

The Evolution of Inclusive Education in Cambodia (1953–2024): A Literature Review

Wen Rouet

National University of Battambang, Cambodia

Rany Sam

National University of Battambang, Cambodia

Vireak Keo

National University of Battambang, Cambodia

Bunrosy Lan

National University of Battambang, Cambodia

Chandarey Vong

National University of Battambang, Cambodia

To Cite This Chapter

Rouet, W., Sam, R., Keo, V., Lan, B., & Vong, C. (2024). The evolution of inclusive education in Cambodia (1953–2024): A literature review. In T. A. Oliveira, & M. T. Hebebcı (Eds.), *Current Academic Studies in Technology and Education 2024* (pp. 244-276). ISRES Publishing

Introduction

Cambodia has faced the repercussions of civil war and a genocidal regime, resulting in numerous adverse effects, particularly a notable increase in the population of individuals with disabilities. Some Cambodians with disabilities have been directly affected by remnants of the civil war, such as mines and unexploded ordnances.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Additionally, disabilities stem from various causes such as traffic accidents, workplace incidents, prenatal and postnatal issues, aging, and other factors. Children with disabilities are considered to be among society's most vulnerable members (Abosi and Koay, 2008). Approximately 10% of Cambodian children are disabled, with speech-to-cognition impairments being the most visible (Dorlack, 2022). However, the education available in Cambodia today is far from universal (Abosi and Koay, 2008). In accordance with (Shaeffer and Perapate, 2022), 17,300 Cambodian students with disabilities received basic education during the 2019-2022 school year. Despite substantial achievements in the creation of inclusive schools, strategic objectives, and regulations, problems continue to be essential to the expansion and growth of disabled diversity (Grimes et al.). This chapter, based on secondary sources, provides a brief overview of inclusive education for children with disabilities in Cambodia, as well as a brief definition of inclusive education and, more specifically, inclusive education for children with disabilities. It then goes into detail about the progress made by the Cambodian government and partner organizations. Before concluding, the chapter suggests future steps to improve the equality and quality of inclusive education for Cambodian children with disabilities.

What is inclusive education?

In addition to all, it is essential to comprehend what inclusive education entails. These statements, often expressed in common phrases like "All means all" or "No child left behind," indicate that every learner matters equally. Inclusive education is the belief that schools should serve as a platform for all children or pupils, regardless of learning differences (Elliott and Thurlow, 2005). In other words, it should be a system that is effective, efficient, and successful in response to the diversity of students in its locality (Leg, 2022; Mpofu, 2022; Chumo, 2020). Unfortunately, according to UNESCO (2022), learners all over the world are being denied access to high-quality education because of factors such as gender, gender orientation, ethnic or social origin, language, religion, nationality, economic status, or abilities.

Education that is inclusive for kids with impairments

In general, inclusive education for children with disabilities is viewed as a method of meeting their needs within general educational settings (Abosi and Koay, 2008). In other words, inclusive education includes everyone without discrimination based on disability (Nind, 2014). People with disabilities, according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, are those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments (Rasmussen and Lewis, 2007). When combined with other societal barriers, such impairments can impede equal participation with others (Latchem and Latchem, 2018).

Actually, if a school is primarily designed for children with disabilities, it is considered segregation.' Similarly, putting children in a special or separated unit is referred to as segregation. On the other hand, 'integration' occurs when both children with and without disabilities are included in mainstream settings but lack appropriate support and accommodations (Thomazet, 2009).

Methods

This paper is a comprehensive review of the development of inclusive education and the effects of inclusive education policy on Cambodia's development prospects over six phases of political change. It also discusses the success and failure of each regime's adaptation of inclusive education as a policy for national development. The researchers briefly reviewed and organized the contents of scholarly articles related to the previously mentioned concepts. The majority of the documents were discovered in the form of journals written by well-known authors who made significant contributions to Cambodia's inclusive educational research.

Data from scholarly sources, such as journal articles, were analysed using content analysis. The two analytical methods used in content analysis are conceptual analysis and relational analysis. However, in this study, the researchers used relational analysis to examine texts from various scholarly sources. Researchers can use relational analysis to investigate in-depth relationships between concepts or units identified

through the examination of semantic or meaningful relationships between those concepts or units.

Result

Under the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (1953 – 1970)

Constitution, Policies, Regulations, and Law Related Inclusion Education

At the Geneva Conference on November 9, 1953, Cambodia achieved peaceful independence from France. Prince Sihanouk dedicated efforts to advance educational initiatives across all levels, aiming to elevate the nation into a modern, industrially developed, and technologically advanced state within the region. Following this, the king established two highly effective political entities: the People's Socialist Community (Sangkum Reastr Niyum-SRN) and the Socialist Youth Movement of the Khmer Kingdom (SYKK) (Rany et al., 2012).

During the Sangkum Reastr Niyum period (1953–1970) in Cambodia, a dedication to inclusive education permeated constitutional provisions, policies, regulations, and laws. Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the leader of this era, endeavored to establish a holistic educational framework that championed accessibility and fairness throughout the nation. The Cambodian constitution under the Sangkum Reastr Niyum accentuated the paramount importance of education as a fundamental right for every citizen. Constitutional provisions underscored the government's commitment to nurturing an inclusive educational system tailored to the diverse needs of the populace. This constitutional framework laid the foundation for subsequent policies geared towards ensuring equal educational opportunities (Keo, 2019).

Under Prince Sihanouk's leadership, specific policies and regulations were implemented to propel inclusive education forward. These measures addressed multiple facets, encompassing basic education access, the quality of educational facilities, and the infusion of diverse perspectives into the curriculum. The government actively dismantled barriers to education, striving to guarantee quality schooling for students from all backgrounds. Legislation enacted during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum

period mirrored the government's dedication to inclusive education. Laws were crafted to secure equal educational opportunities for individuals, regardless of socio-economic factors or geographic location. The legal framework also tackled issues like compulsory education, teacher qualifications, and the establishment of educational institutions (Keo, 2019).

