

Policy Review of Teacher Educators' Research Engagement in Cambodia: Focus on the Context of the National Institute of Education

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Abstract: By reviewing a series of national education strategic plans ranging from the first version of 2001-2005 to the current version of 2019-2023, this study aims to reveal the extent to which Cambodian educational policies highlight the significance of research engagement in teacher education and provide implications for policies that support the research engagement of teacher educators in the future. While the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of Cambodia has recognized the significance of faculty members' research engagement in higher education institutions since 2010, the research engagement of teacher educators, who play a vital role in shaping and implementing educational policies, remains insufficiently emphasized within the educational policy framework. Despite some national and institutional challenges, the contribution, recognition, support, and promotion of policies at all levels appear to improve teacher educators' future research engagement. Thus, to promote teacher educators' research engagement, it is essential that the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the National Institute of Education allocate appropriate funds, improve infrastructure, and develop a clear vision, guidelines, and action plans conducive to teacher educators' research engagement. Similarly, it is necessary for the management of the National Institute of Education to develop a strategic vision and mission for the research engagement of teacher educators so that they can contribute effectively to a knowledge-based society. Future empirical investigations are recommended to gain a deeper understanding of how policies influence teacher educators' engagement in research. Overall, this study contributes to existing knowledge on research development for teacher education and educators and provides insights for policymakers regarding the gaps between policy and practice.

Key words: Cambodia, higher education, policy review, research engagement, teacher educator

1. Introduction

In numerous countries, teacher education has been integrated into higher education (Smith, 2021), which requires research-competent staff. This recognition requires teacher educators to actively engage in research. Thus, research competence is a teacher educator's professional profile. As suggested by Cochran-Smith (2005), in a teacher educator's professional role, practice-oriented research is an obligation, in addition to being acknowledged and promoted, which teacher educators need to conduct

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and publish (Kyaw, 2021, 2022). It is assumed that research is a means of improving and updating higher education-based teacher education, which in turn improves the quality of student outcomes (BERA, 2014; Byman et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2017; EC, 2013). Murray and Male (2005) coined the term “second-order teacher” to refer to teacher educators who guide and support prospective teachers during their induction and ongoing professional development. In a broader sense, teacher educators are crucial in supporting both novice and experienced teachers, who need to acquire and develop knowledge, skills, and values to be effective in the classroom throughout their careers (EC, 2013). This review adopts a broad definition of teacher educators who work in pre- and in-service teacher education as well as professional development programs for educational officers at all levels of the teacher education institution. The term “research,” encompassing practitioner, policy, fundamental, or practice-based research, is used to describe a deliberate and systematic investigation of materials and sources to generate new knowledge and draw fresh conclusions (MacPhail et al., 2018). In a related manner, adopted in this study, “research engagement” refers to involvement in and execution of research by teacher educators, both individually and collectively (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2012). The former aims to develop professional and research knowledge and skills, while the latter applies to and improves their teaching practices through their research findings. In short, teacher educators’ research engagement, covering two features—engagement with and in research—improves theoretical knowledge, professional practices, and links with other professional communities (Livingston et al., 2009; Willemsse & Boei, 2017).

To develop Cambodian human capital, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) has pioneered many educational reforms in different sub-sectors, including teacher education institutions (Hang, 2018; MoEYS, 2014, 2019), which include the National Institute of Education (NIE), teacher education colleges (TECs—Phnom Penh and Battambang), as well as other regional and provincial teacher training centers (RTTCs and PTTCs).

NIE¹ is currently the leading and sole teacher education institution responsible for educating teachers in lower secondary schools in French and upper secondary schools in all subjects nationwide. It also offers education and training to educational and managerial administrators at all levels, focusing on developing the attitudes, skills, and knowledge necessary for the 21st century (NIE, 2022). Additionally, the NIE Center for Educational Research and Innovation, comprising the New Generation Pedagogical Research Center (NGPRC), the Research and Development in Education Office, and the Chuon Nath Library, promotes evidence-based teacher education and conducts research on the Cambodian education system. More importantly, the NIE has proposed evidence-based recommendations to inform the MoEYS’s policies and orientations (NIE, 2022). For instance, over the years, the NIE has offered programs, including master’s and Ph.D. degrees in education, specifically emphasizing teacher reform and enhancing teacher education institutions.

