**Motivational Level of Cambodian Teachers and the Government Policies to Attract and Retain Competent Teachers**

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**Global trends of teaching profession**

Teachers are the best resources in educational process when curriculum is implemented. They are the substitutes for the poor textbooks and ill-designed learning and teaching materials and activities. Hence, it is widely accepted that teachers are considered as the active catalysts in educational quality improvement of the country. They work at the front lines where learning and teaching take place. Thus, their qualifications need to be high since the students learn not only content knowledge from them but also value and behavior traits.

Due to their fundamental importance, policies and incentives are formed to attract competent and devoted candidates to serve teaching positions, and to maintain the current teaching staff in every country. A few years after the declaration of human rights, UNESCO in cooperation with ILO formed The UNESCO-ILO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers in 1966 to promote the teacher statuses, both financial and social, so that highly qualified teachers remain in position and work whole-heartedly throughout the world. However, some countries have adhered to this recommendation; some could not follow it and some other developed countries do more than what were recommended there. For instance, in the countries that have performed so well on the international exams like PISA or TIMSS, teachers are carefully selected out of the high intellects and their statuses in society are by all means guaranteed. For example, in Finland, in order to be a primary school teacher, one needs to hold at least Master’s Degree and intern with experienced teachers for two years before they obtain the license to carry out their own teaching. Teachers are highly respected positions and people are quite autonomous in their professions. In Japan, teachers are called *sensei*, the most respected word that is used to address the people in three important positions in society, namely teachers, doctors, and lawyers. Affirmative-action policies help produce high-quality teachers, who finally produce high education quality for the nation.

**A brief background of teacher condition in Cambodia**

The Khmer Rough killed and starved many Cambodian intellects to death during its almost-four-year administration and other survivors fled the country. After the collapse of the Khmer Rough, with assistance from Vietnam, the Cambodian government at that time put much effort in rebuilding the human resources by resuming education service (Collin, 2009; Dy, 2004). There were a few literate people to fill in many vacant teaching positions. Because of such a great shortage of educated manpower, this country adapted a maxim ‘*those who know little teach those who know nothing*’. It was estimated that 5,000 primary schools were run to provide education nationwide and there were around 21,000 primary school teachers by 1980 (Duggan, 1996). Those teachers came to position without proper pedagogical training and with very limited
knowledge. However, after the first national election organized by the UN in 1993, those teachers were encouraged to pursue their education on part-time or weekend basis, and in-service trainings was installed to provide opportunities for them to upgrade their pedagogical and content knowledge. Though there are no data showing the percentage of those teachers who remain in position now, according to the newest statistics from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), there are 89,651 public teaching staff members who work from pre-school education to secondary education levels throughout the country (MoEYS, 2014).

The most discussed teacher issues in Cambodia lie around the quality and shortage. The number of teachers keeps increasing every year and the pupil teacher ratios have been reduced. For example, the pupil teacher ratio was 43:1 in 2006, but in 2013 the rate was just 34.2:1 (MoYES, 2007; 2014). Yet, competent teachers are always transferred to the urban schools after they served in the designated locations for one year (Badloe, Flanagan, Gore, Hozumi, Imhof, & So, 2007; Benveniste, Marshall, & Araujo, 2008). This results in a shortage of teachers in rural areas. Multi-grade classes, double-shift teaching and using contract teachers are widely observed in the rural schools. Usually, teachers are able to earn more in the urban areas as shadow education is so common and the student families are well-off enough to pay for such education type, as it is supplementary for the low teaching and learning hours in the public schools. Teachers are normally late and absent in Cambodian public schools. Teaching is seen as the last option for most young Cambodians. Hence, only poor and less (or even least) competent students apply for teacher training programs.

**Motivation and dissatisfaction factors**

Cambodian teachers are quite motivated in their profession, according to the Voluntary Service Overseas [VSO] (2008). There are a few factors that attract them to the profession at the first place and keep them motivated in their jobs. They love teaching and working with children (Benveniste, Marshall, & Araujo, 2008; VSO, 2008). They have normally been influenced by their former teachers or their families. Some of them also continue their professions with a hope that the system will change and the teacher status will be paid more attention to, just as what the former king Sihanouk’s regime did. In his administration, teachers were highly paid and enjoyed high status in society. It is said that being a teacher could produce income to feed the whole family of five happily. Some teachers above all want to be a part of development by improving the education system. Though there is not empirical evidence, it is commonly believed that Cambodian teachers devote their efforts and lives to make changes in the society because they possess a strong belief that education plays a pivotal play (Benveniste, Marshall, & Araujo, 2008; VSO, 2008).