The country experienced a significant increase in the number of primary and secondary schools, as well as the establishment of numerous new universities nationwide (Chendler, 2008). Notably, seven higher education institutions were founded between 1953 and 1959, including the National Institute for Law, Politics, and Economics (1953), the Royal Medical School (1953), the Royal School for Public Administration (1956), the National Institute of Pedagogy (1958), the Faculty of Letters and Humanity Studies (1959), the Faculty of Science and Technology (1959), and the National School of Commerce (1959) (Chhum, 1973). Additionally, nine esteemed universities were established in provincial and municipal areas. The Buddhist University, inaugurated in 1954, marked the regime's first university, offering studies in religion and Khmer language. The Royal Khmer University followed suit in 1960, and by 1965, six more universities were established, including the Royal Technical University (RTC), the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), the Royal University of Kompong Cham (RUKC), the Royal University of Takeo-Kampot (RUTK), the Royal University of Agricultural Science (RUAS), and the People's University (PU). Finally, the Royal University of Battambang (RUBB) opened its doors in 1967.

Achievements and issues related to Inclusive Education

Under Prince Norodom Sihanouk's leadership, endeavours were undertaken to widen educational access, particularly in rural regions, with the government aiming to diminish the educational divide between urban and rural communities. Policies were implemented to enforce compulsory education, ensuring that children had the chance to enrol in schools, a move intended to elevate literacy rates and lay the groundwork for advanced educational opportunities. The government also allocated resources to establish tertiary education institutions, responding to the escalating demand for higher

education, thereby contributing to the cultivation of a skilled workforce and the formation of a more educated society.

Inclusive education efforts during this period may not have adequately addressed the needs of students with disabilities or special educational requirements. The primary emphasis was on broad access, with limited attention given to tailored support for diverse learning needs. In summary, while the Sangkum Reastr Niyum era in Cambodia achieved notable progress in inclusive education, persistent challenges included disparities between urban and rural areas, socio-economic obstacles, concerns about educational quality, political control, and insufficient focus on special educational needs. The accomplishments and issues from this period significantly influenced Cambodia's educational landscape, laying the groundwork for subsequent reforms in these following years.

Under the Khmer Republic (1970 – 1975)

Constitution, Policies, Regulations, Law related Inclusion Education

The deterioration of education in Cambodia began with the establishment of the Khmer Republic (KR) after General Lon Nol's 1970 coup against King Sihanouk, supported by the United States to counter communism (Chandler, 1983). Concurrently, Cambodia became embroiled in the Vietnam War, leading to extensive bombings by U.S. B-52 aircraft targeting Communist North Vietnam forces and their supply lines within Cambodia. This conflict resulted in significant casualties, with over 700,000 Cambodians killed and approximately two million displaced farmers seeking refuge in Phnom Penh and other urban centres (Curtis, 1993).

Amidst these challenges, the KR government, preoccupied with war and military expenditure, neglected the education sector. Funding for education was drastically reduced, leading to school closures and prompting some students and teachers to join the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) revolution (Dy, 2004). In summary, the intersection of political upheaval, external conflicts, and resource allocation prioritized military endeavors over education, contributing to a decline in Cambodia's educational landscape (Chandler, 1983; Curtis, 1993; Dy, 2004).

The expansion of education in Cambodia faced significant challenges due to the allocation of the national budget towards war and defense efforts, resulting in the destruction of numerous educational infrastructures (Burgler, 1990; Fergusson & Masson, 1997). Despite UNESCO's acknowledgment of Lon Nol's government's intent to advance the education sector, financial resources were predominantly directed to wartime activities rather than educational development.

Fergusson and Masson (1997) highlighted the devastating impact of U.S. bombardments on educational institutions, citing the destruction of universities such as the University of Takeo-Komprot and the University of Kompong Cham in May 1970. Chandler (1983) further emphasized the extensive bombing campaigns by the U.S. in rural Cambodia, aiming to delay a Communist victory until congressional restrictions halted further bombings in 1973. Consequently, educational infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development were severely hindered during this period (Burgler, 1990; Fergusson & Masson, 1997; Chandler, 1983).

Achievements and issues related to Inclusive Education

During the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime, Cambodia's education system experienced significant instability attributed to political turmoil, civil conflict involving students and teachers, and the ramifications of the Vietnam War, particularly affecting rural areas. The conflict led to a sharp increase in dropouts, with many students and educators either opposing the KR government or joining the revolution. Consequently, school closures were widespread, resulting in a drastic decline in enrollment rates throughout the KR's five-year tenure until the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) assumed power in 1975. The regime did not introduce any new educational strategies or policies to foster the expansion of the education sector during this period. As a result, progress in inclusive education under the Khmer Republic was limited, characterized by a moderate expansion of educational opportunities and a heightened emphasis on technical and vocational education. Nevertheless, these endeavors faced substantial hindrances due to prevailing challenges such as conflict, disruptions, and political instability. These pervasive issues dominated the era, creating a foundation for the subsequent difficulties encountered by the education system in Cambodia.

