

Cambodian Students Association in Japan

Essay Competition 2010

Background Information

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What are the Main Problems in Cambodia Education System?

What Should We Do to Solve those Problems?

Abstract

Despite the many projects and plans to improve education in Cambodia in recent years, the Khmer education system still faces many problems. Financial problems have built a structure of corruption in Cambodia's academic structure. Low teacher salaries cause them to take bribes, and those students who do not have the ability to pay are forced to drop out of schools. More money is needed to build more schools for students in rural area, so that parents can see the importance of schools first-hand and encourage their children to get an education rather than working in the rice field.

It is not just the government, but also the people's responsibility to help achieve these improvements. We must cooperate in gathering funds and supplies that we can donate to schools and the poor. We have to help people living in poverty get education so that they can raise their living standards in the future. Finally, many advertisements should be run to teach the people the significance of education and the equality between males and females. Education is a road to prosperity. Better education means better country and better society.

What are the Main Problems in Cambodia Education System? What Should We Do to Solve those Problems?

I. Introduction

Cambodia is a developing country in which education system is not any closer to the world education system standard. According to my experience and further personal research, I would like to show you the many serious problems that we are facing right now as the next generation of Khmer society and current Khmer students. An example would be to match the country with one of the highest literacy rate in the world, which is in fact our neighbor: Vietnam, which simply shows that we do not have to keep up with the west only, but our own regional trade, tourism and natural resources partner.

II. Body

A. PROBLEMS

- History Affects the Education System

Cambodia education system does not just go wrong all by itself. During the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979), the Khmer education system was completely damaged because the Khmer Rouge themselves thought that a country does not need an education in order to develop. They killed 80% of our educated person such as teachers, doctors and professors. They destroyed learning materials and structures such as books, school buildings and other study equipment. * After the war, there were very few teachers that were qualified to teach anything at all.

Based on a study by the Ministry of Education, Youth and sport (M.E.Y.S), teachers were given more training but the knowledge level was still low. Six percent of the teachers had a study level of grade one to six. 77 percent of the teachers have made it through lower secondary school which is grade six to nine and 14 percent have gone through grade ten to twelve while only about 3 percent that have made it to the third year of university. (The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport 1998).*

Our educated professionals are the biggest resource that we depend on for Cambodia's future but what would happen when and if all those people had been killed, maimed, tortured, intimidated and simply wholesale slaughtered?

Poverty and illiteracy are all that we have left. There are not enough teachers to teach students. Moreover, there are not enough suitable resources, gear and books for the next generation who are left to follow behind.

- **Financial Problem**

Financial problem is one of the main reasons why Cambodia instructive structure is not as advanced as other countries.

As you can see, the monthly salary of the people who work for the government is so low; this is the factor that leads to corruption or making money in an unlawful way. Just the same, the monthly paid of teachers who work in public Khmer schools could go as low as 10\$ a month especially for those who work in rural areas.

This amount of payment is not enough to feed their family and even themselves, which cause teachers to pay less attention in giving students the rightful or complete education at school.

Consequently, in order to survive in their world, the teachers have their own sufficient solutions. Schoolteachers offer for-fee additionally classes outside regular class times for students such as Khmer, Math and Physic.* In addition, teachers sell lesson and test papers in order to get money to supplement income, from the students. This action mostly happen to History, Geography, English, Social Studies and Biology teachers who do not have the chance to open additional classes like others who teach different subjects.

Low salary causes the teachers to start corruption and have less dedication in their teaching job. Through my experience as I was studying in high school, some students gave their money to the teachers so they would have their high monthly score. This brings about the learners to pay less attention to their studies because they can get a good mark to show their parents easily.

Other than that, financial problem also encourage the teachers who are working in the school's office to take bribe from bad students who skipped school all the time, to erase their names on the absent lists, so that they will not get expelled from school.

Concisely, this means that public schools are not for free anymore and students have to pay extra money so that they can get a proper study. This lead to another predicament that cause poor students to not have a proper access to education because they do not have enough money to bribe the teachers, to study in additional classes and buy lesson papers from teachers. If these poor students do not give their instructors any money, they will get in trouble very easily. More importantly, most of them are going to drop out of schools.

- **Study Program**

Another severe issue is the Cambodia study program. In accordance with the program, all the teachers must instruct by following their teaching plans that are being given but the setback is that the programs and its books are not updated. Therefore, students only learn things that the world has already considered very old and not so important since they always come up with many new methods or agendas to boost up student's knowledge.

Furthermore, according to Cambodia study program, high school students will have to study four hours a day and attend 10 subjects. The first thing is that, four hours a day is not enough time for both the students and the teachers to do anything.

Due to what I have noticed while I was in high school, every year, the majority of the teacher could not finish the lessons that have stated in the book as a result of low teaching hours and the numerous holidays that Cambodia possesses.

Furthermore, unlike most countries, students in Cambodia are not be able to choose the subject that they good at or interested in. In fact, they have to study all the ten subjects and complete ten test subjects which are why the students could not focus specifically on their future goal and the ability to know what they specially need. For example, a boy is very skillful at Math but in order to be a math teacher, he is required to have a score of over 100 out of 125 in Math test and a high school degree of at least B. We can believe that he will get over 100 scores on Math test without difficulty but we could not assume that he will get at least B in his high school degree because the tests will consist of ten subjects which include areas that he is not good at. Thus, he might result in being unqualified for the job. This is why being able to classify the students according to their area of interests or abilities are extremely important.

