

Experiences of Vocational Education at Community Learning Centers in Cambodia during Covid-19

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Received: April 20, 2022 Accepted: May 22, 2022 Online Published: May 23, 2022

doi:10.5539/hes.v12n3p1 URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v12n3p1>

Abstract

This research aimed to explore the experiences of instructors and learners in vocational education at community learning centers in Cambodia during the pandemic of Covid-19. The samples of this study were instructors and learners who have been involved closely in their academic conduction. The research instrument was the in-depth interview form which was examined by five intellectual experts. The researcher employed the component analysis to analyze the data. The findings of this study revealed the following: Learning conduction of community learning centers in Cambodia during Covid-19 consists of 3 types: 1) Onsite learning management of vocational education, instructors had to limit the number of learners for each class. It was because learners had kept their distance during the educational performance. 2) Distant learning management of vocational education uses online learning platforms such as National Khmer TV, National Khmer Radio, MoEYS Learning Application, and some other social media to conduct education performance. The digital literacy and digital accessibilities were issued and faced for instructors and learners. And 3) On-hand learning management of vocational education, instructors had to find the needs and conduct learning programs for specific targets. In contrast, learners had to integrate learning programs themselves. This study offers several directions to profound implications for future vocational education studies in Cambodia. Furthermore, it may help Cambodia solving the problem of academic conduction, thereby contributing experiences of facilitating and learning to support technical and strategic vocational education for the future development in Cambodia.

Keywords: vocational education, community learning center, Cambodia, experience, Covid-19

1. Introduction

In the context of Sustainable Development Goals, the royal government of Cambodia has a long-term vision to transform Cambodia from an upper-middle-income country by 2030 to a developed country by 2050. To achieve this, it must be fueled by labor forces who have strong technical skills and 21st-century skills to contribute to the effective workforce for every sector of social services (National Policies on Lifelong Learning, 2019). Therefore, Cambodia's vocational education at community learning centers (CLCs) is playing an essential role to build skilled workforces to respond to the needs of the labor market in the ASEAN region and beyond (Cambodia's Education Roadmap, 2019). Notably, CLCs implemented short-term courses of vocational education between 1-4 months, and focus on sectors such as agriculture, construction, motor repairs, and basic food processing (TVET Country Profiles: Cambodia, 2020). As result, vocation education has equally central roles to play in the development of technical skills for employability (Brewer & Comyn, 2015).

However, all educational institutions are currently running abnormally in the presence of Covid-19, which has hit almost every country. In this context of the global epidemic, Cambodia has also ordered lockdowns, including the closure of all educational institutions, such as community learning centers for an indefinite period of time. As an alternative, the government ordered the learning process in the classroom to be conducted from home. This is the impact of Covid-19 which has triggered all teachers and students to turn to online learning models (Syauqi et al, 2020). Therefore, distance learning is one of the main programs in responding, through the directive on distance learning, to a full list of platforms (both online and television) broadcasting. Moreover, the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training has committed to designing the National Technical and Vocational Education

and Training E-Learning platform to access online. This national system was created to address the distance learning or online teaching and learning of trainers, students during a global epidemic of Covid-19 as well as new learning avenues. This national system contains content, lessons, videos, tutorials, e-lessons, self-assessment, general knowledge, and other information related to technical and vocational education and training in Cambodia. more aimed to facilitate a broader and easier vocational education (Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, 2021).

Challengingly, Cambodia's online learning is a new platform for vocational education which teachers and students have to face many difficulties such as digital literacy, the lack of accessibilities for information, communication, and technology, and especially internet connections. As a result, the low internet access and lack of equipment among poor students in rural areas as key impediments for this kind of learning platforms such as remote learning, online learning, or distance learning (ILO-UNESCO-WBG Joint Survey on Technical and Vocational Education and Training and Skills Development during the time of COVID-19, 2020). On the other hand, Amanda Miller (2020) had also defined the additional challenges faced by, Cambodia's vocational education including lack of financial resources and quality assurance, inexperienced trainers, and outdated training methods and equipment (Miller, 2020). Furthermore, many other students could not afford mobile phones or tablets to attend school online for classes of vocational education. And some couldn't even afford the internet connection to access the classes and many of those students effectively dropped out of school. Therefore, it's also expressed concerns that the current situation is likely to lead to increased drop-out rates as some students become demotivated at training online classes of vocational education in Cambodia. As worried, it will effectively risk the future development of Cambodia to achieve national Sustainable Development Goals.

