

Full Length Research Paper

Teacher competence and teacher quality in Cambodia's educational context linked to in-service teacher training: an examination based on a questionnaire survey

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Competent teacher is an indispensable pillar for students' learning outcome and education quality improvement. This paper examines Cambodian teachers' perception regarding: (1) teacher competence and improving education quality and (2) ensuring teacher quality and in-service teacher training. This study used questionnaire that targeted a line of educational staff of Cambodia: from school to central level. In August, 2012, 230 copies were distributed, and 173 copies (75.22%) were collected. Through concerned notice, it showed that the majority of higher-ranked officials also have experience working at any school education level. As results, it revealed that (a) respondents realized and indicated explicitly that competent teachers do help contribute to student's learning and promote the level of education quality, and (b) respondents recognized the importance of in-service training because it helps make teachers more confident in the profession as it can bring people's respects and trust. This paper shortly concludes that Cambodian teachers acknowledge their crucial profession. They further desire to upgrade their capacity by means of continuous professional development through in-service training programs. Thus, structuring a feasible in-service training model for them becomes evidently needed. Expected structure will be organized in accordance with Cambodia's actual situation and the availability of its resources.

Key words: Cambodia, quality of education, teacher competence, teacher quality, in-service teacher training.

INTRODUCTION

International community has committed to achieving universal primary education (UPE), as part of accomplishing the education for all (EFA) goals and the millennium development goals (MDGs). Remarkable progress, for example, quantitative success of children's access to school education since the 1990s and later on; has been

made since they were established. Bringing children to schools is a significant single first task and ensuring that they stay long enough in school to get advantage from a complete course of quality primary education is another pivotal challenge (UIS, 2012a). Globally, the number of children enrolling in school has gradually increased

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years to years. However, the progress has seemingly stalled, that is, many children are still out of school or they come to school but leave school early. The number of out-of-school children, in the globe, reduced from 102 million in 2000 to 70.5 million in 2005 and to 60 million in 2008; but it slowly dropped from 59 million in 2010 to 57.2 million in 2011. Surprisingly, those are children of primary school age (EFA GMR, 2013; EFA GMR, 2013; and UIS, 2013), and they are poorest and the most vulnerable (based on EFA GMR 2013 Overview), especially girls are more likely to be out of school than boys (UIS, 2012a). Children who do not learn the basics are often lacking essential literacy and numeracy skills, and are far more likely to live in poverty throughout their lives and have poorer health than their educated opponents⁽¹⁾. Unless children learn the basics from early grades, they get thin to acquire skills in their later grades (EFA GMR, 2013). This means that it becomes crucial for children and adult to acquire necessary skills they need to get a decent job in the future; otherwise they will find themselves difficult to work in this changing world or find difficult for those who may later want to become a teacher or other posts.

To a large extent, education contributes to other development efforts and transforms them into long-term advancement. Education is prior and centre in development framework not just because it is essential in people's rights but also because it empowers people to look after themselves, their families, their communities, their environment and their nations or the world as a whole. In other words, education helps improve health and livelihoods, empowering women and other vulnerable groups, boosting economic growth and also eliminating poverty (UIS, 2012a). Providing children an improved quality of education is crucial. Particularly; since the majority of out-of-school children are in developing countries, reaching such disadvantaged children is more prior.

Hence, quality schools and teachers are diligently required to deliver to the most fragile populations. Necessarily, reform in teaching can ensure people acquire skills demanded. It appears necessary for education stakeholders to be well-positioned to make a sound evidence-based decision, regarding the central role of teaching and learning in contributing to a comprehensive range of other development goals. Congruous curriculum and assessment reforms with clear objectives require connecting teachers to fulfill their indispensable role. This is the role in the process of ensuring all children and people are embedded with relevant significant knowledge and skills for contributing to their countries' development. People in the globe also trust in the power of education, according to the recent survey of the United Nations (UN), as people around the world have voted six priorities. 'A good education' is at the top of the six followed by 'better job opportunities; an honest and responsive government; protection against crime and violence; protecting forests, rivers and oceans; and the sixth is