NIE has various distinct advantages over other teacher education institutions, such as its long-standing reputation and prestige, comprehensive higher-level education, education reform, and national and policy influence and impact. Concerning teacher educators in this study, NIE teacher educators are the targeted focus because they are placed in a context different from those of other TECs, RTTCs, and PTTCs. The TECs were technically and non-technically supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and have been accredited on 08 December 2022 by the MoEYS as part of higher education-based teacher education institutions (JICA, 2023). RTTCs and PTTCs are not higher education institutions (JICA, 2023). Therefore, focusing on NIE in general and teacher educators in particular is important for gaining insights into the broader educational landscape of the country.

Although various studies have shown an increasing demand for teacher educators to actively engage in research (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Cochran-Smith et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2017; NIE, 2022), there is a noticeable lack of research examining the policy context that outlines the extent of teacher educators’ research engagement (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2012; EC, 2013; Kyaw, 2022). This critical gap

extends to Cambodia. This review aims to reveal the extent to which teacher educators' research engagement has been emphasized in the policy context within the realm of higher education by answering the following questions:

- How do Cambodian educational policies mention the research engagement of teacher educators?
- What are the key policy challenges to promoting teacher educators' research engagement at the national level?
- What are the key policy challenges to promoting teacher educators' research engagement at the institutional level?

2. Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective of this study is grounded in the international policy context of teacher educators' research engagement. This perspective can be described as follows.

The existing literature has illustrated that various government policies in certain countries have implemented legal obligations for research engagement among teacher educators. For example, the Turkish Law of Higher Education obliges teacher educators to conduct and publish scientific and academic research. In Norway, when the Norwegian Research School in Teacher Education (NAFOL) was established in 2010 (Smith, 2022), teacher educators were increasingly required to hold doctorates and publish research as a criterion for teaching in higher education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2020). The educational reform framework in Wales (Perry et al., 2017) emphasizes the development of research activities among higher education institution teacher educators, with the expectation that they will be vigorous and initiative in conducting, publishing, and supervising research. Similarly, Flemish university-based teacher educators are expected to be dynamic in their research (Tack et al., 2018).

However, teacher educators in some European Commission member states have not been adequately recognized and supported for their growth, as reflected by the lack of funding to conduct research (InFoTED, 2019). Similarly, Cochran-Smith et al. (2020) reported that teacher educators in the United States receive limited research funds due to the absence of a standalone policy for teacher educators' education and professional development.

Studies conducted in developed countries have shown that teacher educators should be knowledgeable about research practices (Cochran-Smith et al., 2020; InFoTED, 2019; Perry et al., 2017; Smith, 2022; Tack et al., 2018). Additionally, due to the shift of teacher education to higher education and universities in many countries, higher education is subject to policies and regulations that govern governance and funding.

In the context of developing and emerging economies, national-level factors such as educational strategic plans, research policies, research cultures, governmental support for facilities and finance, and partnerships powerfully influence academic and institutional research performance and productivity (Heng et al., 2020; Negash et al., 2019; Pornsalnuwat, 2014; Thanh Tien, 2016). An example can be seen in Thailand, which has a pressing need for a national research policy to promote and cultivate research excellence (Pornsalnuwat, 2014). The research policy enhances national competition both regionally and globally by strengthening the research profile. Moreover, teacher educators' research engagement in Myanmar has received minimal attention within the policy framework (Kyaw, 2022). Kyaw (2022) suggested that supportive policies, policy coherence between intended and implemented policies, continuous policy enforcement, and ample time for preparation for research would promote research engagement.

In summary, it is imperative to establish educational policies that provide substantial support to propel teacher educators toward greater research involvement. It has been observed that in

many countries, because teacher education is now located primarily in higher education settings, it is governed and funded by policies and regulations regarding higher education. Overall, a handful of previous studies have suggested that teacher educators face numerous challenges in actively engaging with and conducting research. These challenges stretch across the national and institutional levels. This implies that barriers to research encouragement exist at the national and institutional levels, which sheds light on the varying degrees of recognition, support, and challenges faced by teacher educators across different countries and policy contexts. This understanding serves as a crucial foundation for reflecting the extent to which teacher educators' research engagement is highlighted in Cambodia's educational policy context.

