

Cambodia's Educational System Reform and Development toward Quality and Accessibility of Education

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Abstract: This article provides an overview of Cambodia's educational system, focusing on its historical perspectives, reform efforts, and development. Since 2000, education worldwide has made significant progress with the Global Education Vision 2030 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all. The article states the Royal Government of Cambodia has implemented educational policies and strategies to achieve its Education Vision 2030, focusing on human resources development, schooling quality, and learning outcomes. The article reviews the progress made in rebuilding the education system, which had suffered during political and civil unrest. It traces the evolution of Cambodia's educational system from the French colonial era to the present, highlighting key reforms and developments. The article also discusses the country's commitment to achieving international and national educational goals, specifically the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG4) Education 2030 and Cambodia's Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs) 2030. Despite notable advancements, challenges remain, particularly regarding teacher quality and student access to learning. The article emphasizes the need for significant improvements in teacher qualification and training. Ultimately, this research contributes to the Roadmap for global education modernization by 2030.

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Introduction

Historical Developments

Cambodia's educational system has undergone significant changes and developments throughout history. Early in the 20th century, education was primarily provided by Buddhist monastic schools, where Buddhist monks served as teachers, focusing on memorizing Buddhist chants in the Pali language. However, efforts to modernize education in the 1920s introduced new subjects and established Franco-Khmer public schools to meet the growing need for trained professionals in public administration (Bilodeau et al., 1955).

Following Cambodia's liberation from France in 1953, its education system expanded as primary and lower secondary schools increased. Promoting the Khmer language in public schools was a significant development during the late 1960s as modernized pagoda schools were transformed into public schools (Prudhomme, 1969). However, the education system faced a severe setback during the Khmer Rouge era (1975–1978), with schools shut down and destroyed and teachers targeted and killed, resulting in a significant loss of educational opportunities for the population.

Between 1979 and 1992, after the fall of the Khmer Rouge administration, the Cambodian government reconstructed its educational infrastructure. “Crash Training Courses” have been established to train teachers and educational administrators. Efforts have been made to boost education standards by undertaking curriculum overhauls and changes in teaching methods (Clayton, 1998; Ayers, 2000).

Cambodia has experienced relative stability since 1998, with significant advances in education. The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports (MoEYS) introduced the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2014–2018 and later ESP 2019–2023 to develop human capital and achieve Cambodia's socioeconomic goals (MoEYS, 2014, 2019a).

As Cambodia moves forward, the MoEYS established the Education 2030 Roadmap, aligning with the global Education 2030 agenda and prioritizing teacher training, assessment, and human resource management to maintain and improve the education system (MoEY, 2019a). The vision for Cambodia's schools by 2030 includes becoming learning organizations that provide high-quality education for all students, emphasizing administrative autonomy, accountability, and the professional competence of teachers (MoEYS, 2019a).

There have been significant advancements in the reform and development of Cambodia's educational system for decades, despite the main obstacle for MOEYS, which remains to further develop the educational

system in an approach that substantially stimulates enhancements in educational quality. These remaining concerns about pre-service education and training (PRESET) quality at the teacher training colleges and institutions, which are "the focal points of quality" to obtain more productive secondary education, are necessary. Furthermore, the major concern is early childhood and primary education enrolment and the relatively high dropout rates in secondary education, which must be addressed (MoEYS, 2019a).

Cambodia's Educational System

In 2007, the Education Law was enacted by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), which aims to provide educational personnel with training in pedagogical skills and develop professional criteria for recruiting public and private educational staff to promote quality and efficiency in education (Cambodia National Assembly, 2007). By law, the Cambodian education system establishes boundaries between three levels of education: primary, secondary, and higher education (HE), and two types of education. Higher education comprises technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Therefore, there are three separate sub-sectors: 1) Secondary General Education, 2) TVET, and 3) HE (MoEYS, 2014).