affordable and nutritious food.'⁽²⁾ The reason people have in general is that education makes other priorities happen. With this regard; future growth, poverty eradication, improvements in health, political and social development depends on education that has qualified teacher at its centre pillar. Ensuring the quality of teaching activities and learning environments is a challenge that all countries, regardless of their levels of development, have continue to focus on (EFA GMR 2013 overview). The only reason why teachers are necessary is because they have impacts on their students' learning (OECD, 2005), therefore, ensuring qualified teachers is the forefront of the challenges.

In terms of Cambodia, an agricultural Southeast Asian country of about fourteen million populations, the government is committed in achieving pulling the country out of its least developed country (LDC) status and to achieve other social development targets through Cambodia millennium development goals (CMDGs) (MoP, 2012), though the majority of its people has not completed primary school. Overall, 21% of females have never attended school compared with 11% of males (NIS, 2011). Despite some visible developments such as Cambodian people are less poor and better educated, the task is not fully complete regarding some issues such as children's and women's health and nutrition, and control of threatening diseases (MoP, 2012). Sex disparity in Cambodia, especially out-of-school girls, might be affected by traditional perceptions and/or family economic; in particular, those in rural areas are likely to have less opportunity. Of course, it is the fact that the percentage of literate population to the total population aged 6 to 17 years has increased from 52.8 in 1998 to 77.3 in 2008 (NIS, 2011:121); but less than half (41.2%) of 12 to 14 year old children who had completed primary education are larger in urban than in rural areas (Ibid: xiv & 94). To ensure access to education for all children, stronger efforts need to be extended to more remote areas and children in poor households, especially female and vulnerable children. Within such circumstance, the ministry of education, youth and sport (MOEYS) of Cambodia intends to accelerate its efforts and to continue giving highest priority to ensure educational access for all children with high quality education, especially basic education by 2015 (MOEYS, 2010).

As a result of the efforts, net enrolment rate (NER) for primary education has increased gradually from 91.3 (Fiscal Year 2005 to 2006) to 95.2 (2010 to 2011) and to 97.0 (2012 to 2013); furthermore, repetition rate for primary education has decreased from 11.9 (2005 to 2006), to 5.8 (2010 to 2011) and to 5.3 (2012 to 2013); and dropout rate has also decreased from 11.7 (2005 to 2006) to 8.3 (2010 to 2011) and to 3.7 (2012 to 2013) (MOEYS, 2013, 2006, 2011, 2012, 2013). Some improvements have been made, but there still are severe challenges that MOEYS has addressed including ensuring teacher shortage, particularly securing qualified

Table 1. Number of respondents by entity (N= 173)

Respondents by entity	No	Respondents by entity	No
Nursery teacher	1	District edu. official	52
Primary teacher	48	Provincial edu. official	20
Lower sec. teacher	6	Ministry's official	11
Upper sec. teacher	7	Researcher	1
University instructor	6	Others	3
Trainers of three various Teacher Training Centers (TTC): Pre-School TTC in Phnom Penh, Provincial TTC in Svay Rieng province & Regional TTC in Prey Veng province			18

teachers (MOEYS, 2012; 2013).

MOEYS has clearly addressed the issues concerning teachers without pedagogical training, especially those in rural areas (MOEYS, 2012). MOEYS also indicates low academic level of teachers; particularly in the case of primary teachers, 3.83% has no lower secondary school diploma, and 56.24% has no upper secondary school diploma (MOEYS, 2011, 2012a, 2012b). MOEYS further indicates that there still teachers who have not finished primary school level, though they have few educational staff who holds PhD degree.

