Cambodian Journal of Educational Research (2021)
Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 69–72.

The role of parental and community participation in education amid the COVID-19 pandemic

Piseth Neak
Chulalongkorn University
Bangkok, Thailand

Education is one of Cambodia's main driving forces to attain its aspiration to become an upper middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050. Providing equitable quality education to every Cambodian under the principle of education for all is the primary task that the Cambodian government needs to carry out (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport [MOEYS], 2019). It has been suggested that participation by parents and the community is a key catalyst for encouraging children's learning and augmenting their learning potential, which in turn promotes lifelong learning in the long run (Aref, 2010). Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the Cambodian education system. Under this circumstance, there is a strong need for parental and community participation in sustaining education throughout the country (Neak, 2019).

The spread of the novel coronavirus is universal (Andersen et al., 2020). The spread is also seen in Cambodia, forcing the Cambodian government to abruptly close schools in March 2020 as part of the measures to prevent any community transmission of the virus (Frontières, 2020, as cited in Global Partnership for Education, 2019). For instance, during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, all kinds of face-to-face teaching and learning have been replaced by virtual learning, giving a new experience for Cambodian educators and learners. During the pandemic, virtual learning is the only means for Cambodian learners to have access to education while keeping their safety in addition to practicing social distancing.

There are many critical challenges facing Cambodian education, which requires collaboration and participation from the community people and

parents to support their children's education and assist the government and other relevant stakeholders in alleviating those stupendous impacts. The challenges are largely caused by the inadequacy of technology, physical infrastructures, facilities, and human resources as well as deficiency in knowledge of the community people and learners' parents (Neak, 2020). In addition, there is limited participation by the community people and parents in their children's learning and education, which is a forefront issue in Cambodian education during the pandemic (Tan, 2018).

Without the proper participation of the community people and parents, the inequality in education between children in the rural and urban areas has increased. For example, there is approximately 97 percent of the net enrollment in primary schools in the last decade. Of those enrolled, 80 percent could finish primary school, nearly 40 percent finished low secondary school, but only 20 percent finished upper secondary school (Global Partnership for Education, 2019).

There are some perceptible actions and interventions from the Cambodian government that has paid its attention to the participation of the community people and parents in the education sector and to ensure accountability and transparency in the education process (Benveniste et al., 2008). Additionally, the establishment of the Education Law concerning the partnership and participation of all pertinent stakeholders in Cambodian education is crucial to promote equitable quality education. For instance, Articles 36 and 40 mentioned the participation and involvement of parents or guardians in education and that parents have the right to select educational programs, receive information regarding their children's study, and have active participation at school to raise their voices and opinions (Royal Government of Cambodia [RGC], 2007, pp. 12-15).

MoEYS has established a School Support Committee as an organization representing the community people and parents in school to facilitate their participation and raise their voices in the Cambodian education system (To, 2016). Furthermore, the Cambodian government has cooperatively worked with development partners such as UNESCO, UNDP, and UNICEF to promote community participation in education to keep moving this sector forward and to develop human resources in Cambodia.

In short, although Cambodian education has encountered many challenges, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the window of opportunities is always open for all relevant stakeholders to improve this sector. One way this can be done is through the participation of parents and people in the community. To grapple with those challenges and mitigate the impact of COVID-19, MoEYS shall invite all concerned stakeholders and the local community people to put in their efforts and to actively participate in their children's education to promote their lifelong learning and contribute to the development of the Cambodian education system. Those initiatives will assist the Cambodian government in accomplishing inclusive and holistic education and promoting lifelong learning that is aligned with the Cambodian National Policy on Lifelong Learning (RGC, 2019).

The Author

Piseth Neak is a founder of The Way of Life Cambodia. He received a scholarship to pursue his master's degree in Education at Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. He has worked as an English lecturer at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Email: neak_piseth@yahoo.com.

References

Andersen, K. G., Rambaut, A., Lipkin, W. I., Holmes, E. C., & Garry, R. F. (2020). The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2. *Nature Medicine*, *26*, 450–452. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-020-0820-9

Aref, A. (2010). Community participation for educational planning and development. *Nature and Science*, *8*(9), 1-4. https://doi.org/10.7537/marsnsj080910.01

Benveniste, L., Marshall, J., & Araujo, M. C. (2008). *Teaching in Cambodia*. World Bank and MOEYS https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/8073

Global Partnership for Education (2019). *Results report 2019*. https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/results-report-2019

MOEYS. (2019). *Cambodia's education 2030 roadmap*. MOEYS. https://www.moeys.gov.kh/index.php/en/planning/2901.html#.YAEaGOgzY2w

Neak, P. (2019). *Lifelong learning must be promoted in Cambodia to materialize its vision*. Cambodianess. https://cambodianess.com/article/lifelong-learning-must-be-promoted-in-cambodia-to-materialize-its-vision

Neak, P. (2020). *Inclusive education amid COVID-19 in Cambodia*. Shape SEA. https://shapesea.com/op-ed/covid-19/inclusive-education-amid-covid-19-in-cambodia/

RGC (Royal Government of Cambodia). (2007). *Education law*. Royal Government of Cambodia. http://119.82.251.165:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/390

RGC. (2019). National policy on lifelong learning. Royal Government of Cambodia. https://uil.unesco.org/system/files/cambodia_policy_on_lll_04-10-18_eng_1.pdf

Tan, S. (2018). *Parental involvement in education in Cambodia*. UK Essays. https://www.ukessays.com/essays/education/parental-involvement-in-education-in-cambodia-education-essay.php?vref=1

To, L. (2016). *Community participation in education: A case study in the four remote primary schools in Samlot District, Battambang province, Cambodia* [Master's thesis, Victoria University of Wellington]. https://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10063/6184/thesis.pdf?sequence=1