

# The Policy and Practice of Life Skills Education in Cambodia

Arne Olsen Harsheim



M.Phil. in Comparative and International Education  
Department of Education, Faculty of Educational Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

May 2016



# **The Policy and Practice of Life Skills Education in Cambodia**

Copyright: Arne Olsen Harsheim

2016

The Policy and Practice of Life Skills Education in Cambodia

Arne Olsen Harsheim

<http://www.duo.uio.no>

Trykk: Representeren, Universitetet i Oslo

# Abstract

Cambodia has a turbulent past, during which education has been used for purposes other than serving the needs of the people. For the past twenty years, however, Cambodian education has aimed at providing quality education for all in line with global initiatives such as Education for All (EFA). Pursuing these goals have led to educational reforms that, for the past decade, have defined educational practice.

This thesis analyses the Cambodian life skills framework in policy and practice. The framework has three important policy areas: opportunities for quality education for all; education that is relevant to personal, local, national and international needs; and education that involves participation of local stakeholders in decision-making. These three areas constitute the key principles of education quality in the social justice approach, which has been selected as the framework for analysis, namely inclusiveness, relevance and participation. These three principles serve as the foundation for the policy analysis of the Cambodian life skills framework that, for the last twelve years, has been the guiding educational practice. The principles, also, guided the collection and analysis of data from the local level in Cambodia. The analysis is based on qualitative data collected in four schools in two provinces where interviews were undertaken with school directors, teachers, parents, community members and students.

This thesis identifies significant discrepancies between policy intentions and local practice in relation to the principles of inclusiveness, relevance and participation. Specifically, it shows that: issues of funding, a lack of teacher training opportunities, and an insufficient provision of teaching and learning materials are complicating the framework implementation process; although life skills education is perceived to be relevant by local stakeholders, there seems to be a gap between policy goals, school practice and the needs of local stakeholders; and finally, parents and community members have a marginal impact on school practices, despite the important role assigned to them in the life skills framework.



# Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been a long, and sometimes tedious journey that, without a doubt, I will cherish for the rest of my life, and look back on as one of my greatest accomplishments.

There are many people that have been part of my journey, some more involved than others. First and foremost, I would like to apologize to the most involved person of them all, my girlfriend Tina, for the stress that I might have caused during this project. I know I have been absent, if not physically then mentally, my mind always searching for the next paragraph, or the sudden connections that could improve a section or a chapter.

The journey that I have undergone has not only been a journey in the abstract sense. It took me to the other side of the planet, and to the most welcoming and hospitable people that I have ever met. I want to give a thousand thanks to the staff at KAPE for taking me under their wings and granting me access to a world of education that I would never have discovered on my own. A thousand thanks more to the individuals that participated in my study, for allowing me to get to know you and letting me listen to your stories and opinions. Thank you to my translators for following me around and for helping me make sense of an unfamiliar language.

I also want to thank my good friend Chork, for driving me around in his tuk-tuk during my entire stay in Cambodia, and for his company when I was feeling alone in the world. A thousand thanks to Lene Buchert for being a constructive, wise and patient supervisor, and for allowing me to work at my own pace at a point in my life where much has changed in a short amount of time. Your feedback has been incredibly precious and valuable.

Thank you to my family, who believed in my abilities even though my academic prospects were questioned by most not that many years ago. Thank you to my classmates for the support and feedback that you have provided to me throughout the past couple of years, and for the global friendships that we have established.

Finally, but most importantly, thank you to my little princess. Not even born, yet ever so motivating in times where writing has been slow. I'll see you soon.

# Table of Contents

Abstract .....	V
Acknowledgements .....	VII
Table of Contents .....	VIII
List of Acronyms.....	X
List of Tables, Maps, Photos and Figures .....	XII
1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.1.1 Conceptualising Life Skills at the International Level .....	2
1.1.2 Conceptualising Life Skills in Cambodia .....	3
1.2 Research Purpose and Questions.....	4
1.3 Significance of the Thesis .....	5
1.4 Thesis Structure .....	5
2 The Context for Life Skills Development in Cambodia .....	7
2.1 The Current Socio-Economic Context .....	8
2.1.1 National Economic Indicators .....	8
2.2 Political Change and Educational Development: A Historical Review .....	9
2.2.1 Educational Expansion 1953-1970 .....	10
2.2.2 Civil Unrest and Educational Decline 1970-1975 .....	11
2.2.3 Khmer Rouge and Education 1975-1979 .....	13
2.2.4 Rebuilding Education 1979-1993 .....	17
2.2.5 Education in the New Kingdom 1993-2000 .....	20
2.3 Educational Development since 2001 .....	22
2.3.1 Definition of Life Skills Categories.....	24
2.4 Summary.....	26
3 Framework for Analysis .....	27
3.1 Traditional Approaches to the Quality of Education.....	27
3.1.1 Human Capital Theory .....	27
3.1.2 The Human Rights Approach.....	28
3.2 Education Quality and Social Justice .....	29
3.3 Levels of Analysis .....	31
3.4 Principles of Social Justice.....	33
3.4.1 Inclusiveness, Relevance and Participation.....	33
4 Research Design and Methodology .....	36
4.1 Research Strategy .....	36
4.2 Research Site .....	37
4.2.1 School Selection .....	38
4.3 Sampling of Data.....	40
4.3.1 Document Analysis.....	40
4.3.2 Participant sampling .....	40
4.4 Data Collection Methods.....	43
4.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews .....	44
4.4.2 Focus Group Discussions .....	44



4.4.3	Classroom Observation.....	45
4.5	Use of Translators.....	45
4.6	Transcribing, Coding and Analysis of Data .....	46
4.7	Quality of Data .....	48
4.7.1	Credibility.....	48
4.7.2	Transferability.....	49
4.7.3	Dependability.....	49
4.7.4	Confirmability.....	50
5	The Policy Rationale and Aims of Life Skills Education in Cambodia .....	51
5.1	The Nature of Policy .....	51
5.2	Life Skills Policy and Inclusiveness.....	52
5.3	Making Education Relevant for the Average Household.....	55
5.3.1	Local Life Skills Programmes .....	56
5.4	Aims of Local Participation.....	57
5.5	The PCD and Social Justice .....	58
6	Life skills in Practice: Perceptions of the School and Home/Community Environments .	60
6.1	Conceptual Understandings of Life Skills Education .....	60
6.1.1	Understandings of Life Skills among School Staff .....	60
6.1.2	Home/Community Understandings of Life Skills .....	62
6.1.3	Common Understandings of Life Skills .....	63
6.2	Towards Inclusive Practice?.....	65
6.2.1	School Staff Perceptions of Inclusiveness.....	65
6.2.2	Home/Community Perceptions of Inclusiveness.....	71
6.3	Content and Outcomes: The Issue of Relevance.....	73
6.3.1	Relevant Life Skills in the Eyes of School Staff .....	73
6.3.2	Home/Community Views on the Relevance of Life Skills .....	81
6.4	Participation in School Processes.....	86
6.4.1	Nature of Democratic Decision-Making .....	87
6.4.2	Nature of Participation.....	88
6.4.3	Barriers to Participation.....	91
6.5	Conclusion.....	91
7	Life Skills Education in Policy and Practice: Discussion of Main Findings .....	93
7.1	Inclusiveness in Policy and Practice.....	93
7.2	Relevance in Policy and Practice .....	95
7.3	Participation in Policy and Practice.....	96
7.4	Placing the Findings in a Wider Context.....	97
	References .....	99
	Appendix 1: Fieldwork Schedule.....	109
	Appendix 2: Letter of Consent .....	110
	Appendix 3: Interview Guide.....	112

# List of Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BEC	Basic Education Curriculum
BLS	Basic Life Skills
CCM	Community Committee Member
CGDK	Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea
CPK	Communist Party of Kampuchea
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
DeSeCo	Definition and Selection of Competencies
DK	Democratic Kampuchea
EFA	Education For All
ESP	Education Strategic Plan
EU	European Union
FUNCINPEC	National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Co-operative Cambodia
FUNK	National United Front of Kampuchea
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HCT	Human Capital Theory
HDI	Human Development Index
IBEC	Improved Basic Education in Cambodia
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
KAPE	Kampuchean Action for Primary Education
KPNLF	Khmer People's National Liberation Front
KPRP	Khmer People's Revolutionary Party
LLSP	Local Life Skills Programmes
MoYES	Ministry of Youth, Education and Sports
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
NC	National Curriculum
NEP	NGO Education Partnership
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

NPRD	National Plan to Rehabilitate and Develop Cambodia
NSD	Norwegian Social Data Service
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCD	Policy for Curriculum Development
PRK	People’s Republic of Kampuchea
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SOC	State of Cambodia
UFNS	United Front for the National Salvation of Kampuchea
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization

# List of Tables, Maps, Photos and Figures

<b>Tables</b>	<b>Page</b>
Table 2.1: Cambodian GDP by sector of activity 2000-2010, %	9
Table 2.2: Life skills in the Cambodian curriculum framework	25
Table 2.3: The Cambodian curriculum structure, grade 7-9	25
Table 4.1: Characteristics of qualitative and quantitative research strategies	36
Table 4.2: Participant characteristics – urban primary school	41
Table 4.3: Participant characteristics – rural primary school	42
Table 4.4: Participant characteristics – urban secondary school	42
Table 4.5: Participant characteristics – rural secondary school	42
Table 4.6: Participant characteristics – teacher focus group discussion	43
Table 4.7: Participant characteristics – parent focus group discussion	43
Table 4.8: Participant sample and codes for analysis, by school and focus group	47
<b>Maps</b>	
Map 2.1: Cambodia and its provinces, 2015	7
Map 4.1: Location of research sites	39
<b>Photos</b>	
Photo 2.0: Khmer Rouge soldiers entering Phnom Penh, 1975	14
<b>Figures</b>	
Figure 3.1: Interacting levels of analysis for the study	31
Figure 3.2: Framework for analysis based on the social justice approach	33
Figure 6.1: Word query on life skills	64

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

In light of global economic and labour market developments, educational policy in many countries has changed from a content-based input approach to a competence-based output approach, putting centre stage the inherent skills of the workforce needed for economic growth (Malan, 2000). The change of policy focus partly originates in international organisations such as the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and through global projects, such as the Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo). The DeSeCo was launched in order to identify what key competencies are necessary for individuals in OECD member countries to live meaningful, successful and responsible lives, while being prepared for future societal challenges (OECD, 2001). The definition of competence that emerged from it, namely “...the ability to successfully meet complex demands in varied contexts through the mobilization of psychosocial resources, including knowledge and skills, motivation, attitudes, and other social and behavioural components” (Schleicher 2007, p. 349), have shaped contemporary discussions on the overall goals of education, on the importance of defining measurable learning outcomes, and the purposes that such outcomes are intended to serve.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and other multinational organisations, have adopted a similar conceptualization of competence in their efforts to promote holistic development strategies in the developing parts of the world. The most well known is perhaps the Education for All (EFA) framework (also known as the Dakar Framework for Action), comprised of six internationally agreed upon goals that aimed to ensure quality basic education for all children, youth and adults (UNESCO, 2012). Of the six goals, goals 3 and 6 are particularly relevant for the purpose of this thesis. Goal 3 aims at:

Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes (UNESCO, 2000).

Besides highlighting equitable access for all young people and adults, the goal underpins the importance of acquiring skills that are in line with national and international development

needs (UNESCO, 2012, 2015). Goal 6, on the other hand, specifies the need to define measurable learning outcomes and their achievement. Goal 6 aims at:

Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (UNESCO, 2000).

Thus, ensuring equal access to education for all and improving learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills are imperative in order to improve education quality (UNESCO, 2012). Many governments worldwide, among them Cambodia, have developed education frameworks that reflect these goals.

Successful implementation, especially in lower-income countries must, according to UNESCO (2000), consider the provision of “...a relevant curriculum that can be taught and learned in a local language and builds upon the knowledge and experience of the teachers and learners”, “...a clear definition and accurate assessment of learning outcomes, including knowledge, skills, attitudes and values”, “...participatory governance and management”, and an education that promotes “...respect for and engagement with local communities and cultures” (UNESCO, 2000, p. 17). Such educational policy would therefore be characterized by elements, such as the inclusion of all, democratic values, context specific skills and knowledge, and tools for lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2000).

### **1.1.1 Conceptualising Life Skills at the International Level**

The EFA goals were not successfully implemented in all countries by 2015 although considerable progress was made. The essence of EFA, however, now appear in Goal 4 – and its accompanying targets – of the newly formulated Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which aims to “Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning” (UN, 2016). According to SDG 4, an important measure for achieving sustainable development globally is to substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills for employment (UN, 2016).

In recent literature, such skills are often referred to as 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills and apply to both developed and developing nations. Schleicher (2012 p. 34) categorises 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in

four areas: First, “ways of thinking” which include, among others, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving and learning strategies. Second, “ways of working” which include communication and collaboration skills. Third, “tools for working”, which include information and communications technology (ICT) and information literacy. And fourth, “skills for living in the world”, which include citizenship, life and career, and personal and social responsibility. According to Buchert (2014), the four areas can be associated with the four Delors pillars of education – learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together.

The concept of life skills is often used interchangeably with 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. Besides being explicitly expressed in goals 3 and 6 of the EFA framework, it is important in the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment on HIV and AIDS (UNGASS, 2001) and is frequently mentioned in various works of the World Health Organization (WHO) (e.g. WHO, 2003). According to the World Development Report for 2007, life skills are essential “...not only to succeed in the labour market, but also to process information for a healthy life, to participate as citizens, and to care for their families” (World Bank, 2006, p. 75).

In the context of countries, such as Cambodia, Narayan, Pritchett & Kapoor (2009) stress the importance of life skills for poverty reduction since life skills education may promote self-empowerment that can lead people to jobs and out of poverty. The concept of life skills encapsulates DeSeCo’s definition of competence while reflecting the holistic approach to development promoted by organisations, such as UNESCO.

### **1.1.2 Conceptualising Life Skills in Cambodia**

As part of its macro economic readjustments to globalisation and regionalisation, the Cambodian government has undertaken educational restructuring. This includes the development of outcomes and skills-based curriculum frameworks. The most significant one is the Policy for Curriculum Development (PCD) 2005-2009, otherwise known as the *life skills framework*, conceived in 2003, when the Cambodian Ministry of Youth, Education and Sports (MoYES) prepared the new basic education curriculum (BEC) (Norad, 2008). A primary goal of the PCD, and the political rationale for emphasizing life skills in the curriculum framework, is to increase the quality of education in Cambodia (MoYES, 2004).

For this to succeed the PCD stresses the importance of providing equal access to all children and youth, increasing the relevance of the curriculum, and increasing the degree to which local stakeholders participate in matters concerning education (MoYES, 2004).

According to the PCD, the teaching of life skills is one of the most important roles of schools (MoYES, 2004), and the document clearly conceptualizes life skills in a manner that reflects contemporary competence and skills discourses, as well as Schleicher's four areas of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. The PCD generally defines life skills as “the intellectual, personal and vocational skills that enable informed decision making, effective communication, and coping and self-management skills that contribute to a healthy and productive life (KAPE, 2012). The PCD also introduces the concept of *local life skills* which are defined locally and aim to equip students with specialized local and vocational skills that can serve as a stepping stone in a future career path, and are directly related to increasing student opportunities to generate income (KAPE, 2012).

While the overall definition of life skills in the PCD reflect, to a large extent, Cambodia's commitment to goals 3 and 6 of the EFA framework (MoYES, 2004, p. 8), local life skills have been introduced with the aim to increase the relevance of the curriculum at the local level and to increase stakeholder participation in decision-making processes, as school staff, parents and community members would be given the opportunity to define an educational content that resonates with local labour market and family needs (KAPE, 2012).

## **1.2 Research Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine whether the Cambodian life skills framework has yielded noticeable changes at the local level with respect to its three essential policy areas: educational opportunities; relevance of the curriculum; and local stakeholder participation.

This overall purpose will be examined through three specific research questions:

1. How does the Cambodian life skills framework address inclusiveness, relevance and participation?



2. How do local stakeholders (including school staff, community representatives, parents and students) perceive the inclusiveness and relevance of life skills education?
3. How do local stakeholders (including school staff, community representatives, and parents) participate in decision-making processes as regards life skills education?

### **1.3 Significance of the Thesis**

So far, limited research has been done on the life skills policy framework and local implementation processes. One study by Kim (2011) focuses on the intent behind the Cambodian life skills framework. The study is based on Cambodian policy documents and interview data from policy makers. It argues that the policy emphasis on life skills in Cambodia may hinder the development of children's wider aspirations for social mobility, and that it may lead children into a work life at an unacceptably low age.

Another study by the NGO Education Partnership (NEP) in Cambodia (KAPE, 2012) analysed the implementation processes of the framework, with a focus on local life skills. It is based on data from policy makers at the national and local levels, and from local Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) officials and highlights the lack of coordination between civil society and the Cambodian government in implementing the life skills framework. Thus, both studies are based on analysis and interpretations at the policy level. In contrast, this thesis explores the understandings and perceptions of local stakeholders on the same issues in order to examine potential discrepancies between national level policy and local level perceptions of practice.

### **1.4 Thesis Structure**

After the introduction, Chapter 2 presents the political, economic and educational changes in Cambodia with particular emphasis on the period since independence in 1953 and until now. To the extent possible, the analysis sets a historical perspective on the three general areas (educational opportunities, relevance, participation) that are essential in the life skills framework.

Chapter 3 introduces the framework for analysis. The social justice approach has been selected because of its emphasis on the three key principles of inclusiveness, relevance and participation. The general approach is contrasted with other approaches and its application in the study is laid out

Chapter 4 presents the research design and methodology. It explains why qualitative methods have been chosen, how sampling was done, and how data was collected and interpreted. It also discusses the reliability and validity of the data.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 present and analyse the primary data collected for the study based on the analytical framework. The analysis focuses on three environments: the policy, school and home/community environments that derive from the analytical framework. In Chapter 5 the PCD 2005-2009 policy document is analysed, while Chapter 6 presents and analyses the data collected from school staff, community members, parents and students.

Chapter 7 provides a concluding discussion on the findings and their importance for existing knowledge on life skills education in Cambodia.

# 2 The Context for Life Skills Development in Cambodia

This chapter focuses on some of the most important historical events that have shaped the Cambodian education system, and led to the current emphasis on life skills. This includes the significant political changes in Cambodia during the previous century which have led to changes of the education system and the curriculum. Underlying these political changes are considerations on the policy areas of opportunities, relevance and participation that are central to the thesis.



Map 2.1: Cambodia and its provinces, 2015  
Source: Mapsoftheworld, 2014

## **2.1 The Current Socio-Economic Context**

Cambodia is a low-income country with a total land area of 181,035 square kilometres organised in 25 provinces (Map 2.1) inhabited by approximately 15.3 million people (UNDP, 2016; World Bank, 2015). Only 20 per cent of Cambodians live in urban areas, leaving the large majority of the population as rural dwellers (UNDP, 2016). The average household size is 4.7 (WHO, 2016). The population density is 75 per square kilometre for Cambodia as a whole, with a higher density in the cities, especially in the capital of Phnom Penh, which is by far the largest city, with approximately 1.3 million inhabitants (Ministry of Planning, 2010a). According to the Human Development Index (HDI), Cambodia has a fairly young population, with approximately 65.3 per cent under the age of 30, and a life expectancy rate of 63.3 years (UNDP, 2016).

### **2.1.1 National Economic Indicators**

Cambodia is one of the poorest nations in Asia (Ministry of Planning, 2010a). However, during the past two decades, its economy has been one of the fastest growing in the region, unmatched by any other post-conflict society (UNDP, 2016). It has been estimated that Cambodia will be a lower-middle income country in the immediate future (UNDP, 2016).

The Cambodian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, a universal measurement of economic power and a common indicator of development (Tikly, 2011) now stands at 1,237 USD (UNDP, 2016) compared to 805 USD in 2011 (Ministry of Planning, 2010a). The rapid economic development is primarily due to the country's embracement of economic liberalization, decentralization and privatization strategies, and its integration into the global economy (Ministry of Planning, 2010b). The most important sectors are services and agriculture, followed by industry (see Table 2.1) (Ministry of Planning, 2014). Of these, only agriculture seems to have somewhat declined in relative importance (from 36 per cent in 2001 to 31 per cent in 2015) (World Bank, 2016). The increased contribution to GDP comes in particular from an expanding garment industry and from tourism. Reform strategies have been implemented in the agricultural sector to increase agricultural profits, particularly in rice and rubber cultivation (Ministry of Planning, 2014).

Table 2.1: Cambodian GDP by sector of activity 2000-2010, %

Sector	2001	2005	2010	2015
Agriculture	36	33	37	31
Services	41	41	40	42
Industry	23	26	23	27
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: World Bank, 2015

Despite the positive economic development indicators, approximately 45.5 per cent of Cambodians live in multidimensional poverty<sup>1</sup> (UNDP, 2015). The percentage of the population living beneath the national poverty line (1.25 USD) has, however, declined to 13.5 per cent in 2014 from 17.7 per cent in 2012 (UNDP, 2016).

## 2.2 Political Change and Educational Development: A Historical Review

Cambodia was originally the Kingdom of Angkor which, since the 12th century gradually lost its power and influence because of internal and external conflict with frequent invasions from both Thailand in the west and Vietnam in the east. In 1863 Cambodia was colonized by France, and became part of French Indochina which also included Vietnam and Laos (Chandler, 1998). The colonization by France has been understood as a mutual agreement in which France was allowed to exploit Cambodia's strategic geographical location in exchange for protection against outside threats (Chandler, 1998).

The first schools in French Cambodia were intended exclusively for the children of the Cambodian royal family and the French elite. The education system was initially French, governed from Paris and taught by French teachers (Ayers, 2000). In 1912, when Albert Sarraut was appointed Governor-General of French Indochina, education was to be extended from an elite education only, to also include the poorer sections of the population in a western-style formal education system (Ayers, 2000). The system was designed to operate as in France, rather than being adapted to the poor population of a severely underdeveloped country (Hollister, 1958). This meant that differences in, for example, religious beliefs,

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on household surveys, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) measures indicators across the dimensions of education, health and standards of living in order to identify deprivations (such as being malnourished, not having electricity and clean water, and enrolment in education).

cultural identification and geographical differences amongst the population of French Indochina were essentially ignored (Hollister, 1958; Ayers, 2000).

Long before the French colonization, schools were set up in Buddhist temples around the country. Many parents still favoured this traditional form of education as it fulfilled their needs as opposed to the focus on French language, European literature, science and mathematics in the French schools (Ayers, 2000). In the eyes of the French however, the temple schools were unstructured and inadequate, having no examinations, no defined curriculum or inspectors to oversee student progress (Ayers, 2000).

In 1942, there were few secondary educational institutions, mostly due to the lack of educational investment from the colonial power despite highly increased numbers of primary school leavers (Dy, 2004). In Kampong Cham province alone, where much of the data for this study have been gathered, the number of primary school leavers rose from approximately nine students per year, to about 90 at the end of the decade (Ayers, 2000).

### **2.2.1 Educational Expansion 1953-1970**

At independence in 1953, Cambodian education consisted of six years of primary education followed by six years of secondary education taught in French. Upon completion of primary education the students were given the examinations for the Certificate of Primary and Complementary Education, which was needed to access secondary education and a government career as a civil servant (Hollister, 1958).

The French assigned King Norodom Sihanouk initiated a massive educational expansion immediately after independence. Between 1955 and 1958 the number of modernized temple schools increased, primary school facilities increased from 1,352 to 1,653 and secondary school facilities from 11 to 29 (Ayers, 2000). The number of students completing primary education increased from 442 in 1940 to over 11,500 in 1956 (Hollister, 1958). However, as more students completed primary education, the government intentionally limited the number of students receiving the certificate which, in turn, reduced enrolment to secondary education significantly (Hollister, 1958). Approximately 6,500 students out of the total of 11,500 candidates received the certificate in 1956 of whom only 2,307 were admitted to secondary

schools for financial and capacity reasons (Hollister, 1958). Despite UNESCO advice to stop the expansion, King Sihanouk initiated an even larger expansion aiming at compulsory secondary education for all Cambodian youth (Ayers, 2000).