In the period of lockdown, online learning was ordered to conduct the form of distance learning or learning from home in an undermined time. As illustrated, Cambodia's vocational education challenged and experienced a new trend of academic conduction, especially teachers and students of community learning centers have to face experiences of accessing online classes and digital learning platforms. As a result, teachers must switch to online teaching methods, while students must adapt to the online learning environment in a short time. However, vocational education profitably emphasizes not only the mastery of academic knowledge but also practical skills. Therefore, the learning process of vocational education emphasizes significantly that students have to enhance the effectiveness of practical skills and competencies through the development of manual work. Moreover, the domain of the learning process, especially in vocational education, must include cognitive (knowledge), psychomotor (skills), and affective (attitude) for an effective learning outcome of human capital invested in vocational education (Cambodia's Education Roadmap, 2019). However, online learning was experienced to face various challenges for vocational training and its conduction during Covid-19 in Cambodia. As result, it's experienced that the teacher was lower competencies of digital skills in providing mentoring, response, feedback, discussion, and sharing information in online learning. On the other hand, it's also experienced for the students to face the difficulties of digital skills and efforts, errors of internet and digital accessibilities during classroom training which they have to struggle in learning twice to compare with face-to-face classroom (Syauqi et al, 2020).

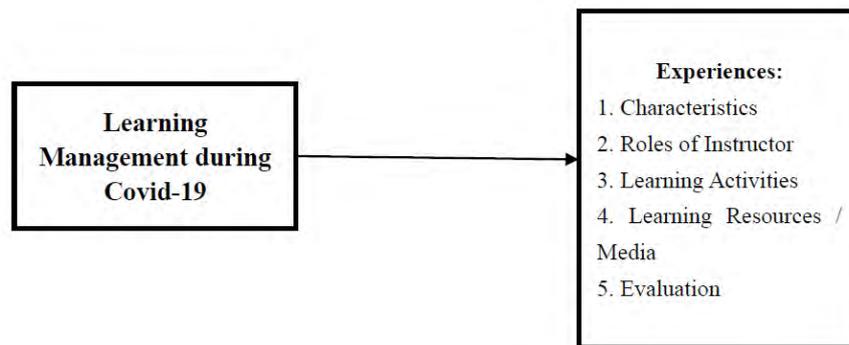
1.1 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of instructors and learners in vocational education at community learning centers in Cambodia during the pandemic of Covid-19.

1.2 Research Questions

The question that guided this research was: 1) how is learning management of vocational education at community learning centers in Cambodia during Covid-19? and 2) what are the experiences of instructors and learners of vocational education at community learning centers in Cambodia during Covid-19?

1.3 Research Framework



2. Method

2.1 Design

The researcher adopted qualitative approach to explore the experiences of vocational education within the Cambodian context during the pandemic of Covid-19.

2.2 Key Informants

The researcher used purposive sampling to select the key informants that represent the whole population. The researcher divided the key informants into two groups which were 1) the instructors who currently conducted learning management with more than three years of experience in teaching and 2) learners who enrolled the course from the academic year of 2019 to 2021. Significantly, all of them were directly involved in teaching and learning at vocational education at community learning centers during the pandemic of Covid-19 in Cambodia.

2.3 Data Collection Tool and the Data Collection Process

In this research study, the researcher employed the in-depth interview which was studied from reviewing literatures and related documents, including Cambodia Covid-19 Development Response Plan and Cambodia Education Response Plan to Covid-19 Pandemic (2020) to collect the data. Furthermore, the evaluation of the research instrument was examined by five experts for the research validity and consistency of the study.

To collect the data, the researcher firstly created a research instrument that was evaluated for the effective validity of this research objectives. Secondly, the researcher targeted and selected the research key informants who were qualified and influenced for this study. Thirdly, the researcher coordinated to appoint the key informants for the in-depth interview. Lastly, the researcher had processed online interviews by using the Zoom application and also the Google Meet. The duration of the interview was 60 minutes of limitation for each, the researcher introduced himself, research objectives, the importance, and outcome of research to the key informants.

2.4 Data Analysis

The exploratory survey data were analyzed several times to follow up on a particular issue, clarify concepts or check the reliability of data from instructors and learners. The researcher conducted the coding for studying the components of learning management consisting of characteristics, the role of instructors, the role of learners, learning activities, learning resources and media, and evaluation.