School Administration

In Cambodia, the education system governance serves four hierarchical levels: the national or central level (Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports [MoEYS]), the provincial or municipal level (Provincial Office for Education [POE]), the district or Khan level (District Office for Education [DOE]), and the educational institution level (school). Cambodia's education structure comprises public and private education at the national level to issue regulations on the educational system and educational policy and to monitor and control education systems. PoEs and DoEs implement national policies and guidelines and support schools regarding feedback and monitoring (Cambodia National Assembly, 2007). According to the education law, the educational institution level (schools) is differentiated by three stages of education: primary, secondary education, and HE (Cambodia National Assembly, 2007).

Schooling Systems

Cambodia's official education system functions as preprimary, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, and HE. General education is the foundation for learners to continue their studies and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. The formal education system in Cambodia is a 12-year,

6 + 3 + 3 schooling system (UNESCO, 2004). There must be four years for a bachelor's degree, two years for a master's degree, and three to six years for a doctoral degree in HE. The seven sub-sectors comprise the education system: 1) Early childhood education (ECE); 2) Primary education; 3) Secondary and technical education; 4) Higher education (HE); 5) Non-formal education, including adult and continuing education; 6) Youth development; and 7) Physical education and sports (MoEYS, 2014).

Primary Education

Primary education consists of two phases: Phase one is pre-primary education and phase two is primary education. Preprimary education is free and compulsory and not a part of basic education. There are generally four types of preprimary education in Cambodia: formal preschools (FPS), private preschools (PPS), community preschools (CPS), and home-based education programs (RGC, 2014, pp. 3–4). Typically, children begin official preschooling and CPS at the age of three (UNESCO, 2016). Primary education, or the first phase, is (the 1st Phumaseksar) of education, comprising grades one to six, is the formal education service or the equivalency level of education. Grades one through six constitute the six years of primary education in Cambodia. Generally, children leave primary school at the age of six (UNESCO, 2016).

Secondary Education

Basic education includes free and compulsory primary and lower secondary education. Secondary education, or the second phase is (the 2nd Phumaseksar), which comprises grades 7–12. Secondary education is organized into two phases: Phase 1 is lower secondary school, including grades 7–9, and phase 2 is upper secondary school, comprising grades 10–12 (Cambodia National Assembly, 2007). The three years of study constitute Cambodia's upper secondary school, grades 10–12. The typical entry age for upper secondary school is 15 years, and the typical exit age is 18 years. A national exam gauges educational advancement at the end of grade 12. Upper secondary school is free and compulsory and not part of basic schooling (UNESCO, 2016). In secondary education, students acquire their personality and characteristics by improving their knowledge, skills, and vocational training. They receive morality education to contribute to economic and social development and pursue studying in HE or TVET (Cambodia National Assembly, 2007).

Postsecondary and Higher Education

In Cambodia, students must complete upper secondary school by the age of 18 years to enroll in further education. It takes three to four years to complete a bachelor's degree, two years to obtain a master's degree, and three to five years to complete a doctorate. In contrast, a Bachelor of Medicine takes seven years, a Bachelor of Engineering takes five years, and a Bachelor of Technology takes four years; these are the only exceptions (UNESCO, 2016). Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are divided into two interrelated streams: 1) academics and 2) TVET, which are governed separately. The General Directorate of Higher Education (GDHE) of MoEYS governs the academic stream, while the General Directorate of Technical and Vocational Training of the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (MoLVT) supervises the TVET stream. Therefore, the Department of Higher Education (DHE) oversees associate and undergraduate programs, and the Department of Scientific Research (DSR) manages graduate and postgraduate programs and research (Un & Sok, 2018, pp. 1–2).

Therefore, this article aims to review the reform and development perspectives of Cambodia's educational system toward the quality and accessibility of education. It analyses the historical context, fundamental reforms, and current initiatives in the education sector. The questions need to be addressed as follows:

- What reforms and developments have been implemented to enhance the quality and accessibility of education?
- What are the current challenges and future prospects for Cambodia's educational system?

By addressing these questions, this article desires to provide an extensive comprehension of Cambodia's educational system and insights into its ongoing reform and development.

