

## Personal Background

**Name:** Leng Kongkea  
**Date of Birth:** September 25, 1987  
**Age:** 23  
**Address:** #118AB, St. 470, Sangkat Toul Tompong II, Khan Chamkarmom, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.  
**Tel:** 012 371 751  
**E-mail:** [kongkea\\_leng@yahoo.com](mailto:kongkea_leng@yahoo.com)  
**University:** Royal University of Phnom Penh, Institute of Foreign Languages(IFL) , Department of English.

### Short Summary

With problems arising with Cambodian education system, all people are very concerned since education is significantly vital to everyone. According its history, Cambodian education system is changed depending on different periods of times. In French colonization, most of the programs were adapted from French. Then, it went down almost to zero point during Pol Pot regime. After that, civil wars constantly happened, so education showed very slow development. After the nightmare had been gone, educational problem are involved in four main important factors: regional, personal, official, and school factors. First, schools are not enough, especially in remote areas, and roads are very difficult to travel. So, the solution is that more schools and roads need to be built and reconstructed. Next, family plays very important role in children education. When they are poor, parents do not give enough physical and emotional support to children because they don't really give value to education. Worse, the wide gape between man and woman on education still exists constantly. This, government should convince poor families to send their children to school by promising them to provide work after students graduate, and parents should provide their children with enough physical and emotional needs and they should give equal opportunity to woman as stated in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Articles of the Cambodian constitution issued in 1993 about all women who have rights to get education and work in the society. Third, educational problems are involved in lack of new materials, school supplies, lack of resources: teachers, and poor school management and poor school policy. To deal with this kind of problems, government should pay more attention on educational progress by increasing teacher's salary, providing money to school board to buy new school supply: schools need to be quipped with new material such things as updated course books, computers, tape recorders and so on, which can be availably found in schools, especially in libraries. Moreover, quality of education has to come to the priority, so management system needs need to be reinforced and school policy should be strict. In addition, more teachers are necessarily needed. Thus, "Teacher's Centre", opening class for teacher training, should be provided to train young generations to be good, qualified teachers in the store. Last, the issue is related to the government, which plays very significant role in Cambodian education. According to UNESCO, the government spends very low GDP, 1.6 percent, on developing education system, comparing to the western counties around 5.5 to 6.4 percent of GDP. Furthermore, fund raised from the nations to develop

education standard is corrupted hierarchically. To solve this problem, the government should increase the amount of money to innovate new strategies to apply in teaching as well as increasing payment of teacher's salaries, and corruption on educational fund should urgently be prevented. Therefore, plans for improving the education system will be effectively worked out.

### **Topic:**

## **What are the main problems of Cambodian education system? What should we do to solve those problems?**

Education is significantly important to all people because it can help give value and honor to them. The problems arising with the educational system, especially in Cambodia, are being concerned by all and particularly by the Ministry of Education. Truthfully, Cambodia, regarded as a developing country, has been suffering a lot from foreign colonization and its civil wars. Therefore, its educational system is randomly changed according to different periods of time. Historically, Cambodia had been colonized by the French for ninety years from 1863 to 1953. During that time, most of its programs learnt in school had been mostly adapted from what the colonizer had been set for us to learn. French language was majorly taken into account. People who desirably wanted to learn Khmer language had to secretly come to the pagoda to learn from the monks. Cambodian language was not generally learnt in schools. If there was, it was not openly let. More negatively, its educational system went down almost to its zero point during the Pol Pot regime from 1975 to 1979. Education was completely prevented and forbidden by the Organization. Education provided to people, especially the young, was mainly taught how to sing and praise the Organization and honestly obey the Communism system. After Pol Pot was out of control, civil wars in Cambodia occurred constantly. Therefore, its educational trend showed very slow movement. According to the Ministry of Education report from 1993 to 1998, though no exact percentage, there were only around seventy percent of total children who were sent to schools, and the rest helped their parents do farming on the field. This showed the negative effect which was the result from the genocide period. Although the wars have gone so long ago, the bad influences still exist in Cambodians' minds, which was the nightmare for their lives. Until now, the educational development has showed very sluggish improvement due to some problems still having happened endlessly. To analyze the historical factor also can help us form some concepts of the root causes of the educational problems. The four main problems: regional, personal, official and school factors will be discussed, and the following paragraphs will show how its issues happen and how the solutions are rightly applied.