The rapid educational expansion affected the quality of education partly because of the lack of qualified and trained teachers (Ayers, 2000; Dy, 2004). There was no national curriculum and there were differences in what was taught in urban and rural areas. While urban children often had the opportunity to learn mathematics, technology and science, rural children were usually taught local traditional culture (Dy, 2004).

In the new political climate, a democratic movement was on the rise, threatening the sovereignty of the King and eventually leading to his abdication in 1955. In reaction, Sihanouk initiated a national political movement named Sangkum Reastr Niyum (People's Socialist Community) and regained power after winning the national elections in the same year (Ayers, 2000). Although the aim of Sangkum was to unify the country, the previous societal order was re-established with Sihanouk as supreme leader with absolute authority and suppression of political opposition (Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox, 2013). Sihanouk's comeback "...signalled the demise of a multi-party democracy in Cambodia – and made it a model for the consolidation of power for all subsequent regimes" (Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox, 2013, p. 4).

In addition to expanding education, Sihanouk managed to keep the country out of the Vietnam war from 1955 to the end of his reign in 1970, when a pro-American government led by General Lon Nol overthrew Sihanouk (Chandler, 1998) and established the Khmer Republic (Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox, 2013). Lon Nol immediately launched a war against the Vietnamese communist movement that, according to Chandler (1998), was unwinnable from the start. The end of Sihanouk's reign meant a new direction for Cambodian politics and the end of a positive era for Cambodian education.

### **2.2.2 Civil Unrest and Educational Decline 1970-1975**

As General Lon Nol seized power in 1970, the Cambodian labour market and economy did not require an abundance of secondary school graduates (Ayers, 2000). The new government instead emphasized primary education and locally relevant skills, such as maritime and

freshwater fishing, rubber cultivation and rice growing, depending on the local areas (Ayers, 2000). The increasing tension between the republican government and the Vietnamese-led communist movement soon disrupted educational developments (Ayers, 1999). There were 5,275 primary schools in Cambodia when Lon Nol and the republicans came to power in 1970. The number was reduced to 1,064 at the beginning of the following academic year, and half of the nation's secondary schools were shut down (Ayers, 1999).

The internal conflict between the republican government and the communist movement escalated, and Cambodia plunged into a civil war with educational facilities in the countryside being in the crossfire. A large number of schools were destroyed in the American bombing of communist areas in the east as a means to slow down the communist expansion (Dy, 2004). Others served as barracks, prisons and ammunition storages for the regime or the communist movement. As educational funding was reduced dramatically, only a small number of schools remained operational (Dy, 2004; Ayers, 1999).

In the shadow of the armed conflict the educational policy promoted by Lon Nol and the republican regime was influenced heavily by nationalism, and a desire to unite the country through *Cambodianization* (Ayers, 2000). This was not a completely new idea, as attempts at developing a Cambodian curriculum aimed specifically at Cambodians were emphasized by Sihanouk during the 1960s. While the previous regime wanted to distance Cambodian education from French influence by removing subjects that dealt with France, it failed to address Cambodia's development needs as French educational content was simply replaced with content that related to everyday Cambodian life (Ayers, 2000). The new regime's nationalist ideology gave renewed life to the idea of *Cambodianization* as a political weapon against the communist movement. The policies of the new regime highlighted the need to adapt the education system to the new political and economic needs of the republic and introduced Khmer as the official language of instruction at all levels of the education system. Most pressing, and probably most valued by the republican government, was the intention to use education as an arena for student mobilization against the national communist enemy (Ayers, 2000).

In other words, unease, conflict and destruction characterized the Republic of Cambodia ever since General Lon Nol and his regime took power in 1970. As the civil war and corruption escalated within the Republic, many of Lon Nol's followers drifted back to Sihanouk who had



aligned himself with the communist movement near the Vietnamese border during the Vietnam War, and formed the National United Front of Kampuchea (FUNK) (Ayers, 2000). The structure and discipline of the FUNK was in stark contrast to the one of Lon Nol and the republican government (Ayers, 2000). As a result, more and more areas of Cambodia became “liberated zones”, areas occupied by the communists (Ayers, 2000).

Each zone had a different leader, resulting in a variety of educational strategies within the individual zones. The local differences in educational policy and planning were often a problem for the communist centre. Sihanouk and the FUNK for instance, promoted an educational policy that eventually led communist forces to shut down all educational activities due to ideological differences. Sometimes the schools were reopened, promoting a new form of education more in line with the revolutionary ideology, but more often they were used as barracks, prisons or storage centres (Ayers, 2000).

By 1974, as the civil war reached new heights, the *Cambodianization* of the curriculum and language of instruction had been abandoned completely, while educational quality continued to deteriorate (Ayers, 2000). Schools were closed for security reasons, and teachers went on strike because of low salaries. The student movement, previously supportive of the republican coup, now initiated protests against the republican regime, and many teachers and students fled to the communist resistance forces in the countryside (Ayers, 2000). Cambodian education thereby reached a new low. With the Lon Nol government spending most of their resources fighting Vietnamese and Cambodian communists within their own borders, the devastation of the Cambodian countryside, and the increasing civil unease, a new period of only about three years began which left deep scars in modern Cambodia (Chandler, 1998).

### **2.2.3 Khmer Rouge and Education 1975-1979**

*As they marched victoriously into Cambodia’s capital, Phnom Penh, on 17 April 1975, the troops of the Communist Khmer Rouge did not return the smiles of the war-weary population who had turned out on the streets, white flags in hand, to welcome them. Instead, they ordered, often at gunpoint, the immediate evacuation of the entire population of the city. Young men and women, the elderly, children, even patients confined to their hospital beds, were forced to join the exodus (Ayers, 1999, p. 205).*

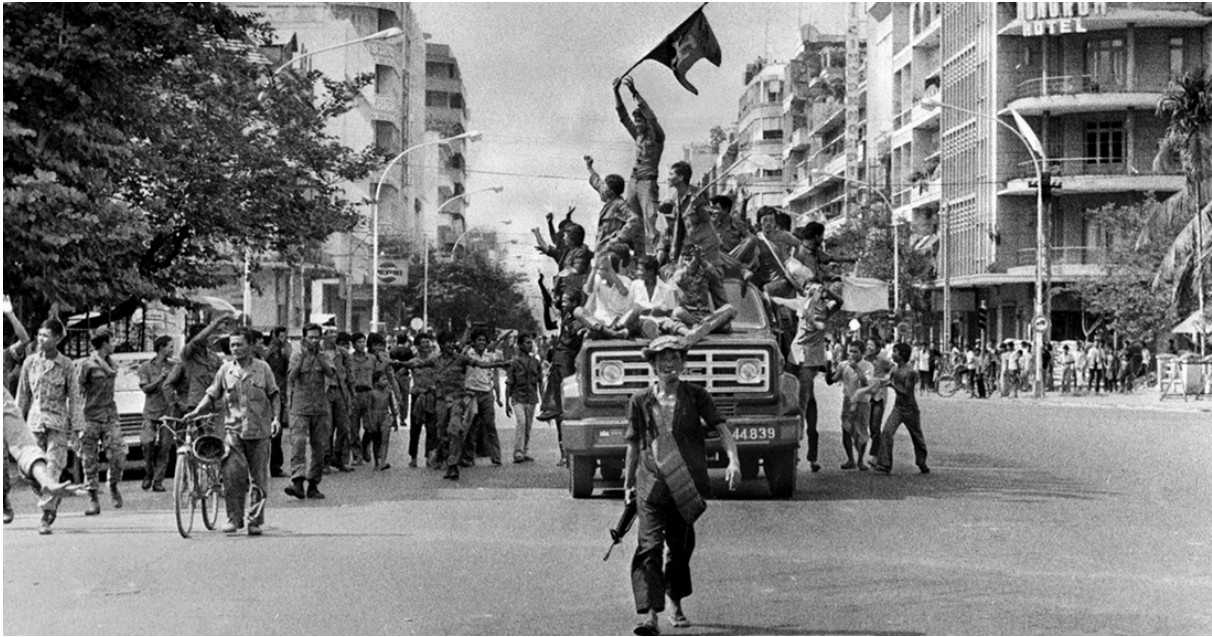


Photo 2.0: Khmer Rouge soldiers entering Phnom Penh, 1975

*Source:* endgenocide.org, 2016

The communist movement Democratic Kampuchea (DK), known as the Khmer Rouge, eventually became so strong that it could seize power in April 1975 (Chandler, 1998; Ayers, 1999). The leaders of DK were composed of members from the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) with the former teacher Saloth Sar, formally known as Pol Pot, at its apex (Chandler, 1998). The members of the DK leadership were, however, unknown to both Cambodians and the world until 1977 when they became known due to political pressure from China (Ayers, 2000).

The DK had one agenda once in power: to achieve socialism and to remove the barriers to national autonomy through a swift revolution (Chandler, 1998; Ayers 1999). According to the DK, barriers included family ties, the Buddhist tradition, urban life, money, ownership of property, and the monarchy, which the FUNK and Sihanouk previously had struggled to restore (Ayers, 2000). In order to rebuild the Angkorean glory of the past, the DK initiated what Ayers refers to as “...one of the most radical and terrifying programmes of orchestrated social change in the modern age” (1999, p. 205).

In contrast to the former regime of absolute power and authority, the DK promoted egalitarianism and equality (Ayers, 2000). Its particular form, however, came at a high cost for the Cambodian population (Chandler, 1998). It started with the evacuation of urban settlements that, according to the DK, were representations of capitalism, western thinking,

western institutions, class divisions and corruption (Ayers, 2000). Consequently, with the DK followed a systematic shut down of religious practices and Buddhist culture, the dismantling of Cambodia's market-based economy, the targeting and prosecution of the educated classes, and the dissolution of Cambodia's family-based system of social organization (Ayers, 2000; Chandler, 1998).

As urban life became illegal, Cambodians were forced in huge numbers into the countryside to work in the regime's new collectivized agricultural system or were executed for resisting orders from revolutionary soldiers, while others died from exhaustion and malnutrition along the way (Ayers, 1999; Chandler, 1998). The Cambodian population effectively found themselves in a huge nation-wide prison camp, experiencing living conditions that were worse than they had ever experienced before (Carvin, 1999; Chandler, 1998).

Once in power in 1975, the DK closed all schools. Ninety per cent of them were destroyed, together with most of the teaching materials and laboratory equipment. The remaining ones were used for other purposes. The Royal University of Phnom Penh was turned into a farm, while the Khmer-Soviet Friendship Higher Technical Institute became the Khmer Rouge's Central Political School that also served as a prison for Cambodians that had returned home in light of the communist victory. Another Phnom Penh school was also turned into a prison in which tens of thousands of Cambodians were killed during the three-year period (Clayton, 1998).

The educational destruction originated from the idea of "levelling the ground" so that a new and improved nation could arise (Ayers, 2000). Although sources vary, it can be assumed that approximately 75-80 per cent of teachers, 96 per cent of tertiary students and 67 per cent of primary and secondary students died during the Khmer Rouge (Clayton, 1998). Another group of people that was particularly exposed were Cambodians who had studied in another country. Ironically, the inner circles of the DK were all well educated, most of them in France, even Pol Pot who worked as a teacher after returning from technical studies in Paris (Ayers, 2000; Clayton, 1998).

The Khmer Rouge wanted an education system free from western influence, and that suited the needs of Democratic Kampuchea (Clayton, 1998). In 1976, it outlined the Four-Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields which highlighted, amongst others, educational policy and

planning under the new regime. Even though there was contempt for educational development among DK officials, education continued to play a role (Ayers, 2000). According to Pol Pot, the aim of education should be to serve the goals of the revolution, suggesting that the ideology and the moral standards of the Khmer Rouge might be embedded in the curriculum (Clayton, 1998, p. 9; Clayton, 2005).

According to the Four-Year Plan, basic education should consist of three years of part-time education revolving around general subjects. These subjects are listed in the plan documents as “reading and writing, arithmetic, national geography, natural science, physics and basic chemistry, the history of the revolutionary struggle of the people”, and “...the party’s politics, consciousness and organization” (Ayers, 2000, p.107). Primary education was to take place in factories, cooperatives and revolutionary establishments. After three years of primary education students were, according to the plan, to attend three years of either “general” or “technical” secondary education, followed by a three-year technical tertiary education (Clayton, 1998).

As the Khmer Rouge rule lasted only for about three years, the Four-Year Plan was not implemented to any particular extent, and the official announcement of the plan was cancelled due to disagreements in the centre of the communist elite (Ayers, 2000). There were reports of children at the primary levels of education being taught according to the plan, at least in some districts. Most witness accounts, however, mention children receiving primary education under trees and in stables in the countryside (Clayton, 1998; Ayers, 2000). Whether the general subjects were taught in schools is difficult to establish since DK teaching materials were not preserved after the fall of the Khmer Rouge (Clayton, 1998). The result of DK education was not significant since most children were labelled illiterate by the new government after the Khmer Rouge was overthrown in 1979 (Clayton, 1998).

According to Clayton (1998), DK education was often synonymous with manual labour and agricultural work, although educational practices varied across the country. Through education children and youth were supposed to gain knowledge of “technology by the means of work and practice”, suggesting an educational emphasis on practical skills that would benefit national development (Clayton, 1998). The Khmer Rouge leader, Khieu Samphan, stated in a radio broadcast in 1977 that natural science is the knowledge of how agriculture works, for instance how to grow different strains of rice. According to Samphan, this

knowledge is truly “...connected to the reality of the nation, to the ideas of nationalism, production, national construction, and national defence” (Clayton, 1998, p. 11). In other words, agricultural education resulting in a skilled agricultural labour force was both a way to build socialism in all fields of society and to independence (Clayton, 1998).

On 7 January 1979, the newly assembled United Front for the National Salvation of Kampuchea (UFNS), led by former communist commander Heng Samrin, marched into the streets of Phnom Penh after almost two weeks of battling the Khmer Rouge in the south (Ayers, 2000). Backed by 100,000 soldiers from the Vietnamese army they met little resistance as they fought their way north (Ayers, 2000; Carvin, 1999). Shortly after, the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was formed in Phnom Penh under the leadership of Heng Samrin and a number of former DK revolutionaries that had left the movement (Ayers, 2000).

#### **2.2.4 Rebuilding Education 1979-1993**

In 1979, Cambodia was in shatters (Ayers, 1999). There was “...no currency, no markets, no financial institutions and virtually no industry” (Ayers, 1999, p. 205). The roads had been severely damaged and not attended to, no trains were running, clean water, sanitation facilities and electricity were virtually non-existent, and telephone lines and postal services were reduced to nothing (Ayers, 1999, 2000). Thousands of Cambodians still wandered the countryside dislocated from their homes and trying to find lost family members (Ayers 2000). In education, there was no administration, no curriculum, lack of teaching and learning materials, and only a few qualified teachers (Ayers, 2000).

The educational rehabilitation process was initiated immediately after the establishment of the PRK in 1979 when a Ministry of Education was set up led by the former physics teacher, Chan Ven (Ayers, 2000). The immediate aim was to get Cambodian children back to school and transform Cambodia into a nation of “new Socialist workmen” (Ayers, 2000). Questions of access, quality, teacher training and educational content were, according to Ayers (2000), “...clearly beyond the capacity of the new Ministry of Education” (p. 128).

Cambodia lacked expertise at all levels of government, resulting in thousands of foreign advisers from, amongst others, the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic, although the majority came from Vietnam (Clayton, 2005; Ayers, 2000). Until the mid-1980s, the Vietnamese influence and control over Cambodian educational developments was significant (Ayers, 2000). Many local educational initiatives arose all over Cambodia immediately after the fall of the DK. These were neither organized nor sanctioned by the PRK administration, but nevertheless gathered local children for educational activities, teaching local knowledge based on the memories and individual experiences of their parents and the older generation (Ayers, 2000).

At the end of April 1979, the PRK leaders, together with the Ministry of Education, began working towards the initiation of an officially sanctioned school year. The Ministry, together with its Vietnamese advisors, assembled a national body of teachers and officials to run the education system locally. The Ministry recruited as many former teachers and officials as possible that had survived the Khmer Rouge regime as well inexperienced volunteers "...virtually picked up from city streets and village pathways" (Ayers, 2000, p. 130). In less than two months, the PRK had recruited the required personnel and simultaneously developed an educational programme that was characterized by hasty policy decisions and was to be carried out by inexperienced and unqualified personnel at the local level (Ayers, 2000).

According to policy documents from the newly formed Ministry of Education, the main objectives for Cambodian education during the early 1980s were to assure children "good technical training" as well as "good political training". The new regime, like its Vietnamese friends, had specific political ideals, which made the second objective the most important element of Cambodian education throughout the PRK period (Clayton, 2005). Education was to be "...concerned with serving and protecting the nation leading to the socialist way and following the objectives of socialism" (Clayton, 2005, p. 510). The PRK government emphasized many of the same subjects as the Sihanouk regime. For instance, the primary school curriculum of the pre-1970 education system emphasized subjects such as ethics, civics, Khmer and French language, history, arithmetic, geography, science, hygiene and manual work. In comparison, the PRK primary school curriculum excluded subjects such as ethics and civics and replaced them with "moral education", promoting socialist conceptions of the "good citizen". Science and hygiene education were eliminated and greater emphasis

was put on political history, manual labour, drawing, singing and physical education (Ayers, 2000).

Primary and secondary school textbooks for moral education and political history emphasized the Cambodian struggle for liberation, as well as the struggles and victories of countries with the same ideology, such as the Soviet Union and Cuba (Clayton, 2005). This international outlook had not been a part of Cambodian education since the Sihanouk era with its linkages to the French colonial power. Although intended to strengthen the legitimacy of the communist regime, the internationalization of education during the PRK actually served as a first step to open up Cambodia to the world (Ayers, 2000; Clayton, 2005).

In the wider picture, the socialist PRK was struggling as the Heng Samrin government was denied the Cambodian seat in the United Nations (UN). While the UN seat was initially occupied by the DK, a coalition between the Khmer Rouge, former king Sihanouk's royalist National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Co-operative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) and the republican Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) was formed. The coalition, labelled the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), held the Cambodian seat in the UN throughout the 1980s, while efforts were made to break the PRK government in Phnom Penh (Ayers, 2000).

As a result, pressure started to build up around the PRK from the outside while their political mission to rehabilitate social, economic and political life in Cambodia continued. By 1985, the PRK had officially announced the formation of a communist government controlled by the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP). They had formulated a national constitution and held national elections that produced two PRK prime ministers (Ayers, 2000). The first Prime Minister, Pen Sovann, led the KPRP in the years following the fall of the Khmer Rouge, although under the supervision of Heng Samrin. Later, Chan Si replaced Sovann who was himself replaced by the young PRK foreign minister Hun Sen, who still serves as Prime Minister of Cambodia today (Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox, 2013).

During Hun Sen's first years as Prime Minister, Cambodia became less Vietnam reliant, and major changes developed within the PRK. It changed its name to the State of Cambodia (SOC) as a means to gain international legitimacy and initiated measures that radically changed the economic landscape of Cambodia away from socialism and towards capitalism

(Ayers, 2000). By 1989, Vietnamese troops had completely withdrawn from Cambodian territory. The UN initiated negotiations to settle the political disputes that had raged between the PRK and the CGDK-coalition since the fall of the DK regime (Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox, 2013). These negotiations came to an end in October 1991 with the Paris Agreements, restating the Kingdom of Cambodia as a constitutional monarchy with Sihanouk at the crown once again. Cambodia now became a liberal, multi-party democracy with fair elections and a full set of fundamental rights (Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox, 2013).

Prior to the Vietnamese withdrawal in 1989, primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education were dedicated to creating the “new” Cambodian men and women that would advance the communist cause internationally (Clayton, 2005). However, the communist impact on the population was insignificant as Hun Sen announced the path towards democracy and a free market economy immediately after the Vietnamese withdrawal. Combined with the fall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc that had provided both funding and ideological fuel to the Cambodian PRK movement, together with the decreasing revolutionary momentum within the PRK leadership itself, the socialist orientation started to wither (Ayers, 2000; Clayton, 2005).

The last period of PRK rule was characterized by a widening divide between the party’s socialist aims for the education system and the reality of the state that portrayed Cambodia as a nation that embraced the ideals of capitalism (Clayton, 2005). This identity crisis also became apparent within Cambodian classrooms. Primary school children were singing the anthem of the SOC in front of the PRK flag. Many classrooms with pictures of prominent communist leaders now taught values of which Heng Samrin, Stalin, and Ho Chi Minh would never approve, and tertiary students were given examinations in political history that reflected PRK ideology, well aware of the new values of the SOC (Ayers, 2000).

### **2.2.5 Education in the New Kingdom 1993-2000**

Even though the civil war had officially ended, unease still characterized the political climate of the new democracy. As 19 political parties entered the national elections in 1993, only two got the majority of Cambodian votes: the royalist FUNCINPEC led by King Sihanouk’s son Norodom Ranariddh, and Hun Sen’s newly established Cambodian People’s Party (CPP)



(Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox, 2013). Although political rivals, the two parties went into office together in what was supposed to be a two party government with equal power distribution. However, the CPP soon held the majority of votes in rural areas and the power distribution turned in favour of Hun Sen. As a consequence, the FUNCINPEC sought collaboration with the remnants of the Khmer Rouge (Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox, 2013). In 1997, the CPP, still in control over its own armed forces and the police, forcefully engaged a coup where some fifty key FUNCINPEC officials were killed and many others fled the country (Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox, 2013).

This period impacted education as well. Only one month after the formation of the coalition government between the CPP and the FUNCINPEC in 1993, a national project for modernization was initiated that affected all areas of Cambodian society (Ayers, 2000). The project was named the National Plan to Rehabilitate and Develop Cambodia (NPRD), and echoed to a large extent the values of the New World Order that emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War (Ayers, 2000). Cambodian political structures, including education, became increasingly decentralised, opening up for increased local autonomy (Pellini, 2007).

The Rebuilding of Quality Education and Training Program was approved in January 1994 at the first National Education Seminar. Determined to renew and improve education, the recently appointed Minister of Education, Ung Huot, outlined the main priorities ahead: “Universalizing nine years of basic general education”, “modernizing and improving the quality of the education system”, and linking skills development with the requirements of employers and workers (Ayers, 2000, p. 166; MoYES, 1994). These priorities were further highlighted in the national constitution where nine years of free primary and secondary education would be guaranteed to all children (MoYES, 1994). In 1996, the education system would be based on a 6+3+3 model, with six years of primary education, three years of lower secondary education and three years of upper secondary education (Clayton, 2005; Ayers, 2000).

Furthermore, the elimination of communist ideas in education paved the way for new educational content in addition to the traditional subjects of Khmer language, math, physical education, etc. Children now had lectures on civic education and home economics, with one hour per week being dedicated to each of these subjects (Clayton, 2005). Civic education emphasized, for example, the purpose of life, intelligence, knowledge building, family

relations, teamwork skills and religion. For secondary students, topics, such as world history that looked past the borders of Cambodia, would be emphasized in order to distinguish the new Cambodia from its socialist past (Clayton, 2005).

Although new educational structures were put in place, questions of educational quality still remained. Qualified teachers and teaching materials were still in short supply, local stakeholder participation in decision-making was scarce at best, and there was a significant lack of funds to support the emphasis on education (Ayers, 2000; MoYES, 1994). After the CPP coup in 1997, the issue of funding became even more severe, because important international donors, such as the European Union (EU) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) initiated economic sanctions against the Cambodian government (Ayers, 2000). Others, however, continued to fund, in particular the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) who together provided 73 million USD. Other important contributions came from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that have helped establish and rebuild over 6,000 educational institutions since the 1990s (Tan, 2007).