All above, it appears significant to take a particular look on teachers' conditions in Cambodia so as to overcome in and deal with ensuring qualified teachers in order to ensure quality of teaching and learning. Thus, this study firstly intends to examine Cambodian teachers' perception regarding: (1) teacher competence and quality improvement of education, and (2) ensuring teacher quality and in-service teacher training. In terms of related studies and findings, there have been some related literatures (such as Khlok, 2001 and 2003; Courtney, 2007), but those studies and findings are not yet clearly demonstrated the target issue as in this study. Needless to say, progress of children to secondary education and to relevant higher education will not get complete without enrolment and success of primary education. The ultimate goal is not just to bring children to school to complete a course of primary education, but to provide them a quality education that requires qualified teacher.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilized questionnaire targeted a line of educational staff from school level to central level of Cambodia. In August, 2012, 230 copies were distributed, and 173 copies (75.22%) were collected (Table 1). Among these, 9 were distributed to and collected from some educational officials who came from different provinces of Cambodia to stay at teacher's guesthouse in Phnom Penh for a short period for work.

The author notices that the majority of higher panel officials cooperated in this study had experienced working at any level of school education. In this paper, the author extracted two sections from the whole questionnaire: (a) teacher competence and (b)

quality of teacher. In the questionnaire, based on related literature and official documents of the MOEYS, some points of view were provided as answers in each question for respondents to choose and evaluated by A, B, C, D, or X; which mean relatively as very important, important, moderately important, not important and I do not know. The author scored A, B, C, D and X as 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0 respectively; then found the average score.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

An estimated 250 million children of primary school age fail to learn the basics – they are unable to read or write and figure the basic arithmetic (UNESCO, 2012). Undeniably that it results from a poor quality of education. Such education usually occurs in developing countries or conflict-facing countries where educational facilities are poor, policy in education is not prior, and a lack of qualified teachers is more serious. A well-trained qualified teacher educates children confidently in core subject matter in a manner that can raise literacy, numeracy and related skills. A teacher, thus, is defined as a person whose professional activity involve in the transmission of knowledge, attitudes and skills that are settled to students enrolled in the educational program (OECD, 2005). With such regard, the emphasizing components involved in this paper are of four variables: (a) teacher competence, (b) quality of education, (c) teacher quality and (d) in-service teacher training. Each is discussed as follows:

Teacher competence: The impact of investing in modern curriculum, school facilities, instructional materials, textbooks, and other technologies on the student's learning depends on the capacity of teachers to use the resources accordingly (Raudenbush et al., 1993). Teacher education has become one of the biggest constraints of educational reform that many nations have emphasized firmly especially since the 1980s (Sato, 1992). Many countries worldwide have shifted from quantitative improvement of children's school access to qualitative improvement in the entire education. There is a spread of the issue's recognition that many teachers lack capability of the subject matter, knowledge and skills needed to transform their students. No mentioning of out-of-school children; even in-school children, particularly children in developing countries, are learning very little or nothing (GCE and EI, 2012; and UNESCO, 2012). The fundamental reason is because of the acute shortage of well-trained teachers. Teachers require embedded with core competencies such as knowledge, teaching skills and attitudes.

Quality of education: A wide range of people worldwide have trusted that education is the foundation of economic and social developments. Benefit from quality education is highly anticipated

that it produces adequate skillful youth and adults for the generation to come. With such aspect, quality education includes: (a) learners who are well-nourished and ready to learn, (b) sufficient resources and equipments of a safe environment, (c) content of curricula that reflects skills for life, (d) processes through which trained-teachers use to facilitate learning, and (e) outcomes of gained knowledge, skills and attitudes that is link to the nations' goal and participation in any society (Rasheed, 2000). In order to provide a quality education to people, there are needs to supply adequate number of necessary educational services such as school facilities and particularly enough trained teachers. In Cambodia, the government has committed all the efforts to increase access of children to school and reduce primary school dropout. In addition, support of availability of health-related facilities such as drinking water and latrines, and learning facilities such as textbooks, libraries is also a focused by the central government. Furthermore, the quality of teachers is recognized as another key factor that can assist improve children's long stay in primary school in order for their opportunity to absorb the basics (WB, 2005). To this response, an appropriate structure to secure the quality of teachers becomes pivotal.