Methods

This article review focuses on the implementation of reforms and developments to improve education quality and accessibility, as well as the current challenges and future prospects of Cambodia's educational system. This review process consists of four distinct steps: (1) creating the purpose and review questions; (2) reviewing literature through journals and databases using inclusion and exclusion criteria; (3) conducting a selection process that includes title and abstract screening and full text screening; and (4) following review analysis and synthesizing the outcomes.

Data Sources

To answer these two questions, the search approach was used in order to generate adequate potential contributions to the literature review, such as

conceptual articles and policies, from databases like Science Direct and the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS), which focus on Cambodia's educational reforms and developments that have been implemented to enhance the quality and accessibility of education. Furthermore, several review themes and terms were identified to search for relevant studies, including "Cambodia's Educational System" and "Cambodia's Educational System Reform and Development." These themes were searched for in both the article's title and abstract. The search was made with reviews from United Nations agencies like the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), and the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS). The article also reviewed archival documents about Cambodia's educational system, education laws and policies, and education reform and development by the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports (MoEYS), such as the reforms and developments and the current challenges and future prospects for Cambodia's educational system (MoEYS, 2019a).

Search Procedures

The review procedure and selection of contributions adhered to the Cambodia's educational system reform and development; the articles had to meet the following criteria: Peer-reviewed journals, studies, or policies published in English between 1955 and 2021 focused Cambodia's educational system reform and development. The full-text review of Cambodia's educational system reform and development, on the other hand, excluded articles that didn't meet the criteria. In particular, these articles did not describe the educational system settings or report on the results of policy implementations that influenced the quality and accessibility of education. After eliminating duplicate articles, the author screened each title and abstract for inclusion and exclusion based on established requirements, and 20 full-text articles met all selection criteria for further analysis.

Results

The section outlines four main components that emerged from the selected articles on inclusive education: (1) Educational System Reform and Development, and (2) Current Challenges and Future Prospects that describe the results of the chosen review literature, which includes 20 contribution articles.

Educational System Reform and Development

Since 2000, Education for All worldwide has made significant progress, while the six Education for All (EFA) goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were developed and reached by 2015; however, a new vision for education needs to be extended for the next 15 years, from 2015 to 2030, as the unfinished agenda requires completion (UNESCO, 2015). The Global Education Vision 2030 revision aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." The 2030 Education Agenda (SDG 4), addressing the remaining actions and challenges of EFA and education-related MDGs for global and national education. This agenda emphasizes access, fairness, inclusion, quality, and learning achievements while employing a lifelong learning approach to attain guaranteed employment and eliminate poverty (UNESCO, 2015).

To adhere to the global and regional transformation and modernization of Education, Cambodia acknowledges that education is vital to seeking a change in status from a lower-middle-income to an upper-middle-income nation by 2030 and to a high-income nation by 2050 (RGC, 2019). To achieve this goal, the RGC developed the Rectangular Strategy Phase four (RS4) 2018–2023 to provide direction on legislation and strategic education planning initiatives, with the overarching objective of creating a peaceful, tolerant, safeguarded community through a development that is equitable and sustainable (RGC, 2018a). People are the top priority when pushing to build competent and high-quality human resources to respond to a nation's economic growth and competitiveness (RGC, 2018a). According to RGC (2018a) mentioned in Rectangle Strategy One, emphasized on Human Resource Development focuses on four primary goals as follows:

"1) Enhancing the quality of education, science, and technology; 2) Vocational training; 3) Promoting public healthcare and nutrition; and 4) Strengthening gender equality and social protection." (RGC, 2018a).

According to the lessons learned and the outcomes attained by the National Assembly, the RGC acknowledged that the development of human resources is still essential and that Cambodia should pursue it to obtain the development of high-quality human resources (RGC, 2018b). To comply with the population's desire and new national and international contexts, the RGC developed the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2019–2023 to implement RS4 (RGC, 2018b). The NSDP determined the priorities, measurements, and timeline for the execution, as well as the recognition of means of monitoring and evaluation of the resulting framework, and supported the advancement of human resources, focusing on enhancing the quality of education, science, and technology fields by developing a "quality, equitable and inclusive education system" (RGC, 2018b).