3. Method

This review is centered on educational policy documents; therefore, the method requires some understanding of the purpose and nature of the policy (Cardno, 2019). The review was based on two complementary datasets of policy-relevant documents. First, the policy document review presented in this paper centers on educational policy documents developed and issued by the MoEYS, including a series of six Education Strategic Plans (ESPs) (MoEYS, 2004, 2005, 2010a, 2014, 2019; Un & Sok, 2022). Similarly, other relevant documents, such as institutional-level strategic plans and literature (NIE, 2022; Tan, 2007), were also included in this review, which mainly examined visions, missions, goals, strategies, and implementation actions. These documents are easily accessible on the MoEYS website (MoEYS, 2023). These types of operational policy documents can be portrayed succinctly in the form of (i) a national education policy stating the main visions, missions, and priorities of specific educational aspects; (ii) a strategy specifying how the policy objectives are to be achieved; and (iii) plans to define the targeted programs and activities to be implemented within time-bound, required responsibilities, and resources to realize the policy and strategy (Yano, 2013).

This review employs the analysis suggested by Bowen (2009) to examine and develop insights into the phenomena studied. First, the documents were quickly scanned to obtain a general understanding of their content and main topics. The author then thoroughly read the documents to review the detailed content and highlighted the key passages to identify relevant information. After thoroughly reading the documents, their meanings and contents were analyzed and inferred. This review process was repeated several times and discussed with other PhD students who had studied the same topic in a similar context to refine their understanding of the documents. This study focuses on how teacher educators' research engagement is outlined in policy documents. Moreover, the policy requirements and resources at the national level and the support system at the institutional level related to teacher educators' research engagement were also reviewed.

4. Finding

4.1. Incorporation of Research Engagement of Teacher Educators in Education Strategic Plans

These Education Strategic Plans (ESPs) aim to develop human capital for economic growth, aligning with the Rectangular Strategy Phase IV and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (MoEYS 2019, p. 18), as noted in the following statements:

"1) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

2) Ensure effective leadership and management of education staff at all levels."

In response to these aims, the MoEYS must address education quality and relevance challenges with a focus on improving teaching, learning, and research (MoEYS, 2019).

Research engagement in the higher education sector received less attention until the mid-2000s (Un & Sok, 2022). This was evident in the minimum systematic interference in the priority policies, except from the ESP 2009-2013 to the current ESP 2019-2023 in higher education, which has received attention, as reflected in its subsectors (MoEYS, 2010a, 2014, 2019).

ESP 2019-2023 aims to improve educational quality by focusing on research engagement in Cambodian higher education institutions (HEIs). The main goal of the education strategic plan is to enhance the quality of research; encourage research activities among HEIs, facilitate ongoing development through partnerships, internationalization, and training initiatives, and offer financial assistance through various funding mechanisms, including research grants, scholarships, and training programs (MoEYS, 2019). Table 1 shows that research in the higher education subsector has received attention regarding policy action.

Table 1. Policy Action on Research in Higher Education Sub-sector Planning

Policy	Strategy	Main Actions
ESP 2019-2023	Improve quality in research through the development of higher education partnership programs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish Centers of Excellence at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) 2. Upgrade faculty qualifications in research in collaboration with partner HEIs in and outside of the country 3. Develop research projects in collaboration with industrial partners and/or partners HEIs in and outside the country

Source: Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023 (MoEYS, 2019, p. 41-42)

This strategy strives to establish research centers, enhance capacity, and foster industry partnerships. For example, one of the nine strategic reforms of the ESP 2019-2023 was to promote research quality, as shown in Table 2. The strategy is to establish at least three research centers of excellence in public HEIs, create a national fund for research in higher education, create a system to motivate researchers and develop partnerships with enterprises and industries (MoEYS, 2019, p. 105).

Table 2. Higher Education Strategic Reforms

Policy	Strategy	Components
ESP 2019-2023	Reform 4: Promote the Quality of Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote establishing excellent research centers in public HEIs, at least three centers; 2. Create a national fund for research in higher education; 3. Create a mechanism to motivate those who perform good work through competition; 4. Promote protection and research businesses; 5. Create a partnership with enterprises and industries

Source: Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023 (MoEYS, 2019, p. 105)

It seeks to strengthen research in HEIs by supporting research, by establishing research funds and developing partnerships to enhance research capacity. Hence, the role of faculty members in improving the overall quality of education was highlighted.

More specifically, over a decade ago, 2010 had straightforwardly signified research in the Cambodian higher education setting. In that year, a Policy on Research Development in the Education Sector was issued (MoEYS, 2010b), envisioning the building of human resources in terms of entrepreneurship, innovation, creativity, ethics, skills, and knowledge to maximize Cambodia's long-term progress. This policy aims to cultivate a research-oriented context to promote international networks,

increase innovation, and improve higher education standards.

