
THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

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ABSTRACT: *This paper reviewed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education by preliminary document studies. In Cambodia, as of 30 October 2020, school closures replaced by distance learning. First, the paper highlighted the immediate impact on student learning and wellbeing, mostly kids. Second, it illustrated teachers and school personnel are facing on adapting with ICT skills to support distance learning. Third, it showed ineffective delivery of continuous learning and learning outcomes are not quite well and limit for quality of education. Finally, it stated the implementation of the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports (MoEYS) Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2019-2023 is also severely impacted by the pandemic. To address these challenges, MoEYS developed learning platforms and continue learning programs for line learning. The Joint Technical Working Group (JTWG), MoEYS and ESWG created objectives for the Education COVID-19 Response Plan. MoEYS is planning to reopen educational institutions in three phases with the strictest health safety standards by blended learning following the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the condition of Covid-19. The paper recommended that the government and MoEYS and stakeholders should respond to the situations during the Covid-19 pandemic: i). The continuous learning program should be strengthened as a priority for online learning with social media to ensure effective learning; ii). The digital infrastructure should be promoted in the countryside and remote areas to strengthen online learning with the platforms of MoEYS; iii). The ICT skills and digital education should be strengthened by providing training and development to teachers to ensure effective online learning; and teachers and students engagement, and iv). The content and curriculum on paper should be adapted and replaced by digital form to ensure effective learning and teaching.*

KEYWORDS: impact, COVID 19, pandemic, education

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has threatened the education systems in history. It affects nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries across the globe. It is likely to impact on practically in schools-those are the most disadvantaged children, teachers, and education staff through their time in education. There were 94 percent of the world's student population have been affected due to closures of schools. The crisis is having a bad effect on pre-existing education by reducing the opportunities to continue learning for children, youth, and adults for those living in rural areas. The pandemic's economic impact, there may be 23.8 million children and youth will drop out or not have access to school next year. However, distance learning solutions

were developed by governments all over the world to support education continuity. There were innovative approaches in supporting of education and training by online communication tools, radio and television. The teachers need for better training in new methods of education delivery, as well as support. Many countries in the world have planned to reopen schools, but the majority of countries surveyed in May–June 2020 had not yet announced a date for schools to reopen. The governments, parents and children are struggling with when and how to approach the next phase. Although, school closures are affected it will continue to face reduced students, teachers wellbeing, a lack of resources or enabling environment to access learning, and quality of learning in Cambodia.

Impact of Covid19 on implications of educational systems

UNESCO has highlighted that 113,000 Cambodian school personnel in the world including Cambodia have been impacted by COVID-19. While celebrating the World Teacher's Day, 2020, the Cambodian education sector is one of the affected-sectors by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the statement released on October 5, 2020, UNESCO affirmed that COVID-19 affected nearly 1.6 billion learners at all levels and 63 million primary and secondary teachers in more than 190 countries. According to data from UNESCO, approximately 1.3 million students across the globe are currently out of schools or universities, which equals 90% of the world's total number of students. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a severe impact on education as schools closed. Although schools have been replaced face-to-face teaches with distance learning. In Cambodia as of 30 June 2020, there had been a total of 141 confirmed cases. Of these, 130 patients have recovered to date. MoEYS took the decision to close all educational institutions, including all public and private schools, on 16 March 2020. This decision, as in many other countries, was taken as a preventative measure against the spread of COVID-19. The school closures have resulted in disruption of learning in all of Cambodia's 13,482 schools, affecting 3,210,285 students and 93,225 teachers. This does not include tertiary/higher education and non-formal education institutions. Those students affected, 233,132 are in pre-school; 2,023,473 are in primary school; 618,968 are in lower secondary school; and 334,712 are in upper secondary school. Those teachers affected, 5,414 are in pre-school; 44,914 are in primary schools; 27,738 are in lower secondary schools; 15,159 are in upper secondary schools.