Teacher quality: Quality of education requires quality teacher at its centre indispensable pillar. Quality teacher can contribute to a healthy education. They refer to those who are capable of delivering a curriculum that provides learning opportunities for all children and youth irrespective of family background, gender or where they live (based on EFA GMR 2013 Overview). They ensured teacher certification, proper working conditions, appropriate evaluation and assessment, commitment and pride of teachers themselves in the profession, and attainable proper-and-feasible continuous professional development of teacher (Hammond, 2000; and Leang, 2012).

In-service teacher training: In the developing and changing world, flexibility in teaching appears absolutely crucial for every teacher whether or not they are in classrooms. Not only do in-service training programs usually provide teachers opportunities to improve and develop their profession, but also for contributing to student's learning outcome, school achievement as well as the educational environment (Arani and Matoba, 2006; and EU, 2012). There are various kinds of in-service teacher training structure, it, however, can be generally divided into three patterns: namely, (a) in-service teacher training within a school, (b) in-service teacher training out of school and (c) in-service teacher training through self-study.

RESULTS

Teacher competence and quality of education

The average score was calculated to find out if there was any gap or contradictions regarding respondents' perceptions concerning teacher competence and quality of education toward the significance of related matters in the five questions. It was shown that there was no remarkable gap amongst the responses. Though it was calculated to be average score, it still stayed at the highest score level. (Table 2)

Teacher quality and in-service teacher training

Like previous section, the average score was also calculated in this section but in terms of teacher quality and in-service teacher training. It was demonstrated that there

was no gap or contradictions of perceptions obtained from the respondents. Respondents acknowledged the significance of in-service teacher training programs for their continuous professional development. (Table 3)

DISCUSSION

As stated previously, the purpose of this paper is to examine Cambodian teachers' perception regarding: (a) teacher competence and quality improvement of education, and (b) ensuring teacher quality and in-service teacher training. The empirical results of (a) and (b) are presented in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively, obtained from the questionnaire survey conducted with a line of Cambodia's educational staff from school to central level, indicated with its average score as following:

In terms of (a), questions in the questionnaire were designed with five related perspectives. To answer, as stated earlier, based on related literature and official documents of the MOEYS, some points of view were provided for respondents to choose, and space for respondents to give extra comments was also set up.

The results indicate no far gap between one and another answer's average score. It tells their significance among each other and that the highest average score, which is 3.95 out of 4.00, goes to "general knowledge and solid knowledge of all subjects that they are going to teach," followed by "high professional consciousness, moral goodness of character and behavior, 3.89 out of 4.00," and "strong passion for teaching: commitment and pride for teaching pupils/students, 3.86 out of 4.00." Furthermore, "systematization of trainings for teachers, who are in-service, for continuous professional development, 3.84 out of 4.00, appears also very important for ensuring teacher's capacity." These results demonstrate that respondents explicitly indicate that competent teachers do contribute to student's learning achievement and also take part in promoting quality of education. Additionally, a vice principal, who is male and is of 32 years of service, of a lower secondary school provides an extra comment that: *a teacher needs to be creative in developing competencies so as to be a model for pupils/students, community and social development.*

In terms of (b), questions in the questionnaire were designed with three prospects. Regarding to the first prospect's question (see Figure 1), unlike other questions, six choice scales are provided: A= very important, B= quite important, C= moderately important, D= not so important, E= not important at all and F= I do not know.

The results demonstrate that despite 12 (6.9%) respondents who did not choose any, 150 (86.7%) in 173 respondents chose "A," 9 (5.2%) chose "B," 2 respondents (1.2%) chose "C". Mentioning of the 12 (6.9%) respondents who did not choose any answer, it is unable

Table 2. List of contents involved in 'teacher competence' and 'quality of education'.