The first problem which we are going to discuss is how the regional factor has contributed to the causes of the educational problems. As mentioned earlier, Cambodia, regarded as a developing country among the others, has just been recovered from its damage and nightmare, the result of

foreign colonization and genocide period. Thus, some parts of it may not have been developed yet. Most of the schools especially in the remote areas which had been destroyed in difficult periods have not been rebuilt and reconstructed. Schools are old, so whenever it rains heavily, schools need to be closed. The amount of times in academic performance is limited. Roads are extremely difficult to travel. Students whose homes are far away from schools find really hard to access to them since the schools and road are not convenient to the students. Furthermore, possibly, only the rich can effort to send their children to schools, while the poor cannot because of their living standard and lack of transportation. This will show a limited number of students enrolled in schools.

To deal with such a kind of problems effectively, the Ministry of Education and the government have to work hand in hand to find the way out. First, raising fund from the developed countries also helps our government generate the plans for restoring what has been lost. It means that without fund, the improvement of educational system will not show great consequences and slowly grows because building schools and restoring roads vitally need money. More importantly, more schools and roads need to be built and reconstructed since it will help students accessible to schools and help increase the allocated time for academic learning. Moreover, government should help the poor by providing them shelter where it is close to schools. For instance, dormitories are necessarily built for students from the poor background. Doing so, a number of students enrolled in schools will be greatly increased.

Besides the regional factor, more important thing to figure out is how family plays an important role in children education. Because Cambodia is a poor country, eighty percent of all its population is farmer, and most of them are moderate and some absolutely poor, according to statistic shown in 2008. As financial crisis, most of the farmers don't really give value to education since they seemingly make off that education will decrease working labors on the farms. Because they are very busy on their doing farming, most parents fail to give their children both emotional and financial support in education. Students from poor living condition who are lack of emotional and financial support from their parents seem to lose their interest in learning in that the simultaneous work appears on them: they spend a little time in school, most on their farms. Then, they tend to quit schools due to this situation. More seriously, the opportunity in education between man and woman is still widely gaped, though some families provide equal chance to their children. Traditionally and prejudicially, Cambodian does not give value to girl on education since they've thought that if their daughter knows how to write well, she will send love letter to man. From this point of a view, girls are preferred to stay home and do housework. Education is not significantly vital because when they get married, man is a breadwinner and supports the whole family. This leads to gender inequality between man and woman.

Solutions have to be importantly worked out to improve educational system. First, this needs help from both family and government. In order to make parents believe that education can help their families out of poverty, government should promote the value of education to them especially for those living in the rural areas by promising and convincing that after graduation, all students have equal opportunity to serve and work in the society and can earn money afterward to help improve family's living condition. Convincingly, parents will believe and send their children to school because no one wants to live in a hardship life. Moreover, parents should give children both physical and emotional supports because students learn best through study supplies accessible to

them and spiritual strength is an important factor which can help them try their best in learning. More vitally, the discrimination between man and woman on education should be urgently discarded. According to law stated in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Articles of the Cambodian constitution issued in 1993, woman can have rights to get education and work in the society. Thus, Parents should give equal rights to them since they also can contribute to improving family's living standard.

The next problem to be concerned is how school system is operated in education nowadays. In school, the three important things to look into are materials, resources, and management systems. How these three work well is interrelated. Today is the age of modern technology, so modern equipment is widely used in the world. However, because Cambodia is a poor country, schools are not installed with modern school supplies yet. State schools are under-equipped and some classes are run without text books or pen and pads for students. New necessary materials needed are such things as updated course books, computers, media players, tape recorders, and so on, which are available found in the library for students to learn by themselves. In contrast, our schools are unable to purchase such a kind of things. That's why our educational system shows very slow progress. Moreover, our schools lack the resources which mainly play vital role in Cambodian education. Here, resources refer to the teachers who serve in schools. Because of poor living condition and their low salary, most teachers do not really pay attention on their teaching rather than taking times to do their own business in class and outside schools. According to the final report from SNIS, Second National Integrity Survey, a main cause of corruption is still attributed by all those interviewed to low salaries and delay in payment in salaries. Selling food and thing in the class is the best example to show that teachers do not give real freedom to the students and make corruption. Teachers are not well paid, though this is improving marginally with university graduate teachers being offered higher salaries than their counterparts, but with pay around \$US50 to \$60 or up to \$US100 every month, two widespread problems have arisen. The first is bribe taking; with teachers accepting cash gifts in return for additional after school tuition or, worse, "pass grades" in examinations. There's a blurred ethical boundary between trying to earn enough for a living, versus breaking the professional code of teaching. And last, more skilled teachers prefer to teach in private schools which can earn \$20 per month for each student. In one hand, it is so crowded that in a class there are too many students due to a limited number of teachers. Noisy sounds, unpredictable problems and simultaneous events occur constantly. These contribute to preventing education from the improvement. Most seriously, school management system is not strong enough, especially in high schools. Noticeably, the quality of education in high schools goes down because of bad tradition of corruption. Most students are not qualified enough: it means they are in high schools, but considerably, their actual abilities are not. They are sometimes, without permission, truant. The acts of giving money to controllers and teachers for cheating in examination, for instance, show poor school management system and not so strict school policy.

