she is a PhD student at the Royal University of Phnom Penh. She is involved in various research papers, journals and magazines, including SEAMEO Journal’s 2020 Special Issue on ‘Maximising Learning: Education Responses during the COVID-19 Crisis and Beyond’, SEA Mag and the Institute Agama Islam Negeri Ponorogo journal.

Mr Koembo Rano is an official at the Department of Planning, MoEYS. He holds a bachelor’s degree in International Relations from the Royal University of Phnom Penh and in Accounting from the University of Economic and Finance. In early 2022, he graduated from the Royal School of Administration, specialising in Economics and Finance. He is also a former research official at the Securities and Exchange Regulator of Cambodia. He is currently interested in education policy and planning, which contribute to his daily tasks.
Factors Affecting Dropout at the Lower Secondary Education Level in Cambodia Using the IIEP Policy Tree

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Examining Level Completion
Constraints of the Education System
Teacher-Related Constraints
  Teacher Behaviour
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  School Violence
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  Addressing School Violence
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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuous professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOEYS</td>
<td>District Office of Education, Youth and Sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOP</td>
<td>Department of Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMIS</td>
<td>Education Management Information System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIEP</td>
<td>International Institute for Educational Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoEYS</td>
<td>Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport</td>
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<td>NEP</td>
<td>NGO for Education Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUI</td>
<td>Open University Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POEYS</td>
<td>Provincial Office of Education, Youth and Sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESET</td>
<td>Pre-service training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SABER</td>
<td>Systems Approach for Better Education Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEC</td>
<td>Teacher education college</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The final product of this report would not have been achieved without the following valuable contributions and collaborations from all the people who actively participated. The Cambodian team would like to convey gratitude and appreciation to all those who have contributed to this report.

First, we the team would like to express our deepest gratitude to Dr Amélie A. Gagnon and Dr Carolina Alban Conto, who have helped us throughout the course as well as provided us with an extensive experience in applied policy research with the fruitful knowledge of identifying system bottlenecks for improved education policy planning, with a special focus on the use of diagnostic tools for system performance analysis.

Next, our sincere gratitude goes to Ms Yeonju An and Ms Anaka Harish Ganesh, who provided us with the necessary support and facilitated our full participation in the course. We could not have taken part in this wonderful course and benefited from it without the generous welcome from the KIX EAP Hub Team.

Lastly, we are deeply indebted to the Department of Policy; the Department of Planning of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS); the NGO Education Partnership; and World Education, where we are working, for giving us the time and necessary support to complete the course successfully.
Introduction

Cambodia’s lower secondary school completion rate has shown only a very slight increase since the beginning of the 2019 Education Sector Plan (ESP) implementation. Likewise, the dropout rate has been on the rise, reaching 18.6%, 3.2 percentage points above the baseline. Therefore, school dropout was identified as the most significant and applicable interest of analysis to the country, specifically at the lower secondary education level in the administrative area, Sihanoukville in Preah Sihanouk Province, where the dropout rate was the highest in the 2019–2020 school year in Cambodia, at 36.3%. The 2019–2020 ESP and the MoEYS (2018) report produced prior to the Learning Cycle served as relied-upon data sources to address the issue.

Data Availability

Data on the completion rate and the dropout rate at the lower secondary educational level were analysed and disaggregated by province to compare the 2017/2018, 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 cohorts as well as by gender. Data collected through various means were used, including the grade 3 assessment (2006), the PETS survey (2004), which was a small-scale research survey conducted by a group of teacher educators in a school in Kandal province, and a research study by the NGO Education Partnership (NEP), to examine the constraints and challenges related to the topic. In addition, a variety of qualitative research papers were used to investigate the issue.