Under the Democratic Cambodia (1975 – 1979)

Constitution, Policies, Regulations, Law related Inclusion Education

From 1975 to 1979, Cambodia experienced a devastating revolution under the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) regime led by Pol Pot, resulting in the loss of millions of lives. The Khmer Republic, previously led by Lon Nol, was overthrown in April 1975. This period, often termed "Year Zero," aimed to rebuild Cambodia through an emphasis on education. However, the DK regime targeted intellectuals, educators, students, and other perceived enemies, resulting in mass killings, starvation, and forced labour. Scholars such as Ayres (2000) and Chandler (1983) highlight the DK regime's catastrophic impact on Cambodia's educational infrastructure, with approximately 90% of schools destroyed. Libraries and laboratories were abolished, and educational institutions were repurposed for other uses, exemplified by the transformation of the Toul Sleng Prison from a high school. The regime's policies led to a significant loss among educators and students. Clayton (1998) reported that 75% of teachers, 96% of tertiary students, and 67% of elementary and secondary students perished. Moreover, Whitaker (1973) noted a drastic decline in the number of teachers, with only 5,000 remaining out of over 20,000 before the DK regime. Among intellectuals at the University of Phnom Penh, only 87 out of 1,000 survived. The DK regime indoctrinated Cambodian youths with revolutionary ideologies, viewing them as instruments to transform Cambodia into a socialist country. However, scholars such as Burgler (1990) and Chandler (1983) underscore the profound implications of this indoctrination, leading to the exploitation and manipulation of young individuals for the regime's objectives. In summary, the DK regime's radical policies resulted in widespread devastation, particularly targeting Cambodia's educated population, disrupting the education system, and leaving enduring scars on the nation's history.

Achievements and issues related to Inclusive Education

During the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) regime, education in Cambodia underwent significant changes and was primarily geared towards indoctrination rather than traditional learning (Burgler, 1990; Vickery, 1984; Clayton, 1998). Schools were

established for children up to ten years old, offering limited hours of instruction focused on basic subjects like reading, writing, arithmetic, and revolutionary songs and dances. Instruction was conducted in Khmer, prohibiting foreign languages. Teachers were selected based on trust by the Angkar organization and typically came from peasant backgrounds with minimal education or teaching experience (Burgler, 1990; Whitaker, 1973). The DK regime aimed to instil revolutionary values in the youth, emphasizing ideological indoctrination over academic development (Whitaker, 1973). Furthermore, Vickery (1984) and Vireak & Bunrosy (2024) highlighted additional educational initiatives focused on technical training. The Institute for Science Training and Information offered specialized courses for selected youths, primarily from peasant families, aiming to produce technicians and scientists rapidly. Some of these individuals were sent abroad for further training, reflecting the regime's ambitions to expedite national development. Furthermore, political education was integral, targeting DK squads and members with daily sessions on agricultural production, infrastructure projects, and revolutionary policies (Vickery, 1984). Music and songs served as essential tools for disseminating the regime's ideology and maintaining control over the population. In summary, education under the DK regime was profoundly influenced by ideological objectives, emphasizing revolutionary values, and control over the population.

Under the People's Republic of Cambodia and State of Cambodia (1979 – 1991)

Constitution, Policies, Regulations, Law related Inclusion Education

In the era spanning the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) and the subsequent State of Cambodia (1979–1991), various constitutional, policy, regulatory, and legal changes significantly influenced inclusive education in Cambodia. This period emerged after the collapse of Democratic Kampuchea and was characterized by extensive initiatives to reconstruct the nation's educational system. Noteworthy elements concerning inclusive education during this timeframe include the adoption of the 1981 constitution of the People's Republic of Kampuchea, which, along with subsequent legal frameworks, formed the basis for governing the country.

The period also witnessed a focus on vocational and technical education, aligning educational priorities with the country's developmental goals. Training programs were developed to equip individuals with practical skills, contributing to economic growth. The government recognized and endeavored to tackle disparities in educational access, potentially formulating policies to bridge gaps between urban and rural areas and address socioeconomic imbalances affecting educational opportunities. Seeking international support and collaboration, the PRK and the State of Cambodia engaged in partnerships with international organizations, and donor assistance played a pivotal role in shaping inclusive education policies.

Achievements and issues related to Inclusive Education

Substantial endeavors were undertaken to rebuild the education system, which had suffered extensive damage during the Khmer Rouge regime. These efforts encompassed the restoration of schools, the training of educators, and the rehabilitation of educational infrastructure. Initiatives were launched to widen the reach of basic education, specifically focusing on augmenting enrollment rates and ensuring broader accessibility, particularly in rural areas. The implementation of teacher training programs was geared towards augmenting the skills and capabilities of educators, resulting in an overall enhancement of educational quality and better-equipped teachers capable of addressing diverse learning needs.

In short, accomplishments during the People's Republic of Cambodia and State of Cambodia era include significant strides in educational reconstruction, the extension of basic education access, and a focus on vocational training. However, enduring challenges, including resource limitations, post-conflict trauma, rapid recovery pressures, socioeconomic disparities, and international controversies, impacted the effectiveness of inclusive education initiatives.

Under the UNTACT and the coalition Government (1991 – 1993)

Constitution, Policies, Regulations, Law related Inclusion Education

Education was deemed as the most important sector to restore after the 1991 Paris Peace Accords at the United Nations (UN). Therefore, the modern education system was initiated under the support of the United States, UN agencies, and other countries. The international development aids started to flow into Cambodia about 500 million dollars or more since the early 1990s. The newly elected government adopted education as the priority goal for the national development by emphasizing on human resource development as the key to poverty alleviation and socio-economic development. According to the Constitution adopted on September 21st, 1993, the right to quality of education was guaranteed as stated in the Article 65, and Cambodian government was rigorously committed to providing compulsory education for nine years for free of charge by 2015 (Sovachana, 1991). After the national election sponsored by the UN in 1993, Cambodia experienced significant stable political and educational development.

The Policy of Education for Children with Disabilities, drafted in 2008 (Smith et al., 2010), comprehensively covers all children with Disabilities and is meant to ensure that they enjoy their right to education similar to other children without such disabilities. This policy supports the Policy for Child-Friendly Schools. The MoEYS is giving full support in implementing this policy to meet the goals of the Education Strategic Plan as well as the National Plan for Education for All.

Achievements and issues related to Inclusive Education

Between 1991 and 1993, Cambodia was undergoing significant political and social changes, particularly after the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1991, (Curtis, G. 1993). That aimed to restore peace and rebuild the nation after years of conflict and the devastating Khmer Rouge regime. However, the term "UNTACT" is not directly associated with Cambodia's historical or educational context during this period. Regarding inclusive education in Cambodia during the early 1990s, the focus was

primarily on rebuilding the education system, which had been severely disrupted by years of conflict.