Impact of school closures on the health and wellbeing of children

Children get hit by COVID-19 in Cambodia. According to a report by Joining Forces and CRC Cambodia with children aged 10-17, students continuing some sort of home learning, half of the study for less than 10 hours a week, which is different from what they would do on a normal week at school. They face challenges in accessing online learning materials because of internet connectivity. Online learning demands appropriate learning materials (hard-ware, soft-ware), and a high-speed internet connection. The technical guidelines for all schools in the country did not prepare well for the students. School closures, there are negative impacts on children's physical and mental health, nutrition, safety, and learning. It is already having an intense effect on children's wellbeing with concern how vulnerable children, especially the girls and the

disabled, and marginalized communities will be able to cope with this wide-ranging educational, social, and economic impact of this crisis. For the students, the most immediate impact has naturally been that the temporary cessation of face to face teaching at schools has left them, particularly kindergarten.

Impact of school closures on teachers and school personnel

Teachers are also impacted significantly in the workplace and professionally. The teachers, within a very short period of time, had to adapt to new challenging methods of teaching and learning by incorporating distance learning methods into their practice and making home-visits to their students to ensure they continue to learn. However, there has been 113,000 school personnel, 93,225 teachers in Cambodia were affected. Teachers are also severely impacted by the pandemic. School closures and restrictions on public gatherings interrupted teacher training. The absence of face-to-face training, continuous professionalism is likely to lower teacher effectiveness.

Impact of continuous learning programs

The continuous learning programs are being utilized by students across Cambodia with support from their parents and teachers. These programs are impacting on student learning outcomes since they were developed in response to the COVID-19 emergency and there has been insufficient time to fully assess their impact; the programs also require students to adopt a different learning methodology (e-learning in place of face-to-face classroom-based learning) representing a significant shift for children, including in their learning experience. Among the other impacts, the production of continuous learning programs is new to MoEYS and teachers. Therefore, there is an element of 'learning by doing' to offer opportunities to improve the quality of continuous learning. Thus, the continuous learning programs are the parental engagement in their child's use of these programs, as well as small-group time with a teacher, is understood to be a significant determinant of a child's learning experience, particularly for children in lower grades. However, the limited teacher capacity, especially in the areas of distance learning which makes it difficult for them to meaningfully engage with students. Another problem is exacerbated in remote areas where teachers have limited access to technology and a restricted ability to meet with students and parents face-to-face. The most challenging is to inform and explain to parents how to use the school's chosen online platform. MoEYS has been organizing various online platforms and content, including multilingual content for minorities living in remote areas and content for those with disabled persons. The lessons are broadcasted via the Ministry's formal platforms including radio, TV, Website, Facebook, YouTube, and other partners' webpages. However, social media won't reach all children. Some parents do not use smartphones, and they live in areas where the internet connection is weak. Another challenge of school directors who need the resources to be able to better monitor and support teachers in the effective delivery of continuous, and blended learning.

Impact of education quality

MoEYS encourages every school to provide education online or online learning. Though, distance learning decreasing the quality of education due to the unlimited suspension time. The school also does not have adequate time for digital curriculum, there are differences between current and past curriculum. The online classes are not as effective as physical learning in the classroom or school-based learning. It is difficult to conduct online classes or learn from home for primary school students. The students have never developed this style of learning, and there is less participation between teachers and students. Cambodia has also closed down schools across the country since March, but MoEYS directed all educational institutions to conduct classes online. The problems are not yet resolved as Cambodia culturally relies on physical teaching at school. The finances for schools have been severely affected by Covid-19, resulting in the delay of the curriculum. These challenges contribute to limited learning outcomes and even lower quality of education.

Impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of the Education Strategic Plan

The impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of the Education Strategic Plan. The Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2019-2023 is underpinned by two medium-term education policies is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all and to ensure effective leadership and management of education officials at all levels. The ESP will be reviewed in 2021 a mid-term and a final one in 2023 to assess the overall impact of the program for education sector reforms. However, school closures and the broader impact of COVID-19 on livelihood, child protection, health, student, and teacher wellbeing. Therefore, there is a serious risk to MoEYS progress in meeting its ESP 2019-2023 objectives. It is reviewed to monitor and evaluate how effectively and efficiently the program is contributing to the outcomes of the National Strategic Development Plan and the National Vision 2030.