Much research has been conducted in Cambodia on why teaching is not the first career option and why some teachers seek for the possible ways to leave teaching profession. Most of the teachers in the studies by Benveniste, Marshall and Araujo, and VSO mentioned that they entered the career because the university tuition fees for their desired majors were too expensive for them to afford. There are a number of prevalent reasons of dissatisfaction that the
most teachers have and the potential candidate are not attracted to the teaching positions in Cambodia. The most known factor is the low salary. In a survey by VSO (2008), 91 percent of the sample teachers were not happy with their salaries when their workload was high. On average, Cambodian teachers earn less than 100USD a month, which is less than the garment factory workers who is able to earn 150USD or so if they work overtime. However, the inflation is higher and higher every year. Normally, the primary school teachers earn around 50USD per month with a requirement of 16 hours of teaching a week, while lower-secondary and upper-secondary receive around 75USD and 100USD respectively (Cambodia Independent Teacher Association, 2011). They thus are not able to survive with such a small amount of salary. They need to perform moonlight jobs to support their living. Some teachers in rural areas even change their jobs to work in micro finance institutions, which have been mushrooming in rural Cambodia recently. That lowers the status of teachers in Cambodia. Besides, there are several more dissatisfaction reasons, such as low social status, corruption, no voice in education sector, poor benefits, unfriendly working environment, workload, lack of teaching materials and resource, no professional development, and so on (Benveniste, Marshall, & Araujo, 2008; VSO, 2008). These factors push them out of teaching profession and out of motivation to perform high quality teaching, which later affects the student learning outcomes immensely.

**Recent policies to attract and retain competent teachers**

By understanding the important roles of teachers in carrying educational tasks and activities to build up strong human resources for the country and the factors that lead to a shortage of competent teachers, in 2013 the government of Cambodia formulated the first teacher policy whose goal is “to develop teachers with quality, competencies and accountability in line with their professional code of conduct as well as providing enabling conditions to fulfil their profession effectively and efficiently.” In that policy document, MoEYS uses 8 policies in order to achieve the stated goal. Policy 2 was created to attract competent persons into teaching profession. In this policy, there are 4 strategies needed to be worked out, namely (1) improving the living condition, professional value, status and social standing of teachers, (2) improving teacher’s professional development, (3) defining criteria and professional conditions required to recruit/ select teachers and (4) modernizing the standards of teacher training programs to meet the national needs and to be competitive regionally and globally. Policy 7 is to motivate teachers so that they will not leave their profession once they have entered. To realize this policy, MoEYS needs to improve conducive working environments and living conditions of teachers through the provisions of salary, remuneration/compensation, social welfare, general benefits and retirement benefits, particularly females and those who work in remote and disadvantaged areas; provide recognition and rewards to outstanding teachers; and enhance career growth, autonomy and professional decisions of teachers as defined in the law to improve students’ learning achievement.

After the formulation of the aforementioned policy document, the government of Cambodia has taken many actions. It works to raise the salaries of teachers. According the recent
Sub-Decree 468 (anukkret lek 468 in khmer), which was dated on August 06, 2013 and signed by Prime Minister Hun Sen, the lowest minimum basic salaries of teachers and other government officers are raised to 320,000 Riels (80USD) and the amount excludes the payment for their functional activities. Second, the good teachers are rewarded every year. And on January 29, 2013, Royal Decree 092 on the professorship was put into practice in order to reward those hard-working and outstanding teachers at public higher education institutions. The titles are offered based on their performance, years of service, publications, education and some other qualifications. Very recently, teachers were encouraged to join professional development workshops or field visits, and the government is responsible for their expenses during their travel, according to the Sub-Decree 216, dated on July 22, 2014.

Conclusion

The issues concerning teacher development in Cambodia are around their quality and shortage. These two problems are the results of their low professional motivation and no mechanisms to attract and retain teachers. However, the fifth-mandate Royal Government of Cambodia has been putting much effort in reforming public sectors, and teachers are now receiving more and more attention and their statuses are being raised, as the new minister of education is committed to working out the teacher issues.

References