Over the last decade, the RGC has made significant progress toward several objectives, including security, stabilization of politics, happiness, and

a swift decrease in poverty. Cambodia also localized its MDGs as Cambodia's Millennium Development Goals (CMDGs) and obtained many objectives earlier than anticipated in 2015 (RGC, 2019). In this new phase of advancement, the RGC has maintained its attempts to adapt the SDGs to the circumstances of Cambodia (RGC, 2019). In late 2018, the RGC approved Cambodia's Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs) Framework 2016–2030 to be incorporated into the NSDP and industry strategies, as constituting primary components for the NSDP in improving human resource development, quality of schooling, and learning outcomes (RGC, 2018b).

Furthermore, the RGC implemented its Industrial Development Policy (IDP) 2015–2025, which aims to advance industrial development in the nation and retain sustainable and inclusive economic expansion through increased productivity, competitive advantage, and the diversification of the economy (RGC, 2015). The country aims to develop modern technological and knowledge-based industries (RGC, 2015). Human resource development and specialized training are among the strategies adopted by governments. Technological know-how and skills are essential to Cambodia's deeper integration with ASEAN (RGC, 2015). In response to the growth and the skills gaps, the RGC defined its strategic objective as creating a “quality, equitable and inclusive education system” concentrating on science and technology, employment market induction, and athletics to assist the country's socioeconomic development. The RGC's central concerns are the following (RGC, 2015):

- Increasing the pay and incentives for educators based on their performance
- Maintaining financial support for primary school buildings
- Strengthening thorough school inspection
- Modernizing and putting into practice the master plan for technical education in upper secondary schools
- Improving educational responses to labor market needs,
- Establishing a comprehensive curricular framework,
- Making preparations for the Southeast Asian Games in 2023 and encouraging kids to take up and participate in sports.

To maintain and implement the two medium-term NSDP 2019–2023 plans, SDG 4 and RS4, the MoEYS has two fundamental guidelines: ensuring professional management and leadership of education personnel across the board and promoting possibilities for lifelong learning. The establishment of the two indicated policies is meant to achieve three educational goals (MoEYS, 2019a). The first is to raise the standards of

science, technology, and education by emphasizing the following seven top reforms (MoEYS, 2019a):

- Teaching staff
- The growth of schools at all levels
- Increasing the efficiency of school management inspections
- Improvement of technical instruction at the upper secondary level
- Education for skills that are in line with the labor market
- Development of thorough curricula and textbooks, and
- Assurance of Southeast Asian Games readiness in 2023

The second is to fulfil SDG4 on education focused on ensuring high-quality, equal access to educational opportunities and enhancing lifelong learning for all five years (2019–2023) toward 2030, and 2050 (MoEYS, 2019a). The third is to reduce skill gaps by cooperating with stakeholders to increase the availability of skills training in priority areas and deploying digital education in alignment with policy and the trajectory of Cambodia's technologically advanced economy (MoEYS, 2019a).

To align with the vision of Cambodia's socioeconomic development and education reform, MoEYS established the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2019–2023 to implement education, youth, and sports reforms and establish a robust base for education by 2030 and beyond (MoEYS, 2019a). The ESP applies subsector organizational management mechanisms to solve rational connections between subsector goals, strategic platforms, significant operations and demands on resources, implementation and approaches for constant quality enhancement (MoEYS, 2019a, pp. 56–61). The following are the ten significant reforms:

- National Education Policy
- Education Policy in the Five-Pillar Framework
- Education Management
- Teacher Training at Teacher Training Institutions
- School
- Youth Development
- Physical Education
- Digital Education
- Gender Integration
- Decentralization and De-Concentration