These will go on endlessly if we do not take some steps to find the way out. First, the government should pay more attention on situation in schools by proving money to school board to purchase new materials to equip in classrooms and also in library. Learning requires searching, so students find it easy place for their extra learning activities. Moreover, teacher's salary has to be accelerated in order that teacher spends more time on teaching and investigating their learning

progress and actual academic performance. Based on Education International (EI), in addressing the problem of salaries and corruption in the education sector, it is helpful to look at the various stakeholders, including teachers, students and parents. Even if there are very few studies of teacher job satisfaction in developing countries, studies available show that what attracts people to the teaching profession is its degree of autonomy, job security and respect. Involving teachers in the fight against corruption through their unions and professional codes of conduct therefore seems to be a reasonable way to go, in parallel to discussions on salaries. More importantly, school should open one program called "Teacher's Centre". The program is mainly intended to train new generation to be good, qualified teachers in the store and also can help old, experienced teachers get new strategies of teaching methodology to apply in their recent teaching. Furthermore, the corruption has to be rapidly eliminated and school policy is also reinforced to make quality of education strong. Teachers should encourage students to study hard, build up their self-contained perspectives and not depend on money used for cheating in examination. Quipping new up-dated materials, training new generation to be qualified teachers and strengthening school management and policy will help improve educational system to meet its high standard.

Most seriously, the last challenging problem is happening with government. Since the government plays a significant role in Cambodian education development, it is necessary that government take some responsibilities for the causes of the issues. In Cambodia 12.4 percent of government spending is in education, and just 1.6 percent of Cambodia's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) according to UNESCO is spent on education, ranking around 170th in the world. Most western countries spend around 5.5 to 6.4 percent of GDP on education. This shows very big gape between how our government spends fund on improving educational system and how the other developed countries do. In addition, with educational fund, raised from the other nations, corruption appears hierarchically. That's why the plans for educational development cannot work out. The fund, provided for building and reconstructing more schools and roads, increasing teacher's salary, buying new materials for schools and reinforcing school management and policy, has been robbed, from lower to higher positions in the government.

First, the government should spend more attention on education by providing more money to achieve the plans which have been set. Related to salaries increasing, the government should refocus the civil service reform and to increase the pace of implementation in order to achieve better control of the wage bill, to further improve the balance of spending between operations and maintenance spending and to promote improvements to service delivery. Moreover, building up the idea of honesty and self-righteousness is the first step to eliminate corruption. It is required individual's understanding of educational value. Otherwise, it is not so effective solution in that individual still thinks of their own benefit more than of the others. On one hand, money or fund that is going to be used to develop education standard should be publically announced. Doing so, it can prevent money from losing because everyone knows the actual amount of it. For example, on each plan, how much it should be spent is annually reported. Therefore, all plans used to improve educational system will properly work out effectively.

In short, with the problems, arising with Cambodian education system, all people are deeply concerned about how they are badly going on if we do not measure up the root causes. As mentioned earlier, the issues are mainly involved in four main factors: regional, personal, official

and school problems. Those are very influential on our nowadays education. Thus, some solutions need to be applied. It is suggested that if more schools are available and accessible to students, a number of students enrolled will be increased, and to strengthen quality of education, school management and policy reinforcement should go in the first place. Teacher's salary should be increased. Moreover, the government should pay more attention on how educational system is developed. Corruption has to be necessarily discarded. We, Cambodian, should love our nation. If not, who is going to give value to us? We should clear a way for our next generation by helping improve our educational standard because education is important to all people.

## **References**

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