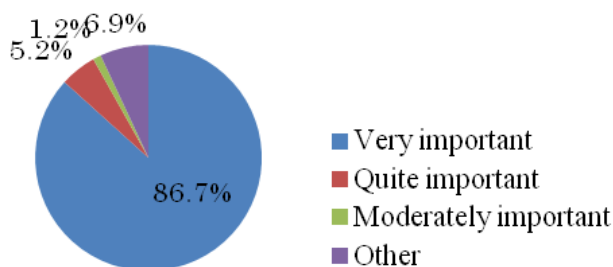
1. To take part in promoting the quality of education, a teaching staff need to be equipped:	Avg. score
.General knowledge and solid knowledge of all subjects that they are going to teach	3.95
.High professional consciousness, moral goodness of character and behavior	3.89
.High professional skills in teaching, while fostering a habit of self-improvement	3.73
.Ability to maintain good relations with schools and communities for national development	3.67
.Spirit of participation in the local community development	3.45
2. For ensuring teacher's quality and competence, it is demanded to have:	Avg. score
.Strong passion for teaching: commitment and pride for teaching pupils/students	3.86
.Pedagogical know-how	3.77
.Ability to teach or advise or guide pupils/students	3.76
.Responsibility and love toward pupils/students	3.72
.Proper common sense and general knowledge	3.67
.Organizational competence and collaboration	3.65
.Flexibility	3.65
.Openness (being able to work with parents and other non-teachers)	3.63
.Ability to change/make use of teaching materials	3.60
.Ability to participate in school development	3.59
.Expertise (source of knowledge and understanding)	3.58
.Cooperation with other colleagues and administrators	3.56
.Ability to create enjoyable class	3.50
.Understanding of technology	3.51
.Ability to understand pupils/students	3.49
3. To ensure teacher's capacity, the important issues to consider are:	Avg. score
.Working Conditions (particularly the low salary, social status is low, graduated from teacher training college but do not enter teaching)	3.90
.Systematization of trainings for teachers, who are in service, for continuous professional development	3.84
.Selection of teacher trainees for entering into teacher training centers, Quality of institutions, including training curriculum	3.68
.Teacher distribution	3.60
.Teacher Rotation (within the nation, province, district)	2.42
4. Mentioning of teacher professional standards, the elements of teaching ability are:	Avg. score
.Self-realization as a teacher	3.88
.Professional ethics	3.86
.Professional knowledge	3.80
.Professional practice	3.78
.Professional study	3.71
.Ability to understand children	3.60
5. Teacher needs to be equipped with ability for:	Avg. score
.For being used a wide range of teaching strategies appropriate for students needs	3.72
.To work effectively with colleagues and the school community	3.65
.To have enthusiasm, creativity and commitment to students' success	3.65

to say that they may choose "D, E, or F." because the author notices that they pay high attention on providing their perceptions actively, plus writing extra comments, in other questions of the questionnaire. For this question, more than 90% of respondents in this study judge in-

service teacher training as important for improving teacher's quality and their status. The reasons why over 90% of respondents find in-service teacher training important to improve teacher's quality are because: (a) it helps increase teacher's knowledge, skills and

Table 3. List of contents involved in 'teacher quality' and 'in-service teacher training'

1. Is in-service teacher training important to improve teacher's quality and teacher's status? (See Figure 1)	
2. Since/after being appointed, a teacher who is working at school needs:	Avg. score
.Continuous professional development through in-service training within school	3.75
.Continuous professional development through in-service training out of school	3.75
.Continuous professional development through self-study	3.53
3. If, in-service teacher trainings are important for teachers, why?	Avg. score
.It helps increase teachers' knowledge, skills and experiences	3.76
.To acquire new teaching methods	3.74
.To produce and develop teaching/educational materials together	3.68
.To enhance human qualities as an educator	3.68
.It shares information/experiences among teachers	3.66
.It provides a chance for teacher to learn from each other	3.65
.It contributes to improve pupils' learning	3.64
.It contributes to school/educational improvement	3.60
.It helps bring pupils/parents' confidence in teachers	3.54
.It brings better work evaluation	3.47

**Figure 1.** Is in-service teacher training important to improve teachers's quality and teacher's status.

experiences, whose average score is 3.76; (b) it is a tool used for acquiring new teaching methods, 3.74; (c) it helps to boast the confidence of pupils/students' parents in teacher, 3.54; and so forth.