3. Findings

The research finding revealed three types of learning management at community learning centers in Cambodia during Covid-19, which consisted of 1) onsite learning management, 2) distant learning management, and 3) on-hand learning management which was discussed as follows:

Table 1. Onsite learning management

1. Onsite Learning Management	
Elements of Learning Management	Data Analysis
Characteristics	<p>- The number of learners were limited, not more than 8 learners of each class and they had to keep distant during learning activities. It was not more than 90 minutes for each class.</p> <p><i>"...after Covid-19 pandemic infected, teaching activities were conducted for only 50 percent in classroom and other 50 percent is for learners to practice at home. And learners were increasingly absent and limited only 5 to 8 learners of each class during Covid-19..."</i></p> <p>1st instructor was interviewed on January 17th, 2022</p> <p><i>"...it was hard to learn during Covid-19, I had to keep distant and wear face mask every time and I felt worry to attend classroom which can be infected, we, everyone felt bored and lazy to learn because we had issued with losing jobs and earning during this time..."</i></p> <p>1st learner was interviewed on January 18th, 2022</p>
Roles of Instructor	<p>The instructors had play essential important roles to access learning activities and to support learners as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lecturing, instructors worked as team to give lecture at classroom and support learning activities. 2. Monitoring, team of instructors had monitored and guided learners to respect the movement policies of Safe Operation of School (SOS), it was secured and safe for everyone of classroom. 3. Empowering, learners were empowered and inspired to develop the capacities of self-directed learning and experimental learning which they can indecently learn at home after schooling. <p><i>"...before instructors just only lectured and trained but now after Covid-19 we, instructors had to monitored to guarantee safety to communities and support to empower learners apply self-directed learning rather than classroom learning with instructors..."</i></p> <p>1st instructor on January 17th, 2022</p> <p><i>"...instructors had supported to train learners but we, ourselves, were issued to learn because we had no passion to learn, learners lose their incomes, occupational careers which could not be empower to learn..."</i></p> <p>1st learner on January 18th, 2022</p>
Learning Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lecture based which instructors gave lecture at classroom and the main contents of lessons were only lectured. 2. Self-directed learning and experiential learning which instructors empowered learners to access their self-directed learning and learning from their life experiences after classroom lecturing. <p><i>"...learning and teaching activities were changed, it was decreased for lectured based and teachers-centered but increase learning based and students-centered..."</i></p> <p>1st instructor on January 17th, 2022</p> <p><i>"...learners had to independently learn by themselves rather than learning with instructors, trainers had only explained purposes and main concepts of lessons but learners had to read for self -directed learning after classes..."</i></p> <p>1st learner on January 18th, 2022</p>
Learning Resources / Media	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Printed books were playing essential sources for learning and teaching during Covid-19 in Cambodia. 2. Learning videos were sourced for learners to access self-directed learning and experiential learning at home. <p><i>"...teachers and trainers take pictures of printed books and let learners read for more detials and then summary to submit for thier homework..."</i></p> <p>1st instructor on January 17th, 2022</p> <p><i>"...we learned from printed books and watched videos to understand more after school..."</i></p> <p>1st learner on January 18th, 2022</p>
Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teaching evaluation is checked by school administrators to define useful concepts for classroom activities. 2. Learning evaluation is tested and scored at classroom but it's inspired to support more 25% of full score for learning tests. <p><i>"...after Covid-19, teaching activities were not evaluated strictly, we worked as team to support learning together between teachers and administrators..."</i></p> <p>1st instructor on January 17th, 2022</p> <p><i>"...learners had to submit homework and test was easier than previous, however everyone of learners were supported to pass all test..."</i></p> <p>1st learner on January 18th, 2022</p>