Achievements

Rehabilitation and Reconstruction: After years of conflict, efforts were initiated to rehabilitate and reconstruct the education system in Cambodia. Schools were rebuilt, and efforts were made to restore educational infrastructure to facilitate access for all students (UNESCO, 1993).

Policy Development: The establishment of a coalition government and international support paved the way for policy development in education. Although inclusive education might not have been fully realized during this period, initial steps were taken to address the educational needs of marginalized groups (UNICEF, 1993).

International Assistance: Cambodia received significant international assistance to rebuild its education sector. Organizations like UNESCO and UNICEF played crucial roles in supporting educational reforms and initiatives aimed at promoting inclusivity and accessibility in education (UNESCO, 2003).

Issues

Resource Constraints: There were severe financial, human, and material resource constraints facing Cambodia. These restrictions made it difficult to implement comprehensive inclusive education programs and provide effective support to marginalized communities (Sharma & Mahapatra, 2007).

Teacher Training: There was a significant shortage of trained teachers and educational professionals equipped with the necessary skills and expertise to implement inclusive education practices effectively (UNESCO, 1993).

Accessibility Barriers: Rural and marginalized communities encountered various barriers to accessing quality education, including inadequate infrastructure, transportation challenges, and socio-economic constraints (UNICEF, 1993).

Societal Attitudes and Stigma: Deep-rooted societal attitudes and stigma towards individuals with disabilities or special needs remained pervasive, posing challenges in fostering inclusivity within schools and communities (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Under the Royal Government of Cambodia (1993 – the present)

Government policies/regulations/Laws

The Royal Government of Cambodia, under the Rectangular Strategy, Phase III, prioritizes the implementation of the national policy on disability through the Disability Action Council (DAC). This involves strengthening the enforcement of the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and aligning the rights and welfare of disabled individuals with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The National Disability Strategic Plan (2014-2018) outlines 10 strategic objectives, focusing on reducing poverty among persons with disabilities. It aims to ensure equal access to quality health services, physical and mental rehabilitation, and justice intervention services. The plan also emphasizes active participation, access to information, gender equality, empowerment for women and children with disabilities, and international cooperation.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport implemented an Education Policy for Children with Disabilities (2008-2018) to provide equal opportunities for all, resulting in 54,838 children and youths with disabilities (22,621 female) being enrolled in schools during the 2017-2018 school year.

Cambodia's Constitutional Law (Article 74) mandates state assistance to disabled persons and families of combatants who sacrificed their lives. Article 38 of the Education Law encourages special education for disabled persons and exceptional learners. The Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Articles 27-32) advocates for the rights of learners with disabilities to access education.

Educational Strategic Plan, (1993-2024)

1993

In 1993, Cambodia was recovering from the Khmer Rouge regime and grappling with challenges in rebuilding its educational system, especially in providing inclusive education for children with disabilities. The hurdles included limited infrastructure and resources, barriers to access for children with disabilities, stigma and discrimination, slow progress despite international assistance, and the development of policies and legislation for inclusive education. Despite ongoing efforts to reform the education system and promote inclusivity, progress was sluggish, and substantial barriers persisted. International assistance and community-based initiatives played vital roles in supporting endeavours to enhance educational access for children with disabilities in Cambodia (Zucker, 2013).

2001-2005

The Cambodia Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2001-2005 was a critical framework developed to guide Cambodia's education sector during that period (Tan, 2007). The plan aimed to address the challenges faced by the country's education system and lay down strategies for improving access, quality, relevance, and equity in education.

Universal Primary Education: One of the primary objectives was to ensure that all children, especially those from marginalized and vulnerable groups, have access to primary education. Efforts were made to increase enrolment rates and reduce dropout rates at the primary level.

Quality of Education: The plan emphasized enhancing the quality of education by improving teacher training programs, curriculum development, and educational infrastructure. There was a focus on providing teachers with the necessary resources and training to deliver quality education.

Relevance and Equity: To ensure that education is relevant to the needs of the country and its people, efforts were made to align the curriculum with national development

priorities. Special attention was given to promoting gender equity and ensuring that girls have equal access to education.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET): Recognizing the importance of TVET in meeting the demands of the labor market, the plan emphasized strengthening technical and vocational training programs. This included improving the quality of TVET institutions, curriculum development, and collaboration with the private sector.

Infrastructure Development: Infrastructure development, including the construction and renovation of schools, was a crucial component of the plan. Efforts were made to improve school facilities, classrooms, libraries, and laboratories to create a conducive learning environment.

Partnerships and Collaboration: The plan recognized the importance of partnerships and collaboration among various stakeholders, including government agencies, development partners, civil society organizations, and the private sector. Collaborative efforts were essential to mobilize resources, share expertise, and implement effective education reforms.

Monitoring and Evaluation: To ensure the successful implementation of the strategic plan, a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism was established. Regular assessments and reviews were conducted to track progress, identify challenges, and make necessary adjustments to the strategies and interventions.

Overall, the Cambodia Education Strategic Plan 2001-2005 aimed to transform the education sector by addressing key challenges and laying down a comprehensive framework for improving access, quality, relevance, and equity in education. While the specific details and outcomes may vary, the overarching goal was to create a more inclusive, responsive, and effective education system to support Cambodia's socio-economic development aspirations.

2006-2010

The Education Strategic Plan 2006 – 2010, Tan (2007) identifies education policy and strategic priority of the education for following five-year period. The MoEYS has been prioritizing the provision of equity in schooling access and quality in basic education, which is Goal and Strategy of National Plan of Education for all, during this period. This plan, being implemented in partnership with private stakeholders, NGOs, and the community of parents, has also highlighted:

- Expansion of Early Childhood Education
- Expansion of Non Formal Education and Professional Training for Youth
- Increasing opportunities in Secondary Education Access and Higher Education Access
- Ensuring the encouragement of capacity-building for educators
- Enforcing Education Law, good management, and accountability.