In the 1998 elections, the CPP won by a small margin and once again had to form a coalition with FUNCINPEC. The CPP continued to dominate the coalition winning control over almost all commune councils in the 2002 local elections, and made lucrative deals with financial supporters and powerful families. The CPP has created a political and economic elite and a government that, according to Jacobsen & Stuart-Fox (2013), are steeped in corruption at all levels, "...from education to what passes at the justice system" (p. 6).

## **2.3 Educational Development since 2001**

Since the 1990s, Cambodian education has become increasingly mainstream, with content and practices that largely resemble education systems in other developing nations. In 2001, the MoYES published its first Education Strategic Plan (ESP). Preparations for an education framework with a comprehensive emphasis on skills development were initiated in 2003 leading to the PCD, which was the first guiding educational policy document in Cambodia that applied the term *life skills*. The policy continues to be the foundation for educational content and practices today.

Cambodia's embracement of global development discourses is clear from the policy document. According to the PCD, the aim of the curriculum is to "...develop fully the talents and capacities of all students in order that they become able people, with parallel and balanced intellectual, spiritual, mental and physical growth and development" (MoYES, 2004, p. 4). It is also to promote learning experiences that enable students to learn how to know, learn how to be, learn how to do, and learn how to live together in accordance with Delors pillars of education and UNESCO's humanistic approach to development (MoYES, 2004; UNESCO, 1996). This is to be achieved by equipping students with the everyday life skills that they would need in order to reach their full potential and to "...become effective and productive members of society" (MoYES, 2004, p. 5) which is in accordance with mainstream human capital thinking (Robeyns, 2006).

Life skills are broadly defined as "intellectual, personal, interpersonal and vocational skills that enable informed decision-making, effective communication, and coping and self-management skills that contribute to a healthy and productive life" (MoYES, 2004, p. 8). The most fundamental of all life skills are Khmer literacy and numeracy. These life skills should be the main priority of primary education, especially in the first three years of schooling (MoYES, 2004). This is consistent with a more recent definition of life skills education as the form of education that emphasizes the "...technical personal capacity of reading, writing, calculating, and using personal skills from birth" (UNESCO, 2013, p. 67).

The life skills initiative in Cambodia is guided largely by the nation's commitment to EFA and the Dakar Framework for Action. Specifically, the PCD states that its emphasis on life skills education is a direct response to the EFA pledges of (1) improving and diversifying educational programmes by "...guaranteeing and consolidating literacy training", and by "...giving priority to the acquisition of basic life skills" (UNESCO, 2000, p. 38), as well as (2) to:

Continue to move forward with processes of curricular reform and to strengthen curricula by including within it life skills, values and attitudes that encourage families to keep their children in school and that provide people with the necessary instruments to overcome poverty and to improve the quality of life of families and communities (UNESCO, 2000, p. 39).

The Cambodian commitment to the EFA framework and its adaptation to international education strategies have influenced its emphasis on equitable access for all, educational quality, and the efficiency of educational services that still remain an issue in Cambodian schools (World Bank, 2005; Tan, 2007). Figures from the National Strategic Development Plan 2014-2018 show a Net Enrolment Rate (NER) in primary schools at 97 per cent and a Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) at 119 per cent in 2014 (Ministry of Planning, 2014). Repetition rates are still high in primary education, and enrolment is lower than the 100 per cent goal set by the government (Tan, 2007; Ministry of Planning, 2014). In lower secondary education, the GER has steadily increased in recent years, standing at 60 per cent in 2014 with a completion rate of 44 per cent (Ministry of Planning, 2014). At upper secondary education levels, the GER was 30 per cent in 2014 (Ministry of Planning, 2014).

### **2.3.1 Definition of Life Skills Categories**

Life skills in the Cambodian curriculum framework are explicitly divided into two separate categories: basic life skills and local life skills (see Table 2.2) (KAPE, 2012). *Basic life skills* (BLS) refer almost exclusively to various psychosocial skills, including among others general life skills, such as personal hygiene, safety, planning of daily life, organization, relationships and moral citizenry, as well as pre-vocational skills, such as communication skills, problem solving skills and team working skills aimed at enabling the individual to contribute to the workforce or to their communities (KAPE, 2012). The skills are basic, and each student, no matter the local context, would benefit from them. The skills are generally referred to as soft skills and resonate with the international competence debates and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skillsets as discussed in the introduction of the thesis.

*Local life skills programmes* (LLSP), also referred to as career skills (KAPE, 2012), cover skillsets, abilities and knowledge that are in demand and of high value in local contexts (Norad, 2008). The purpose of LLSP is "...to provide schools, in partnership with parents, their local community, community organizations and NGOs, with the opportunity to provide training in specific life skills that have a particular relevance to local students" (MoYES, 2004, p. 7).

Table 2.2: Life skills in the Cambodian curriculum framework

<b>Basic Life Skills/Soft Skills</b>	<b>Local Life Skills/Career Skills/Hard Skills</b>
Khmer Language (Oral & Written)	Bicycle Repair
Literacy & Numeracy	Bio-Gardening
Conflict Management	Chicken Raising
Empathy	Cooking
Problem Solving	Fish Raising
Critical Thinking	Frog Raising
Analysing skills	Fruit Processing
Self Evaluation	Masonry
Science	Rice Growing/Processing
Mathematics	Sewing
Foreign Languages	Hair Dressing

*Source:* KAPE, 2012

Local life skills are sub-divided into simple career-skills and vocational skills (KAPE, 2012). Simple career-skills can be described as skills that require short training courses to equip the learner with practical skills that may improve family income and/or quality of life. Vocational skills are skills that require longer courses and programmes to develop, that are more technical in nature and execution, and that prepare learners for future studies and particular professions (KAPE, 2012; MoYES, 2004). Although teaching LLSP is highly emphasized in the framework, LLSPs are locally developed, funded and structured. According to the PCD, they are extra-curricular, and to be taught for 2-5 hours per week without the use of government resources (see Table 2.3) (MoYES, 2004; Norad, 2008). Skills that belong in the LLSP categories are generally referred to as hard skills.

Table 2.3: The Cambodian curriculum structure, grade 7-9

<b>NC Subjects</b>	<b>Number of Lessons</b>
Khmer	6
Mathematics	6
Social Studies	6
Sciences	6
Foreign Languages	4
Physical and Health Education and Sports	2
LLSP (including Art education)	2-5
Total	32-35

*Source:* MoYES, 2004

Although the PCD is clear about purposes, definitions and the curriculum layout, Kim (2011) and KAPE (2012) show that implementing the life skills framework in Cambodia is not as straightforward as the policy document would imply. While enrolment and other significant indicators are positive, there is uncertainty about the practical impacts of the life skills framework at the local level in the areas that it is to address. This is further explored in this thesis.

## 2.4 Summary

The historical analysis has shown how education has been used by different political regimes for purposes that were closely associated with their particular ideological agendas. Of particular interest is the fact that issues of educational opportunities, relevance and participation have been on the agenda although interpreted and emphasised differently in the different periods. Educational opportunities and relevance were stressed in the earlier periods, while that of participation of the wider community has been largely disregarded. Thus, during long periods, the educational content in Cambodia has echoed the immediate needs of local communities with particular emphasis on practical, and mostly agricultural skills.

This was also reflected in the *Cambodianization* of the curriculum in the early 1970s although with an underlying strong ideological agenda. With the turn to modernization of education during the 1990s and a more capitalistic development process later on, the notion of life skills and local life skills also became part of the educational agenda.

In the next chapter, the analytical framework that has guided the analysis of the PCD and the perceptions of practice at the school level is introduced. It responds to the core policy areas in the PCD of providing educational opportunities for all, providing relevant education, and ensuring local participation in decision-making processes.

# 3 Framework for Analysis

This chapter discusses the choice of the social justice approach compared to other approaches to the analysis of the quality of education. It stresses the importance of the approach for the three policy areas of the PCD based on the underlying principles of social justice theory and explains how these principles have been applied in the analysis.

## 3.1 Traditional Approaches to the Quality of Education

According to Barrett (2013, p. 2), any debate on the quality of education is “...inextricably entangled with issues of social justice so that any attempt to conceptualize education quality assumes a position on social justice, whether this is made explicit or not”. Although the social justice perspective does not provide a blueprint for policy and practice, it addresses key concepts for education quality that should form part of debates (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). The social justice perspective draws on multiple theories and approaches that have made a significant impact on quality discourses during the past decades (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). The human capital theory and the human rights approach have been particularly influential.

### 3.1.1 Human Capital Theory

The *human capital theory* (HCT) considers education quality as an important element for economic growth (Hanushek & Woßmann, 2007). Human capital “...refers to the fact that human beings invest in themselves, by means of education, training, or other activities, which raises their future income by increasing their lifetime earnings” (Woodhall, 1997, p. 219). The skills and competencies that a person acquires through education and training are thus believed to confer a variety of benefits, both personal and economic. Direct investment in education, or investment in the development of human capital, is often considered the main goal for many countries worldwide when implementing education policy. Consequently, human capital approaches have in recent decades provided governments and policymakers “...with an important economic rationale for a focus on education quality” (Tikly & Barrett, 2011, p. 4).

According to HCT, education quality can be measured by students' cognitive skills or competencies acquired at various levels of education, much in line with the main purpose of the well-known PISA assessment (Hanushek & Woßmann, 2007). Human capital approaches to education quality are in many ways directly related to the implementation of competitiveness and finance-driven reforms (Carnoy, 1999). This is particularly so in education systems that: (1) increase the use of standardized testing due to increased competition between school; (2) reduce the public spending on education; (3) provide schools with greater local autonomy and decision-making power through decentralization strategies; and (4) create greater accountability through the publication of school performance data (Tikly & Barrett, 2013; Hanushek & Woßmann, 2007). These elements can, to various extents, be found in the Cambodian education system.

According to various scholars, strategies based on HCT are very effective in relation to education quality. Hanushek & Woßmann (2007, p. 5) find that there is a significant positive correlation, both statistically and economically, between the quality of education and economic growth that is far larger than the association between the quantity of education and growth. Thus, and according to the HCT perspective, years spent in school correlate less strongly with economic growth than high scores on standardized tests (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). A major issue is the disregard of the learning process (Alexander, 2008). Another critique is that even though competition, greater school autonomy and greater accountability might improve outcomes in some contexts, there is limited evidence that this is a universal truth, especially for disadvantaged groups worldwide (Tikly & Barrett, 2013).

### **3.1.2 The Human Rights Approach**

While the HCT is concerned mainly with economic growth, the human rights approach advocates the realization of fundamental human rights as the object of development (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). Rights-based influence on international discourse originates from various United Nations (UN) agencies and other international organizations that base themselves on human rights thinking, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989). From a human rights perspective education quality is not assessed based on cognitive skills measurable through standardized tests. Rather, it is based on the equality of opportunity (Carnoy, 1999), and whether the education that is provided covers the needs of the learner in



terms of learning environment, content, processes and contextually relevant learning outcomes (Tikly & Barrett, 2011).

Another important consideration is an education system's ability to facilitate educational opportunities for groups that could be considered disadvantaged or marginalized due to gender, language, socio-economic status, ethnicity or religious beliefs (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). In equity-driven and human rights based educational reform, the inclusion of all learners within a democratic and context-based education system is what defines the quality of education (Carnoy, 1999; Tikly & Barrett, 2013).

The rights-based approach is not without its critiques although it has a major influence on contemporary education discourses. Robeyns (2006), for instance, considers the rights-based approach as overly rhetorical, possibly compromising its ability to assess education quality. While almost all governments globally have granted every child the right to education legally, many children have no education at all, be it for lack of educational facilities, the lack of teachers or other matters (Robeyns, 2006). Thus, ensuring that the right to education is legally and actually granted in national and local contexts is important in rights-based education reforms (Robeyns, 2006).

## **3.2 Education Quality and Social Justice**

Considerations on education quality from a social justice perspective are in many ways similar to the rights-based approach. According to Nussbaum (2006, as cited in Tikly & Barrett, 2013, p. 13) social justice approaches to education represent a “species of a human rights approach”. There is, however, one significant difference that makes this approach more favourable than the human rights approach for the purpose of this thesis. While the rights-based approach emphasizes international and national legislation to ensure the right to education, the social justice perspective emphasizes moral philosophy and ethics as its starting point in quality discussions (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). From a social justice perspective, moral and ethical considerations go beyond the rights discourse, bridging and extending aspects of both HCT and human rights approaches to education quality (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). These considerations are important especially since Cambodia is striving to provide

education for all as a measure to increase their competitiveness in the global economy (MoYES, 2004).

The social justice approach to education quality draws heavily on the work of Nancy Fraser and on Amartya Sen's capability approach (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). Fraser's work represents the fundamental understanding of social justice in today's world with respect to the broader social, economic and cultural context of globalization. Sen's capability approach provides the social justice perspective with a deeper understanding of justice and freedom in relation to development, be it of economic, social or human kind. In short, Fraser defines justice as "parity of participation" and stresses that institutionalized obstacles, such as economic or cultural ones that prevent the inclusion of disadvantaged groups from participating in social interaction, must be overcome (Fraser, 2008). Sen's capability approach, which has become influential in recent development discourse, understands capabilities as the opportunities that individuals have to realize different 'functionings' that he or she may have reason to value (Sen, 1999).

According to Walker (2006, p.156), functionings can be defined as "...doings and beings such as being well nourished, having shelter and access to clean water, being mobile, being well-educated, having paid work, being safe, being respected, [and] taking part in discussions with your peers". The difference between capability and functioning equals the difference between potential and outcome (Walker, 2006). This means that a capability can translate into a student attending quality education in order to potentially access desirable jobs. Fraser's dismantling of institutionalized obstacles may be seen as a prerequisite for an individual's achievement of different functionings. In the capability approach, freedom involves the option to choose which functionings or outcomes to strive for with the resources available for the individual (Tikly & Barrett, 2011).

Sen's capability approach, which is gaining international momentum in education, is highly contextualized being primarily concerned with the "...kinds of capabilities that learners, parents, communities and governments have reason to value" in local contexts (Tikly & Barrett, 2011, p. 9). This is also true from a social justice perspective, where an education of quality:

...provides all learners with the capabilities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual well-being. The learning outcomes that are required vary according to context but at the end of the basic education cycle must include at least threshold levels of literacy and numeracy as well as life skills, including awareness and prevention of disease (Tikly & Barrett, 2011, p. 9).

In order to show the relevance of the social justice perspective for this study, its analytical environments and core concepts are discussed in the context of the Cambodian life skills framework as a contributor to the quality of Cambodian education.

### 3.3 Levels of Analysis

Tikly & Barrett (2013, p. 15) identify three environments that determine the quality of education from a social justice standpoint: (1) the policy environment; (2) the school environment; and (3) the home/community environment (Figure 3.1). Being contextual in nature, these environments may impact education quality differently in different national contexts.

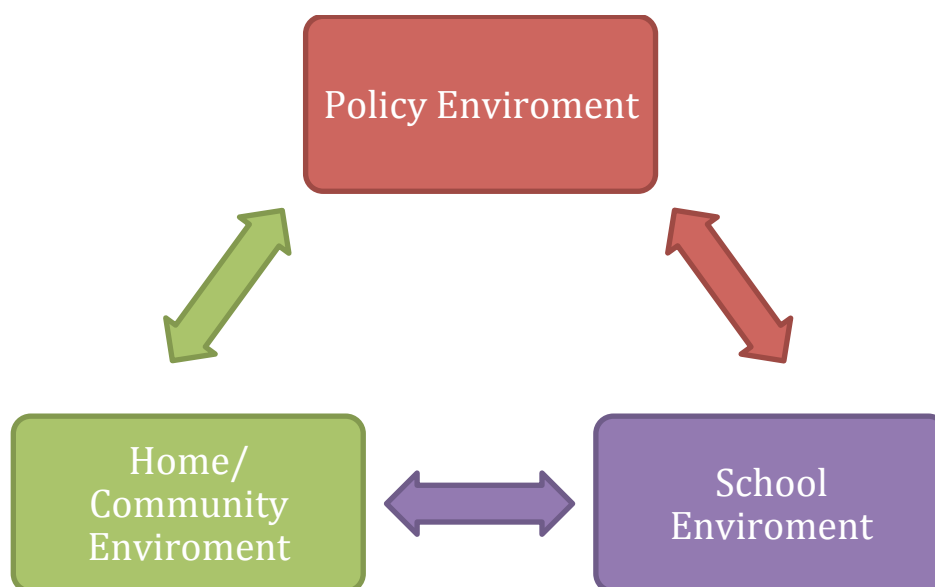


Figure 3.1: Interacting levels of analysis for the study  
*Source:* Tikly & Barrett, 2013

The policy environment tends to be significantly more important for education quality in developed nations that have the political and economic structures necessary to implement educational policy effectively. Nations without these structures may experience issues at the local level that may affect education quality. This is especially so as policy makers in developing nations have a tendency to formulate policy that is too complex for schools to implement without additional support (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). Furthermore, the policy environment may include the underlying intentions of a policy, whether related to economic growth in line with HCT, rights-based approaches, or perhaps elements of both. An analysis of the policy environment can also identify predominant global agendas that, while being primarily promoted by large donor agencies and international organisations, can have a significant impact on the other environments and civil society, and that may also promote discriminatory practices (Tikly & Barrett, 2013).

The school environment is primarily concerned with the implementation processes of a given education policy at the local level (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). An analysis may involve implementation at the school level, and possible differences in understanding of aspects, such as quality or, in our case, life skills. Conceptual understandings can vary significantly between contexts, such as between social groupings or geographical locations. A social justice consideration could, for instance, be whether local needs are accounted for in the policy environment, and whether participatory structures enable various stakeholders to contribute to implementation processes.

The home/community environment relates to participatory processes as well, although emphasizing more directly the role of communities and parents in education and development (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). Both HCT and rights-based approaches are concerned with the role of communities and parental involvement. From a HCT standpoint, parents and communities are expected to prepare children for school in order to increase effectiveness, whereas in rights-based discourses parents are entitled to have decision-making powers in matters concerning education (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). The social justice approach problematizes the concept of community and acknowledges that this is a place where structural and discursive inequalities are produced and reproduced (Tikly & Barrett, 2013).

It is sometimes difficult, analytically, to establish where the school environment ends and the home/community environment begins as both represent the local context. This concerns, for

example, the influence that parents and communities have on schools in terms of content, and whether school practices directly or indirectly result from this. Because of their importance, both the school and home/community environments are maintained in this study.

### 3.4 Principles of Social Justice

The social justice perspective identifies three core concepts related to education quality in a given context: inclusiveness; relevance; and participation. These concepts serve as analytical tools for this thesis as related to the three environments identified above, namely the policy, school and home/community environments (Figure 3.2). The three principles are discussed below as they are understood and applied in this thesis.

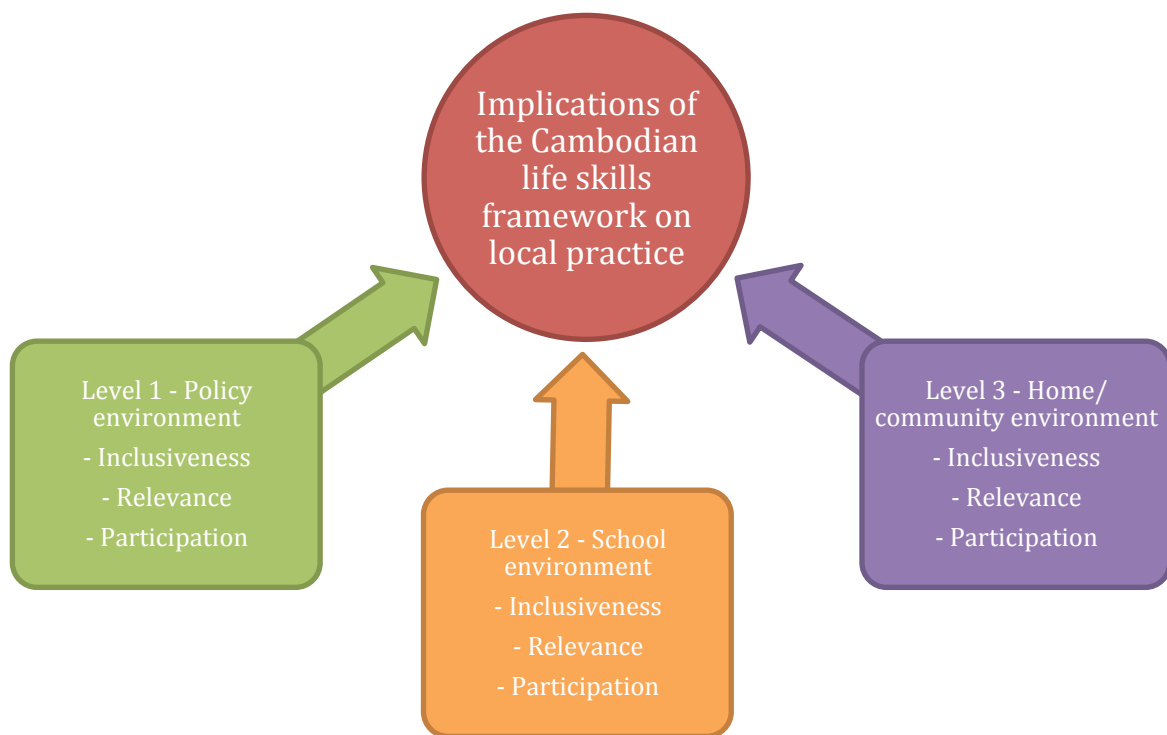


Figure 3.2: Framework for analysis based on the social justice approach

#### 3.4.1 Inclusiveness, Relevance and Participation

In the context of this thesis, *inclusiveness* is highly related to the PCD definition of life skills, and can be translated as the opportunity to achieve desired outcomes. Although inclusiveness can relate to a variety of processes both in policy and practice, the specific aspects of

inclusiveness that are of interest in this study is directly related to school economy. This includes the extent to which the individual school has the financial capacity to implement the curriculum in line with the standards set by the government; whether or not the school budgets allow for a thorough follow-up on the implemented programmes; and whether funds to ensure inclusive education practices are available to the schools, for example books and other practical and technical or non-technical equipment (UNICEF, 2009). Inclusiveness thus concerns both economic redistribution based on HCT concerns, such as school effectiveness and efficiency, as well as rights-based concerns of socio-cultural recognition based on equitable access to education. Furthermore, inclusiveness involves teacher capacity to teach the subjects in line with government and school standards, which in turn, depends on budgets for teacher training, and appropriate teaching equipment. According to Tikly and Barrett (2013), all these elements impact student ability to convert educational resources into capabilities.

*Relevance* is especially important for the Cambodian life skills framework due to its rationale and aims to increase the relevance of education in the eyes of local communities and parents. In this study, relevance relates to the extent to which education is perceived as relevant by schools, communities and parents in relation to individual and local socio-economic and human development needs (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). This includes educational outcomes and the extent to which local and national stakeholders find the outcomes meaningful.

Thus, whereas the concept of inclusiveness concerns the opportunities that the child, family or community have to achieve their desired outcomes, the concept of relevance emphasizes what the desired outcomes are. In order to be relevant, the school must provide an education whose outcomes are perceived as valuable or desirable by the students, their parents and their communities. The Cambodian definition of two separate life skills categories could be considered an effort in addressing this issue.

*Participation* is concerned primarily with justice (or injustice) in relation to participatory and democratic processes (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). According to Tikly & Barrett (2013), participation underpins the other principles in that an inclusive and relevant education requires inputs from local stakeholders, thus implying their participation in decision-making and implementation processes.

The concept of participation is contested in the literature. An important one in relation to social justice, and to this study, is the somewhat vague distinction between "participation" and "involvement", discussed amongst others, by Shaeffer (1994) and the World Health Organization (WHO, 1981). The distinction is important as it relates directly to justice concerns. It poses questions concerning the degree to which local stakeholders, such as parents or communities, are actively involved in participatory processes, and if their involvement is active or passive (Shaeffer, 1994).