Examining Level Completion

Using the available data, including repetition rate, teaching hours, dropout rate by gender, loss of school days and the education level of teaching staff, among others, indicators related to levels 1 and 2 of the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) Education Policy Trees were identified and examined. Based on the analysis, pathways through the decision trees were selected to reflect the different constraints of the education system, and potential root causes were identified, as follows:

(i) Teacher-related constraints:

- Limited instructional contact hours between teachers/students
- Low teaching skills (24.2% with a bachelor's degree and 1.5% with a master's degree at the national level)

(ii) School and family-related factors:

- Children forced into the workforce (especially in rural areas)
- High internal migration
- Grade repetition
- School violence (85.7% of young people aged between 15 and 25 years old faced school violence)

Potential Policy Options

Potential policy options promising to address the constraints uncovered by the analysis were identified. One option could be to strengthen the school support committee by involving the parents and the community in setting up a warning system to prevent dropout and hiring social workers at school to provide counselling to families and teachers. Additionally, in response to the teacher-related constraints, a recommendation was put forth to use the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) framework to analyse the Cambodia Teacher Policy Action Plan, to promote continuous professional development (CPD), to strengthen the implementation of Teacher Professional Standards at schools and to continue with teacher education through the development of the 1 TEC approach, strengthening PRESET and upgrading academic qualifications and pedagogical skills. In the face of socioeconomic issues, a final suggestion was given to provide scholarships to children and connecting parents to social support (cash transfer).

In the end, policy options were prioritised to focus specifically on the issue of school violence. Policy options that could have the potential to make direct changes regarding the dropout/push-out issue of the country are as follows: (a) adopt strict forms of punishment and specific discipline; (b) build a school violence reporting mechanism; (c) create a bullying prevention committee to share data/evidence with students, parents and school personnel and (d) display posters and/or signs about the punishment for bullying at school.
Introduction

This knowledge report aims to analyse the root causes of dropout at the lower secondary level in Cambodia using the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO IIEP) policy tree1. Based on a study of the low completion rates in primary and lower secondary schools conducted by the Department of Policy, MoEYS, in 2019, the high dropout rate, of 50.56%, accounts for the low completion rate. The study identifies other key factors that contribute to low completion rates, such as dropout mobilisation, repetition, average, poverty, ethnicity and disability (Department of Policy, 2019).

Therefore, school dropout was identified as the most significant and applicable interest of analysis to the country, specifically the lower secondary education level in the administrative area, Sihanoukville in Preah Sihanouk Province, where the dropout rate was the highest in the 2019–2020 school year in Cambodia, at 36.3% (see Figure 1 below). The critical analysis of dropout is more significant and applicable to Cambodia’s current challenging situation.

The completion rate for lower secondary schools registered only a very small increase since the beginning of the Education Sector Plan (ESP) implementation. In three years, it has advanced just 1.6 percentage points, to settle at 48.1%. In other words, less than one in two young people aged up to five years above the intended age group for lower secondary complete this cycle. As with other secondary education indicators, female students present higher completion rates than their male peers. The gap between these two groups is 10.3 percentage points. The gap has increased since 2017/18. As of 2020/21, the completion rate of boys reached just 43.1%. One of the possible factors affecting completion and survival rates is the early dropout of students in lower secondary schools.

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1 A PowerPoint application that facilitates discussion among education planners to prioritise issues to include in the education sector plan (ESP) design based on challenges identified in a sector analysis

Figure 1. Dropout Rate in Lower Secondary Education by Province

Source: MoEYS (2022, p. 35)
Despite the crucial strides achieved in the second half of the previous ESP, dropout is again on the rise. By 2019/20, the rate had reached 18.6%, 3.2 percentage points above the baseline. Although both boys and girls suffered losses, young boys continue to abandon lower secondary school in a higher proportion than young girls, registering a dropout rate of 20% in 2019/20 and 19.2% in 2020/21 (MoEYS, 2022). The dropout data are collected and calculated by the Education Management Information System (EMIS) Department.

