

EE466

Political Economy of Development

Individual Essay

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Education Development of Cambodia

Every country all around the world is trying their best to find the flaws in their systems, look for the solutions, and improve the overall performance in order to develop the country and the well-being of the nation. It is widely known that a country's success is affected by the way the country operates, formulates well-planned policies and institutions, copes with its human resource and the way it improves the knowledge and skills of people in the country. Specifically, education is a key fundamental to boost economic growth rates and, hence, income level. Education is the backbone of the society because once people get education, they have a higher chance to get better jobs, high salary and good standard of living. In economic terms, it is called an accumulation of human capital as education expands people's knowledge, broadens their viewpoints and provides incentives to work. People who are well-educated will become human resource or useful citizens that help raise productivity and innovative capacity. These will reflect upon the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Poverty will also be reduced gradually.

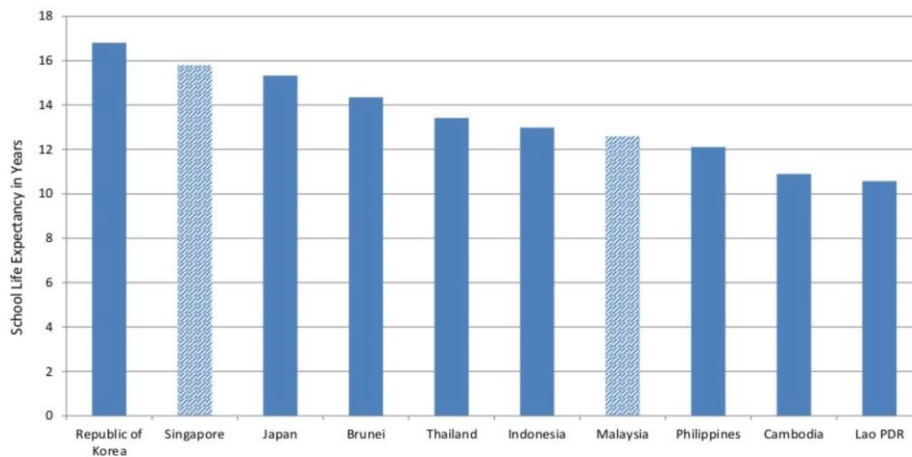
Cambodia is a developing country with GDP per capita of 1,510.32 USD and becomes a lower-middle income economy (WorldBank.Org, 2018). Surprisingly, Cambodia has a literacy rate of 74 percent and it is one of the lowest rates in Asia. There are many reasons behind this issue that government need to take into consideration. Deficiency of foundation skills (numeracy and literacy) are the concern of early childhood education, the high drop-off school rates, and the weak quality of primary and secondary education. Not to mention higher education (University level), Cambodia is still

lack of resource and development in educational system. How do we improve the level of education in Cambodia?

I am interested in this topic because when Cambodia links up with other ASEAN countries and Asian economies, the opportunities for economic development and poverty alleviation will be increased. In contrast, these chances will only be realized if certain conditions are met, thus, citizens and government (economic actors) should better take action all together. This essay will look at the education problems in Cambodia, the government policies proposed as the solutions and some suggestions that would enhance the education level of this country.

To start with, Cambodia's educational system suffered dramatically from the Khmer Rouge Regime from 1975 until 1979. Before this era, the education in Cambodia had already developed in a certain level and the government supported the widespread education. But during this regime, the country was controlled by Communist Party Kampuchea and there was evacuation of cities. There was no religion, no currency (no money), no market and no school. This regime is responsible for Cambodian Genocide. It went through a bitter phase in which 25 percent of the entire population were wiped out through genocide. The Khmer Rouge desire to bring back the peasant society meant the end for the bourgeoisie (the capitalist class). It meant that anyone who was intellectual, had an education, dare to talk about ideas were all killed. Engineers, Scientists, Lawyers, Doctors, authors, writers, poets, teachers, and academics all had been murdered in this killing fields. By the time Khmer Rouge ended, Cambodia was crippled and insufficient for human resource. All the sectors and the whole structure of the economy had been mass destroyed. Cambodia started again from the zero point to restructure the country and started with the development of human resource as it is the main factor that can lead a nation to be prosperous. However, there are some constraints stagnating the education development, and, thus, economic growth in Cambodia.