A related perspective appears in Arnstein (1969) who proposes eight rungs, each representing a level of participatory power, from the lowest level of manipulation describing non-participation, to the middle level describing passive forms of participation such as informing, to the highest levels of partnership and citizen control describing meaningful participation (Arnstein, 1969). Shaeffer (1994) provides a more recent version of Arnstein's ladder. Here involvement characterizes a passive contribution, while participation means active and impactful contributions to participatory processes. In essence, and what this distinction means for social justice and the discussions to come, is that "There is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216).

The three key concepts relate to the three environments for analysis, namely the policy, school and home/community environments. The policy environment, represented by the PCD, is presented and analysed in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 analyses the school and home/community environments. The research design and methodology for the data collection in the schools are first presented in Chapter 4.

# 4 Research Design and Methodology

This study has adopted an inductive approach and relies on qualitative methods for the collection of data. In the following the rationale for these choices are presented. The chapter also presents the general research design, the nature of the data, the sampling and data analysis procedures. It, finally, discusses issues related to the reliability and validity of the data.

## 4.1 Research Strategy

A research strategy can be defined as “...a general orientation to the conduct of social research” (Bryman, 2012, p. 35). Traditionally within the social sciences, there has been a major emphasis on *qualitative* and *quantitative* approaches, distinguished by their epistemological (view on knowledge) and ontological (view on reality) assumptions (Table 4.1). Bryman (2012) points out that while some researchers view the two approaches as fundamentally different, others claim that distinguishing them no longer proves useful. Some argue that qualitative and quantitative approaches merely represent different ends of a methodological continuum (Creswell, 2014), or are highly complementary (Lund, 2005).

Table 4.1: Characteristics of qualitative and quantitative research strategies

Research Strategy	Role of Theory	Epistemology	Ontology
Qualitative	Inductive	Interpretivism	Constructivism
Quantitative	Deductive	Positivism	Objectivism

Source: Bryman, 2012

Yin (2011, p. 7-8) proposes five features of qualitative research that shed additional light on the qualitative assumptions: studying the meaning of people’s lives under real world conditions; representing the views and perspectives of the people through research; covering the contextual conditions within which people live; contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behaviour; and striving to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source. A particularly appealing argument in favour of a qualitative research strategy in relation to these features is that it is



highly flexible. This is important for this thesis that is concerned with aspects of both policy and practice and relies on various data collection methods as will be discussed below.

According to Bryman (2012), an inductive approach can lead to theory emerging from research findings, rather than guiding the research from the beginning which is common in quantitative research. This study does not aim at identifying new emerging theory, but contributes to existing ideas. The social justice approach was identified as the most appropriate analytical lens for the interpretation and analysis of the data that was collected because of its significance for the core areas in the Cambodian policy document.

Although the social phenomenon of education can be researched using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, it was believed that this study would benefit from asking context-specific questions to relevant individuals, as opposed to collecting data through for instance a quantitative survey design (Burrell & Morgan, 2005). The opinions of participants on life skills education were considered to be of great importance in order to understand how policy aspects of life skills education translate to the local context. The underlying epistemological standpoint for the study is thus interpretivism and that the social world cannot be studied according to the same research procedures as for the natural world (Creswell, 2014; Bryman, 2012). It is the complexity of views, meanings, contexts, concepts and descriptions rather than the numerically measurable indicators and categories that are interesting (Creswell, 2014) in order to get to "...the essence of things" (Fairbrother, 2007, p. 40).

Finally, the study is based on the assumptions of constructivism rather than objectivism. Due to the complexity and relativity of the social world that is being researched, full objectivity cannot be achieved (Bryman, 2012; Yin, 2011). The social reality reflected in the data is likely to differ in terms of how education is perceived, and how life skills education is understood to benefit the local community due to the external conditions and the lives and experiences of the research participants (Yin, 2011).

## **4.2 Research Site**

For this study, the province of Kampong Cham and its neighbouring province Tbong Khmum (Map 2.1) were selected as the location for the fieldwork which took place for four weeks in

November/December 2014 (Appendix 1). Kampong Cham is among Cambodia's most populous provinces with approximately one million inhabitants divided among 10 districts, and Kampong Cham city is the third largest city in Cambodia (118 000 people in 2008)<sup>2</sup> (Ministry of Planning, 2008). Tbong Khmum has a total population of approximately 700,000 divided among 6 districts and has its administrative seat in Tbong Khmum town. Both provinces are mostly rural with several primary and secondary school establishments. The geographical diversity of the provinces was important in order to collect data from different community contexts.

Before departure to the field, the research was approved by the Norwegian Social Data Services (NSD) in order to comply to ethical standards. In Cambodia the data collection was facilitated by the local NGO, Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE), located in the city of Kampong Cham that allowed me to conduct the research under their existing permissions. KAPE has been responsible for developing a comprehensive set of life skills based teaching manuals in cooperation with the Cambodian MoYES. The Cambodian life skills framework and the manuals have been introduced in several test schools within as well as outside the Kampong Cham area as part of KAPE's Improved Basic Education in Cambodia (IBEC) programme.

#### **4.2.1 School Selection**

The research was conducted in four schools in the two provinces. The school director at each school granted the permission to collect data at the school and home/community levels. Prior to data collection, the analysis of the historical development in Cambodia was conducted in order to better understand the PCD and the local context for its implementation. In order to reflect the local differences, both urban and rural schools were selected at both primary and secondary levels. School sampling was conducted with the assistance of a KAPE staff member who had frequent dialogue with schools in both provinces.

---

<sup>2</sup> The numbers are based on the 2008 population consensus (Ministry of Planning, 2008) since the population data of the Kampong Cham and Tbong Khmum provinces are not yet included in the national statistics. This is because Kampong Cham was divided into the two provinces researched in this study in 2014, due to political pressure from the CPP (Bopha & Willemyns, 2014).

Four schools were identified based on their location and level. The schools are identified by these criteria in the thesis, i.e. rural/urban and primary/secondary, in order to ensure anonymity for the schools. Map 4.1 shows the approximate location of the schools in the two provinces which are separated by the Mekong River.



Map 4.1: Location of research sites  
Source: [www.maps.google.com](http://www.maps.google.com)

School 1 is an *urban primary school* located in the city of Kampong Cham. It has several buildings in the school compound and has both primary and secondary levels of education. The school was generally very clean with indoor and outdoor facilities, including a library, cafeteria and a computer area for ICT training. It also had a well-kept garden where students grew flowers, vegetables and had frogs and fish under the supervision of the teachers. The school seemed to be very organized and well funded compared to the other schools. It had benefited from direct cooperation with KAPE in areas such as programme implementation and teacher training on-site.

School 2 is an *urban secondary school* located northeast of Kampong Cham. This school did not have the same modern facilities as School 1. The school buildings were worn down with cracks in the walls and signs of poor general maintenance. The classrooms had run-down desks and dirt floors, but did have modern white-boards. The outdoor area was affected by the dry season and the temporary droughts which meant that the garden and play areas were completely desiccated.

School 3 is a *rural primary school* located in Tbong Khmum, southeast of Kampong Cham city. The school has large outdoor play areas for the children, but the school facilities were poorly maintained.

School 4 is a *rural secondary school* located in the rubber plantations of Tbong Khmum, southeast of Kampong Cham city. The community lives off the rubber cultivation industry and resides in small wooden huts close to the plantation. The school buildings were in a better condition than in School 3, students wore school uniforms, and the classrooms had tile floors and ceiling fans.

### **4.3 Sampling of Data**

The data for the policy environment derived from document analysis and for the home/community environments from interviews.

#### **4.3.1 Document Analysis**

The analysis of policy documents is the foundation of the study. The main document was the PCD which has been essential in recent educational restructuring at the school level in Cambodia. Other documents are supplementary to or extensions of the PCD, such as more recent ESPs (e.g. MoYES, 2010, 2014). The PCD states the rationale for change towards life skills education in Cambodia, provides definitions of the most relevant concepts in relation to life skills education, and is a guideline for the implementation processes. Document analysis is in line with the qualitative approach in terms of interpreting the meaning of what the document states (Wharton, 2006). While briefly introduced in Chapter 2, a full analysis of the document appears in Chapter 5.

#### **4.3.2 Participant sampling**

The main data were collected at the school and home/community levels. The participant sample was "...chosen in a deliberate manner known as *purposeful sampling*" (Yin, 2011, p. 88). Considerations were made as regards the diversity of the sample so that contrary evidence or alternative explanations could emerge to reflect the complexity of views that

might exist in the local context as regards the PCD and its implementation. The final sample included school directors, teachers, parents, Community Committee Members (CCM)<sup>3</sup> and students.

Teachers were purposefully selected based on the subjects that they teach. It was believed important to collect data from teachers that had practical experience with LLSP classes, as well as teachers that had no experience with such classes at all, as they might have different perceptions about life skills. This choice was based on the PCD document and the emphasis it places on life skills as central in all areas of education, and not just in LLSP classes. Parents and CCMs were selected purposefully as well on the basis of their geographical affiliation with the school. In case of students, it was assumed that higher grade students (grades 5-12) could provide more relevant information than lower grade students because they had been more exposed to life skills education. The selected participants represent different ages and genders (Tables 4.2-4.7).

Tables 4.2-4.7 show the participant sample organized by school. The tables show the age range, gender, experience, position and grade of the participants. A total of 37 participants were included: 4 school directors, 15 teachers, 8 parents, 9 students and 1 CCM. There were in all 20 males and 17 females.

Table 4.2: Participant characteristics – urban primary school

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years in Education System</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Grade</b>
School Dir.	n/a	M	n/a	Principal	n/a
Teacher	35-40	F	18	Vice Director/ Teacher	1
Teacher	25-30	M	9	LLSP	6
Student	10-13	F	n/a	n/a	5
Student	10-13	M	n/a	n/a	5
Total number of participants: 5					

n/a: not available

<sup>3</sup> Community Committees consist of local community members and serve as intermediaries between schools, local businesses and the people of the local community.

Table 4.3: Participant characteristics – rural primary school

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years in Education System</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Grade</b>
School Dir.	n/a	M	12	Principal	n/a
Teacher	30-35	M	7	All subjects	3-4
Teacher	55-60	F	30	All subjects	1
Teacher	45-50	M	27	All Subjects	3, 4, 5
Student	10-13	F	n/a	n/a	6
Student	10-13	F	n/a	n/a	6
Student	10-13	M	n/a	n/a	6
Parent	40-45	M	n/a	Farmer	n/a
Parent	35-40	F	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total number of participants: 9					

n/a: not available

Table 4.4: Participant characteristics – urban secondary school

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years in Education System</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Grade</b>
School Dir.	n/a	M	12	Principal	n/a
Teacher	30-35	M	9	All subjects	8
Teacher	20-25	M	4	All subjects	9
Student	13-16	F	n/a	n/a	8
Student	13-16	M	n/a	n/a	8
Total number of participants: 5					

n/a: not available

Table 4.5: Participant characteristics – rural secondary school

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years in Education System</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Grade</b>
School Dir.	n/a	M	n/a	Principal	n/a
Teacher	30-35	F	15	All subjects	7
Teacher	45-50	M	26	All subjects/ Office work	10
Parent	45-50	F	n/a	n/a	n/a
CCM	60-65	M	n/a	Farmer	n/a
Student	15-18	M	n/a	n/a	11
Student	15-18	F	n/a	n/a	12
Total number of participants: 7					

n/a: not available

Table 4.6: Participant characteristics – teacher focus group discussion

Participant	Age	Gender	Years in Education System	Position/work
Teacher	40-45	M	n/a	Science/Physics
Teacher	25-30	M	n/a	LLSP
Teacher	35-40	M	n/a	Khmer/English
Teacher	30-35	F	n/a	All subjects
Teacher	45-50	F	n/a	All subjects
Teacher	50-55	F	n/a	All subjects
Total number of participants: 6				

n/a: not available

Table 4.7: Participant characteristics – parent focus group discussion

Participant	Age	Gender	Position/work
Parent	30-35	F	n/a
Parent	45-50	M	CCM
Parent	35-40	F	CCM
Parent	25-30	F	n/a
Parent	45-50	F	n/a
Total number of participants: 5			

n/a: not available

School visits were undertaken with the assistance of translators. Since the translators had classes and full-time jobs, they could only assist me during the weekends. The data collection had therefore to be undertaken during the course of only three Saturdays (Annex 1). Four and a half hours was scheduled for each school visit over a period of two consecutive Saturdays as regards the semi-structured interviews. Two hours was scheduled for each focus group session on the final Saturday. Weekdays were spent transcribing the data, going through the interview notes and visiting the KAPE office to discuss the experiences at the schools and pursue other issues informally. This allowed for thorough preparation of the next visits.

## 4.4 Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods included semi-structured interviews as well as focus group discussions. Classroom observation and informal conversations provided additional insights to the study.

Each participant gave his/her consent by signing a form written in English and translated into

Khmer with the help of one of my translators. The form included information on who I am, where I am from (country, university) and the purpose of the study (Appendix 2). The participants were informed in the consent form that participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, that they could stop at any time for any reason, and that they could withdraw their contribution even after the interview had been conducted. Consent to interview students was given by the school director who could sign on behalf of the parents. Some of the parents, whose children were interviewed as well, signed on behalf of their children during their own individual interviews.

#### **4.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

A total of 26 semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide that was adapted to the different participant categories (Appendix 3). Semi-structured interviews, rather than “unstructured” interviews helped to focus the direction and topics of the interview (Patton, 2002). The interview guide also allowed for flexibility in light of the information that emerged during the interviews. As issues arose in one location, they were brought into the discussion in the others.

Two parent interviews and one CCM interview were scheduled for each of the four schools. However, a number of them did not show up because, according to the KAPE staff member who assisted me during sampling, they might have felt that they knew little about the education system and the life skills framework. A larger pool of both parent and CCM participants could have helped establish a deeper understanding of the perceptions on life skills education.

#### **4.4.2 Focus Group Discussions**

The interview guide was also the basis of the focus group discussions. Focus groups differ from interviews in that the researcher takes on a facilitator role and focuses on specific topics (Bryman, 2012). The main aim of the focus group discussion was to provide new meaning and more substance to the individual semi-structured interview data. The main focus in the focus group discussion was whether there was coherence in the views and perceptions on life skills education, and if the views differed from the individual interviews in any significant



way. The focus group discussions were conducted at the final stage of data collection. Having already completed 26 individual interviews, its timing permitted the inclusion of new topics in addition to those in the interview guide.

There were only two focus group discussions since the translators were unavailable for two of them. The first focus group discussion was conducted with six teachers at the urban primary school (Table 4.6). The teachers in the group taught different subjects in different grades and had an equal number of men and women. One of the teachers had already participated in an individual interview, which was interesting in terms of data consistency. The second focus group was conducted with parents, all of whom had children at the urban primary school (Table 4.7). Five parents attended the discussion, four women and one man, since the discussion was conducted during daytime when most men are at work.

Conducting the focus group discussions presented some difficulties. It was at times hard to keep control of the group in relation to the direction of the conversations that emerged. The discussions were audio recorded. It was challenging to transcribe each session and, specifically, to organize each participant's contribution to the conversation in the transcript.

#### **4.4.3 Classroom Observation**

Classroom observations were scheduled for each school visit. The primary aim was to experience first-hand the Cambodian classroom dynamics, and to make interviewees familiar with my presence at the school before the individual interviews. A translator was present during the observation sessions who updated me continuously on the topics that were discussed in class and what was being said by students and teachers. The classroom observations have been used to support understandings and arguments in the data analysis, when relevant.

### **4.5 Use of Translators**

The assistance of translators was essential to the data collection, as only a few of the participants knew English. In order to avoid difficulties as a foreign white male researcher, I preferred to be accompanied by Khmer speaking female translators which was, however, not

fully possible. Interviews at the urban schools, and the focus group discussions, were conducted in Khmer with two English-speaking translators present. One was a female staff member at KAPE and the other was a local male student, majoring in English at a university in Kampong Cham. A third translator was also a female KAPE staff member who assisted with translation during the rural school interviews.

The use of multiple translators was initially seen as a potential limitation, but was accounted for by ensuring that each translator knew as much as possible about the purpose of the work. I met each one individually, or together, for several hours to discuss the work and get to know them. During these meetings, particular emphasis was placed on discussing the interview guide and the dynamics of the interviews. The interview guide was translated into Khmer by one of the translators. The translated version was then discussed with the other two translators prior to school interviews. In the individual interviews, I asked questions in English which were translated into Khmer. The responses of the participants were in turn translated back into English. This allowed me to ask probing and follow-up questions throughout the interviews and to bring the discussion back to its original focus when it occasionally went astray.

In the focus group discussions, where two translators were present, one of them led the discussion, while the other continuously translated the responses into English. In cases where the responses were too difficult to translate accurately, we took short breaks. It was, however, seen as important to let the conversation develop naturally without extensive interruptions.

## **4.6 Transcribing, Coding and Analysis of Data**

All interviews were audio recorded and stored on an encrypted USB flash drive. The audio recordings were transcribed directly from the wording of the translator when returning from the school visits. During transcription, major grammatical errors were accounted for, and the connections between participant responses and the policy document were outlined to prepare for the coding of the data.

A coding scheme was developed based on the analytical framework presented in Chapter 3 and the principles of inclusiveness, relevance and participation. By using the NVivo qualitative data analysis tool for Macintosh, three main coding categories were established:

*policy level codes* for the analysis of the PCD, and *school* and *home/community level codes* for the analysis of interview data. Each category had three sub-categories corresponding with the principles of inclusiveness, relevance, and participation. For each of these categories, yet another layer of sub-categories were created for the core issues that specifically affected the higher-level category. “Teacher training” was, for example, a sub-category of “Inclusiveness”. Concepts that emerged from the data during the analysis and not initially included as an individual category were continuously added to the list of sub-categories, often to draw connections between codes from different categories.

Prior to analysis, participants at each school were, for anonymity reasons, organised and given provisional coding names such as Teacher 1 or Parent 2 (Table 4.8). These are the names referred to in the data presentation and analysis chapter.

Table 4.8: Participant sample and codes for analysis, by school and focus group

Participant category	Urban primary	Rural primary	Urban secondary	Rural secondary	Teacher focus group	Parent focus group	Total by category
School Director	School director	School director	School director	School director			4
Teachers	Teacher 1 Teacher 2	Teacher 1 Teacher 2 Teacher 3	Teacher 1 Teacher 2	Teacher 1 Teacher 2	Teacher 1 Teacher 2 Teacher 3 Teacher 4 Teacher 5 Teacher 6		15
Parents		Parent 1 Parent 2		Parent 1		Parent 1 Parent 2 Parent 3 Parent 4 Parent 5	8
Students	Student 1 Student 2	Student 1 Student 2 Student 3	Student 1 Student 2	Student 1 Student 2			9
CCMs				CCM			1
Total by school	5	9	5	7	6	5	37

The PCD was analysed first in order to establish a foundation for the data emerging from the school and home/community environments. The school and home/community interview transcriptions were then coded into categories that corresponded with policy level categories. The data were coded several times. The first round of coding aimed at categorizing all data, while the second, third and fourth round of coding aimed at identifying connections within the data, such as between the three main analytical environments, between schools, and between

individual participants. A code directly related to *relevance* might, for instance, relate to *inclusiveness* as well. Such networks of codes were essential in order to compare the PCD and participants' perceptions of life skills practice.

The interpretation of the data during the analysis was informed by secondary literature on Cambodian educational history and on life skills education. This was because the emerging themes in the data often had parallels with the accounts provided in other research, such as understandings of Cambodian political structures, and policy-makers' perceptions of life skills education.

## 4.7 Quality of Data

Social science research must fulfill certain standards of quality (Bryman, 2012), which are generally associated with reliability and validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). External and internal validity address the generalizability of the study across social settings, and whether there is a clear connection between research findings and the social reality in which the study has been conducted. External reliability concerns whether a study can be replicated, while internal reliability is concerned with the objectivity of the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Bryman, 2012).

Much effort has been put into finding ways to assess qualitative studies along the same lines as quantitative studies. *Trustworthiness*, proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985, cited in Bryman, 2012) and Guba & Lincoln (1994) is one of these measures, and presents four criteria that are parallel to reliability and validity in quantitative research, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

### 4.7.1 Credibility

Parallel to internal validity is credibility, which can be considered as the most important criteria to pursue in qualitative studies (Bryman, 2012; Guba & Lincoln (1994). Credibility relates to the truthfulness of the data compared to the social reality of the research participants. This was taken into consideration in the effort to understand the local context prior to data collection and by making sure that the accounts and perspectives of the

participants were understood (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, during the collection of data, I used what Bryman (2012) refers to as “respondent validation”, which involves cross validating the information acquired from the respondent, for instance, by re-formulating certain important questions at a later stage in the interview. The consistency of these responses could then indicate that the information was accurately portrayed by the participant, and accounted for correctly in the data. The presence of two translators at the urban school interviews, and during the focus group discussions was particularly effective to achieve this.

Credibility was also achieved through triangulation. Triangulation involves the use of multiple data collection methods (e.g. document analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions) and the testing of data consistency among them (Bryman, 2012; Patton, 2002). Responses from individual interviews, for instance, were compared to responses in the focus group discussions, and policy data on the implementation of the life skills framework was compared to the responses of school, and home/community participants in order to identify consistencies or inconsistencies.

#### **4.7.2 Transferability**

Transferability concerns whether a study can be replicated, or findings generalised which is parallel to external validity (Bryman, 2012). As the data for this study are highly contextual, and considering the relatively small participant sample, the findings only reflect the areas researched (Bryman, 2012). Thus, the study does not aim at making generalisations that apply to other contexts elsewhere. This research could, however, produce some findings that might hold true in similar contexts, while others may not. In order for potential inferences to be made, the aim has been to gather “rich” data so that others can make judgements about whether the findings can provide insights for other contexts.

#### **4.7.3 Dependability**

Dependability relates to peer evaluation or review of the research data and findings (Bryman, 2012). Other than KAPE staff during fieldwork, peer reviewers have included classmates at the University of Oslo and my supervisor.

After the thesis has been submitted and defended, a copy will be sent to KAPE and to each school director who all expressed great interest in learning about the findings of this study. The original data will be kept secure for future research.

#### **4.7.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability addresses the objectivity of the researcher and the fairness of the research process and findings (Bryman, 2012). As full objectivity is considered impossible in qualitative research the study has paid special attention to constructing its arguments based on the perspectives of the participants without making inferences based on personal opinion (Bryman, 2012).

The research processes and the data for the study are considered to generally fulfill the quality criteria of trustworthiness. However, as pointed out earlier, it would have benefitted from a larger pool of parent and CCM participants, as well as more time for focus group discussions in all schools. The data quality is likely to have improved if there had been no need for translation since, according to Yin (2011), this can taint the evidence.

Nevertheless, it has been possible to use the data that were collected to establish an understanding of the perceptions of practice in the four selected schools of the core areas in the PCD. The document itself is analysed in the next chapter.

# 5 The Policy Rationale and Aims of Life Skills Education in Cambodia

Although the Cambodian government introduced new life skills-related policy documents in 2006<sup>4</sup>, the PCD represents the foundation and introduces the main rationales for why life skills was introduced into the Cambodian curriculum framework in the first place. This policy document has therefore been selected as the most significant to highlight the policy environment for the study. It is analysed in view of the three essential principles of quality in the social justice approach: inclusiveness; relevance; and participation.

## 5.1 The Nature of Policy

The notion of policy is highly complex as it is determined not only by the motivation of the actors involved in its formulation, but also by those who execute the policy in practice (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Furthermore, policy is a highly contested notion. Dye (1992, cited in Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 4) suggests that policy is "...whatever governments choose to do or not to do". Although this definition does not specify decision-making processes or underlying influences such as global discourses or other societal aspects, it clearly highlights what a policy implies, a top-down process that guides practice. On the concept of policy, Rizvi & Lingard (2010, p. 5) state that:

...policy is much more than a specific policy document or text. Rather, policy is both process and product. In such a conceptualization, policy involves the production of the text, the text itself, on-going modifications to the text and processes of implementation into practice (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 5).