However, the dropout data often differ at different levels because the population data are usually reported differently among the Provincial Office of Education, Youth and Sport (POEYS) and the District Office of Education, Youth and Sport (DOEYS) schools and villages. Data integrity is a large problem in Cambodia although much investment has been put in place to improve the EMIS. It is also important to note that most departments in MoEYS have a planning section responsible for collecting data directly from the Provincial Education Department and other relevant sources. Most key data collections in MoEYS include the Annual School Census by the EMIS Department; the Planning Department’s bi-annual data collection by the Personnel and Finance Department; and the tri-annual data collection conducted by the Planning Department, Primary Education Department, Secondary Education Department, Early Childhood Education Department and Non-formal Education Department.

Examining Level Completion

Using the available data, including repetition rate, teaching hours, dropout rate by gender, loss of school days and the education level of teaching staff, among others, indicators related to levels 1 and 2 of the IIEP Education Policy Trees were identified and examined. Based on the analysis, pathways through the decision trees were developed to reflect different constraints of the education system (see Figure 2 below).

Constraints of the Education System

The decision tree process identified potential root causes affecting the education system in Cambodia. Those constraints need to be re-examined, and a solution must be found to deal with them.

Teacher-Related Constraints

Teacher Behaviour. An unpublished small-scale research survey in the Kandal province conducted by a group of teacher educators to examine the factors impacting dropout in a school showed that teacher behaviour and teaching performance influenced the dropout rate. The study showed that when teachers blamed students in class, those students felt ashamed and dropped out. Teachers play a critical role in the learning process, and their classroom behaviour is an essential dimension in a student's educational experience. Some of the challenges teachers face in the school environment in which they operate include poor infrastructure, lack of teaching aids, crowded classrooms and geographical isolation. However, effective teachers can make a difference in students’ lives even under challenging circumstances, such as good teaching practices related to class preparation, assigning homework and classroom management. Also, in the data collected through the grade 3 assessment in 2006, teachers reported working approximately 30 hours per week, mainly in classroom teaching (Benveniste et al., 2008). These estimates roughly concur with the data collected in primary schools in the PETS 2004 survey. In this case, an average teacher reported spending 8.2 hours per week in class preparation and planning and other administrative duties (with a median of 7 hours).

Teacher Absenteeism. A research study by NEP found that at least 50 days of the 186 total days per academic year are lost for various reasons. The findings showed that too much of
the school year is lost in Cambodia through additional official school holidays, teacher absences and decreased contact 
hours due to shortened teaching sessions. International 
research clearly shows that the classroom teacher has the 
most impact and influence on student learning outcomes at 
the school level (Obilor, 2019).

In Cambodia and similar countries, qualified substitute 
teachers are rarely available, and their absence implies a 
significant loss. Students not only miss out on an opportunity to 
learn, but time is also taken away from engaging in productive 
activities at home. The loss of school days because of teacher 
absenteeism further compounds the existing challenges 
posed by a short school day. Limited instructional contact 
hours constrain opportunities for academic achievement. 
Perhaps more importantly, repeated non-attendance reflects poorly on a school’s reputation, deems the intrinsic 
value of education in the eyes of the community and may 
induce student absenteeism. Teacher absences appear to be negatively correlated with student performance in 
mathematics and language tests, albeit these correlations 
are minimal. Nonetheless, it is worth highlighting that loss of instructional time appears to have negative consequences on 
student learning (MoEYS, 2018).

**Teacher Skills.** Principals and teachers are the two main 
actors in the education system who can positively impact 
students’ outcomes. Presently, the challenge in the education 
field is teachers’ lack of competency. Lack of pedagogy and 
lack of teaching method are the main inhibiting factors in 
transmitting knowledge to students. A mid-term review report in 
2021 indicated a high percentage of students performing ‘below the basic proficiency level’.

Moreover, based on the EMIS, in 2019 the education levels of 
teaching staff were as follows: 1.8% had received only primary 
education, 18.4% had obtained lower secondary education 
and 54.2% had attended an upper secondary school. This 
low-level education of teaching staff undoubtedly affects the 
quality of education and increases dropout.