Subsequently, in 2011, the Master Plan for Research Development in the Education Sector for 2011-2015 was developed by the MoEYS (MoEYS, 2011). Integrated with the Policy on Research Development, this Master Plan aims to support research, disseminate research production, and guarantee research ethics. This plan encompasses actions that support the seven strategic themes² of the Education Sector's Policy on Research Development. This Master Plan guided research and development (R&D) in the higher education subsector. Vis-à-vis research, the Policy and the Master Plan on Research Development in the Education Sector strive to improve the research quality, promote collaboration with national and international universities, elevate students' and staff's research engagement, and enhance the country's research and innovation capacity.

Essentially, these research-relevant documents contribute to enhancing the guiding and monitoring frameworks for promoting research culture and quality in the higher education system. However, this appears to be related to teacher educators' research engagement to a certain extent. Remarkably, teacher educators are not often mentioned in the context of research support or policy frameworks.

4.2. Key Policy Challenges in Promoting Teacher Educators' Research Engagement at the National Level

The document review, conducted based on the framework of a theoretical perspective grounded in the policy context, revealed many obstacles at the national level that hindered teacher educators' research involvement. These obstacles include the lack of national research funds, incentive schemes, and compulsory research requirements. For instance, the MoEYS has raised the need to promote research in general; however, there has not been a clear discussion or system on how researchers are rewarded or valued. Universities in Cambodia have not received sufficient government support. According to Sok and Un (2018), MoEYS has received USD 1 million annually since 2015; unfortunately, this limited funding has been used for purposes other than promoting research activities because of the bureaucratic financial management model (Sok & Un, 2018). This type of financial management has led to a scarcity of research activities for teacher educators. In addition, the lack of incentive schemes, namely, the lack of financial support at the national level, limited recognition of research, and insufficient research infrastructure (CICP, 2016; Eam, 2015), is a major challenge in motivating teacher educators to conduct research. Similarly, there is a lack of specific guidance on teacher educators' research engagement, which can be enhanced or prioritized in higher education settings.

Conversely, in increasing the quality of pre-service teacher education (PRESET), one of the main strategies for human resource management reform, the ESP, emphasizes the vital role of the National Institute of Education, whose teacher educators are key assets. Table 3 lists the roles and responsibilities stated in the strategic reform.

Table 3. Main Strategy 4 of Teacher Education in Increasing Pre-Service Teachers' Qualification

Policy	Strategy	Components
ESP 2019-2023	Main Strategy 4: To increase PRESET teachers' qualifications	National Institute of Education 1. Increases upper secondary teacher trainer standards to MA+1; 2. Upgrades qualification of teacher trainers; 3. Conducts fast-track Bachelor of Education training programs; 4. Trains school principals; 5. Trains education inspectors; 6. Provides PRESET school principal training.

Source: Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023 (MoEYS, 2019, p. 103)

From Table 3, it can be inferred that the strategic reform focused on improving the qualifications and training of teachers and school directors, mainly within the scope of pre-service teacher education. A comprehensive examination of the first two points in Table 3 indicates the focus on advancing teacher educators' professional standards and qualifications, which are primarily related to formal educational qualifications and levels. However, if research engagement is defined as an active process of reading, analyzing, and using of the research findings, data, and publications and as a research conduct (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2012; Livingston et al., 2009; MacPhail et al., 2018; Willemse & Boei, 2017), the incorporation of teacher educators' research engagement with professional standards and qualifications may be more difficult to establish. Moreover, the traditional and prominent role of the NIE is still teaching; therefore, the need to develop and update the pedagogy of teacher education is likely a priority to raise professional qualifications instead of research activities. In other words, these points do not prioritize teacher educators' research engagement activities. Accordingly, if research-related activities are not mentioned in these points, the strategy may not encourage active research engagement among teacher educators.

In brief, the review reveals a focus on increasing teacher educators' formal qualifications. Yet, the policy context overlooks the vital aspect of research engagement – active participation in research to enhance teaching practices. The absence of incentives, funding, and policy support further suggests the limited encouragement for research. This strategy seems to understate the importance of teacher educators' research engagement.