A policy could indicate the perspectives and positions of the state, and its different institutions that share opinions about a given field (e.g. education). According to Rizvi & Lingard (2010), policy, as a state decision, must be seen in the context of other decisions taken by political actors in positions of authority. Public policy is, therefore, not generated in a vacuum, but

---

<sup>4</sup> NEP (KAPE, 2012, p. 4) highlights that in 2006, another life skills policy document was published, followed by Ministry guidelines for the implementation of LLSP as well as life skills modules for 20 different life skills topics. With the exception of the 20 life skills modules, these documents have not been accessible neither online nor in Cambodia.

rather constructed to reflect national political strategies. National policies are also highly influenced by international agendas. World institutionalists, for instance, have long argued that the nation-state should be regarded as an institution that is essentially constructed or shaped by supranational processes that exist within a common world culture (Meyer, Boli, Thomas & Ramirez, 1997; Dale, 2000).

The context is, thus, of great importance in order to understand how a policy has been constructed and implemented. Bhola (1975, p. 1, cited in Sutton & Levinson, 2001, p. 5) argues that the intent of policy is to “...*direct* and to *harness* social power for social outcomes”. This implies that policy is not exclusive to the state, but rather a social construct that cannot be regarded in isolation from the individuals and communities that it affects.

## 5.2 Life Skills Policy and Inclusiveness

Several aspects of the PCD document relate to inclusiveness. In fact, inclusive practice is one of the main aims of the National Curriculum (NC) which states:

The aim of the school curriculum is to develop fully the talents and capacities of all students in order that they become able people, with parallel and balanced intellectual, spiritual, mental and physical growth and development (MoYES, 2004, p 4).

That “all students” are to be included in the education system and be given the opportunity to develop their individual talents and capacities regardless of differences is highly inclusive. The document is also gender-specific:

Schools should provide equal access to all components of the curriculum for both girls and boys. Schools should make a particular effort to facilitate participation by girls in all aspects of the curriculum (MoYES, 2004, p. 7).

In addition to gender equality, the PCD also emphasises that:

Schools should support students with learning difficulties through teacher assistance during lesson time and through special programs in the time allocated for the LLSP (MoYES, 2004, p. 7).



From an inclusive perspective, “learning difficulties” could refer to individual cognitive and/or physical constraints which are not necessarily synonymous with a disability. In the PCD however, no such clarification is provided. Nevertheless, the document seems to provide a clear political ambition for inclusive education practices to be provided to all Cambodian children, for instance through highlighting that “schools should attempt to provide wherever possible access to the curriculum for students with disabilities” (MoYES, 2004, p. 7).

The PCD states that education at the individual level aims to promote personal growth and development in terms of intellectual, spiritual, mental and physical dimensions (MoYES, 2004). This aim of the Cambodian curriculum seems to be closely related with Edgar Faure’s description of the “complete man” in the UNESCO report “Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow” (UNESCO, 1972). Thus an important goal of the Cambodian curriculum is to make sure that all students are prepared for their future lives, and that:

When students leave school they should develop a love of learning that will enable them to pursue employment and continue lifelong learning (p. 4).

The document also stipulates various sub-goals, one of which is that when leaving school, the students should:

...have the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to improve and maintain their own physical and mental health and to contribute to the improvement and maintenance of the health of their families and wider society; have the capacity to manage and take responsibility for their own actions and decisions and be self-reliant (p. 4).

These are clearly positive efforts towards inclusiveness. An issue, perhaps, is the wording “When students leave school...” without specifying the stage of education to which it refers. The document probably refers to the attributes that students should have acquired when completing the full length of public education. This is, however, not specified and can generate some confusion since the PCD covers both the primary and secondary levels of education.

### ***Learning Materials***

Inclusive practices also relate to the accessibility to essential learning materials to fulfill the content of the curriculum and enable children and youth to increase their future opportunities. In this respect, the PCD states:

The MoEYS is responsible for developing the curriculum and standard for each subject in the NC and has the responsibility to monitor and regulate the publication or production of core textbooks, additional reading documents, and supplementary teaching materials that serve the purpose of learning and teaching in schools (MoYES, 2004, p. 8).

Thus, the policy document leaves little room for confusion as regards who has the responsibility for providing textbooks and other materials that the children need in order to maximize their potential educational outcomes in line with the subject standards.

Life skills education serves an important role in the effort to provide opportunities for Cambodian children and youth, not only as a means to prepare them for the challenges of their adult life, but also as an important tool to achieve social mobility, to which most Cambodian children and their families aspire (Kim, 2011). Specifically, in order to achieve the goals mentioned above, the PCD states that the school curriculum should focus especially on processes that will:

...equip students with the everyday Life Skills they will require to reach their full potential and to be effective and productive members of society (MoYES, 2004, p. 5).

These “everyday” life skills touch upon a variety of subjects, among others Khmer literature and language, mathematics, sciences, social studies (including morals and civics), foreign languages and health studies (MoYES, 2004). While traditionally, gaining knowledge in these subjects could be considered as the most important goal of education, the PCD specifically highlights the importance of acquiring *skills*. This reflects the global education discourse, especially the one aimed at lower income countries, where acquiring skills, understood as something more than subject matter knowledge, is believed to increase an individual’s chances of getting paid work in contemporary economies (UNESCO, 2012). An emphasis on life skills education, thus, is fairly inclusive in nature as the application of the term “skills”

seems to imply that considerations have been made concerning an individual's opportunities for work after completing education.

A concern, as pointed out by the NEP (KAPE, 2012), is that life skills, particularly those related to practical work, could be perceived by certain stakeholders more as a “safety net” for students that drop out before completion of public education, and less as a desirable set of outcomes that prepare students for adult life, work and future studies. In this logic, life skills education could become a debilitating factor for the prospects and opportunities of the students to achieve their desired outcomes. What the PCD suggests, however, is that the life skills framework has practical elements in order for education to stay relevant despite variations in local needs.

### **5.3 Making Education Relevant for the Average Household**

Making education relevant for the average Cambodian household has perhaps been one of the top priorities for Cambodian policy makers throughout the last two decades. Essentially, relevance involves educational content and practice rather than organizational structures.

In relation to educational content the Cambodian curriculum emphasizes the basic subjects of Khmer language, mathematics, and natural and social sciences (MoYES, 2004). This does not deviate much from curriculum structures globally. An important aspect emphasized in the PCD is that the curriculum is designed in a way that would make it flexible in relation to the local contexts and the work opportunities that exist at the local level in Cambodia. This includes making sure that children and youth obtain:

...employment related skills, an understanding of and positive attitude towards work and a capacity to manage and work effectively and harmoniously with others (MoYES, 2004, p. 5).

It also includes an emphasis on locally relevant knowledge and skills that might generate among Cambodian children and youth a:

...commitment to identifying, analysing and working towards solutions of problems experienced by their families and society (MoYES, 2004, p. 5).

Thus, a clear emphasis has been put on efforts to make sure that parents and the local communities perceive education as relevant, especially in relation to economic return as well as the degree to which the children are being prepared for “problems” that may arise in their local area. Whereas many parents in the Cambodian countryside received little or no education during their childhood due to the Khmer Rouge regime and the turmoil in the decades that followed, the younger generations now grow up in a different political climate where education serves a much more prominent role. This enables children and youth to apply what they learn in school in practice at home or within their respective local areas to a much larger extent than older generations could. The approach that the MoYES has taken on the PCD, emphasizing life skills education, seems to reflect this.

By emphasizing skills that relate to work opportunities, the PCD aims at motivating more parents to encourage their children to stay in school. Life skills could be seen as an important element of this strategy, something the PCD highlights in the document:

Consistent with the policy set out in the EFA (p. 38) the NC will incorporate the teaching of Life Skills into each subject. The textbooks that will be developed for each subject will include activities that focus on the teaching of everyday Life Skills (MoYES, 2004, p. 8).

### **5.3.1 Local Life Skills Programmes**

A related aspect of relevance is defining what the children, their parents and their respective communities “want” to get out of education, in contrast to what the children “need” to learn in relation to contextual circumstances. As both “want” and “need” are highly related to what is perceived to be relevant by Cambodian families and communities, the MoYES has needed to come up with a scheme that would account for both. Adapting the concept of “local life skills” to the curriculum framework could in many ways be seen as the solution (for a general discussion on LLSP, see section 2.3.1). In the words of the PCD, the purpose of the LLSP is:

...to provide schools, in partnership with parents, their local community, community organizations and NGOs, with the opportunity to provide training in specific life skills that have a particular relevance to local students (MoYES, 2004, p. 7).

From a social justice perspective, the introduction of LLSP seems highly beneficial to both students and parents as it allows for a high participation and local accountability in matters concerning the local context and people's own lives.

## 5.4 Aims of Local Participation

As indicated in Chapter 3, participation is the analytical category that, from a social justice perspective, determines the other two (inclusiveness and relevance), since participatory structures in the curriculum are necessary to promote inclusive as well as relevant practice at the school level. Therefore, the PCD emphasizes greatly that although the “MoEYS is responsible for the funding, provision of teaching staff, provision of facilities and resources” within the National Curriculum (NC) framework, the:

Schools, local communities, community groups, NGOs and private education providers are expected to develop programs that will enrich and broaden the NC (MoYES, 2004, p. 6).

The PCD places a significant responsibility on local stakeholders in educational decision-making. Besides reflecting national decentralization strategies in various political areas, granting decision-making power to the local level implies a real opportunity for stakeholders, such as parents and community members, to influence educational content at their local schools. In relation to the LLSP, the PCD states:

Schools, in partnership with parents, their local community, community organizations and NGOs, must develop and administer a Local Life Skills Program (LLSP) of between 2 to 5 lessons per week (40 minutes per lesson in primary and 50 minutes per lesson in secondary level) to supplement the NC (MoYES, 2004, p. 6).

This means that government agencies leave the responsibility for all aspects of LLSP implementation to the schools themselves, with the help of NGOs and other local stakeholders. The PCD emphasizes this by stating:

It is the responsibility of schools, in partnership with parents, their local communities, community organizations and NGOs to design, fund, staff and provide facilities and equipment for the delivery of the LLSP (MoYES, 2004, p. 7).

Although local autonomy could be considered to be beneficial from the perspective of social justice, it also implies great risk. This is so from a government perspective, in case the strategy backfires and the allocated LLSP-time is spent on other matters. This is also so from a school perspective as there is no guarantee that funds and motivated local stakeholders can ensure that the most is made out of the time allocated to LLSP. Despite the emphasis that the PCD places on local life skills, there is no guarantee that the hours for locally relevant life skills allocated in the NC will lead to valued educational outcomes. The implementation rests in the hands of local individuals who are often preoccupied with other matters or have other responsibilities.

## **5.5 The PCD and Social Justice**

From a participation standpoint, there is an important distinction between basic life skills and LLSP. This distinction is important for the other categories of inclusiveness and relevance as well for several reasons. Firstly, as basic life skills are incorporated into the NC there is no specific responsibility in the hands of parents and other community members except for the vague invitation for local stakeholders to “...enrich and broaden the NC” (MoYES, 2004, p. 6). Whether this participation is necessary for the implementation of the curriculum is unclear from the PCD. One can assume, however, that due to its inclusion in the document there seems to be some expectation on behalf of the government that such involvement may be necessary.

Secondly, and in relation to the above, is the issue of funding. While being related to the category of inclusiveness, it affects the remaining categories as well. Stakeholder participation for example, may not be possible for financial reasons. If parents and community members are left out of participatory processes in relation to life skills practices (whether voluntary or not), the relevance of what is being taught to the students may suffer as a result. This is not to say that the concept of life skills is the cause of these issues. Rather, it can be argued that the degree to which the government relies on local participation may create

such problems within certain contexts, for example in areas with little or no NGO involvement, or areas with a lack of individuals with specialized knowledge.

Shaeffer (1992) underlines the essence of the problem, namely that participation "...is not easily achieved nor sustained within societies where people are struggling against political and social oppression, or in societies where more important fundamental needs are not adhered to in the first place" (p. 7). In other words, relying on participation at the policy level does not necessarily mean that participation is fruitful at the community level. This might impact the degree to which education is locally relevant, and may also hinder inclusive practices. These are issues that the PCD does not mention, and that may hinder successful implementation of the life skills framework.

The reality of the local context will now be addressed based on the data collected on the views in the school and home/community environments on life skills education.

# 6 Life skills in Practice: Perceptions of the School and Home/Community Environments

This chapter presents the primary data collected during fieldwork. After a discussion of the general understandings of life skills among participants in the school and home/community environments, the data related to the three analytical categories of the social justice approach: inclusiveness, relevance and participation are presented. The school environment refers to school staff (school directors and teachers), while the home/community environment refers to parents, students and CCMs. This organisation of participants is based on the categorisation in the analytical framework and the notion that school staff mediate education policy to local beneficiaries (students, parents and CCMs).

## 6.1 Conceptual Understandings of Life Skills Education

All participants, with the exception of the students<sup>5</sup>, were first asked: “What does the term life skills mean to you?” (Appendix 3). This question was intended both to uncover the general understanding of life skills among the participants and to verify potential discrepancies between the understanding in the PCD and the perceptions of the participants.

### 6.1.1 Understandings of Life Skills among School Staff

Several understandings of life skills emerged during the interviews. The first is that life skills are skills that might benefit students later in life, but that are not limited to any particular skill category (such as cognitive or practical). For instance, the school director at the rural secondary school identified life skills as:

...a skill that will make a person skilled in a subject in the future. For instance skills that can make the student able to go to higher education. [...] By learning life skills programmes you can gain knowledge from school, learn about specific skills that you

---

<sup>5</sup> Students were not included because they were assumed to not know the PCD.



can apply to the real society. For instance, working together and to help each other (School Director, urban secondary school).

The school director puts emphasis on the student's future in relation to expanding educational opportunities. Teacher 1 at the rural secondary school, on the other hand, replied more generally, by stating that:

To me life skills mean simple skills that are easy to learn, and that can help the students in their future lives (Teacher 1, rural secondary school).

Teacher 2 at the urban secondary school had a similar understanding:

Life skills refer to the learning that relates to the daily life of the students. So one can say that life skills are the skills that you need in many situations in life (Teacher 2, urban secondary school).

There was a clear understanding among some of the participants that life skills can be considered a concept that on its own is quite vague and abstract (e.g. skills that relate to a student's daily life). The majority of the data, however, show that there is a widespread understanding among Cambodian teachers and school directors that life skills are much more context specific, often job-related, and to a large extent practical in nature. For example, according to Teacher 1, at the rural primary school:

Life skills means no specific skill, but refers to many skills, for example raising cows, learn how to protect them and to cure them if they get sick (Teacher 1, rural primary school).

Although this teacher considers life skills as non-specific in that they relate to "no specific skill", the examples provided are highly contextualized to the rural reality. Teacher 2 at the same school similarly said:

Life skills means to teach students something clearly in the class, like weaving. It refers to skills that the student can use at home (Teacher 2, rural primary school).

Teacher 3 at the rural primary school related life skills more directly to life in rural areas and income when he stated that:

I think life skills are about how to learn everything in life in order to increase income, (...) for example to teach the students how to grow vegetables and learning how to keep them alive and harvest them so you can eat them later (Teacher 3, rural primary school).

The school director of the urban primary school said that: “Life skills is part of everything that surrounds us, normally focusing on vegetable planting and parental skills” (School director, urban primary school). When asked to explain further, he stated that:

For primary school, life skills refer to vegetable planting, also frog-raising and the training to work as construction workers (School director, urban primary school).

Teacher 1 at the same school, who was also the Vice Principal, provided a more detailed explanation of the statement given by the school director. She explained that:

Life skills refer to the skills that we can do by ourselves, and that we can use to support our life in the future. For grade 1, life skills can refer to the kids taking care of themselves, like cleaning themselves, washing up properly, and also looking after the plants, like watering, or planting. Life skills can also refer to the cleaning up of the environment, let’s say inside the classroom or at their homes. These are the terms of life skills in grade 1, but in grade 5 or 6 life skills can have other meanings that are more specific than in grade 1 (Teacher 1, urban primary school).

### **6.1.2 Home/Community Understandings of Life Skills**

Most statements from participants in the home/community environment in relation to their understanding of life skills were general. One parent even stated that except for the fact that his children were doing agricultural activities in school, he knew nothing about school content or life skills education (Parent 1, rural secondary school). However, other parents provided several understandings during the individual and focus group interviews, some of which came up several times. Many of these resembled the understanding of life skills in the school interviews, such as life skills being very beneficial to the children’s future in making their life and the life of others better. Parent 1 at the rural primary school stated:

Life skills mean to build the knowledge of the people, not just the young, but the old people as well. It means skills to use in everyday life. It refers not only to skills in school but also the community, to make life better for everyone (Parent 1, rural primary school).

A related perception that supports the findings from the school environment is that life skills will generate financial benefits. Parent 1 from the focus group discussion stated that:

Life skills are skills that can help our families, since the children learn to do things that can support the family income (Parent 1, focus group).

Most parents, as well as the CCM made similar statements. Some parents, however, also expressed great uncertainty about what exactly life skills mean. Parent 1 at the rural secondary school, for instance, stated that:

To me life skills means growing and raising things, like plants and chicken. But I don't know much about it at all (Teacher 1, rural secondary school).

Parent 2 at the rural primary school similarly said:

I think that life skills are about being skilful. I don't know much about it, but I think it is important that the children know different skills that can help them in the future to get jobs (Parent 2, rural primary school).

In summary, although being somewhat more vague, the understandings of the parents resembled those of the teachers and school directors. For instance, all participants were of the opinion that life skills referred to many skills. The majority, however, made immediate associations with practical skills that would benefit the students in their future lives. When specific skills were mentioned, they often related to students' opportunities to acquire jobs and generate income after leaving school. Other participants were more general in their responses, implying the perception that life skills are generic and defined based on what students find important. The latter perception, however, appeared less frequently as can be seen from the following analysis conducted on the responses.

### **6.1.3 Common Understandings of Life Skills**

The above quotes represent the majority of responses provided during the individual interviews as regards participants' perceptions of life skills. In order to further analyse the responses, word query searches were conducted on the basis of the transcripts of all participant responses. The word query was based on prominent concepts in the PCD

document and in the fieldwork data. Doing this not only provided a new way of analysing what appeared to be the most frequent responses by the participants. It also contributed to a deeper understanding of participant perceptions of life skills education.

The query results are relevant since the conceptual understanding of life skills may affect the implementation process of the Cambodian life skills framework at the school level. This, in turn, could generate analytically significant points of comparison both between and within our analytical environments, especially as regards relevance. Figure 6.1 shows the number of times a word was mentioned to reflect life skills in the participant interviews. The most frequent word is placed at the bottom, and the least frequent one at the top. Most words that appeared only once or twice during the interviews, such as “psychology” and “tolerance”, are not included in the figure. The result reflects all participant responses (with the exception of students) in both the school and home/community environments.

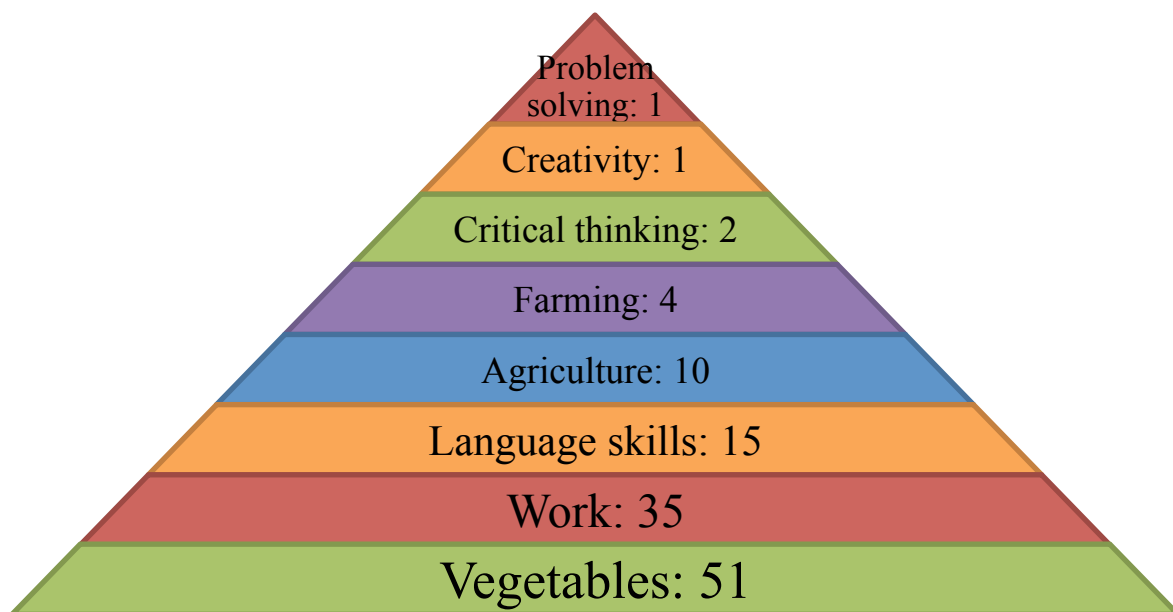


Figure 6.1: Word query on life skills

The conclusion from the word query is that most education staff and parents associate life skills with practical and vocational skills in a broader sense, and with agricultural skills in particular (vegetables, agriculture, farming). Similar results appear in other research as well, undertaken at the policy level (Kim, 2011; KAPE, 2012). This shows that the understanding of life skills appears to be the same at the national and local levels.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the practical skillsets in Figure 6.1 are usually referred to as hard skills as they involve the physical execution of a particular task in a defined context. In contrast, the so-called soft skills refer, for example to problem solving skills, critical thinking skills and language skills (Table 6.1). Soft skills largely represent cognitive, intrapersonal, interpersonal and psychosocial tools that the individual can apply in a variety of real life situations, regardless of context<sup>6</sup> (Carson & Kerr, 2005). Language skills could be understood to be part of both categories of skills. This is also the case for the general category “work” as it implies no particular skill and may include both cognitive tools and skills than can be physically executed. Most school staff was aware of the distinction between hard and soft skills, as will be highlighted in section 6.3.1.

The query results are especially interesting in terms of the way in which local understandings of the PCD, and of life skills, can influence educational content at the school level. The PCD emphasis on LLSP is clearly reflected in the school and home/community data. As will be discussed further in Chapter 7, these results could also suggest that the emphasis on LLSP overshadows the other aspects of the life skills framework.

## **6.2 Towards Inclusive Practice?**

The analysis of inclusiveness derives from the categories identified in Chapter 3, namely the practical implementation of the life skills policy in the curriculum, funding, teacher training and access to teaching and learning materials. Teachers and school directors were asked how the life skills policy has been implemented in their schools, and whether they have any concerns in relation to the practical aspects of the life skills policy.

### **6.2.1 School Staff Perceptions of Inclusiveness**

#### ***Curriculum***

As mentioned in section 2.3.1, the PCD establishes that life skills are to be implemented both in the national curriculum (i.e. ordinary subjects) and in the time allocated for LLSP. While a few participants mentioned this distinction during the interviews, the vast majority of participants referred only to the extra-curricular LLSP when asked about how life skills have

---

<sup>6</sup> A more detailed discussion on hard and soft skills appears in Carson & Kerr (2005).

been implemented in their respective schools. This is especially true of the school directors. For example, the school director at the urban secondary school said:

Life skills that are taught to the students here in this school are divided into two different groups. The first one we can call “easy life skills” that talks about hygiene, so it will show and teach the students how to clean themselves, their home and the environment around them. The other one is referring to “outside life skills”, which is focusing on training students in how to plant crops and vegetables and raise stock animals here in the school garden (School director, urban secondary school).