### Table 1. Education Levels of Teaching Staff (National, Rural and Urban)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>LS (18.4%)</th>
<th>US (54.2%)</th>
<th>Bachelors (24.2%)</th>
<th>Masters (1.5%)</th>
<th>PhD (0.01%)</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>1,651 (1.8%)</td>
<td>17,217 (18.4%)</td>
<td>50,808 (54.2%)</td>
<td>22,657 (24.2%)</td>
<td>1,377 (1.5%)</td>
<td>10 (0.01%)</td>
<td>93,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>4,062</td>
<td>10,991</td>
<td>7,246</td>
<td>803</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>1,263</td>
<td>1,315</td>
<td>39,817</td>
<td>15,411</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>70,226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2. Education and Pedagogical Training of School Staff by Province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Education Level of Teaching Staff</th>
<th>Education Level of Non-Teaching Staff</th>
<th>Teaching Staff without Pedagogy Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>LS</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banteay Meanchey</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>2,217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battambang</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>913</td>
<td>2,704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kampong Cham</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>1,385</td>
<td>2,441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kampong Chhnang</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>1,581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kampong Speu</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>846</td>
<td>1,772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kampong Thom</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>1,996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kampot</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>799</td>
<td>2,303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandal</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>1,343</td>
<td>2,870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kep</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koh Kong</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>783</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued on page 11
The main challenge in students dropping out is those students’ inability to learn and to perform tasks in school in response to teacher instruction. The lack of knowledge in learning affects students’ attendance in school, and consequently, they decide to drop out. Other related challenges could be the insufficient number of teachers with content mastery and student-centred pedagogical skills, including the following: 1) the subject matter and pedagogical preparation of teachers in pre-service not matching student needs, 2) the low education qualifications of secondary school teachers, 3) few incentives to attract qualified individuals to teaching and motivate good performance and 4) not enough professional development opportunities for teachers and teacher educators to enhance their skills and career development.

**Family-Related Factors**

Along with school-related factors, factors related to family also contribute to student learning outcomes. Traag and Velden (2008) pointed out that success at schools relies not only on differences in students’ characteristics but also on their family backgrounds. This is because family-related factors contribute to student learning and school dropout. Pov (2019) defined family-related factors as socioeconomic status, parental education, parental migration, parental involvement, family structure and child labour. Furthermore, several studies conducted in developing countries have found that children from poorer households are at the highest risk of dropping out of school because they need to be involved in labour work to support the expenses of their families (e.g. Adam et al., 2016; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Branson et al., 2014; Brown & Park, 2002; Chugh, 2011; Filmer, 2000; Hussain et al., 2011; Koepke et al., 2011; Nolan et al., 2013; Petrick, 2014; Quinn, 2013; Tas et al., 2013).