4.3 Key Policy Challenges in Promoting Teacher Educators' Research Engagement at the Institutional Level

Another key issue obstructing teacher educators' research engagement is the lack of formal institutional requirements for research involvement. Research has not been stated as a job mandate for a teacher educator and lacks inclusion as a job requirement. Moreover, there is a lack of institutional guidelines for conducting research and no dedicated time for teacher educators to conduct research (MoEYS, 2019; NIE, 2022). NIE's traditional focus remains on teaching, even though research is recognized as essential for transitioning to research-based teacher education. The institute has yet to define, clarify, or reach a consensus on the indicators for measuring research performance, along with incentives and rewards for teacher educators. Consequently, there are no formal requirements that compel teacher educators to engage in research.

Likewise, the structure of an NIE research center is also a barrier to research engagement. The institutional research center is structured such that only the center's designated staff are responsible for research activities, leaving teacher educators from other departments without a defined research role. As a result, this institutional research center structure reduces teacher educators' activities in conducting research.

Moreover, the current state of NIE facilities is not conducive to teacher educators' research engagement. This infrastructure does not facilitate the growth of research expertise and capabilities for the advancement of research undertakings within departments or among teacher educators (NIE, 2022). This condition can be notably exemplified by the weakness analyzed of the NIE's current situation in the National Institute of Education Strategic Plan 2021-2025, as quoted in the following statement, "there is no appropriate research center to guide the development of research knowledge and skills and to promote research projects among department and office's members (NIE, 2022, p. 7)."

In summary, the prevailing institutional context does not seem to encourage teacher educators' research engagement, hindering research policy and culture.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This review emphasizes valuable contributions to improving policy frameworks for fostering research culture and quality in higher education. However, a notable limitation exists in consideration of teacher educators' research engagement. The lack of stipulations for incentives, funding, and policy support further underscores the inadequate encouragement of research among teacher educators. In both national and institutional contexts, there is a deficit in fostering the inspiration, commitment, and conducive settings required to support the research engagement of teacher educators, who are the main actors in designing and executing the national education research vision and policy.

To enhance teacher educators' research engagement at another level, the MoEYS and NIE should allocate appropriate research funds and incentives, both monetary and non-monetary, to nature and nurture the research environment and facilities at both national and institutional levels. This way, research engagement can be supported and enhanced through the collective and individual efforts of teacher educators.

Undeniably, the management of NIE in Cambodia needs to develop a clear vision, mission, and strategic actions for the future of research at the institute and introduce long-lasting reforms to make a difference. They have direct responsibilities to enable and ensure that teacher educators are positioned in a way that allows them to develop their profession, including research skills, and to respond to demands, including the requirement to develop prospective teachers and graduates to participate in regional and global competition and for a national knowledge-based society.

The author acknowledges the several limitations of this study. First, the educational policy reviewed in this current paper is insufficient due to its "biased selectivity" (Cardno, 2019). It does not include other subsidiary documents, such as legislative, procedure, and report documents, which constitute the policies. Another limitation is the lack of data triangulation, both in terms of methods and sources such as interviews or survey data from other informants or policymakers, which could provide a more comprehensive perspective. Concurrently, the primary effort has been to review the policy context without an empirical evaluation of its impact on the implemented policy. To better understand how policies influence teacher educators' research engagement, future research should investigate their effects using empirical scientific methods. By doing so, we may gain deeper insights into the nature, impact, and diverse contributions of relevant policies and factors to the research engagement of teacher educators.

Notes

1. During different political regimes, the NIE served as a training center, a political hub, and even a warehouse. After the Pol Pot regime, it reopened as the School of Politics and later became the School of Center-level Teacher Training and Pedagogy. It was renamed several times and eventually became the Faculty of Pedagogy under MoEYS in 1992. With support from organizations and the United Nations, the Institute has undergone restoration and expansion. It provided training and conducted various educational activities (Chim, 2020; NIE, 2007). In 2004, the Faculty of Pedagogy was transformed into the National Institute of Education, which continues to play its role in teacher education in Cambodia (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2004).
2. a). Research capacity: Strengthen resources, support researchers, and integrate research into education.
 b). Research quality: Focusing on quality, dissemination, excellence, and journal establishment.
 c). Cooperative research: Foster partnerships nationally and internationally.
 d). Research reporting: Regular sharing, applicable databases, and management systems.

- e). Research ethics: Promotes ethical awareness and aligns processes with principles.
- f). International cooperation: Foster collaboration, expertise exchange, and partnerships.
- g). Marketing R&D: Aligned with societal needs, economic progress, and sector links.

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