When asked to elaborate, he continued:

Each class has to take at least one hour of life skills education per week, and during one year all the classes will have had 10 different life skills lessons. And for this school we have several life skills lessons that will be taught to the classes (School director, urban secondary school).

The rural secondary school had a similar approach. The school director explained:

The life skills education here we integrate into agriculture subjects, and we have two hours per week of learning agriculture, so this is how we teach life skills programmes here (School director, rural secondary school).

This was also the case at the primary levels of education. When asked how the life skills framework has affected practice at the urban primary school, the school director stated:

For this school life skills are taught every Thursday for two hours. In class they will learn how to plant, and later on the teacher will lead them on gradually to practice, because they have a vegetable nursery. So after learning inside the class, they will go directly to the nursery to practice planting the crops and plants there (School director, urban primary school).

Although there was a common understanding among school directors that life skills are LLSP-related, there seemed to be disagreement in relation to how the PCD has been implemented at the four schools. The most significant is the time reserved for LLSP. Some schools set aside one hour per week for LLSP, while most schools practice two hours per week. This is 1-4 hours less than the PCD document allows for, namely 2-5 hours per week (MoYES, 2004).

These differences in practice, although minimal, could be considered significant for several reasons, but perhaps most of all because students could be better prepared for practical work if the full number of hours is taught. If a relatively large number of students drop out of primary school each year, and even more at the secondary levels, some students would have twice the amount of practical job-related training than other students, depending on the school they attend. This is also true for the students that graduate, but do not continue to pursue an education. This could possibly affect their work opportunities later in life.

Another related issue, according to Teacher 2 at the urban primary school, is that the less time that a school dedicates to LLSP, the less effective the teaching will be:

We need to change the time for teaching life skills, because we now have a very short time to teach life skills, so we need to arrange the time properly so we can teach effectively (Teacher 2, urban primary school).

The reasons for the discrepancies could well be attributed to the policy documents and the PCD which are rather vague when it comes to the implementation process (MoYES, 2004). It could perhaps also be attributed to a significant lack of accountability structures in educational matters at the local level in Cambodia, an issue described in depth by Bredneberg (2008). A statement from the school director at the rural primary school, who was eager to share his opinion on the life skills framework, can help to clarify this issue. He explained that in his school they taught life skills for one hour every Thursday, but that:

The life skills curriculum from the government is not good enough. For example, the government just says “ok, now all schools have life skills activities”, they don’t explain how this life skills program should be implemented, [...] so I think the government plan is unclear and difficult to understand (School director, rural primary school).

Similar concerns appeared during other interviews as well. A teacher from the urban primary school, for instance, stated during the focus group interview that since life skills education is relatively new at the school level in Cambodia “only a few schools can manage to teach life skills in the school” (Teacher 3, focus group interview).

### ***Funding***

Most of the data gathered for this study suggest that the issue of differences in practice ultimately relates to differences in funding and the amount of money available to the schools that is dedicated to life skills activities. After all school visits had been conducted, it seemed clear that the schools with the least amount of funding were the schools that had the least time allocated to LLSP, as well as other life skills practices in general. There also seems to be a correlation between funds available to the schools, and their access to life skills related teaching materials, other essential equipment as well as opportunities for life skills specific teacher training. This is relevant due to the implications this may have on the delivery of educational content as well as the outcomes of educational activities in school.

In relation to the school's access to funds, participants at all four schools expressed concern about the amount of money available to them in relation to implementing the life skills framework. The urban primary school for instance received significantly less funding for life skills activities during the 2014 school year than what they did the year before. Teacher 2 at the urban primary school expressed:

If we had more money we could implement life skills education more successfully. Another thing about money is that we have to spend the little money that we do get from the community and organizations better, and not waste it. The funds that we get from the community we should spend on equipment, and we need a secure room for this equipment so that it is not stolen (Teacher 2, urban primary school).

Teacher 6 from the focus group discussion, who also works at the urban primary school, was very enthusiastic about life skills education in general. However, he also showed frustration: "...we don't have the funds to get all the equipment we need" (Teacher 6, focus group). The school director at the urban secondary school stated that there should be enough funding available for successful implementation of the framework in their school, but that there is no proper budget in place to ensure that the money is spent effectively on life skills activities (School director, urban secondary school).

### ***Teaching Materials***

Another issue was the general concern about the lack of teaching materials. According to the school director at the rural primary school, a major problem was that:



...the government doesn't have specific books, or guidelines on life skills at the primary school level (School director, rural primary school).

This implied that when students attend classes, the teachers are encouraged to include life skills topics of their own choice based on their own knowledge of the subject matter. The same goes for the topics included in the LLSP. Another teacher at the rural primary school explained:

The framework provides some time to teach life skills, but it doesn't say anything related to clear guidelines, so it is hard for me to teach. So every year we do the same thing over and over again. Every time we grow vegetables, for example, we do it the same way, because we don't have more advanced manuals (Teacher 3, rural primary school).

The concern for the lack of guidelines emerged several times during the teacher interviews at the rural primary school, exemplified here by statements such as: "For life skills we just teach through the knowledge that we have on different things" (Teacher 2, rural primary school); "I would like a more specific framework so that we can teach more easily" (Teacher 1, rural primary school). However, the frustration that these teachers expressed was not exclusive to this school. At the rural secondary school the school director pointed out that:

The government does not provide life skills manuals to the school, and I rarely see the government staff, or for example anybody from the government provincial level provide any teaching aids for life skills (School director, rural secondary school).

This suggests that teachers at the rural secondary school as well have to rely largely on their own intuition and experience rather than on teacher manuals and teacher training. Although the PCD does establish that the LLSP is the responsibility of the schools and the local communities, school staff feel that too little is done by the government to ensure that life skills education can be implemented properly, in terms of both funding and the provision of teaching and learning materials.

According to the data gathered for this study, this is especially true for the two rural schools. Teachers at the urban schools for the most part expressed satisfaction in relation to manuals and guidelines. Teacher 2 at the urban primary school, for instance, explained that his LLSP classes:

...have to be taught based on the guidelines from the Ministry of Education, since these books describe and explain very detailed about the life skills, for instance raising the fish or animal and planting vegetables. They all have a guideline (Teacher 2, urban primary school).

The same can be said for the urban secondary school although they received the government manuals quite recently (Teacher 1, urban secondary school). Why these guidelines seem to be absent in the rural schools is unknown since all schools have received guidelines for the core curriculum subjects.

### ***Teacher Training***

The data also show variation in relation to teacher training. This is important from a social justice perspective, as “The opportunities provided to learners are inextricably inter-related with the capabilities of professionals” (Tikly, 2013). While all rural teachers had some sort of teacher training, only a few were content with the training they had in relation to life skills activities. At the rural secondary school, where teachers found it hard to diversify the life skills activities, Teacher 1 explained:

...life skills subjects must have professional teachers to provide better understanding of the skills. So we need more professional teachers on life skills topics here (Teacher 1, rural secondary school).

The urban primary school participants had more teacher training opportunities than the rural teachers. For example, the school director indicated that, while not all teachers at the school had specialized training in relation to life skills education, the school would make sure that all who needed it would receive invitations to attend such training programs. He explained:

...before teaching life skills to the students the teachers will join training programs, let's say a program of planting vegetables. After the training the teacher will come and teach directly, so yes, the teacher can join training arranged by the school, or other organizations (School director, urban primary school).

The situation at the urban secondary school was similar to the one at the urban primary school judging by the response of the school director who stated:

The teachers who teach life skills here are invited to take some training about life skills, for instance emigration. They will take part in that training and later on they will share the information, and teach students about the life skill of emigration. This is the same for raising crops and animals as well (School director, urban secondary school).

It, therefore, seems that the urban schools are better off in terms of providing opportunities for Cambodian children. This concerns the provision of government guidelines and teaching manuals, as well as opportunities for new and experienced teachers to attend teacher training programs related to life skills activities.

### **6.2.2 Home/Community Perceptions of Inclusiveness**

The responses from *parents* differed somewhat from those of teachers and school directors on the issue of inclusiveness. This is partly because parents knew very little of the various implementation processes initiated by the individual schools. Nor did they know much about the school budgets for the implementation of the life skills framework or teacher training opportunities. However, the data still provide some insight into students' overall "opportunities to achieve" which is an essential indicator for inclusiveness (Tikly & Barrett, 2013).

The major theme that emerged during the interviews with the parents was the impact of life skills on their children's future. Parent 3 from the focus group session stated:

I believe that the life skills training will give our children a better future. For example, I am the parent and I know what my children want in the future. I cannot help my children achieve this goal, but I believe that the school can help my children to achieve what they want in the future. Attending school is therefore really important, and life skills will help them to do what they want when they grow up (Parent 3, focus group).

This statement resonated well with the other parents attending the focus group. Parent 5 stated that her grandson was a poor student before life skills education was introduced, but that skills, such as money management, had taught him valuable lessons that would make his and his family's life better in the future (Parent 5, focus group). Parent 1 said that life skills

education had changed her son's attitude towards work, and that this would improve his chances to get a job in the future (Parent 1, focus group).

The *CMM* from the rural secondary school stressed the positive effect that life skills education has on student attendance at the rural secondary school as "...children don't like learning in the class, but life skills are skills that can teach them to gain knowledge in other areas, so they can have a better life. Because they like life skills classes they stay in school for longer" (Community Committee Member, rural secondary school).

Although these "benefits" of life skills education may not be interpreted as strictly inclusiveness related, considering the areas discussed with the school staff, it seems clear from the parents' point of view that life skills education increases their children's opportunities to achieve. These aspects also relate to the PCD document and its overall aim, namely to "...develop fully the talents and capacities of all students in order that they become able people, with parallel and balanced intellectual, spiritual, mental and physical growth and development (MoYES, 2004).

In the eyes of the *students*, the school was considered exclusively as good. When asked if they liked school, all stated that they did. Many of their reasons are inclusiveness related as they offer an insight into student perceptions of their own opportunities in light of attending school. For example, Student 1 at the rural primary school explained that she likes to read, and that school is the only place in her community with a library. She further explained:

I am happier at school than I am at home because at school I can meet and play with my friends. I also like school because I can get an education here (Student 1, rural primary school).

Student 2, at the same school, similarly said:

I want to become a teacher when I grow up, [so] it is important for me to be able to read well and to do calculations. At school I can learn these things (Student 2, rural primary school).

From the student responses it was clear that education was expected to provide them with opportunities for social mobility. Many students expressed hope that education would provide

more opportunities for them than was the case for their parents. Student 1, at the urban secondary school said:

I think that school is a beautiful place, and I like my teachers very much because they help me learn new things. When I learn these things I can get a better job than my parents when I grow up (Student 1, urban secondary school).

Student 2 at the rural secondary school highlighted the benefits of school and life skills education in relation to its social aspects, such as its ability to facilitate cooperation:

...when we have life skills classes we can practice with our friends and we can increase our knowledge together, [...] because all people have to have knowledge to discuss something with each other. By having an education we can solve problems together (Student 2, rural secondary school).

Overall, student responses on inclusiveness suggest that the school is seen as a place where opportunities are created which is in line with the perceptions of parents. Providing students with the opportunity to achieve also concerns whether what is being taught at school resonates with local needs in the eyes of local stakeholders. If the outcomes of attending school are not relevant for the students in the local context, then the opportunity to achieve might be compromised.

## **6.3 Content and Outcomes: The Issue of Relevance**

A large proportion of the data from the school and home/community environment relates to the relevance dimension. This is partly due to the fact that the Cambodian life skills framework was created and promoted as a tool to increase the relevance of Cambodian public education (MoYES, 2004; Norad, 2008). Conversations that naturally emerged during the interview settings also returned to this issue quite frequently.

### **6.3.1 Relevant Life Skills in the Eyes of School Staff**

The focus of the discussion with participants in the schools was whether life skills education was considered an important aspect of their daily practice, and whether life skills was considered an important part of Cambodian education in general. All respondents agreed that

the life skills framework is a vital part of Cambodian education, and many participants explained that life skills education would have direct benefits for the students in their future lives. A statement made by the school director in the urban primary school exemplifies this general position:

Life skills are very important, and very relevant to the Cambodian children who are learning in this school. They can use these skills in the future, for instance after graduating from this primary school they will have their own life skills so that they can support themselves later in life (School director, urban primary school).

The response from Teacher 2 in the same school followed the same rationale, while also being more specific about the outcomes of life skills education. She stated that:

Life skills play a very important role in the development of student competencies because many students may decide to stop studying, so if they come to school and learn life skills, they will have their own skills that will enable them to run their own business in the future (Teacher 2, urban primary school).

In the rural primary school, the school director stressed a related aspect, but emphasized the benefits of life skills specifically in relation to being qualified for work. That life skills implied work opportunities was also very common among the teachers. For example, Teacher 2 at the rural secondary school stated:

...life skills education is a “must have” for Cambodian children, because if they don’t have any skills they will not have a job if they quit school (Teacher 2, rural secondary school).

The school director at the urban secondary school argued along the same lines, but was much more context specific in his response:

There are many factories that run their business here, so life skills education is really important since it can teach students some specific skills so they can get work very easily in the factories that run a business in this district (School director, urban secondary school).

Teacher 1 at the rural secondary school highlighted the benefits of life skills in the case that students do not pursue higher education:

I think life skills education is very good, because at least students will learn one skill. If they don't wish to study higher education, they can for instance learn about cooking, and at least they have this skill with them in the future (Teacher 1, rural secondary school).

Teacher 2 at the urban primary school explained that many teachers and students are positive about life skills education because the skills are easy to learn, and does not take long for the students to master (Teacher 2, urban primary school). According to this teacher, if life skills are easy to learn, and they come with the possibility of making money after leaving the education system, there is little about the life skills framework not to like (Teacher 2, urban primary school). Teacher 2 in the rural primary school stressed that life skills are very important because it can reduce the spending of the students' families, whether the students make money for themselves, help out with family businesses or become better at money management (Teacher 2, rural primary school). Teacher 2 argued that the benefits of children having life skills education in school would enable parents to keep their children in school for a longer period of time (Teacher 2, rural primary school). However, considering the high use of child labour in Cambodia (Kim, 2011), it is unclear whether training in school actually does make poor families keep their children enrolled in education.

Regardless of motive, the data clearly suggest that participants at the school level consider access to practical training in school as exclusively positive. Providing students with skills for work, skills that can benefit the students in supporting themselves and their families in the future, and skills that relate to local businesses seem to be one of the most valued outcomes of education. This was irrespective of the location of the school.

### ***Relevance to Local Context***

With this in mind a closer examination of the research data can show what specific life skills are emphasized in the individual schools, and whether the participants in the schools find the skills taught to be relevant and meaningful for the lives of the students in their local area. This relates to the quality concerns from the social justice perspective since a relevant education should consider the socio-cultural diversity of any local context (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). The school directors and teachers were, therefore, asked to identify the life skills they found especially relevant for the students in their respective schools.

In the urban primary school agriculture is a significant part of school reality for both teachers and students, as became apparent when the school director proudly presented me with a beautifully kept garden. This became further apparent during the teacher interviews as both teachers referred extensively to practical and agricultural aspects of life skills education. Teacher 2 explained that this could reflect the fact that:

Cambodia is an agricultural country. Eighty per cent of Cambodians are farmers, so teaching students about life skills is really important, as it can help feed our economy. I also think it improves the teaching in the schools (Teacher 2, urban primary school).

Teacher 1 provided a more nuanced picture of Cambodian reality:

All life skills are relevant, but sometimes it depends on the student. For instance if they come from rural areas, then planting and growing crops are the most important for them to learn since they can use this skill once they graduate and go home. For the students that come from the city, repairing motorbikes and cars, and trading is the most important for them to learn since they can use these skills to run their own business once they finish school (Teacher 1, urban primary school).

For these teachers, practical livelihood skills were identified as the most important skills for their students considering the local context. Teacher 2 also expressed that mathematics in relation to selling and buying goods and produce can be considered equally important for many children in their school (Teacher 2, urban primary school). He indicated that even though many skills can be considered important for the students, agricultural skills are the easiest, as well as the cheapest for the school to teach. This could mean that life skills education (LLSP in particular) at the urban primary school is determined, and perhaps limited, by the funds available, thus limiting the relevance of education in the eyes of some stakeholders.

A similar agricultural emphasis can be found in the urban secondary school. Both teachers interviewed stressed the relevance of agricultural skills in their local area. According to Teacher 1:

Based on my own observations I believe that planting vegetables is more relevant than other skills since it costs less money to do it and it is easier than raising frogs or fish (Teacher 1, urban secondary school).



When asked to elaborate, Teacher 1 explained:

All of the skills that the student learns in school are important. Also other skills, for instance when learning math they can learn to save money, and they learn how to read when they have Khmer literature, and when they learn how to plant vegetables they learn how to make money. In my own opinion however, I feel that practical hard skills are more important than other skills. Hard skills are important because it depends on the level of the students. At this age the student level of competency is not so high, so hard skills are easy for them to learn, and it can help their families (Teacher 1, urban secondary school).

Teacher 2 at the same school had a similar argument. Because most parents of the students at the urban secondary schools are farmers, planting vegetables and raising animals could be considered as the most important skills for the students (Teacher 2, urban secondary school). However, Teacher 2 pointed out that:

Other skills like for instance soft skills are also important, but because of the local needs hard skills are more important for this school (Teacher 2, urban secondary school).

In fact, one of the most interesting aspects of the interviews at the urban secondary school was the participants' deliberate separation between hard and soft skills, as discussed earlier. This distinction was identified in the other schools as well.

Interestingly, despite being located in a rural area, where family income was predominantly generated through manual labour, participants in the rural primary school had a surprisingly low emphasis on practical skills in their responses to the relevance of certain life skills. For instance, when asked to elaborate on the most important life skills for the students in his school, the school director stated:

The kinds of life skills that I think are very important in this school are skills on cultural diversity. These types of life skills teach the students how to behave well and to respect each other. We call them "soft skills". "Soft skills" are related to how the students and people learn from each other and how to work together (School director, rural primary school).

The school director, who stressed the importance of generic skills, continued by highlighting the intrinsic value of meeting me, who was a person from “another world” with an entirely different cultural background. The school director appreciated the fact that we were able to:

...meet each other from two very different cultures, and still we knew how to treat each other. I shook your hand and you greeted me like Cambodians greet. And now that I have met you, I have learned something new. Being able to adapt to different situations is an important life skill, not only for me, for all the students as well (School director, rural primary school).

In this conversation a variety of life skills topics were discussed, from skills that relate to problem solving and critical thinking, as well as practical skills such as raising animals and planting vegetables. While emphasizing the softer skillsets, the school director continued to also stress the benefits of students being skilled in certain areas of the practical realm. For instance:

The most important practical skill we teach the students here is when the teachers show the students how to make a washing basin so they can be clean and healthy (School director, rural primary school).

Cleanliness and health concerns were generally not mentioned in other individual interviews with school staff, except as an add-on to other topics. At the rural primary school, however, health was central in the LLSP classes together with occasional alternative practical and non-practical topics. Teacher 3, for instance, said that although he agreed with the statements of the school director in relation to the importance of cultural skills, he strongly believed that life skills primarily was beneficial “...because I give the students useful knowledge about being healthy, and I also teach the students how to grow vegetables and learning how to keep them alive, and harvest them so you can eat them later” (Teacher 3, rural primary school).

In the rural secondary school most participants mentioned cooking as the most important life skill for their students. Teacher 1 explained:

From my own observations I think that cooking is very important for the students here. Because planting vegetables for instance is not interesting for the students, and they don't like it, but they like cooking (Teacher 1, rural secondary school).

According to Teacher 2, however:

...the most important skills are soft skills related to drug abuse awareness, because in my community this is very important (Teacher 2, rural secondary school).

Teacher 2 highlights a very important aspect of life skills education, namely its potential effects on individual and societal wellbeing (Sen, 1999), awareness raising and teaching that go beyond traditional school subjects. Fighting drug abuse seems to be the perfect example of such a life skill.

While the individual interview data in the urban primary school show a significant emphasis on practical and agricultural life skills, primarily in LLSP classes, the focus group with teachers in the same school emphasised life skills (both soft and hard) in traditional subjects.

For instance, after a vivid discussion on the potential benefits of life skills education, Teacher 5 explained:

We think that all classes and all life skills are important for the students, especially the skills that focus on Khmer literature, English language and scientific skills like mathematics, physics and chemistry, as well as computer skills. I think these skills are going to be really important for the students in the future (Teacher 5, focus group).

Teacher 3 elaborated in the following way:

I am an English teacher, so I teach English, but I also try to take life skills into my teaching. For example: How can my students use their English in their real lives. And he (pointing at teacher 1) is a physics teacher, so how can students use physics and the theory in their real life? Life skills are important like that. And for me they can also use English with physics, English with history and in other areas of school and life as well. This means that in school they can use one skill in many subjects, but they can also use many skills in one subject. The skills that the students need in order to adapt their knowledge into practice, is what life skills mean to me (Teacher 3, focus group).

Although all participants seemed to agree with Teacher 3, the focus group also highlighted concerns about the life skills framework. It became clear that, like all school subjects:

...the students' own interests determine the skills that the students learn in school, so we can't force all the students to learn something that they don't like. If they are interested in scientific knowledge we can teach them this, and if they are interested in growing vegetables we can teach them this as well (Teacher 3, focus group).

The other issue in the focus group session was the importance of language and communication skills, particularly English language skills and the lack of such skills among teachers and education staff in Cambodia. As will be discussed further in section 6.3.2, this was a concern that the teachers were not alone in having.

### ***Assessment of Learning Outcomes***

Various relevance issues related to the life skills framework emerged during the individual interviews as well. First, in relation to practical life skills and LLSP, Teacher 2 in the urban primary school stressed the need for teachers to follow up on certain life skills activities such as planting vegetables, for example through traditional evaluation and testing:

One idea to change life skills education is that we need to have a test for each student in life skills topics, for instance planting vegetables, maybe every three months where they do the whole planting process by themselves, and the teacher can evaluate them. Through these kinds of tests the teacher can know what the students have learned and whether what they have implemented is working (Teacher 2, urban primary school).

The idea was to ensure that the students learn not only how to plant, but also make an effort to understand the life cycle of vegetation as a whole, from planting the seed to harvesting its fruits (Teacher 2, urban primary school). The school director in the rural primary school had a similar concern about practical life skills and LLSP:

The idea of teaching students these practical skills in school is to give the students the fundamental knowledge and skills that they can build on in the future, but often the parents just want the vegetables planted and they do not think of the process, only the practice. So the students forget what they learned here at school, and instead do what the parents teach them. These methods are often very traditional, and not so effective (School director, rural primary school).

In the rural secondary school, some parents reacted to their children learning practical skills that did not benefit them and their families. However, as Teacher 1 in the rural secondary school pointed out, it is nearly impossible to make all parents happy about their children's outcomes of education considering the differences in viewpoints among the parents about what is relevant and what is not (Teacher 1, rural secondary school).

Although there seems to be a general opinion among school staff that all kinds of life skills can be considered important, the higher emphasis on agricultural skills in the urban schools, compared to the rural ones was initially surprising. One could imagine that the urban schools had distinct areas of interest that would reflect the job opportunities in an urban environment. What seems clear from the data, however, is that a majority of school staff tends to perceive life skills as related to LLSP, and thus to a lesser extent the other aspects of the life skills definition provided in the PCD document. With reference to the Delors pillars of education (UNESCO, 1996), school staff perceptions of the relevance of life skills seem to be associated much more closely with learning to do than with the other pillars education; learning to know, learning to be, and learning to live together.

### **6.3.2 Home/Community Views on the Relevance of Life Skills**

Parents, the CCM and students also provided rich data on relevance. This is primarily due to the fact that parents had a much clearer understanding of what their children were learning and what they wanted their children to learn in school than of administrative and implementation processes. The parents were asked to identify what life skills they found to be especially important for their children, if they had any opinions regarding the relevance of these skills in relation to their local reality, and if they had any concerns about their children's educational outcomes.