Families in Cambodia spend nearly 9% of their annual family income on education. Employment is chosen over education because this way the children can help support the family. Low-income families need children for the workforce to increase the family income. In traditional family structures in Cambodia, young people are expected to contribute to the household (UNICEF, 2020). In rural areas, farming is the primary revenue source for households, and extra help is needed in rice cultivation. Some children work in the street begging for money, selling goods or scavenging, for example. Students’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Education Level of Teaching Staff</th>
<th>Education Level of Non-Teaching Staff</th>
<th>Teaching Staff without Pedagogy Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>L.Sec.</td>
<td>U.Sec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kratie</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>1,635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mondul Kiri</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otdar Meanchey</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pallin</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phnom Penh</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>1,254</td>
<td>3,330</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preah Sihanouk</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>179</td>
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<td>Preah Vihear</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>312</td>
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<td>Preay Veng</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>1,338</td>
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<td>Pursat</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>632</td>
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<td>Ratanak Kiri</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>774</td>
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<tr>
<td>Siemreap</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>737</td>
<td>3,136</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>901</td>
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<tr>
<td>Svar Rieang</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>1,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takeo</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>3,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tbaung Kmhm</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>2,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Kingdom</td>
<td>2,796</td>
<td>15,594</td>
<td>43,435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Urban Area</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>3,098</td>
<td>9,077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Rural Area</td>
<td>2,165</td>
<td>12,496</td>
<td>34,358</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main challenge in students dropping out is those students’ inability to learn and to perform tasks in school in response to teacher instruction. The lack of knowledge in learning affects students’ attendance in school, and consequently, they decide to drop out. Other related challenges could be the insufficient number of teachers with content mastery and student-centred pedagogical skills, including the following: 1) the subject matter and pedagogical preparation of teachers in pre-service not matching student needs, 2) the low education qualifications of secondary school teachers, 3) few incentives to attract qualified individuals to teaching and motivate good performance and 4) not enough professional development opportunities for teachers and teacher educators to enhance their skills and career development.
frequent school absence can be due to the distance between home and school, prioritising earning money over schooling to assist their family or low academic performance (UNICEF, 2020).

The family situation pushes the whole family, including the child, to migrate to another city or even another country to look for new opportunities. Migration within Cambodia and across national borders can significantly impact the education and employment prospects of those who migrate and their families (UNICEF, 2020). Apart from this, if the parents’ educational level, especially that of the father, is high enough, they are more likely to understand the importance of education and thus send the children to school or support them as much as they can to make sure that the children stay in school. Moreover, if educated, parents can also help their children learn at home, so they can improve and learn better at school. Parents and schoolteachers need to work together on the children’s education, specifically ensuring regular communication between parents and teachers about the learning situation.

The results of Pov (2019) showed that only one family-related factor significantly predicted dropout status for grade 8: parental involvement in their children’s schoolwork. This finding added a new perspective to the dropout literature in Cambodia (e.g. Keng, 2004; No & Hirakawa, 2012; No et al., 2012, 2016) in addition to private tutoring participation. Parental involvement in their children’s schoolwork refers to the time parents spend daily helping their children with their homework. In some research conducted, this participation varied by grade. Parents of grade 8 students tended to be more involved in helping their children learn at home than parents of grade 7 students. Previous studies in Cambodia did not find this factor to significantly influence the odds of dropout or student achievement. Most of these studies indicated parents’ educational level as the main contributing factor to dropout or achievement (e.g. Keng, 2004; No & Hirakawa, 2012).

Over the past decades, a large body of the dropout literature has suggested that the impacts of parental education on dropout rates were exclusively focused, while only a few studies investigated the relationships between parents’ involvement at home and achievement or school dropout incidences. In this regard, the current study’s findings were consistent with those of Alexander et al. (1987), Bridgeland et al. (2006), Nguon (2012) and Rumberger et al. (1980). Parental home-based resourcing, in this case, refers to the time parents spent helping with their children’s school-related work, especially homework. Several studies suggested that parental involvement in home-based activities, such as homework assistance, tended to be lower and appeared to be less significant for pupils at the secondary level (Campbell & Uto, 1994; Ho, 2003; Tam & Chan, 2009; Tett, 2004). These studies’ findings are consistent with those of the current study conducted at the secondary level.

In this regard, student achievement possibly explained how parental involvement in homework supervision decreased the likelihood of dropping out of school. The results showed that there was a significant relationship between parental involvement in homework supervision and achievement ($r = -14, p < .01$). Higher-achieving students have been found to have lower risks of dropping out of school (e.g. Finn et al., 2005; Hardre & Reeve, 2003; Janosz et al., 1997; Jimerson et al., 2000; Lamb et al., 2004; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger & Lamb, 2003; Stearns et al., 2007; Traag & Velden, 2008; Williams et al., 1993). Therefore, the empirical results of this study suggest that regardless of parents’ social backgrounds, their involvement at home is crucial to their children’s academic success and can reduce the probability of children dropping out of school. Parents should consider allocating sufficient time at home to help their children with their school-related work so these students can stay on track.