On track with the global and conscious of the need to transform its education, MoEYS established and formulated the Cambodia Education 2030 Roadmap to provide the educational goal for 2030 of attaining an upper

middle-income nation by 2030 and a high-income one by 2050. The roadmap establishes the underlying structure for a long-term comprehensive industry-wide mechanism for developing and delivering education programs to achieve SDG4 targets and address its development priorities (MoEYS, 2019b). The five policies outlined in the roadmap 2030 include: 1) All kids, boys and girls, shall have access to high-quality early childhood and primary education, as well as accessible, equitable, and high-quality fundamental education, both and lower secondary school, with appropriate and efficient learning outcomes; 2) All children, boys and girls shall graduate upper-secondary school with sufficient academic outcomes, and a significant proportion of young people now shall have greater access to excellent vocational and technical schooling that is both inexpensive and accessible; 3) Guarantee that all men and women have equal opportunity to technical, vocational, and tertiary education that is both inexpensive and high quality, including higher education; 4) All children and adults shall develop abilities in literacy and mathematics, and students of all ages have more chances for lifelong learning; and 5) The management and leadership aspects of educational improvement shall be enhanced at all levels (MoEYS, 2019b).

In early 2021, MoEYS created the Cambodia Secondary Education Blueprint (CAMSEB 2030) to align with ESP 2019–2023, IDP 2015–2025, CSDG4 Education Roadmap 2030, and RS4 (MoEYS, 2021). CAMSEB 2030 guides the foundational principles and goals of secondary education in Cambodia, along with the platform's accomplishments and disadvantages, significant priorities, achievements, action plans, and implementation mechanisms (MoEYS, 2021). Additionally, it offers a blueprint for long-term strategic planning that indicates resource needs up to 2030 within multiple circumstances in line with core desired outcomes (MoEYS, 2021). CAMSEB 2030 outlines eight essential priorities to resolve the obstacles in secondary education and promote the country's long-term goal to become an upper-middle-income nation by 2030 and a high-income nation by 2050 (MoEYS, 2021):

- Enhance students' access to general secondary education and its quality, particularly that provided by General and Technical High Schools (GTHS)
- Systematically concentrate on elevating educational leadership and management
- Integrate all subject curricula with 21st-century quality education, focusing on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)
- Make secondary education more digitally integrated
- Create an extensive secondary education teacher policy

- Maintain the structure and focus on enhancing secondary teacher training
- Improve technical secondary education achievements to better serve the demands of the local economy and labor market
- Encourage participation and relationships in secondary and postsecondary education

Cambodia's long-term vision is to preserve the nation as an economically developed country with a vibrant, global economy guaranteed by competent, efficient people. Improving human resources and building a knowledge-based economy are key components of this goal (MoEYS, 2021). The education sector is essential to ensuring that Cambodia can accomplish these objectives. Cambodia has implemented various reforms and developments to enhance the standard and availability of education. These include:

- The global education agenda for 2030 and Education 2030 Roadmap: To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,” representing the (SDG 4). Following this vision, the Cambodia's Education 2030 Roadmap focuses on improving management and leadership aspects of educational at all level (MoEYS, 2019b; UNESCO, 2015)
- Rectangular Strategy Phase Four (RS4) for 2018-2023: To guide overall educational policy and strategy development to enhance quality of education. (RGC, 2018a).
- Cambodia's SDGs (CSDGs) 2016–2030 and National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2019–2023: CSDGs integrating it into the NSDP and sectoral plans as pivotal components for advancing human resources development, improving educational quality, and enhancing learning outcomes (RGC, 2018b; RGC, 2019)
- Industrial Development Policy (IDP) 2015–2025: To foster human resources and technical training, recognizing the critical role of skills and technology in Cambodia's integration with ASEAN (RGC, 2015).
- Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2019–2023: Employs sub-sector structural management approaches introduces key national education policy reform, teacher training, and school reform including HRM focusing on recruitment and selection, training and development, compensation and benefit, and performance appraisal (MoEYS, 2019a).
- Cambodia Secondary Education Blueprint (CAMSEB 2030): Outlines the rationale and objectives of secondary education in Cambodia, assesses current system challenges and successes, and

identifies key priorities, breakthrough outcomes, action plans, and a monitoring and evaluation framework (MoEYS, 2021).