*Parent 2* in the rural primary school expressed great satisfaction with the skills that are taught to her children in school and that her children seemed to enjoy life skills education very much. According to her:

Life skills education is teaching our children about being healthy, and it provides the children with important knowledge. Another thing is that life skills teach the students how to be creative in their thinking, because they have to do things for themselves (Parent 2, rural primary school).

She continued by highlighting some of the collective benefits of her children's education:

My children for instance, come back home from school and help the family by doing housework and going to the fields, and help with farming and growing things for us to eat and sell. Because the children learn how to grow vegetables at school they can

come back home and apply this knowledge, like for instance how to grow vegetables rapidly and other techniques that are unfamiliar to us (Parent 2, rural primary school).

Besides being the only person among the participants to mention creativity as a valuable skill, the statement is interesting as a basis to discuss educational relevance in light of the goals set in the PCD document. First, life skills seem to be the basis to increase health awareness among children at the primary levels of education. Although not of primary concern, the PCD does stress the importance of life skills education in promoting the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to improve and maintain children's physical and mental health, as well as its potential contribution to the improvement and maintenance of the health of their families and the wider society (MoYES, 2004).

Parent 2 in the rural primary school expressed that her children are taught "important knowledge" and that agricultural skills are valued greatly within her family. Parent 1 in the same school stated that, "...all kinds of life skills are important because the students learn how to grow things, and can then take the skills home to their families" (Parent 1, rural primary school). The *CCM* at the rural secondary school highlighted the benefits of agricultural life skills as well, and the positive impact such skills might have on families and local communities. According to him:

...life skills can benefit our community. The children that learn life skills will introduce to the parents what they have learned in school, for instance growing and raising things. When the parents know these things and hear about this, the children can help increase the production and income for the family (Community Committee Member, rural secondary school).

However, according to the *CCM*, even though activities in school are beneficial for both individual and local development, the short time allocated for the activities will never result in professionalism. Parent 5 from the focus group discussion had the same opinion:

All practical skills, for example related to agriculture, are important, but the things that I really want is that I want the teachers to teach the students all the practical skills clearly and very detailed, for instance when they learn how to plant vegetables they have to know it well when they are finished with the programme, and not only half way (Parent 5, focus group).

Some parents, thus, seemed to be concerned that LLSP classes in primary and secondary education only skim the surface of necessary skillsets, more often than not leaving students familiar with many things at a general level, but not enough to leave a significant mark on the local community (Community Committee member, rural Secondary school). From a practical perspective, this concern partly relates to the issue that life skills education is too open for interpretation in the individual schools and can result in a variety of different practices and outcomes. The extent to which the PCD aims at preparing students for professional work in the first place is also questionable.

A majority of the home/community data was collected during the focus group discussion with parents at the urban primary school. Although parents mentioned the relevance of practical and agricultural skills frequently during individual interviews, the parent focus group provided a contrast by placing major emphasis on other skills. The reply that best summarizes the parent focus group discussion is a statement by Parent 4:

I think that all skills and classes are important for all students, but the most important skills for me is that the school provides soft skills, and ways to encourage students to work hard and to be good students in class. These skills can upgrade the student's competence. After that the students will be better at school, be better friends, better children and better at their future jobs. [...] So I think soft skills and especially psychology is very important. English and mathematics are also important to me because they can help our children to think differently. By learning these skills they can understand how to learn by themselves, to do other things by themselves as well and setting personal goals for the future (Parent 4, focus group).

The emphasis on soft skills may be the result of the urban location of the school although the general agricultural emphasis promoted by staff at the same school in previous interview rounds makes this questionable. The contrast between school staff and parents became even more apparent when Parent 2 stated in the focus group discussion:

Practical life skills are really important, but I think that I want my children to learn other skills rather than learning practical life skills in the future, because I am living in the city with my family so I believe that life skills will not be so helpful to my children and my family. But I believe that other subjects and classes in school will help my children more to achieve opportunities for work. In summary, I want my children to learn other things than practical life skills (Parent 2, focus group).

Thus, in the parent focus group discussion practical skills were overshadowed by an emphasis on non-practical skills. Skills, such as computer and ICT skills (Parent 4, focus group), skills related to the improvement of moral, attitude and respect for other people (Parent 1, focus group) and money management skills (Parent 1, focus group) were the most important.

The responses of the *students* reflect the same reality. Very few student participants highlighted practical classes, such as the weekly LLSP as their favourite part of school. Instead they mentioned subjects, such as Khmer literature and math (Student 1, urban primary school), and science and language (Student 2, rural secondary school) as their favourite and most beneficial subjects in relation to what they wanted to become when they grow up (among others a doctor, attorney, engineer and tour guide). Some students did, however, confirm the perception of some of the teachers, namely that students enjoy life skills classes because they are easy, and because they enable them to help out at home.

Student 2 in the rural secondary school pointed out that a real issue for him was the lack of English classes at his school (Student 1, rural secondary school). This student interview was conducted without the use of a translator thanks to the student's relentless effort to learn the language on his own at a private education facility. His parents were his biggest influence on what school subjects he liked, and in his parents' eyes, no skill is more important than learning languages.

I study English three hours every day. I study from 6 am to 7 am, and from 5 pm to 7 pm. I learn English not in this school, because this school is not good enough, but I study before and after school so I can get better (Student 2, rural secondary school).

The issue implied by Student 2 is reflected in the fact that the number of private institutions in Cambodia has highly increased in recent years (Dawson, 2010). Private institutions have become essential to prepare students for tertiary and higher education on topics that are not sufficiently covered in the public education system.

The extracurricular education that students attend outside of the public education system in order to reach a sufficient level in important subjects was a major topic of concern during the parent focus group discussion, particularly as regards proficiency levels in English. Most parents expressed that English language skills is one of the most important skills that their children could acquire through education. This is no surprise since Cambodia has experienced



a blossoming of tourism and international affairs, creating many new industries and job opportunities for which English is a prerequisite. Parent 1 expressed some frustration on this issue:

I believe that the English language programme that is provided by the Ministry of education for the students at the high school is not good enough at this time. For example my children study in grade 12, and they learn some English from the state school. But they are in grade 12 now, and they still can't speak English very well. Therefore some of my children learn English in a private school. Private schools provide English language more effectively than the state schools here. I really want the Ministry to focus on good English language programmes to be provided to the student so that they can learn effectively from the school (Parent 1, focus group).

Parent 5 explained in relation to private actors in education:

Right now there are many institutions of foreign language that provide English education, but it is private institutions only. If we want our children to learn English, or other subjects as well, they need to spend their time after public school to go to private English class, and they have to learn before school and after school in the evenings as well. Our children they study too much sometimes, and that is not good for them, because they are only children. So I would really like the ministry to make especially English class much better, so that they don't have to go to the extra classes in the expensive private centres (Parent 5, focus group).

Parent 1 explained what she thought was the initial problem: "...the teachers that are teaching English at the public school they are always late for the class, so they might not focus seriously on the subject. The teachers that are teaching English in the private centre, they are punctual and they always focus on each lesson" (Parent 1, focus group). Furthermore, according to Parent 1, the "teachers at the private schools are simply better at what they do, and they are much more motivated and better educated than public school teachers". According to Parent 3, the "...ministry should provide English programmes from grade 1. And the students should spend at least four hours per week learning English in the state school, even in primary school" (Parent 3, focus group).

From the responses of the focus group participants it also became apparent that parents consider ICT of great importance to the future of their children. Parent 4 stated:

Learning computer and technical skills is really important to me since all students will need it in the future. My children already use computers all the time at home. So I think new technology is really important for their future (Parent 4, focus group).

There is therefore a difference in the responses from school staff, and parents and students when it comes to the relevance of certain skills. While the LLSP can be considered a welcome addition to Cambodian education from the perspective of both parents and school staff, the value of practical life skills differed, school staff generally emphasising these skills more than parents. Common for all participants was the perception that life skills education was highly relevant regardless of whether they appreciated hard or soft learning outcomes the most. Some participants in the home/community categories, however, were concerned that life skills in their soft or generic forms were underemphasised by schools, making students dependent on private schooling in order to become sufficiently prepared in subjects, such as English.

## **6.4 Participation in School Processes**

The issue of participation was examined in terms of the say that teachers, school directors, parents and students have on the content of education and life skills practices. In other words, whether the educational content is the result of top-down communication from national or local government bodies, or whether it is partly or even fully the result of democratic processes at the local level.

This is important in the context of the PCD document and the emphasis it places on local autonomy at the school and community level. If local stakeholders are not participating in the decision-making processes on the content of education in line with the PCD, the implementation of the life skills framework may suffer due to the potential disconnection between school content and the desires of the wider community. In a social justice approach, this is a serious concern, as all actors in education (including learners and their families) are entitled to some decision-making power in matters concerning the content of education (Tikly & Barrett, 2013).

### **6.4.1 Nature of Democratic Decision-Making**

Considering the diversity of the sample, it was somewhat surprising to discover the uniformity in the responses at the school level. Despite the different life skills practices in the schools, the processes of participation were very much the same. For instance, in deciding what skills to teach, participants at all schools mentioned a yearly meeting that included the school director, the vice school director, teachers as well as local stakeholders, such as community representatives and/or parents. The primary goal of this meeting was to decide what skills to teach and which teachers were to teach what life skills topic based on the life skills framework as well as the interests of the teachers, students and the local community. Teacher 2 at the urban primary school explained:

Early in the year the school develops a school development plan. All teachers together with the school director have a meeting where we can choose which life skills we want to teach to the students (Teacher 2, urban primary school).

The urban secondary school participants mentioned a similar meeting that was held each year. Regarding teacher autonomy, Teacher 2 stated:

I am involved in choosing the life skills to teach the students inside the class. Not only me, other teachers as well, together with the school principal. We have a meeting and make the decisions together every year (Teacher 2, urban secondary school).

At the rural primary school, Teacher 2 mentioned a meeting as well, and stressed the role of parents in deciding on educational content:

I attend meetings at this school with teachers and the school director, but sometimes with the parents as well. Here we decide what skills to focus on for the next year. We try to talk to the community and to the parents to make sure that the children enrol in school and do not stay at home. We call it education campaign. We have this kind of campaign every year. When we talk to the parents they tell me what they want their children to learn so they can come to school, and then we decide together what to teach when we go to the meeting (Teacher 2, rural primary school).

The school director at the rural primary school explained this particular practice:

For the life skills that we teach in school we have to invite the community to be a part of decision-making. I cannot make my own decision, because the area here depends on the community. If for example I would like to have a mushroom growing class because I think that it is relevant here, I have to talk to the community first (School director, rural primary school).

At the rural secondary school meetings, parents and community members seemed to have a central role as well. The school director stated:

The decision-making comes from the management level at the beginning of the year. The school director, vice director and the teachers come together and decide what to teach. We have school support committee members that sometimes attend this meeting as well (School director, rural secondary school).

The CCM who was associated with the rural secondary school, however, had never participated in these meetings, and were unaware if others in the committee had done so previously (Community Committee Member, rural secondary school).

Based on the participant responses above, it appears that the rural schools include the community more than the urban schools in educational decision-making. This is not to say that home/community stakeholders are considered insignificant by school staff in the urban schools, as the participation of both parents and communities were regarded as valuable. The nature of the participation, however, seems to vary.

#### **6.4.2 Nature of Participation**

Parents and community members at the urban schools have a more active role in the teaching of life skills, but do not influence what is being taught. For instance, the school director at the urban primary school explained that some parents take on the role as assistant during the life skills classes, helping the teachers to plant vegetables and raise fish in cases where the teachers feel uncertain about the appropriate way to do these activities (School director, urban primary school). When asked about the importance of such parental participation, the school director said:

I believe that it is very important for this school, especially for the teachers and the students. These people have a lot of experience, and they can come here and share

those experiences with the teachers and the students (School director, urban primary school).

At the urban secondary school, the school director indicated that parents usually never participate in school activities. However, it was common practice to invite other community members to participate in life skills classes. For example:

The parents of the students are usually not involved in any way in the activities at this school, but sometimes we invite community members to teach students life skills. For example, the chief of construction workers will be invited to teach students how to construct buildings. These community members are volunteers, but we have some money to support them (School director, urban secondary school).

Initiatives that involve participation from community members and in-class parental guidance in certain life skills topics were common at both the urban and the rural schools. Other forms of participation involved money and fundraising, provision of essential equipment such as seeds and tools and, most importantly, sharing knowledge on how to improve school practices. These practices varied across the schools.

### ***Parental and Community Participation***

The school/community ties were investigated during the interviews with the parents. Two parents at the rural primary school had different experiences. Parent 1 stated that although she was always invited to attend meetings at the school, she had never participated in any school decision-making or activities. Parent 2 was actively involved in both. Parent 2 stated:

I sometimes come to the school to share ideas. For example if we, the local community, want to produce something, for example vegetables or fish, me and some other parents come here and share our ideas with the teachers and school director, and help make a life skills programme that can produce the things that we need. I also help promote keeping the environment clean. I come to the school and talk to the students about the importance of keeping the school, classrooms, and houses clean (Parent 2, rural primary school).

Both parents were content with the influence they had on decision-making processes at the school. While not yet having participated, Parent 1 felt motivated to do so in the time to come due to the importance of education for the future of her children (Parent 1, rural primary school). Parent 2 felt that he had participated enough for the last eleven years, but would

gladly provide some of his knowledge to the school if need be in the future (Parent 2, rural primary school). Parent 1 interviewed at the rural secondary school participated in various ways as well. Being in charge of the flower garden, he regularly came to the school and shared his ideas with the administration and the teachers. He also helped out with maintenance of the garden and with the life skills programmes (Parent 1, rural secondary school).

According to the CMM at the rural secondary school, the wider community represented by the committee does not influence educational content and practice in relation to life skills education, at least not in any direct way (Community Committee Member, rural secondary school). The most important role of the committee is to encourage children to attend school by enlightening them and their parents about the opportunities that education provides. Although the CCM felt that the participation of the general community could be considered important for the schools and for the students, he was convinced that the committee, as well as the community as a whole, could participate more actively in both decision-making, and the delivery of education programmes and life skills activities. He stated that:

I really want the community to contribute more to the school, to give more ideas to the school director as well as deciding what kinds of life skills to teach in the school that are relevant to the community. The problem is that my community consists of workers, mostly in the plantations, and I am afraid that they don't have much time to share their knowledge, and to help out at the school. If I could choose, I would like my community to contribute more, so that education here would be better (Community Committee Member, rural secondary school).

The parents in the focus group discussion at the urban primary school mentioned a similar situation where direct participation in decision-making processes was a rare, if not non-existent, phenomenon. Parent 2 even indicated, after checking with the other parents in the room, that this was the first time they had come to the school to talk to someone about educational content and practices (Parent 2, focus group). It was also pointed out in the focus group that all parents were invited to take part in fundraising activities in order to fund life skills programmes and essential equipment. All parents stated that they felt that parental participation is an important practice, and that they want to participate more actively in the future, although they were uncertain as to how.

### **6.4.3 Barriers to Participation**

A topic of interest during the interviews was whether barriers to participation at the school level might affect the teachers, and whether the teachers felt that they participated in decision-making to a satisfactory extent. Most teachers expressed that they participated enough, that they were satisfied with the amount of decision-making power they had been granted and that little more could be done from their side.

Many teachers, however, referred to issues that relate more to inclusiveness and relevance on the matter of participatory constraints. Common obstacles were that implementation procedures and student limitations (both interest and ability related) could affect their decisions in regard to what they decided to do in class. Although parents and the community were identified as important participants in their own ways, many teachers implied that life skills education would be better if parents and the community participated more during various life skills activities, contributed more funds and provided more equipment.

From the perspective of the parents, the barriers to participation were difficult to identify. Some parents mentioned time constraints related to work and other responsibilities. Others indicated that they were very motivated to participate, but that they simply did not know how to get involved. Despite their motivation, such uncertainty might be the result of school practice and the extent to which schools actively reach out and encourage parents and community members to participate in school decision-making. Thus, although community participation is a prerequisite in the PCD for the implementation of the curriculum, it seems that local systems that promote these forms of participation have yet to be established to a satisfactory extent.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

Life skills education in Cambodia holds the potential to increase student opportunities for work and lifelong learning since it provides students with skills that are particularly valued by local stakeholders. Inspired by the development discourse promoted by major international organisations, the Cambodian life skills framework aims at providing an education that is

related both to national economic and labour market needs and to the needs of local communities, parents and students.

Based on the perceptions of participants at the school and home/community environments, the PCD goals related to inclusiveness, relevance and participation are only partly realised and many of the issues that were prevalent during the years of conflict are still evident today. These issues may compromise the effective implementation of the life skills framework in Cambodian schools and, thus, contribute less than originally intended to education quality.



# **7 Life Skills Education in Policy and Practice: Discussion of Main Findings**

This study set out to examine life skills education in the local Cambodian context from a social justice perspective. The purpose has been to examine whether the life skills policy framework has contributed to education quality as related to inclusiveness, relevance and participation. These three social justice principles are apparent in the goals of the PCD which is the basis of the analysis in this study. This is reflected in its emphasis on opportunities for all, increasing the relevance of education by allowing for a large degree of local autonomy in relation to educational content, and democratic participatory processes by emphasizing the role of communities and parents. This concluding chapter discusses the main findings in view of the social justice approach and the three research questions presented in Chapter 1:

1. How does the Cambodian life skills framework address inclusiveness, relevance and participation?
2. How do local stakeholders (including school staff, community representatives, parents and students) perceive the inclusiveness and relevance of life skills education?
3. How do local stakeholders (including school staff, community representatives, and parents) participate in decision-making processes as regards life skills education?

## **7.1 Inclusiveness in Policy and Practice**

According to Oduro, Fertig & Dachi (2013), decentralised education systems are particularly prone to face issues of inclusiveness when implementing new education policy. This is especially so in developing countries that strive to achieve EFA, much like Cambodia, where increased enrolment in education, as a result of establishing fee-free public education, often render schools short of the appropriate resources necessary for successful curriculum implementation. Such issues are often referred to as “implementation gaps” (Tikly, 2011) and could indicate several discrepancies between policy and local level realities. In the case of this study, several of these “gaps” were identified that, according to the social justice approach, could have implications for education quality.

One gap is reflected in the fact that implementation of LLSP differed between the four schools, indicating that students often receive life skills education that looks different between, and possibly even within local communities. From a human capital perspective, one could argue that such differences in practice could affect the overall development and capacity of skilled labour to contribute to national economic development. From a social justice perspective, these differences could imply that some children are being deprived of the opportunities that are provided to others. The evidence suggests that these individual differences in practice is the result of the extensive local autonomy that the PCD provides, and the lack of local accountability structures that can help to ensure that the implementation process follows certain standardised procedures.

The limited funds that are provided to schools from government and local sources impact the education that is being provided to students. A particular concern is the accessibility of appropriate life skills related teaching and learning materials which is considered vital for ensuring learner achievement in line with the goals of the PCD (Yu, 2007) and to provide students with the tools they need in order to transform learning experiences and outcomes into capabilities (Sen, 1999). This is especially so in the context of developing nations, where the subject knowledge of teachers is often limited due to the lack of teacher training opportunities.

As the life skills framework is understood by a majority of school staff as beneficial for reasons relating to student capacities to generate an income after graduation, providing teachers and learners with the tools they need in order to maximise the potential outcomes of learning activities can be considered of great importance. The varying availability of teaching and learning materials between the schools researched is another example of the need to establish clear accountability structures that can ensure the adherence to standardised implementation procedures of the life skills framework in Cambodian schools.

Appropriate teaching and learning materials must be accompanied by sufficient teacher training opportunities (Tikly, 2011). As some teachers in this study felt incompetent as to diversify life skills activities, it seems evident that more investment in teacher training is required. However, and according to both teachers and parents, the life skills framework has increased students' appreciation of attending school which, in turn, may affect completion

rates and increase students' overall opportunities to convert school experiences into meaningful capabilities (Tikly & Barrett, 2013).

## **7.2 Relevance in Policy and Practice**

It is evident that all participants found that the life skills framework had increased the relevance of education in regards to the local context, in line with the goal of the PCD. This is one area in which policy and practice are very synchronised. According to some participants, the local definition of highly contextual educational content is especially beneficial as it prepares students for locally relevant work. The contextual differences in content were not determined by the geographical location of the schools. Rather, the urban schools seemed to emphasize practical and agricultural skills more than the rural schools. According to parents, however, these practical skills were generally highly appreciated regardless of the urban/rural distinction.

Although participants found life skills education to be exclusively positive and beneficial, a pressing issue as regards relevance is the apparent gap that exists between the PCD and the perceptions of local stakeholders in the understanding of life skills. The issue primarily concerns the PCD understanding of life skills as a concept in line with competence and skills discourses that aim at holistic human and economic development (such as the DeSeCo and EFA), compared to the perceptions of participants that life skills are related to practical livelihood skills. While such skills, according to UNESCO (2012), can be of benefit to families in developing countries in increasing their family income while also having implications for aspects of both human and economic development, the overarching issue in relation to social justice, as implied by Kim (2011), is that life skills, at the local level, seem to be understood in such a way that it might deprive students and parents of the chance to consider the diverse possibilities that are available to them outside of their immediate contexts.

Furthermore, making education more relevant usually involves enabling children to do better than their social background would suggest. A concern, however, is that in the Cambodian political equation, relevance is more closely connected to broader political strategies to increase profits from industry and agriculture, than providing relevant life skills that enable

children to pursue what they want to be and do (Kim, 2011). After all, life skills, according to the PCD, are intended to enable children to reach their full potential and become effective and productive members of society (MoYES, 2004). A key question in relation to social justice, then, is whether the local understanding of life skills is based predominantly on these national economic motives promoted by a top-down discourse from government levels (as implied by Kim, 2011), or whether it is based on democratic processes at the local levels that have taken into account the actual “needs” and “wants” of school staff, parents and communities. Based on the data for this study, and the study of NEP (KAPE, 2012), it seems that the latter scenario is the least probable of the two.

Thus, while life skills education is perceived to be highly relevant by local stakeholders, their reasons as to why may be affected by the government rhetoric and the constraints that it potentially places on local stakeholder ability to consider the many opportunities that education can provide outside of their immediate contexts.

### **7.3 Participation in Policy and Practice**

The categorization of participatory processes described by Arnstein (1969) and Shaeffer (1994) could serve as an interesting starting point in discussing the findings as regards parent and community participation in relation to the PCD and social justice. First, in relation to school environment participation, teacher autonomy was considered to be quite high by the participants. As a result, teachers felt that they had significant influence over education content, especially so in relation to LLSP. Based on Shaeffer (1994), teachers in this study can thus be considered as actors in decision-making processes with a real opportunity to affect educational processes. A pressing issue emerging in light of the other findings is the potentially limiting effects of teacher autonomy on student achievement in light of scarce teacher training opportunities and the varying availability of manuals in the schools.

Second, and in relation to the participation by home/community participants, such as parents and CCMs, it was evident that participation in decision-making processes was low since only a fraction of parents had ever attended the meetings, and did not participate in any other significant way. Interviews with teachers and school directors, however, implied that the sharing of ideas, monetary support, provision of LLSP equipment, and practices of

community assistants was common among parents, although to varying extents. Based on Shaeffer (1994), the extent to which such practices can impact on school processes, content and outcomes is questionable. Parental and community initiatives seem to lean more towards involvement and passive participation rituals, rather than towards true and impactful decision-making powers (Shaeffer, 1994). These findings raise the question whether parents and community members, at all, are aware that such responsibilities are provided to them by the PCD.

It was highlighted in Chapter 3 that the principle of participation underpins the other two. This is evident from the discussions since the common theme was the need to strengthen the dialogue between schools, communities and parents in Cambodia in order to build a strong network of accountability structures at the local level. In order to do so it is essential to begin by empowering parents and the community so that they feel confident that their ideas actually matter, both when it comes to implementation in relation to ensuring that education provides their children with the best possible opportunities for life and work, and by ensuring that local educational content is decided taking their opinions into account (Tikly & Barrett, 2013).