**School Violence**

According to UNESCO (2019), ‘school violence produces devastating consequences for the victims. Unsafe learning environments not only undermine the quality of education for all learners, negatively impacting pupils’ academic achievement, but they can also lead the victims to drop out of school’. Today, we classify the form of school violence into two types: corporal punishment and bullying.

Firstly, corporal punishment is a common occurrence that happens at every school level. In the context of Cambodia, every parent used to give the teacher the right to punish their child when they misbehave. In Cambodia, there is a saying, ‘When I entrust my child to a teacher, all I ask is to get back the eyes, skin and bones’. According to the education law of 2007, corporal punishment is prohibited under article 35. However, UNICEF (2018) stated that 30.5% of teenagers still receive corporal punishment in poor urban communities.

Secondly, bullying is not a new issue and remains to be addressed. According to stopbullying.gov (2022), ‘Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school-aged children that involve a real or perceived power imbalance’. Bullying has become a serious problem and is a significant concern at every school level. It comes in many forms, including physical bullying, sexual bullying, psychological bullying and cyberbullying (UNESCO, 2019). UNESCO (2019) showed that 8.6% of students received physical bullying, 6.8% psychological bullying, and 18.4% sexual bullying. Other research by UNICEF revealed that 41.8% of adolescents believed that victims of bullying are usually children with physical or learning disabilities. 25.3% of students felt that the bullying happened based on the victims’ socioeconomic background, 17.7% of the incidents on ethnic discrimination and 15.2% on gender discrimination.
Additionally, digitalisation brings cyberbullying into consideration. In total, 85.7% of Cambodians between ages 15 and 25 have faced and/or are currently in danger related to online violence, cyberbullying and digital harassment. Moreover, 68% of parents stated their child experienced inappropriate content, 56% believed that their child would receive negative influences, 47% fear cyberbullying and 34% are concerned about their children's well-being on social media (The ASEAN Post, 2019).
School Environment

According to PISA-D, an inclusive environment is vital for students to feel safe and welcome at school. The students’ sense of belonging also plays a crucial role in measuring an inclusive environment. In total, 93.6% of the students feel that they belong at school, while 11% expressed that they experience feeling lonely at school. Moreover, principals and teachers are important stakeholders in creating a positive climate at school. From the principals’ perspective, 93.2% of students in school whose principals agreed or strongly agreed that more special classes are needed for students who lag behind, 88.8% of students who have repeated a grade learn that they must try harder to succeed. The teachers of 15-year-olds, on the other hand, expressed views that were in contrast with the goal of promoting inclusiveness in education. They agreed or strongly agreed that 99% of students with disabilities should be taught in special schools and that 85% of the students who are behind should have been held back or that 98% of students who lag behind should be placed in special classes. All in all, principals and teachers showed positive attitudes towards inclusion. However, several principals and teachers also indicated that grade repetition is needed for students who lag behind, 88.8% of students who have repeated a grade learn that they must try harder to succeed. The teachers of 15-year-olds, on the other hand, expressed views that were in contrast with the goal of promoting inclusiveness in education (PISA-D/2018).

Grade Repetition

When children cannot progress to the next grade academically, they may need to repeat that year. The PISA-D Cambodia report identified that students who repeat a grade are more likely to leave school early and that boys are more likely than girls in Cambodia to repeat a grade (MoEYS, 2018). In the 2018/19 school year in Kratie, for example, 3% of boys in lower secondary school were repeating a grade compared to slightly more than 1% of girls. The statistics are similar to those in Battambang and Phnom Penh. Taniguchi and Hirakawa’s (2016) longitudinal study in Cambodia identified repetition as a key reason for leaving school early as students became disengaged and were old enough to potentially earn a wage. While grade repetition has been linked to an increased likelihood of leaving school early, it is important to note that automatic promotion to the next grade is not necessarily a solution. Researchers found that in India, the policy of automatic promotion, which was used as a policy initiative to combat high numbers of pupils leaving school early, may have further contributed to placing students at increased risk of leaving early. This is because academically unprepared students are less likely to receive the support they require to meet academic expectations. These students fall further behind and can have greater levels of academic frustration. Consequently, they may be at higher risk of leaving school early.