2009-2013

The Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2009-2013 in Cambodia underwent a comprehensive review to align with the "Rectangular Strategy Phase 2" and the "National Strategic Development Plan Update 2009-2013." This review marked a crucial commitment by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport to ongoing reforms within the broader government initiatives.

Over the five-year implementation of the ESP, the Ministry and its partners achieved significant progress in enhancing equitable access to education, improving educational quality and efficiency, and better managing the education sector. The plan prioritized establishing connections between education policies, strategies, development programs, and effective planning and budgeting

With a focus on achieving the National Education For All (EFA) Plan by 2015, the ESP emphasized equitable access to high-quality education, especially in basic education. It also emphasized expanding early childhood education, non-formal education, technical and vocational training, and opportunities for secondary and post-secondary education. Collaboration among the Royal Government, development partners, private sector, NGOs, communities, and parents was emphasized for successful implementation.

The development of the ESP involved clear mechanisms, studies, consultations, and broad participation from relevant stakeholders, including the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG). The Ministry expressed optimism that the ESP would serve as a roadmap for the effective implementation of accelerated education sector reforms for the benefit of all Cambodians.

2011-2015

The Cambodia Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2011-2015, Onn & Hyojin (2019) continued the efforts of the previous strategic plans to further improve the education sector in Cambodia. This plan built upon the achievements and lessons learned from previous initiatives and aimed to address the evolving challenges and priorities of the education system during that period.

- *Quality Education*: The plan emphasized enhancing the quality of education at all levels, from primary to tertiary education. Efforts were made to improve teacher training, curriculum development, and learning outcomes. The focus was on ensuring that students acquire relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies to meet the demands of the 21st-century world.
- *Access and Equity*: The plan aimed to improve access to education, especially for marginalized and vulnerable groups, including girls, children from rural areas, and children with disabilities. Efforts were made to increase enrollment rates, reduce dropout rates, and ensure that all children have equal opportunities to access quality education.

- *Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)*: Recognizing the importance of TVET in addressing the skills gap and promoting economic growth, the plan emphasized strengthening TVET programs. Efforts were made to improve the quality of TVET institutions, enhance curriculum relevance, and strengthen partnerships with the private sector.
- *Infrastructure Development*: Infrastructure development remained a critical component of the plan. Efforts were made to improve and expand educational facilities, including the construction and renovation of schools, classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. The aim was to create a conducive learning environment for students and teachers.
- *Teacher Development*: Recognizing the crucial role of teachers in the education system, the plan focused on improving teacher recruitment, training, professional development, and retention. Efforts were made to enhance teacher competencies, motivation, and working conditions to ensure quality education delivery.
- *ICT in Education*: The plan emphasized integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education to enhance teaching and learning processes, improve access to educational resources, and prepare students for the digital age. Efforts were made to expand ICT infrastructure in schools, train teachers in ICT skills, and develop digital learning resources.
- *Partnerships and Collaboration*: The plan recognized the importance of partnerships and collaboration among various stakeholders, including government agencies, development partners, civil society organizations, and the private sector. Collaborative efforts were essential to mobilize resources, share expertise, and implement effective education reforms.
- *Monitoring and Evaluation*: A robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism were established to track progress, assess the impact of interventions, identify challenges, and make necessary adjustments to the strategies and programs.

Regular assessments, reviews, and evaluations were conducted to ensure the effective implementation of the strategic plan.

Overall, the Cambodia Education Strategic Plan 2011-2015 aimed to build upon the achievements of previous initiatives and address the emerging challenges and priorities of the education sector. By focusing on quality education, access and equity, TVET, infrastructure development, teacher development, ICT integration, and partnerships, the plan aimed to create a more inclusive, responsive, and effective education system to support Cambodia's socio-economic development aspiration.

2014-2018

The Strategic framework of ESP focuses on continuing, extending and sustaining the improvements already made in access and equity, building a relevant and quality learning experience for children and youth delivered professionally, transparently and accountably. In order to achieve these policy objectives, programs will work with the following principles (Heng, M. 2022):

- Connect with the National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development (NPSNDD) and contribute to process of installing unified and sub-national administrations (SNA) under the guidance of the National Committee for Democratic Development (NCDD).
- Prepare mechanism of internal and external institutional operational arrangements and clear vertical and horizontal management, information, and operational functioning reflecting the sub sector approach and the objectives of the Ministry's policy on the decentralization and de-concentration reform.
- Actively respond to the framework for result based planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation
- Based on rights and equity
- Provide a holistic quality accountability framework that will include student learning assessment (and connect with regional and international

assessments), curriculum and learning materials, teaching knowledge and skills, facilities, and management, service standards

- Improve financial sustainability built on needs based projections
- Mobilize the involvement of all stakeholders and development partners Top of Form

2019-2023

The Education Strategic Plan for 2019-2023 outlines a comprehensive roadmap to enhance the quality, accessibility, and inclusivity of education. This strategic plan aims to address current challenges, leverage opportunities, and achieve sustainable development in the education sector (Em et al., 2022; Keo et al., 2024).

Vision, Mission, and Values

Vision: To create a future-ready education system that fosters innovation, equity, and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Mission: To provide a high-quality, inclusive, and equitable education that empowers individuals, strengthens communities, and drives national progress.

Values: The strategic plan is guided by principles of excellence, equity, collaboration, innovation, and accountability.

Strategic Goals

Curriculum Innovation: Emphasize curriculum reform to promote 21st-century skills, interdisciplinary learning, and holistic development.

Teacher and Leadership Development: Enhance teacher quality, professional development, and leadership capacity to meet evolving educational needs.

Infrastructure and Learning Environment: Modernize educational facilities, improve accessibility, safety, and create conducive learning environments.