Current Challenges and Future Prospects

Despite these notable advancements, the education industry nevertheless faces enormous obstacles. In the initial stage, regarding the transformation of institutional structure, the blueprint is a direction for the plan of action up to 2030 (MoEYS, 2021). As a result, substantial adjustments to current procedures are required to restructure secondary education in Cambodia. Change frequently results in resistance, as was previously mentioned; this must be taken into account organizational transformation obstacles may appear in a variety of disciplines (MoEYS, 2021). The new environment or distinctness may lead some people to feel intimidated because “We have always done it this way.” People may become powerless, anxious, and resistant to the change. When management pursues a “top-down” strategy and excludes staff from decision-making and consultation, there may be an impression of diminishing autonomy. Effective change may be hampered by a more extended period of transition (MoEYS, 2021). The creation and execution of development may increase the duties and accountability of decision-making staff members, leading to a disconcerting, unsatisfying, and counterproductive overburden (MoEYS, 2021).

To promote “true transformation,” the alternative to conventional political swiftness and convenience “is a quiet, evolving, collaborative process positioned within intricate contexts” The components of the formula for transformation require: 1) Vision; 2) Strategic plan; 3) Resources; 4) Skills; and 5) Rewards. By contrast, failing to consider one or more of these elements may contribute to poor direction, frustration, inefficiencies, low achievement, and even an absence of change. The interaction between these aspects maximizes the system’s potential for transformation and enhancement (MoEYS, 2021, p. 16).

Second, there are deficiencies in teacher education and preparation. Studies and reports by MOEYS and its development partners have identified a wide range of problems in teacher pre-service education and training (PRESET) (MoEYS, 2019a). These include the following: 1) Students who excelled in secondary school are less likely to apply to become teachers and are more likely to choose other careers; 2) As opposed to primary or lower secondary PRESET, graduates from universities interested in employment in upper secondary PRESET; 3) At the Regional Teacher Training Centers (RTTCs) and the National Institute of Education (NIE), PRESET curriculum standards need to be revised, with no significant learning outcomes. The practicum can be better organized to provide student teachers with valuable learning opportunities; and 4) Teacher educators’ professional knowledge

and abilities need to be included, and they have a propensity for teacher-centered pedagogy (MoEYS, 2019a).

Third, in 2018, MOEYS indicated that teacher deployment was a constant concern affecting financial resources (No & Nguon, 2018). According to this report, there needs to be more statistics on the availability of instructors, and recruitment and deployment methods lead to an inequitable distribution of personnel across schools (No & Nguon, 2018). According to the teachers' survey results, the teachers were unwilling to transfer to schools with insufficient staff members for some of the main reasons: 1) They had worked at the school, which is close to their home and relatives, for many years; 2) They were unwilling to work in schools in remote or rural regions with inadequate infrastructure, security, or healthcare; 3) They argued that there were fewer opportunities to take additional tuition classes; and 4) They viewed themselves as having more demanding responsibilities and cramped classrooms in schools with a shortage of teachers (No & Nguon, 2018). The decline in the number of young people receiving training is a consequence (No & Nguon, 2018). The MoEYS's ongoing concerns are managing youth centers and supplying the resources required to guarantee critical instructors in the provinces. However, it is believed that, with a strong government commitment, the deployment concerns may be "fixed" (No & Nguon, 2018).

Finally, although the implementation of ESP 2014–2018 has made notable strides toward its policy goals, there are still a few areas that need to be strengthened and further improved to meet the subsector targets (MoEYS, 2019a):

- Early Childhood Education: Limitations on enrollment in ECE include a shortage of teachers for young children and inadequate infrastructure for ECE programs. Teachers must implement lesson plans, adequate teaching and learning resources for students and teachers, and inquiry-based learning activities. There is a need for more preschool teachers and community preschools to adhere to the quality standards.
- Primary Education: The challenges to enrollment at the primary level include the overage of students who drop out of school. The completion rate was 83%, the net enrollment rate was 98%, and dropout rates decreased during the previous five years. Some districts have no schools, and early-grade reading, writing, and math skills require improvement.
- Secondary and Technical Education: Dropout rates are still relatively high at the lower and upper secondary schools. According to the curriculum framework, most secondary schools require science laboratories, computer rooms, libraries, teaching aids, and workshops.