Addressing School Violence

To tackle school violence, specifically school bullying, school personnel and the school itself play a crucial role in ensuring that students at school are free from bullying. Firstly, teachers function as the guides in the classroom and make sure that their students are well behaved. To prevent bullying, teachers should have in place strict punishments and specific disciplinary actions for bullying. They must create a safe and peaceful learning environment and also ensure that not a single student faces bullying. Teachers must take a stand against these actions and not ignore them. Moreover, the teacher should report cases of bullying to the appropriate school committee if the issue is too overwhelming to resolve in class. Secondly, the school staff’s responsibility, especially the principal, is to mentor the team, address bullying incidents in schools and deliver a safe and supportive environment for students. Further, a bullying prevention committee is also helpful when sharing summaries of data/evidence with students, parents and school personnel. Lastly, a supportive network at school is also important in preventing bullying, such as installing cameras at places where incidents are likely to happen. Also, posters or signs detailing the repercussions for bullying should be displayed in schools and communities. All stakeholders, including parents, caregivers and communities in general, should also work collectively to provide and ensure a safe environment for students.
Strengthening the Capacity of the School Management Committee to Support Students’ Learning and Detect Early Signs of Dropout

Parents’ and the community’s participation in children’s education is critical. Building the capacity of the members of the school management committee is important, especially to increase knowledge of school-related policies and setting up an early warning system to prevent dropout from happening. Teachers will then be equipped with the capacity to identify children who are at risk of dropping out. They can provide this information to the school management committee and social workers at school to counsel the family and to identify the key issues that teachers can support them with to help children remain in school. Therefore, MoEYS should invest in the deployment of social workers or collaborate with the Ministry of Social Affairs to send social workers to support the school.

Providing Scholarships and Social Protection

The Government and MoEYS must provide scholarships for living and study expenses to disadvantaged students and connect parents to social support (cash transfer), income generation activities and employability.

Ensuring Teachers’ Accountability for Students’ Learning Outcomes

Policy implementation would ensure that schools and teachers are actively accountable for the students’ learning. The implementation of school-based management may be one of the approaches to reinforcing teachers’ accountability to students’ learning. Robust performance management linked to teacher professional development should be in place in the schools.

Establishing an Early Warning System to Identify Dropout Risk

MoEYS should find better mechanisms that allow teachers, schools and local communities to work together to detect the symptoms leading to dropout among students and take timely actions. A dropout prevention tool kit should be developed and adopted. Using technology for tracking students who are likely to drop out is another option. So far, school information systems (SIS) have been implemented in 265 upper secondary schools, and school tracking systems have been piloted in some schools. These systems store and track all student data and decentralise the job details to assign to all teachers via App/Web. The data in these systems allow teachers and administrators to manage their classrooms and run their schools, respectively. Parents can also easily communicate and monitor their children’s performance real time via the SIS Mobile App. Over 60 categories of reports in compliance with MoEYS’s regulations have been designed to support the schools. There are more functions with which the SIS can support schools, including having real-time data on dropout rates, repetition rates and teacher shortages. MoEYS should scale up the deployment of SIS in primary schools and lower secondary schools or at least in schools that are vulnerable to high rates of dropout.

Ensuring Effective Recruitment and Deployment

In the long term, MoEYS should have better recruitment policies and strategies to select competent and committed teachers. The teacher development policy must be revised so that competent teachers are deployed in disadvantaged and remote areas.


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