Technology-Enhanced Learning: Integrate technology in education to enhance digital literacy, connectivity, and interactive learning experiences.

Equity, Access, and Inclusion: Implement targeted strategies to reduce disparities, promote inclusivity, and ensure equitable access to quality education for all learners.

Implementation Framework

Phased Approach: The plan adopts a phased implementation strategy with specific milestones, timelines, and performance indicators.

Resource Allocation: Detailed budgeting, funding mechanisms, and resource mobilization strategies are outlined to support plan implementation.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Robust monitoring, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms are established to track progress, measure impact, and facilitate continuous improvement.

Collaboration and Partnerships

The strategic plan emphasizes collaboration with government agencies, NGOs, private sector, academia, and community stakeholders. Strategic partnerships will be forged to leverage expertise, resources, and innovative solutions to achieve shared goals.

Risk Management

The plan identifies potential risks, challenges, and barriers to implementation. Risk mitigation strategies, contingency plans, and adaptive management approaches are developed to address uncertainties and ensure plan resilience.

The Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023 serves as a guiding framework to transform and elevate the education system. By focusing on curriculum innovation, teacher development, infrastructure enhancement, technology integration, and equity promotion, the plan aims to create a future-ready education ecosystem that equips learners with the knowledge, skills, and competencies to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

National and International Collaborations with NGOs and Civil Societies

Several non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including Rabbit School, Save the Children, and Aide-et-Action, are actively engaged in promoting inclusive education in Cambodia. The Rabbit School Organization is working in collaboration with the government to develop the National Manual on Teaching Children with Intellectual Disabilities, Learning Disabilities, and Autism Spectrum Disorder, with leadership from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) and international non-profit organizations like Save the Children.

Aide-et-Action's Schooling for Deaf and Blind Children focuses on integrating children with disabilities into general classrooms. The organization provides teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to teach children with disabilities, supplies required materials, and assists parents in enrolling their children in school. In Steung Sen and Kampong Svay districts of Kampong Thom province, the USAID-funded Children Reading-Cambodia project ensures educational opportunities and access for children with hearing problems, treating them similarly to children without disabilities. The project includes sign language and teaching methodology training for volunteer teachers and deaf volunteers, along with the use of learning and teaching materials.

Catholic Relief Services is another organization contributing to inclusive education in Cambodia. They have implemented inclusive education activities for young children and provided digital recording materials to the Department of Special Education. Collaborating with other ministries, the organization has promoted and launched inclusive educational games for preschool children on the MoEYS website.

Issues Related the inclusive Education in Cambodia

In Cambodia, various barriers, including poverty, disabilities, language differences, and prejudice, impede certain students from accessing education. Despite the government's efforts to promote inclusive education, significant challenges persist, such as limited resources, insufficient teacher education on inclusive methodologies, and societal beliefs that perpetuate discrimination. Research by Vong and Penh in 2019 identified challenges faced by children with disabilities, including inadequate

infrastructure, financial constraints, lack of specialized teacher preparation, and negative perceptions about disabilities. A 2018 report by the Cambodian Disabled People's Organization (CDPO) revealed instances of exclusion, discrimination, and harassment against these children in regular schools.

The government has taken steps to improve educational access for marginalized communities, including students with disabilities, by establishing support centers and allocating resources for inclusive education programs. Save the Children highlighted successful instances of inclusive education in Cambodia, particularly their initiative integrating children with disabilities into regular school settings. To amplify these achievements, enhanced collaboration among stakeholders, including the government, civil society, and international organizations, is imperative to exchange best practices and expand proven models. The Cambodian government's proactive measures, such as the Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023, aim to augment educational opportunities for marginalized sectors, specifically addressing the needs of children with disabilities, according to UNESCO in 2020.

Discussion

To successfully execute the Educational Strategy Plan for inclusion education in Cambodia, it's crucial to intensify resource constraints, teacher training, accessibility barriers, societal attitudes and stigma, and policy development. The constraints of this research encompass its narrow geographical focus within Cambodia and its reliance on qualitative methodologies, potentially constraining the broader applicability of the results. Subsequent studies should broaden their scope to investigate challenges and prospects for inclusive education across various regions of Cambodia. Additionally, assessing the efficacy of distinct interventions and approaches aimed at advancing inclusive education remains imperative.

This research indicates that while Cambodia faces notable obstacles in advancing inclusive education, there exist viable avenues for advancement. By tackling these challenges head-on and leveraging successful initiatives, Cambodia has the potential

to cultivate a more inclusive and fair educational landscape, thereby positively affecting the lives of numerous children within the nation.

Conclusion

This paper aims to explore the historical evolution of inclusive education in Cambodia across six different regimes, spanning from the era of Prince Norodom Sihanouk to the recent leadership of Mr. Hun Manet as the new prime minister. Additionally, a comprehensive literature review is provided, delving into the Cambodian Constitution, Policies, Regulations, and Laws pertaining to Inclusive Education. The review also encompasses an examination of the achievements and challenges associated with inclusive education in Cambodia. In summary, the discussion highlights five critical issues: Resource Constraints, Teacher Training, Accessibility Barriers, Societal Attitudes and Stigma, and Policy Development. These present-day challenges within inclusive education need urgent attention and resolution by the government and stakeholders. The aim is to effectively enhance the education system and integrate inclusive practices across all educational institutions. This aligns with the Cambodian Education Strategic Plan and the Government Policy on equal and equitable education for all citizens, emphasizing the need for inclusivity in learning opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Recommendations

To improve the equality and quality of inclusive education for children with disabilities in Cambodia, collaboration among various stakeholders, including the government, partnering organizations, and individuals, is crucial. A shared goal is necessary to ensure that Cambodian children with disabilities can fully exercise their rights and become productive citizens. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) highlights the importance of collective efforts. The document provides several suggestions for stakeholders to consider in pursuit of these objectives.