Cambodia education response plan to the COVID 19 pandemic

The first responding to the context of COVID 19 pandemic, MoEYS established a set of guidelines outlining teachers' roles and responsibilities in this area at an early stage of its COVID-19. MoEYS was immediately to respond through launching of continuous learning programs and the involvement of teachers. Distance Learning is one of the main learning programs in responding. Through the directive on distance learning, a full list of platforms (both online and television) broadcasting. The process of the program is to establish online learning groups with students and parents or caregivers. The directions are also included providing information on how to access continuous learning programs and ensuring students could access additional paper-based learning materials and textbooks. To ensure the smooth learning and teaching progress with good academic outcomes, the program continuous learning Guideline of Distance Learning has been developed to conduct home visits to facilitate and monitor distance learning activities which further articulates the role of teachers and other education professionals in support of distance learning. The second responding, the Joint Technical Working Group (JTWG) for Education, which includes MoEYS and ESWG

members, identified and agreed on four objectives, activities, and indicators for the Education COVID-19 Response Plan to solve the COVID-19 main consequence on school systems during school closures and after school re-opening. The objectives include i). Distance teaching and learning are well-processed and safe for education staff and students, ii). Education staff students are able to come back to education institutions safely; iii). Teaching and learning in an adaptable learning environment are provided for staff and students, and iv). MoEYS systems at national and sub-national levels become stronger and successfully.

The third response plan, MoEYS has prepared strategies based on two approaches to ensure the highest safety measures are in place within Cambodia's schools to carefully reopen. These include the reopening is being carried in three phases for educational institutions that meet the strictest health safety standards. In addition, blended learning methods continue with a combination of in-class and distance learning through electronic platforms and self-study supported by supplementary worksheets and core textbooks as necessary. To support the two learning programs, MoEYS, on August 4 released the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the reopening of schools within the context of Covid-19, introducing guidelines, rules and regulations. The SOPs guide four main components – the development of legal frameworks and mechanisms; the enhancement of the learning infrastructure and environment; stakeholder engagement; and reporting platforms. These include the health measures that all educational institutions need to follow for operationalizing their teaching and learning activities to ensure sustainable safety standards for students, parents, teachers, and all education staff within the context of Covid-19 and beyond.

CONCLUSION

The paper concluded that there were negative impacts of the Covid19 pandemic on Education in implications on educational systems as schools closed and replaced with distance learning. School closures were affected on children's physical and mental health, nutrition, safety, and learning, mainly kids. The teachers and school personnel are facing on adapting to technology, namely, ICT skills to support distance learning more effectively. For the implementation of a continuous learning program, the teachers got a challenge of engagement with students in learning and as well as the parents in using the school's online platform. The lack of resources for education staff to monitor and to support teachers in the effective delivery of continuous learning make the student learning outcomes are not quite well and limit for quality of education. The COVID-19 pandemic have threatened the implementation of the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2019-2023 since it needs to be revised in 2021 a mid-term and a final one in 2023 to assess the overall impact of the program for education reforms. To address these challenges, MoEYS established the learning platforms and the continued learning program with a set of guidelines outlining teachers' roles and responsibilities of the learning platforms and broadcasting. The Joint Technical Working Group (JTWG) for Education, MoEYS and ESWG have developed objectives for the Education COVID-19 Response Plan. The MoEYS is planning to reopen with three phases for educational institutions that meet the strictest health

safety standards with blended learning methods as necessary. The Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) have been created for the reopening of schools within context of Covid-19.

Recommendations

In order to mitigate the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in Cambodia, the governments, MoEYS, and the stakeholders are encouraged to pursue the following policy responses:

i). The continuous learning program should be strengthened as a priority for online learning with social media and other channels which are included the TVK2 (Cambodian television station), and provide pre-recorded lessons for all grade levels on its Facebook page, YouTube, and e-learning website. In addition, learning program via Telegram, Zoom, and Google meet to ensure effective learning;

ii). The digital infrastructure should be promoted by creating standards for infrastructure and network connections at national and sub-national levels to strengthen online learning, especially, in the countryside and remote areas so that the students can study online and other MoeYS platforms;

iii). The ICT skills and digital education should be strengthened by providing training and development to teachers to ensure effective online learning; and teachers and students engagement;

iv). The content and curriculum on paper should be adapted and replaced by digital form to ensure effective learning and teaching.

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