Another reason is students do not have the chance to have real practice or experiment which leads to the matter of not understanding the lessons 100% completely.

- **School**

Schools in Cambodia are low in both quantity and quality.

Why quantity? Even though there are just the enough schools in the capital city of Phnom Penh, the rural area still have to face the shortage of schools. My father who is from Bonteymeanchey told me that he had to get up at 3:30am every school days in order to review his lesson and more importantly to go to school on time. It took him the maximum of 3 hours to get to school by riding through very quiet street and dangerous jungle with his old bicycle because the school was three villages away from his own home.

Moreover, Khmer schools are inadequate for students. They do not acquire enough help from the government or many organizations to improve their quality. Most schools do not have

enough facilities for learners. For example, they do not obtain sports equipment, labs for chemistry experiments and computers for further research.

So it means that most public educational places do not provide place or time for actual practice, experiment and extra-curricular class. Therefore, there is a possibility that there are some students who graduate from high school that do not obtain any real experiment with their specialty.

Finally, the most important part of all is that schools do not set an appointment for parents and teachers to meet and discuss about the student progress or learning problems because nowadays most parents are blind on how well their children perform at school since all the reports from school are not being descriptive enough about the student progress and sometimes the reports are not even trustable.

- **Khmer Culture and Societies**

Cambodians are people who really respect their culture especially those who live in the country-side or rural area. Culture affects their living, their religion and the way they think.

Since culture has such a big impact on Khmer people lives, the majority of the remote people still believe that boys are needed to have a further education than girls and the females are only suppose to take care of their families and do housework. As you can see, long ago when there were not enough schools in Cambodia, boys were mostly sent away from home to live in the pagodas in order to consume education from the monks but girls could not go anywhere accept staying at home. For instance, a poor family really wants to send both of their children to school but they do not have enough money so they will have to decide which one should go to school. It is a very predicable choice that the family will choose the son rather than the daughter.

A research has stated that while the number of female students in primary school is about 46.2% which is almost half, in lower secondary school it has fallen to only about 37% and in upper secondary about 31.8% (MEYS 2001).*

Also based on MEYS investigations, girls are mainly forced to stay at home to look after her younger brothers and sisters and do house work (MEYS 1998).*

In addition, in rural area, it is not safe for girls to go to school which is so far away from home and their family because they will face dangerous situation like getting abused, for example.

- **The Government**

The Cambodia education system is also weakened due to the government. They did not pay much attention and contribution to education.

More importantly, very little of the government funding is paid on education. A survey of 11 provinces and the city of Phnom Penh has shown that 74.8% is paid by the societies for primary education whereas only 12.9% is paid by the government. Among all the surveys, this result showed one of the lowest fund made by the government to primary education in the world (cited in UNESCO 2000:23).*

B. Solution

Even though the Cambodia education system problems sound really complex but it does not mean that it is impossible to solve.

In order to get to the bottom of this problem we must first work out a way to raise the teacher's salary because they are the ones who give the children part of their education, discipline and future.

Additionally, we must cooperate with each other, both the government and the people, to wipe out instantly on any act of corruption because only honesty that can lead the children and the country to a better education and get accepted by the world.

Also Cambodia study program need to be modified. As you can see, our government has already stepped out to make a solution to solve this problem by setting a new study program that allows students to choose the subject they interested in or good at and sharpen their skills as they started grade 9.

Despite this success, the government still have not figure out a way to increase the study time for the students yet since doing it could effect some issue such as the students might need some time to study another language or help out with the family business. Making this huge decision without studying the Cambodian student's lives, could cause the students to discontinue their studies.

What's more, we also need to collaborate with each other in order to give out some supplies or help to the schools that are lack of important facilities. Moreover, parents should make contacts with the teacher so as to track their children studies.

It is important that we all should look out for the poor by proposing a project to build schools for rural students through organizations which some of us have already made some achievements in these recent years.

Finally the most important factor of all is that the government needs to spend more on education because it could increase the teacher's salary, erase corruption and more significantly help the poor. A researcher has written that recoveries can be made as long as the government invests more money for education out of the whole government funding and as long as the money goes to the teacher's salary straight away. Paying enough salary for the teachers and move the load of paying for education to the government and move it off from the responsibilities of the poor, could cause remarkable changes.*

III. Conclusion

Cambodia educational system is a big problem that is hard to solve. It includes the damage from war, lack of funds and schools, culture and the government spending. Although it is a long-term problem these drawbacks are not unfeasible. Both the government and the people have to work together and take steps to improve this system so that our next generation can have a better education and moreover, better society and country.

“Education is a Road to Prosperity”

(Only if it is traveled easily and equally by all people, otherwise it stays a tool for the rich, to keep the poor as unpaid serfs)

* Education in Cambodia [online] available from:

<http://www.seasite.niu.edu/khmer/ledgerwood/Contents.htm>

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