- **Cambodian Government:** For children with disabilities to receive an inclusive education, the Cambodian government plays a critical role. To

overcome the obstacles, these students facing inclusive education must be given top priority as a critical developmental objective. This entails providing enough funding at the subnational level for initiatives that cater to their particular needs, like materials and infrastructure that is accessible to people with disabilities. Enforcing strict laws requiring special considerations during building construction—especially in schools—is essential to removing obstacles to students attending classes regularly, especially those with mobility issues. It's crucial to look into programs aimed at enhancing mobility in places with weak infrastructure.

- **Partnering Organization:** Issues have been successfully addressed by partnering organizations, but government cooperation is essential to achieving a shared objective. Transparent sharing of action plans is crucial to prevent duplication. When mandates expire, independent operation frequently results in ambiguous transitions that cause regression from advancement to stagnation. This pattern of unsustainable development highlights the necessity of government cooperation. Partnering organizations should also support secondary and higher education in addition to primary education. The Sustainable Development Goals' aim of promoting lifelong learning for all is undermined when these later stages are disregarded.
- **Individual:** People's understanding of human rights and the current injustices experienced by those with disabilities is crucial to improving inclusive education for kids with disabilities. It is imperative that all people view disabled children as fellow human beings. The antiquated belief that a person's disability results from their past life's Karma must be given up and recognized as a mistake. Sadly, a lot of Cambodians still hold onto this misconception, which makes them think that children with disabilities are helpless, weak, and pitiful. Addressing discrimination is still a particularly difficult problem. Children with disabilities might not have the bravery to navigate the world and stand up for their rights until society accepts them as equal members.

References

- Abosi, O., & Koay, T. L. (2008). Attaining Development Goals of Children with Disabilities: Implications for Inclusive Education. *International Journal of Special Education*, 23(3), 1-10.
- Ayres, D. (2000). Tradition, Modernity, and the Development of Education in Cambodia. *Comparative Education Review*, 4(4).
- Brizendine, B. J. (2019). Advanced Code-reuse Attacks: A Novel Framework for JOP.
- Burgler, R. A. (1990), *The eyes of the pineapple: revolutionary intellectuals and terror in democratic Kampuchea*, Germany,
- Chandler, D. P. (1983), *A history of Cambodia* (Second Edi), The United State of America, Westview Press, Inc.
- Chantou, I. (2021). Towards Inclusive Education in Cambodia: Overcoming Barriers and Embracing Diversity. *Journal of Education Review Provision*, 1(3), 48-52.
- Chendler, D. (2008). Mabanie Neshaneh Shenasi. *Translator: Mehdi Parsa. Third*.
- Chhum, S. (1973). Higher education in the Khmer Republic. *Development of higher education in Southeast Asia: Problems and issues*, 100-104.
- Chumo, S. (2020). *SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IMPLEMENTATION IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NANDI COUNTY, KENYA* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Eldoret).
- Clayton, T. (1998), Building the New Cambodia: Educational Destruction and Construction under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979, *History of Education Quarterly*, 38(1), 1-16.
- Connelly, U. B. (2009). Disability rights in Cambodia: using the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities to expose human rights violations. *Pac. Rim L. & Pol'y J.*, 18, 123.

- Curtis, G. (1993). *Transition to What?: Cambodia, UNTAC and the Peace Process*. Geneva: UNRISD.
- Dorlack, T. P. (2022). *Examining Early Identification of Autism Spectrum Disorders: Improving Pathways Toward Referral and Diagnosis Through Records Review*. The University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Dy, S. S. (2004), Strategies and Policies for Basic Education in Cambodia: Historical Perspective, *International Education Journal*, 5(1), 90-94.
- Elliott, J. L., & Thurlow, M. L. (2005). *Improving test performance of students with disabilities... on district and state assessments*. Corwin Press.
- Em, S., Khan, S., & Nun, N. (2022). Education system in Cambodia: A brief review from the prehistoric period to the present, and an education strategic plan for the future. In *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education* (Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 141-164).
- Fergusson, L. C., & Masson, G. Le. (1997), A culture under siege: post-colonial higher education and teacher education in Cambodia from 1953 to 1979, *History of Education*, 26(1), 91-112.
- Grimes, P., Heijnen-Maathuis, E., Trisnadi, W., & Ikhyaul, I. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION CROSS-COUNTRY PEER-REVIEW BANGLADESH (HOPE project) and INDONESIA (IDEAL project)“DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE PRACTICES THROUGH ACTION LEARNING”.
- Heng, M. (2022). Cambodia’s gender policy: An analysis of women and girls’ education strategies under the Neary Rattanak IV Strategic Plan (2014-2018). *Cambodian Journal of Educational Research*, 37-61.
- Human Rights Watch. (2001). *Human rights watch*. Human Rights Watch.
- Kalyanpur, M. (2014). Distortions and dichotomies in inclusive education for children with disabilities in Cambodia in the context of globalisation and international development. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 61(1), 80-94.

- Keo, Vireak., Sam, R., Lan, B., & Wen, R. (2024). Challenges And Opportunities Of Educational Technology Integration In Cambodian Higher Education Institutions: A Literature Review. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 9(54), 157-176. DOI:10.35631/IJEPC.954013
- Keo, S. G. (2019). *Writing the Postcolonial City: Phnom Penh and Modernity during Sangkum Reastr Niyum, 1955-1970* (Doctoral dissertation, UC Berkeley).
- Latchem, C., & Latchem, C. (2018). The Disabled, Refugees, Displaced Persons and Prisoners. *Open and Distance Non-formal Education in Developing Countries*, 107-119.
- LEGODI-RAKGALAKANE, K., & MOKHAMPANYANE, M. (2022). Evaluation of educators' experiences and practices of inclusive education in primary schools: A South African perspective. *International e-Journal of Educational Studies*, 6(12), 255-263.
- Mosia, P. A., & Lephoto, M. N. (2023). Non-governmental and Community-Based Organisations as Enablers of Inclusion in Education. In *Inclusion in Southern African Education: Understanding, Challenges and Enablement* (pp. 209-221). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Mpofu, J. (2022). Modeling Inclusive Education in Urban Schools. In *Handbook of Research on Creating Spaces for African Epistemologies in the Inclusive Education Discourse* (pp. 274-289). IGI Global.
- Nind, M. (2014). Inclusive research and inclusive education: Why connecting them makes sense for teachers' and learners' democratic development of education. *Cambridge journal of education*, 44(4), 525-540.
- Nishio, A. (2019). History and Current Situation of Education for Children with Disabilities in Cambodia: A Gray Literature Review. *Creative Education*, 10(08), 1753.