## **7.4 Placing the Findings in a Wider Context**

This thesis has identified several issues that have emerged in other studies as well. This includes Kim's (2011) qualitative analysis of the intent behind the life skills framework, and the NEP study on life skills practices in Cambodia conducted by the means of qualitative semi-structured interviews at the school level and quantitative surveys (KAPE, 2012). Both focused more on the opinions of policy-makers in various positions of authority than on local level stakeholders.

In contrast, this study has placed particular emphasis on the perspectives of local stakeholders, such as school staff, parents, community members and students. The social justice approach stresses that, in order to consider implications of education policy, the local school and home/community environments must be taken into account. Thus, while supporting the findings from related research, this study sets an additional perspective on Cambodian life skills education. Furthermore, applying the principles of social justice has presented an alternative approach to investigate educational policy and practice in Cambodia.

Both the approach and the findings may be applied for other studies as well as enlighten the situation in Cambodia.

# References

- Alexander, R. (2008). Education for All, the quality imperative and the problem of pedagogy. *CREATE Research Monograph No. 20*. University of Sussex, Brighton. Accessed August 25, 2015, from [http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf\\_documents/PTA20.pdf](http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/PTA20.pdf)
- Arnstein, S. (1969). A Ladder of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35:4, 216-224. Accessed March 23, 2015, from <https://www.planning.org/pas/memo/2007/mar/pdf/JAPA35No4.pdf>
- Ayers, D. M. (1999). The Khmer Rouge and Education: beyond the discourse of destruction. *History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society*, 28:2, 205-218. Accessed January 15, 2015, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/004676099284744>
- Ayers, D. M. (2000). *Anatomy of a crisis: education, development, and the state in Cambodia, 1953 –1998*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Barrett, A. M. (2013). Education quality and social justice in the South: An introduction. In Tikly, L. & Barrett, A. M. (eds.) (2013). *Education Quality and Social Justice in the Global South*. Oxon/New York: Routledge
- Bopha, P., & Willemys, A. (2014, January 10). Government Creates New CPP-Majority Province. *The Cambodia Daily*. Accessed April 15, 2016, from <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/government-creates-new-cpp-majority-province-50391/>
- Bredneberg, K. (2008). Discussion Paper: Governance Issues within the Formal Education Sector in Cambodia. Accessed July 7, 2014, from <http://www.kapekh.org/?p=publicationsdetail&id=27&l=English&>
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Science Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Buchert, L. (2014). Learning needs and life skills for youth: An introduction. *International Review of Education*, 60, 163-176.
- Burrell, G. & Morgan, G. (2005). *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis: Elements of The Sociology of Corporate Life*. London: Ashgate.
- Carnoy, M. (1999). *Globalization and Educational Reform: What planners need to know*. Paris: IIEP. Accessed March 31, 2015, from <http://unesco.amu.edu.pl/pdf/Carnoy.pdf>
- Carson, E., & Kerr, L. (2005). *Transitions and Portability of Skills: Soft Skills and Task Specific Skills*. Melbourne: Centre of Public Policy. Accessed April 15, from <http://vital.new.voced.edu.au/vital/access/services/Download/ngv:5049/SOURCE2?view=true>
- Carvin, A. (1999). From Sideshow To Genocide: Stories of the Cambodian Holocaust. Web resource. Accessed January 25, 2015, from <http://www.edwebproject.org/sideshow/>
- Chandler, D. (1998). Cambodia's Historical Legacy. In Accord (1998). *Safeguarding Peace: Cambodia's Constitutional Challenge*. London: Conciliation Resources. Accessed July 7, 2014, from <http://www.c-r.org/accord-article/cambodia%E2%80%99s-historical-legacy>
- 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. Accessed February 18, 2015, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/369662>
- Clayton, T. (2005). Re-orientations in moral education in Cambodia since 1975. *Journal of Moral Education*, 34:4, 505-517. Accessed February 23, 2015, from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03057240500410236#.VOsmn1OG82I>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. California: Sage Publications



- Dale, R. (2000). Globalization and Education: Demonstrating a “common world educational culture” or locating a “globally structured educational agenda”? *Educational Theory*, 50:4, 427-448. Accessed November 5, 2013, from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2000.00427.x/abstract>
- Dawson, W. (2010). Private tutoring and mass schooling in East Asia: reflections of inequality in Japan, South Korea, and Cambodia. *AsiaPacific Education Review*, 11:1, 14-24. Accessed November 15, 2015, from <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12564-009-9058-4>
- Dy, S. S. (2004). Strategies and Policies for Basic Education in Cambodia: Historical Perspectives. *International Education Journal*, 5:1, 90-97. Accessed February 5, 2015, from <http://ehlt.flinders.edu.au/education/iej/articles/v5n1/dy/paper.pdf>
- Endgenocide.org (2016). Picture from website. Accessed January 4, 2016, from <http://endgenocide.org/learn/past-genocides/the-cambodian-genocide/>
- Fairbrother, G. P. (2007). Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches to Comparative Education. In Bray, M, Adamson, B., & Mason, M. (2007). *Comparative Education Research: Approaches and Methods*. Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre.
- Fraser, N. (2008). *Scales of justice: Reimagining political apace in a globalizing world*. Cambridge: Polity press.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.) (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research* (105-117). Thousand Oaks: Sage. Accessed August 18, 2015, from <https://www.uncg.edu/hdf/facultystaff/Tudge/Guba%20&%20Lincoln%201994.pdf>
- Hanushek, E. A., & Woßmann, L. (2007). *Education Quality and Economic Growth*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

- Hollister, F. J. (1958). Education in Cambodia. *The Clearing House*, 33:4, 209-212. Accessed January 28, 2015, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30190782>
- Jacobsen, T., & Stuart-Fox, M. (2013). Power and Political Culture in Cambodia. *Asia Research Institute, Working Paper Series Nr. 200*. Accessed January 15, 2015, from [http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/wps/wps13\\_200.pdf](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/wps/wps13_200.pdf)
- KAPE (Kampuchean Action for Primary Education) (2012). *Life Skills Practices in Cambodia: A review of Implementation by NEP Members*. Phnom Penh. Accessed July 5, 2014, from [http://kapekh.org/images/book/pdf/Life\\_Skills\\_Practices\\_in\\_Cambodia\\_KAPE\\_NEP\\_final.pdf](http://kapekh.org/images/book/pdf/Life_Skills_Practices_in_Cambodia_KAPE_NEP_final.pdf)
- Kim, C. Y. (2011). Children's Work and The Life Skills Education Policy in Cambodia. *Journal of International Development*, Nr. 23, 262-273. Accessed October 6, 2015, from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jid.1767/abstract?userIsAuthenticated=false&deniedAccessCustomisedMessage=>
- Lund, T. (2005). The Qualitative–Quantitative Distinction: Some comments. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 49:2, 115-132. Accessed April 29, 2015, from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00313830500048790>
- Malan, S. T. P. (2000). The “new paradigm” of outcomes-based education in perspective. *Tydskrif vir Gesinsekologie en Verbruikerswetenskappe*, 28, 22-28. Accessed February 17, 2014, from <http://www.ajol.info/index.php/jfec/s/article/viewFile/52788/41390>
- Mapsoftheworld (2014). Political map of Cambodia. Accessed September 22, 2015, from <http://www.mapsofworld.com/cambodia/cambodia-political-map.html>
- Meyer, J. W., Boli, J., Thomas, G. M., & Ramirez, F. O. (1997). World Society and the Nation State. *American Journal of Sociology*, 103:1, 144-181. Accessed August 27, 2013, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/231174>

- Ministry of Planning (2008). *General population consensus 2008*. Accessed January 22, 2016, from [http://www.stat.go.jp/english/info/meetings/cambodia/pdf/pre\\_rep1.pdf](http://www.stat.go.jp/english/info/meetings/cambodia/pdf/pre_rep1.pdf)
- Ministry of Planning (2010a). *Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey*. Accessed August 7, 2015, from [http://www.unicef.org/cambodia/Cambodia DHS 2010 Complete Report Part1.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/cambodia/Cambodia_DHS_2010_Complete_Report_Part1.pdf)
- Ministry of Planning (2010b). *Achieving Cambodia's Millennium Development Goals*. Accessed August 10, 2014, from [http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Cambodia/Cambodia MDG 2010.pdf](http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Cambodia/Cambodia_MDG_2010.pdf)
- Ministry of Planning (2014). *National Strategic Development Plan 2014 – 2018*. Accessed October 19, 2015, from <http://www.mop.gov.kh/Home/NSDP/NSDP20142018/tabid/216/Default.aspx>
- MoYES (Ministry of Youth Education and Sports) (1994). *Rebuilding Quality Education and Training in Cambodia*. Accessed April 20, 2015, from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001500/150092eo.pdf>
- MoYES (Ministry of Youth Education and Sports) (2004). *Policy for Curriculum Development 2005-2009*. Accessed June 20, 2014, from [http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Cambodia/Cambodia\\_Policy\\_curriculum\\_development\\_2005-2009.pdf](http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Cambodia/Cambodia_Policy_curriculum_development_2005-2009.pdf)
- MoYES (Ministry of Youth Education and Sports) (2010). *Education Strategic Plan 2009-2013*. Accessed October 6, 2015, from <http://www.moeys.gov.kh/en/policies-and-strategies/esp-2009-2013.html#.Vwa6pBOLSQV>
- MoYES (Ministry of Youth Education and Sports) (2014). *Education Strategic Plan 2014-2018*. Accessed October 6, 2015, from <http://www.moeys.gov.kh/en/policies-and-strategies/559.html#.Vwa6RBOLSQU>

- Narayan, D., Pritchett, L., & Kapoor, S. (2009). *Moving out of Poverty Volume 2: Success from the bottom up*. Washington, DC: The World Bank. Accessed September 20, 2015, from <http://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/978-0-8213-7215-9>
- Norad (Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation) (2008). *Education Strategy Assessment: Final Report*. Accessed August 11, 2014, from <https://www.norad.no/om-bistand/publikasjon/ngo-evaluations/2009/education-strategy-assessment/>
- Oduro, G. K. T., Fertig, M., & Dachi, H. (2013). Leading and managing change in schools. In Tikly, L. & Barrett, A. M. (eds.) (2013). *Education Quality and Social Justice in the Global South*. Oxon/New York: Routledge
- OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) (2001). *Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations (DeSeCo) background paper*. Accessed March 10, 2013, form <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/41529556.pdf>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Sage Publications.
- Pellini, A. (2007). *Decentralisation Policy in Cambodia. Exploring Community Participation in the Education Sector*. Academic dissertation, University of Tampere. Accessed September 20, 2015, from <https://tampub.uta.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/67734/978-951-44-6978-7.pdf?sequence=1>
- Rizvi, F., & Lingard, B. (2010). *Globalizing Education Policy*. London & NY: Routledge
- Robeyns, I. (2006). Three models of education: rights, capabilities and human capital. *Theory and Research in Education* 4:1, 69–84. Accessed October 15, 2015, from <http://tre.sagepub.com/content/4/1/69.short?rss=1&ssource=mfr>
- Schleicher, A. (2007). Can competencies assessed by PISA be considered the fundamental school knowledge 15-year-olds should possess? *Journal of Educational Change*, 8:4, 349-357. Accessed March 11, 2014, from <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10833-007-9042-x>

- Schleicher, A. (ed.) (2012). *Preparing teachers and developing school leaders for the 21st century: Lessons from around the world*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Accessed September 15, 2015, from <http://www.oecd.org/site/eduistp2012/49850576.pdf>.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. New York: Anchor Books
- Shaeffer, S. (1992). *Collaborating for educational change the role of teachers, parents and the community in school improvement*. Paris: IIEP. Accessed February 23, 2015, from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0009/000923/092321eo.pdf>
- Shaeffer, S. (1994). *Participation for Educational Change: a synthesis of experience*. Paris: IIEP. Accessed September 10, 2014, from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0009/000992/099230e.pdf>
- Sutton, M., & Levinson, B. A. U. (2001). *Policy as Practice. Toward a Comparative Sociocultural Analysis of Educational Policy*. London: Ablex Publishing
- Tan, C. (2007). Education reforms in Cambodia: issues and concerns. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 6, 15-24. Accessed February 23, 2015, from <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10671-007-9020-3>
- Tikly, L. (2011). Towards a framework for researching the quality of education in low-income countries. *Comparative Education*, 47:1, 1-23. Accessed October 8, 2015, from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03050068.2011.541671>
- Tikly, L. (2013). Education quality and social justice in the South. Priorities for policy, practice and research. In Tikly, L. & Barrett, A. M. (eds.) (2013). *Education Quality and Social Justice in the Global South*. Oxon/New York: Routledge
- Tikly, L., & Barrett, A. M. (2011). Social justice, capabilities and the quality of education in low income countries. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31, 3-14. Accessed October 5, 2015, from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0738059310000726>

- Tikly, L., & Barrett, A. M. (2013). Education quality and social justice in the global South. Towards a conceptual framework. In Tikly, L. & Barrett, A. M. (eds.) (2013). *Education Quality and Social Justice in the Global South*. Oxon/New York: Routledge
- UN (United Nations) (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Ratified by General Assembly of the United Nation in Resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989*. Accessed October 10, 2015, from <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf>
- UN (United Nations) (2016). *Sustainable Development Goals. 17 goals to change our world*. Accessed March 20, 2015, from <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (2015). *Human Development Report 2015. Work for Human Development*. New York: UNDP Accessed April 10, 2016, from [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015\\_human\\_development\\_report.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015_human_development_report.pdf)
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (2016). *About Cambodia*. Accessed August, 2015, from: <http://www.kh.undp.org/content/cambodia/en/home/countryinfo/>
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) (1972). *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*. Paris: UNESCO Accessed November 5, 2013, from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0000/000018/001801e.pdf>
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) (1996). *Learning: The treasure within*. Paris. Accessed March 12, 2013, from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001095/109590Eo.pdf>
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) (2000). *The Dakar Framework for Action. Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments*. Paris: UNESCO. Accessed May 15, 2015, from [http://www.unesco.at/bildung/basisdokumente/dakar\\_aktionsplan.pdf](http://www.unesco.at/bildung/basisdokumente/dakar_aktionsplan.pdf)

- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) (2012). *Youth and Skills. Putting Education to Work. Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2012*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) (2013). *Policy Review of TVET in Cambodia*. Paris: UNESCO. Accessed July 5, 2014, from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002253/225360E.pdf>
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) (2015). *Education For All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges. Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2015*. Paris: UNESCO
- UNGASS (United Nations General Assembly Special Session) (2001). *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. United Nations General Assembly Special Session*. Accessed September 15, 2015, from [http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/sub\\_landing/files/aidsdeclaration\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/sub_landing/files/aidsdeclaration_en.pdf)
- UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) (2009). *Manual: Child Friendly Schools*. Accessed December 8, 2015, from [http://www.unicef.org/publications/index\\_49574.html](http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_49574.html)
- Walker, M. (2006). Towards a capability-based theory of social justice for education policy-making. *Journal of Education Policy*, 21:2, 163-185. Accessed October 8, 2015, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02680930500500245>
- Wharton, C. (2006). Document Analysis. *The SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods*. Retrieved October 15, 2015, from <http://srmo.sagepub.com/view/the-sage-dictionary-of-social-research-methods/n57.xml>
- WHO (World Health Organization) (1981). *Development of Indicators for Monitoring Programs: Toward Health for All by the Year 2000*. Geneva: WHO. Accessed April 14, 2015, from <http://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/40672>

- WHO (World Health Organization) (2003). Skills for Health Skills-based health education including life skills: An important component of a Child-Friendly/Health-Promoting School. *Information Series on School Health – Document 9*. Accessed September 20, 2015, from [http://www.who.int/school\\_youth\\_health/media/en/sch\\_skills4health\\_03.pdf](http://www.who.int/school_youth_health/media/en/sch_skills4health_03.pdf)
- WHO (World Health Organization) (2016). *Country indicators: Cambodia*. Accessed Mars 22, 2016, from <http://www.wpro.who.int/countries/khm/en/>
- Woodhall, M. (1997). Human Capital Concepts. In Halsey, A. H., Lauder, H., Brown, P., & Wells, A. S. (1997). *Education: Culture, Economy, Society*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- World Bank (2005). *Cambodia: Basic Education For All*. Accessed February 23, 2015, from [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEAPREGTOPEUCATION/Resources/cambodia\\_efa\\_jan05.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEAPREGTOPEUCATION/Resources/cambodia_efa_jan05.pdf)
- World Bank (2006). *World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation*. Accessed October 15, 2015, from [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/IW3P/IB/2006/09/13/000112742\\_20060913111024/Rendered/PDF/359990WDR0complete.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/IW3P/IB/2006/09/13/000112742_20060913111024/Rendered/PDF/359990WDR0complete.pdf)
- World Bank (2015). *National Data: Cambodia*. Accessed September 20, 2015, from <http://data.worldbank.org/country/cambodia>
- World Bank (2016). *Data. Agriculture, value added (% of GDP)*. Accessed March 15, 2016, from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.ZS>
- Yin, R. (2011). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*. New York: The Guilford Press
- Yu, G. (2007). *Research evidence of school effectiveness in sub-Saharan Africa*. EdQual Working Paper Number 7. Bristol: EdQual. Accessed October 15, 2015, from [http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/impquality\\_rpc/workingpaper12.pdf](http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/impquality_rpc/workingpaper12.pdf)



# Appendix 1: Fieldwork Schedule

## **Saturday November 22: Urban primary school**

07:00 – Arrive at school  
07:30 – Meet the principal and conduct interview  
08:15 – Observe class  
09:00 – Interview teacher Nr. 1  
09:45 – Interview teacher Nr. 2  
10:30 – Interview student Nr. 1  
10:45 – Interview student Nr. 2

## **Saturday November 22: Urban secondary school**

12:00 – Arrive at school  
12:30 – Meet the principal and conduct interview  
13:15 – Observe class  
14:00 – Interview teacher Nr. 1  
14:45 – Interview teacher Nr. 2  
15:30 – Interview student Nr. 1  
15:45 – Interview student Nr. 2  
16:00 – If possible: Parent Interviews

## **Saturday November 29: Rural primary school**

08:00 – Arrive at school  
08:15 – Meet the principal and conduct interview  
09:00 – Observe Class  
09:30 – Interview teacher Nr. 1  
10:00 – Interview teacher Nr. 2  
10:30 – Interview student Nr. 1  
10:45 – Interview student Nr. 2  
11:00 – Parent interviews

## **Saturday November 29: Rural secondary school**

12:00 – Arrive at school  
12:30 – Meet the principal and conduct interview  
13:15 – Observe class  
14:00 – Interview teacher Nr. 1  
14:45 – Interview teacher Nr. 2  
15:30 – Interview student Nr. 1  
15:45 – Interview student Nr. 2  
16:00 – Parent Interviews

## **Saturday December 6: Focus Group Discussions**

10:00 – Teacher focus group  
12:00 – Parent focus group

# Appendix 2: Letter of Consent

## Request for participation in the Research Project:

### The Policy and Practice of Life Skills Education in Cambodia

#### Background and Purpose

The purpose of this research is to investigate the Cambodian life skills Framework on the local level. This data collection is part of a masters' thesis conducted at the University of Oslo, Norway, and will contribute to the understanding of life skills education in Cambodia.

You are hereby asked if you are willing to participate in this study, as your views on the subject matter are very relevant and important for this project and its findings. This letter may also concern parental consent.

#### What does participation in the project imply?

Your participation will imply a short interview (approximately 20 minutes) concerning the topics of life skills, policy implementation and local participation and involvement in the development of life skills programs. Your answers will be recorded on audio files, and through my own notes.

If this letter concerns parental consent, or if you are concerned about anything related to the project; you may request the interview guide at any time in advance of the interviews.

#### What will happen to the information about you?

All personal data will be treated confidentially. No one but my supervisor and me will have access to the data gathered prior to publication, and no data will be connected to you personally, or to your institution at any time. This means that you will **not** be recognizable in any way in the published thesis.

The project is scheduled for completion by June 2016. After completion of the thesis, the raw data (audio files and transcriptions) will be kept anonymous and on password-protected disks. The data might be released upon request and used for further analysis the future. The level of confidentiality and anonymity will however not change.

#### Voluntary participation

It is voluntary to participate in the project, and you can at any time choose to withdraw your contribution without stating any reason.

If you have any questions concerning the project, please contact me at [arneharsheim@gmail.com](mailto:arneharsheim@gmail.com).

**The study has been notified to the Data Protection Official for Research, Norwegian Social Science Data Services.**

# Consent for Participation in the Study

I have received information about the project and I am/my child is willing/allowed to participate:

---

(Participant signature)

---

Date/location

# Appendix 3: Interview Guide

## Interviews with School Staff

### Background (if appropriate)

- 1) Age?
- 2) What is your position at the school?
- 3) How many years have you worked in the education system?

### General Information on Perceptions and Relevance

- 1) What does the term life skills mean to you?
- 2) Could you tell me a little bit about how you perceive life skills education, and what skills you perceive to be the most important life skills for Cambodian children?
- 3) Can you tell me about how Life skills education is practiced at this school? (Is there a particular focus on certain kinds of skills?)
- 4) What is your impression on the importance of teaching “hard” life skills in school? (e.g. different livelihood skills/local life skills program)
- 5) What is your impression on the importance of teaching “soft” life skills in school? (e.g. cognitive skills like problem solving/critical thinking/analysing skills)
- 6) Do you think life skills education is a good thing?
  - In what way?
- 7) Do you find life skills education relevant for the needs of the children at this school?
- 8) What do you perceive to be the benefits with life skills education?

### Implementation

- 1) How has Life skills education been implemented at this school?
- 2) Who decides what skills to be taught in class?
- 3) Besides school staff, what other stakeholders are participating in the implementation of life skills programs at this school?
- 4) To what extent are parents and the local community involved in the decision-making process at this school?
  - Could you explain further?
- 5) In your opinion, which life skills do you perceive most relevant for your students at this

school?

- Why?

## **Interviews with Parents (and CCM)**

### **General Information**

- 1) What does the term life skills mean to you?
- 2) Could you tell me a little bit about how you perceive life skills education, and what do you perceive to be the most important (life) skills?
- 3) What do you know about the MoYES Life Skills policy framework?
- 4) What do you know about the distinction between “basic life skills” and “local life skills”?
- 5) Are you in any way involved in life skills education, and the implementation of such programs? (Yes/No – *If Yes, see Section 2, if No, see Section 1*)

### **Section 1 – If No**

- 1) In your opinion, why do you think you are not involved in the decision-making- and implementation process?
- 2) Would you be interested in participating in the implementation of life skills in the future?
- 3) In what way do you think that you could have participated in the implementation process, if you were to participate in the future?

### **Section 2 – If Yes**

- 1) Could you tell me more about your involvement in the definition and implementation of life skills education?
- 2) Do you believe that you could participate more actively than you do today?
  - How?
- 3) Are you facing any constraints regarding your participation? (E.g. difficulties)
- 4) Are you working with any other stakeholders in the implementation of life skills?
  - Who?
- 5) What life skills do you perceive the most relevant for your child?
- 6) What life skills are taught to your child at school?
- 7) How beneficial do you believe these life skills are to your family and your local

community?

- Why?

8) Do you think “basic life skills” are more/less relevant than “local life skills”

- Why?

9) Do you think life skills education is a good thing?

### **Interviews with Students**

1) What grade are you in?

2) Do you like school?

3) What is your favourite subject in school?

4) Do you have a least favourite subject?

5) Do you use what you learn a school at home?

- For example?

- (Why?)

6) What would you like to do when you grow up?

7) Do you think that what you learn at school will help you become what you want to be?

8) If you could choose, what would you have liked to learn in school that you are not learning now?