- There are still skill gaps in HEIs, and graduate student quality must catch up with social and labor market requirements. In some HEIs, the establishment of internal quality systems has failed. Only 53 of the 125 HEIs were evaluated and assigned to the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC). The execution of assessment recommendations needs to be enhanced and there must be more qualified evaluation employees.

In addition to the critical barriers mentioned in the previous section, external factors also affect teaching and learning. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic disturbed communities and harmed education by suspending schools and HEIs (MoEYS, 2020). In the meantime, the Cambodian government started implementing budget cuts of up to 50% to maintain financing for the educational and healthcare industries. Non-government organizations (NGOs) and collaborators also reduced aid for education, which may significantly affect some critical services when the government finds it challenging to afford the shortcomings. Compared to the previous academic year, public school enrollments decreased across the entire region, according to early 2021 statistics from MOEYS, mainly due to parents who used to support their children losing income (MoEYS, 2020). They need help to adequately offset materials, transportation, and food (MoEYS, 2020), and the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational quality.

Every school has been urged by MoEYS to offer online learning and education. However, the limitless suspension time associated with distance learning lowers the quality of education. There are disparities between current and previous curricula, and schools need more time for a digital curriculum (MoEYS, 2020). Additionally, COVID-19's influence on the execution of the ESP 2019–2023 was reinforced by two medium-term education policies to guarantee high-quality education accessible to all and contribute to the outcomes of the NSDP and the National Vision 2030 (MoEYS, 2020).

Conclusion

This article provides a comprehensive overview of Cambodia's educational system reform and development from the early twentieth century to the present. Modernization efforts have encompassed various aspects, including the schooling system, education law, school administration, and education policies, with precise strategies and directions in the context of a peaceful country. However, Cambodian teachers' inadequate educational background remains a significant concern, posing a risk to the effectiveness of education and academic achievements. This article emphasizes the need for a more comprehensive teacher-training system to address this issue.

To further enhance educational access, quality, and management procedures, MoEYS should identify at-risk groups in secondary schools in Cambodia and investigate the causes associated with the risk of dropping out to promote student enrollment and support continuing education. Effective strategies should be developed, including the assessment of scholarship programs, improvement of teaching and learning methods, exploration of innovative teaching approaches, and provision of adequate teaching and learning resources. Additionally, attention should be paid to career counselling, orientation, training, seminars, facilities, internship programs, and collaborations (MoEYS, 2019a).

This article highlights the alignment of the Cambodian Education Strategic Plan (ESP 2019–2023), Cambodia Secondary Education Blueprint (CAMSEB 2030) with the Integrated Development Plan (IDP 2015–2025), and the Cambodia's Education 2030 Roadmap. This alignment is crucial for addressing the barriers in education and working toward Cambodia's long-term goals. This article also encourages researchers interested in educational system development and reform to implement policies and strategies to advance the quality of education, thereby advancing national and global education. Furthermore, the article suggests that educational policymakers should undertake more research on the impact of education policy reforms on various aspects of the educational system and anticipate future educational trends.

This article has some limitations. First, it relies primarily on secondary data sources, which may have inherent limitations in terms of accuracy and comprehensiveness. Additionally, this article mainly focused on the education system in Cambodia and may not fully capture a broader international context. Future research could incorporate primary data collection methods, such as surveys or interviews, to gather more in-depth insights.

Furthermore, while this article provides valuable recommendations for improving teacher training and enhancing educational access and quality, further research is required to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies. Longitudinal studies and impact assessments can be better comprehended the outcomes and implications of the educational policy reform in Cambodia. Additionally, exploring the role of technology and digital tools in education and addressing socioeconomic disparities and cultural factors, could be promising avenues for future study in the area of education system development and reform.

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