- Omiegbe, O., & Ezehi, F. C. (2023). Correcting misconceptions about persons with disabilities. *Special needs education from the lens of interdisciplinary dialogue: A Festschrift In Honour Of Prof. Emeka D. Ozoji*, 1(1).
- Onn, S., & Hyojin, K. (2019). Challenges to Provincial Education Strategic Plan Preparation in Cambodia. *Cambodia Education Review*, 3(1), 98-114.
- Pearson, J. (2022). Capacity Development in Cambodia: The Challenge of Changing an Educational Culture. In *Education in Cambodia: From Year Zero Towards International Standards* (pp. 175-194). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- Phnom Penh Center for Independent Living, 2024
- Pov, S. (2021). Education of children with disabilities in Cambodia: Trends, collaborations, and challenges. In *Instructional Collaboration in International Inclusive Education Contexts* (pp. 139-150). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Rany, S., Zain, A. N. M., & Jamil, H. (2012). Cambodia's higher education development in historical perspectives (1863-2012). *International Journal of Learning and Development*, 2(2), 224-241.
- Rasmussen, M., & Lewis, O. (2007). United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. *International Legal Materials*, 46(3), 441-466.
- Royal Government of Cambodia. (2010). National Strategic Development Plan Update 2009–2013.
- Save the Children. (2018). *Inclusive education in Cambodia: Success story*.
- Shaeffer, S., & Perapate, T. (2022). Early Childhood Education in Thailand. In *International Handbook on Education in South East Asia* (pp. 1-31). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- Sharma, K., & Mahapatra, B. C. (2007). Emerging trends in inclusive education.
- Shaw, R., Jones, H., & Reed, B. Water and Sanitation for Disabled People and Other Vulnerable Groups.

- Slee, R. (2018). Defining the scope of inclusive education.
- Smith, D. D., Robb, S. M., West, J., & Tyler, N. C. (2010). The changing education landscape: How special education leadership preparation can make a difference for teachers and their students with disabilities. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 33(1), 25-43.
- Sovachana, Pou. "Progress and challenges of education in Cambodia today." *Cambodia progress and challenges since (1991)*: 292-319.
- Tan, C. (2007). Education reforms in Cambodia: issues and concerns. *Educational research for policy and practice*, 6, 15-24.
- Tan, C. (2007). Education reforms in Cambodia: issues and concerns. *Educational research for policy and practice*, 6, 15-24.
- Thomazet, S. (2009). From integration to inclusive education: Does changing the terms improve practice?. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 13(6), 553-563.
- UNESCO, (1993). Education for All: The year 2000 assessment. Cambodia country report.
- UNESCO. (2020). Education in Cambodia
- UNESCO. (2022). *Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education*. UN.
- UNICEF, (1993). Children and women in Cambodia: Towards a policy agenda for development.
- UNICEF. (2003). Inclusive Education Initiatives for Children with Disabilities: Lessons from The East Asia And Pacific Region.
- Vickery, M. (1984), *Cambodia 1975-1982*, South End Press

- Vireak, K., & Bunrosy, L. (2024). Exploring Language Teaching Methods: An in-Depth Analysis of Grammar Translation, Direct Method, and Audiolingual Method: A Literature Review.
- Vong, S., & Penh, S. (2019). Barriers to education for children with disabilities in Cambodia. In E. Boeren & S. Petrovic (Eds.), *Inclusive education in the global south* (pp. 171-191). Springer.
- Whitaker, D. P. (1973), *Area Handbook for the KHMER Republic (Cambodia)*, The United State of America, Library of Congress.
- Zucker, E. M. (2013). Trauma and its aftermath: Local configurations of reconciliation in Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 72(4), 793-800.

About the Authors

Rouet Wen is an English teacher. He is a graduate student pursuing a Master's Degree in TESOL at the Graduate School of the National University of Battambang, Cambodia.

E-mail: rouetwen@gmail.com

ORCID: 0009-0008-5592-4098

Dr. Sam Rany is an international researcher and Vice Rector at the National University of Battambang, Cambodia. He has conducted extensive research in areas such as TESOL, higher education, and social sciences.

E-mail: samrany82@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-3266-5974

Keo Vireak is an English teacher at a State School in Cambodia. He is also a graduate student pursuing a Master's Degree in TESOL at the Graduate School of the National University of Battambang. His research interests include educational technology and teaching methodologies.

E-mail: keovireak92@gmail.com

ORCID: 0009-0001-1889-6939

Lan Bunrosy is an English teacher. He is a graduate student pursuing a Master's Degree in TESOL at the Graduate School of the National University of Battambang, Cambodia. His research interests include educational technology and teaching methodologies.

E-mail: rosy.bun45@yahoo.com

ORCID: 0009-0008-1862-7369

Lan Bunrosy is an English teacher. He is a graduate student pursuing a Master's Degree in TESOL at the Graduate School of the National University of Battambang, Cambodia. His research interests include educational technology and teaching methodologies.

E-mail: rosy.bun45@yahoo.com

ORCID: 0009-0008-1862-7369

Vong Chandarey is an English teacher. He is a graduate student pursuing a Master's Degree in TESOL at the Graduate School of the National University of Battambang, Cambodia.

E-mail: chandareyvong@gmail.com