Table 2. Distant learning management

2. Distant Learning Management	
Elements of Learning Management	Data Analysis
Characteristics	<p>1. Online classroom which instructors and learners accessed learning together but learning activities were decreased, it's one hour for each class.</p> <p>2. Digital learning applications and social media were designed for learners to access self-directed learning from videos of lessons, practicing homework and assignment.</p> <p><i>"...distant learning is new environments of learning in Cambodia, it has online and learning applications such as national TV and Radio, MoEYS E-learning, Facebook lived, Youtube etc...."</i></p> <p>2nd instructor on January 17th, 2022</p> <p><i>"...learners faced online learning, they are digital literacy but videos of lessons and practices were helpful to learn at home..."</i></p> <p>2nd learner on January 18th, 2022</p>
Role of Instructor	<p>1. Monitoring, which instructors had to monitor learners to be able to access online learning classroom and lecturing was not applied but the learning discussion was applied for instructors' roles.</p> <p>2. Empowering was playing essential role for instructors to access distant learning; they had to inspire and empower learners to continue learning and learning from digital learning applications.</p> <p><i>"...the role of instructors played to monitor learners to access online learning and empower them to independently learn and not to drop out of school..."</i></p> <p>2nd instructor on January 17th, 2022</p> <p><i>"...my trainers and facilitators supported learning accessibilities and inspired us to continue learning..."</i></p> <p>2nd learner on January 18th, 2022</p>
Learning Activities	<p>1. Learning discussion between instructors and learners were active promoted for online learning.</p> <p>2. Question and answering were significantly applied for online learning activities.</p> <p><i>"...instructors supportively assigned questions and answers related to lessons for online learning..."</i></p> <p>2nd instructor on January 17th, 2022</p> <p><i>"...learners and instructors share and exchange idea and experiences to reflect learning concepts..."</i></p> <p>2nd learner on January 18th, 2022</p>
Learning Resources / Media	<p>1. Digital accessibilities and internet connection were significantly sourced for online learning environments.</p> <p>2. Printed books and videos of lessons were essential resources for distant learning.</p> <p><i>"...printed books and documents, digital devices and internet accessibilities were useful to access online and distant learning during Covid-19..."</i></p> <p>2nd instructor on January 17th, 2022</p> <p><i>"...we access internets and download videos to learn and printed books were to answer the question..."</i></p> <p>2nd learner on January 18th, 2022</p>
Evaluation	<p>1. Teaching evaluation is checked from video recorded of online learning which was supported for team discussion.</p> <p>2. Learning evaluation is scored from learners' homework, and assignments there was no final test but learners' attention was empowered to give extra score for their tests.</p> <p><i>"...teaching and learning evaluations were not regulated but it was motivated and supported to implement learning conduction during this Covid-19..."</i></p> <p>2nd instructor on January 17th, 2022</p> <p><i>"...just submit all homework assignments, no final test but have to attend online classroom regularly then instructors give score to pass..."</i></p> <p>2nd learner on January 18th, 2022</p>

Table 3. On-hand learning management

3. On-Hand Learning Management	
Elements of Learning Management	Data Analysis
Characteristics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning group was proposed and targeted depending on maximizing the needs of local people. 2. Time of learning is scheduled and limited for classroom learning but promote experimental learning from learners' practices. <p><i>"... local people proposed learning program, then instructors and administrators designed organized learning materials and traveled to conduct learning activities in the rural area and local community..."</i> 3rd instructor on January 17th, 2022 <i>"...learning is based experiences and practices rather than theories or concepts understanding..."</i> 3rd learner on January 18th, 2022</p>
Role of Instructor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Traveling from one place to place, instructors had to travel from one place to place where learners were targeted and scheduled. 2. Monitoring, which instructors monitored learning activities and protection and safety of Covid-19 infections during learning activities. 3. Training and empowering, instructors had guided learning-based practices and experiences, and empower local learners commit apply learning concepts to occupational works or lives. <p><i>"...had to travel from one village to one village which to teach targeted groups of local learners..."</i> 3rd instructor on January 17th, 2022 <i>"...my trainer tried to empower us to learn and reflect learning concepts from our experiences and practices..."</i> 3rd learner on January 18th, 2022</p>
Learning Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discussion is active promoted for on-hands learning in local villages, instructors share learning concepts while learners share their experiences. 2. Practice is applied between academic concepts and practical experiences; learners had to learn and practice their learning projects to improve their learning outcome. <p><i>"...learning from experiences were discussed for learners' practices which is significantly applied for classroom activities of on-hands learning..."</i> 3rd instructor on January 17th, 2022 <i>"...we discussed lesson and share experiences then trainers monitor us to practice and do projects of learning..."</i> 3rd learner on January 18th, 2022</p>
Learning Resources / Media	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pictures and related concept written which were important for learners to understand concepts and to see the pictures of concept practiced. 2. The learning materials of practicing were essentially sourced for learners to do their learning based projects and practices. <p><i>"...pictured boards were important sourced which learners can understand and see pictures to follow every steps of practices their learning projects..."</i> 3rd instructor on January 17th, 2022 <i>"...trainers showed pictures and explained the learning concepts and processes of practice..."</i> 3rd learner on January 18th, 2022</p>
Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teaching was evaluated from learning activities and learners' practices toward learning goals. 2. Learning was evaluated to score by checking their learning projects and practices of learning activities. <p><i>"...learning activities were applied to learners' practices, it was important to empower learners to practice their experiences and project related to learning..."</i> by 3rd instructor on January 17th, 2022 <i>"...learning and teaching were not about theories or academic knowledge but it was learning based practiced and experiences..."</i> 3rd learner on January 18th, 2022</p>