In addition to these grounds, a primary school teacher writes his comment that pre-service teacher training alone is not enough, so we need extra in-service training. Another valuable comment obtained from a central ministry's official, male and of 20 years of service, who writes that teachers need to research and study more and do it regularly. Another perception is written and committed by a primary school teacher, male and of 15 years of service; that is in-service training is significant because teachers become more and more self-confident in their capacity in transferring relevant knowledge and skills to students, society will then get advanced. Overall, these revealed that Cambodian teachers exactly emphasize the concept of ensuring teacher's quality through

in-service training.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined Cambodian teachers' perception regarding: (1) teacher competence and quality improvement of education and (2) ensuring teacher quality and in-service teacher training.

Ensuring the quality of education requires competent teachers, based on results of this study. This belief does exist not only in Cambodia, but also to a large extent in the globe according to some foreign studies; for example, UNESCO (2006) and Hanushek, (2012). Then, ensuring qualified teachers is the forefront of challenges that all countries, regardless of their levels of development, have been focusing (EFA GMR, 2013 Overview and OECD, 2005). Nonetheless, patient challenges have arrived at many countries world-wide when it was realized that less than 50% of primary teachers of those nations has received a limited minimum teacher training, for example, 48.0% (2011) in Ethiopia, 36.4% (2008) in Honduras and 47.9% (2010) in Senegal⁽³⁾. In Cambodia, MOEYS (2011, 2011, 2012) also indicates teachers' low academic level of education and teaching staff without pedagogical training as shown in this paper and as revealed in other sections of the present questionnaire. Even so, according to the UN's data⁽⁴⁾, percentage of trained teachers for primary education in Cambodia has been showed as follows: respectively for 95.91 in 2001, 96.01 in 2002, 94.74 in 2003, 96.50, 97.68, 98.31, 98.41, 98.21, 99.47, 99.05 in 2010, and 98.92 in 2011. The training is, however,

inadequate and not regular; as a lower secondary school provided in the present questionnaire that training provided by the government is still limited. Cambodian teachers, now, demand appropriate in-service teacher training and desire to have it regularly. Totally, a sustainable system model of proper-and-feasible continuous professional development opportunity for teachers gets evidently crucial, and it urgently needs to be structured in accordance with the actual situation and availability of resources, mainly focus on where that may be able to response to the local people's needs (Im S., Nov 2008). Teacher has a central role to play toward children's learning achievement, quality improvement of education, and lifting citizenship of nations (Ban, 2012), but teaching is a very challenging profession particularly when teacher has to struggle over limited resources to implement their responsibilities. To overcome such hardship, the author is willing to continue, and now conducting another process of the study to explore the low-cost-but-most-effective structure of it, particularly in-service training structure model for primary school teachers.

NOTES

(1) Based on Rose P., Director of the Education for All Global Monitoring Report published by UNESCO. Rose P. (17 June 2013). Schooling for millions of children jeopardized by reductions in aid, accessed on 25 June 2013

(<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/06/2013617171857522559.html>).

(2) Based on a global survey for citizens led by the United Nations and Partners, accessed on 15 July 2013, <http://www.myworld2015.org/?page=results>

(3) Based on data of the World Bank re-accessed on 17 July 2013 at its webpage at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTEDUCATION/EXTDATASTATISTICS/EXTEDSTATS/0,,contentMDK:22614780~menuPK:7196605~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:3232764,00.html?KHM%2C32>

(4) Based on the United Nations: UN, Trained teachers by level of education Primary. (http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=trained+teachers+by+level+of+education+Cambodia&d=UNESCO&f=series%3aTRTP_1%3bref_area%3aKHM, accessed on 17 July 2013)

Conflict of Interests

The author(s) have not declared any conflict of interests.

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