School life expectancy primary to tertiary



Source: Elizabeth Fordham, Senior Advisor, Education and skills Directorate, OECD

This graph illustrates the comparison of the school life expectancy from primary to tertiary in ASEAN countries. The average school life expectancy in Cambodia is 11 years which is relatively low compared to other countries in South East Asia. Moreover, the statistics from the Ministry of Education, Youth and sport in Cambodia demonstrated that 47.6 percent of men in Cambodia are literate, at the same time, only about 29 percent of Cambodian women can read and write. As I mentioned before, the literacy rate in Cambodia is 74 percent overall compared to literacy rate of Thailand is 95 percent, and Vietnam's literacy rate is 92.9 percent, according to UNDP's human development report. These statistics place Cambodia quite well behind to its neighboring countries. Based on the fact that foundation skills play a vital role as a path to higher learning, not to mention the standard of living, the low level of numeracy and literacy can be considered as a pressure for post-secondary students to acquire the cognitive, technical, and vocational skills that are essential for the future career. In Cambodia, almost 25 percent of students in grade three in the primary schools cannot

write a single word in the test and 55 percent of teenagers have dropped out of school. Inadequate teaching methods, teacher qualifications, policy, course outline, and resourcing also seem to relate to the problem upon poor quality of education. There are not enough schools, qualified teachers and school supplies. The learning environment has poor quality with insufficiency of basic equipment, for instance, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities which make it difficult to the students especially teenage girls and disabled children. Children with disability still face discrimination in today society and make them have less chance to receive education. Another thing is institutions in the culture of Cambodia. Many parents still cannot realize the necessity of education and give value to it. They still have mindsets that once you are a farmer, you will always be a farmer. So, it is normative that parents will not allow children to enroll in schools and this mindset is a poverty trap. Furthermore, parents in rural and undeveloped area are poor and they cannot afford to send children to school. Instead, their children must make earnings to support their families and they become the children labor since they were young. In addition, the schools are located far away from their homes. In rural areas of Cambodia, children walk from home to school up to 10 kilometers every day. They find it hard to get access to the education. That is one of the reasons that they choose to drop out.

In accordance with the Cambodian constitution, it states that “the state shall provide free primary and secondary education to all citizens in public school. Citizens shall receive education for at least nine years”. The government of Cambodia has since then made effort to improve the level of education. They try to do education reform, but it takes up to a decade to make a single reform work. The government try to deal with barriers that halt children from attending school such as remoteness, poverty, discrimination and so on. Government has provided scholarships to poor families, so they can go to school instead of working. They improve the infrastructure that make it easier for children in remote areas to access education. They have made a number of dormitories near the school campus, so those children don’t have to make daily journey anymore. The government have also improved the

school facilities with appropriate water, sanitation and hygiene supplies for boys, girls, and disabled students. Another policy of government is to focus on the quality of the education. They make financial support on the research and training of the teachers from primary to higher education level. Many campaigns have been promoted by the Ministry of education to raise awareness towards the value of education, enlighten the parents and motivate the children to attend school in order to catch the chances in the future. The Ministry has effectively revised the national curriculum, for example, textbooks, course syllabus, learning standard, hence, they can integrate the 21st century skills into the education system of Cambodia.

On the other hand, there are some problems with the government policies. According to the world bank, the government expenditure on Education in Cambodia is 8.839 percent of the total government expenditure in the country, while the government funding on military sector is nearly 20 percent. My suggestion is government should make a better national budget allocation and pay more attention to education sector. Investing in education is investing in the future of Cambodian children. Another suggestion would be the salary given to the teachers working in the system. Government should provide them with higher salary, therefore, they have incentives to teach the young fellow Cambodian people, work hard to improve the quality and don't have to charge additional fees from students that make it difficult for poor students to get the same chance as other students. The last recommendation is government should promote the soft skills such as leadership skills, critical thinking, problem solving skills to the children in Cambodia because it seems that it lacks in many aspects of the way the teachers teach in class. There is always a mismatch between what the students are learning and what the employers are seeking for. So, by encouraging students to develop soft skills, they would have another strength in their lives that help prepare them to face in the future situations.

To sum up, education is an essential sector that government and citizens should focus on and cooperate with each other to develop it leading the country to sustainable growth and achievement. I

believe that Cambodia education level will be improved rapid if the government make the rights policies favoring the children and the future of the nation.