4. Conclusions, Discussions and Implications

The researcher was able to conclude and discuss to implicate the research findings of this study as follows:

1. The researcher would conclude that the first finding is onsite learning management of vocational education at community learning centers in Cambodia during Covid-19. Onsite learning management is conducted under policies of the Safe Operation of School (SOS) which instructors and administrators properly regulated to guarantee the safety of their learning community. Therefore, among of learners was limited, and learners had to keep their distance, keep their hands clean, wear face masks all the time and it is less than 90 minutes of class activities. However, adult education was essentially an effective method for vocational education learners who had to strengthen their active learning while teamwork or group discussion was not allowed during the Covid-19 pandemic in Cambodia. Therefore, adult education was a suitable method applied to instruct vocational education learners, because adults are self-directed and problem-centered than subject-centered, internally motivated to learn and they are self-concept to understand the purpose of their learning (Finn, 2011). However, adult learners of vocational education at community learning centers in Cambodia draw from life experiences,

learning how to learn, real-life learning, and self-learning strategies (Bear, 2012). Significantly, instructors and administrators had to train learners how to improve the concepts of adult education, self-directed learning, or andragogy much more than the pedagogical approach.

2. The researcher defined that the second finding is distant learning management of vocational education at a community learning center in Cambodia during Covid-19. Distant learning management is designed and conducted to access online learning platforms in which instructors and learners attend online classroom learning through using digital devices and internet connections such as applications of Zoom, Google classroom, MoEYS E-learning, etc. Moreover, distant learning management is also conducted by using National TV and Radio channels which learners could access learning independently. According to Knowles defined self-directed learning is a "process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help from others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating goals, identifying human and material resources, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (Knowles, 1989). However, digital literacy is still issued and information, communication technology is usually limited and supported to conduct distant learning or online learning in Cambodia. Therefore, it was argued that teachers need to model learning strategies such as predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing so that students will develop the ability to use these strategies on their own (Many, et al., 1996). Notably, distant learning management is taken more time and further developed to access the modern learning platform. It needs financial and technical support from many shareholders locally and internationally to improve the distant learning platform in Cambodia.

3. The researcher concluded the final finding is on-hand learning management of vocational education at community learning centers in Cambodia during Covid-19. On-hand learning management is designed and implemented at local villages where local people proposed the needs of learning and they could available attend learning. The instructors had to travel to meet learners and conduct learning classrooms at local communities outside of community learning centers. On the other hand, learners had to access learning by doing and practicing for their classroom activities which is a kind of collaborative and social learning methodology that allows learners to develop the feelings of group belonging, cohesion, and membership so important to create more responsible and engaged citizens who will develop sustainable social communities (Wales, 2020). Indeed, the roles of the teacher and learners are not traditional at all, and participants are challenged to translate theoretical course content into real-world applications, thus bringing the subject closer to professional practice. Further, this will allow the development of skills that will enable the construction of a more sustainable society (Granado-Alcón, et al., 2020). However, the motivation to learn is still issued for learners and teachers because their occupational and life opportunities, especially incomes were limited and challenged for them during Covid-19.

Recommendations

This study has contributed to the understanding of experiences of vocational education at community learning centers in Cambodia during Covid-19. As the study progressed, a few areas surfaced as suggested areas for future studies. The recommendations are as follows:

1. This study was on instructors and learners of vocational education which was applied to underpinning the Theories of Adult Education. It is reasonably recommended to conduct a similar study, in a few other institutions to examine if these findings still reflect the future study.
2. The finding of this study has shown that digital devices and internet connections were playing an important role to conduct in academic performance in the new era. It is reasoned to recommend enhancing the competencies of digital skills among instructors, learners, and related shareholders.
3. The experiences of vocational education at community learning centers in Cambodia were recommended to apply both academic knowledge and practical knowledge to conduct learning for local people.

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