

Effectiveness of Educational Institution Reform for the Quality of High Schools: A Case Study in High Schools in Phnom Penh

San Soeurn¹; Dr. Paradise Ros²

¹BELTEI International University, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

²Faculty of Education, Arts, and Humanities, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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Abstract

The study aims to extent the educational institution reform for the quality of high schools in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The study challenges, ranging from climate change and skill mismatch to global terrorism. Moreover, the unfolding Fourth Industrial Revolution requires new skills for young people. The research design: Qualitative approach was the main supplemented by the quantitative method. RQ1, RQ2, RQ3 were developed from an extensive literature review related to the study. 286 panelists with heterogeneous characteristics: sex, nationality, qualification, working seniority, specialization, was invited to conduct in the survey (Yamane Formula, 1976). The study's findings, based on a sample predominantly composed of male teachers (72%) and deputy school directors (42.5%) primarily from public institutions (71%), reveal the substantial impact of a specific leadership style on employee performance within Cambodia's educational sector. This highlights the necessity of employing a highly influential leadership approach to foster improved job performance. Further analysis of group discussions emphasizes the importance of student-centered learning, the use of engaging teaching methods, and the integration of technology in the classroom. However, these discussions also acknowledge key challenges, including difficulties with student focus and engagement, the need for personalized and adaptive instructional strategies, and obstacles encountered during the implementation of educational reforms. Effective management practices, characterized by clear expectations, supportive relationships, and the creation of inclusive learning environments, are identified as crucial elements for overcoming these challenges and fostering a positive educational landscape.

Keywords: *Effective, Educational institution, Reform, Quality of Education.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Cambodia has set ambitious national goals to transition into an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and achieves high-income status by 2050. A critical component of reaching these goals is the development of a skilled and competitive workforce, particularly within the ASEAN region. Recognizing that human capital is the foundation of economic growth and innovation, the Cambodian government has placed significant emphasis on improving the quality of education. While notable progress has been made since the reconstruction of the education system in 1979—particularly in increasing school enrollment rates and expanding access to basic education—serious challenges remain, especially in rural and underserved areas. These include chronic teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate infrastructure and learning materials, and alarmingly high dropout rates at the secondary level. These problems are compounded by widespread teacher absenteeism, weak school management, a lack of effective leadership, and uncompetitive teacher salaries that discourage

qualified candidates from entering or staying in the profession. To strengthen both national policy and school-level implementation by promoting accountability, enhancing teaching quality, improving learning environments, and aligning education with labor market demands—especially those of the emerging digital economy. The reform emphasized the importance of effective school leadership, transparent administration, teacher professional development, and student-centered learning. In 2023, the government launched the Pentagonal Strategy, a broader socio-economic development plan that further prioritizes human capital development. This strategy highlights the importance of not only improving education and technical and vocational training but also strengthening healthcare, expanding social protection systems, and cultivating moral and responsible citizenship. Together, these efforts reflect Cambodia's recognition that building a resilient, educated, and ethically grounded population is essential for long-term prosperity, social equity, and regional competitiveness.

➤ *Problem*

The dropout rate in Cambodian secondary schools continues to be a significant concern, underscoring persistent challenges within the public education system. This issue not only reflects students' disengagement but also highlights systemic problems such as limited access, socio-economic barriers, and inadequate support mechanisms. A critical factor contributing to educational disparities is the migration of qualified teachers from public to private schools, which exacerbates inequalities by concentrating experienced educators in better-resourced private institutions. As Hong (2023) points out, this teacher shift disrupts the balance of educational quality, potentially weakening the already vulnerable public school system and deepening the urban-rural divide in educational outcomes. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive evaluation of both teacher and student flows, alongside targeted interventions to improve teaching standards, resource allocation, and student retention within public schools. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport's rapid assessment report in 2019 highlighted the urgent need for stronger academic leadership and strategic planning to enhance learning outcomes and ensure that schools meet national education standards.

Additionally, there is a notable scarcity of studies on the integration of technology in Cambodian high schools, despite growing recognition of digital literacy as a vital skill for the 21st century. Research is also limited on how inclusive education policies are being implemented to accommodate students with diverse learning needs, including those with disabilities or from marginalized communities. Expanding knowledge in these areas is critical for ensuring equitable access to quality education and for preparing all students to thrive in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.

➤ *Research Objectives*

• *Identify Problems Affecting High School Reform Quality*

A thorough understanding of the challenges hindering the quality of high school reforms is essential. These problems may include inadequate teacher training and retention, insufficient school leadership, lack of resources and infrastructure, and poor curriculum alignment with modern skills and labor market needs. Other issues may involve high dropout rates, unequal access to education across urban and rural areas, and ineffective implementation of policy changes at the school level. Socio-economic factors, such as poverty and family support, as well as systemic issues like bureaucratic delays and limited stakeholder engagement, also play critical roles. Identifying these problems helps pinpoint where reforms fall short and what barriers prevent successful change.

• *Find Effective Strategies to Improve High School Education*

Developing and implementing effective strategies is key to overcoming the identified challenges and enhancing the quality of education. Strategies may include comprehensive professional development programs to improve teacher competency and motivation, strengthening school leadership and management, and ensuring equitable distribution of resources. Curriculum reforms that integrate critical thinking, digital literacy, and vocational skills can better prepare students for the future workforce. Additionally, fostering stronger partnerships between schools, families, and

communities encourages supportive learning environments. Leveraging technology to facilitate teaching and learning, alongside policies promoting inclusive education for all learners, are also crucial. Effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms ensure continuous improvement and accountability.

• *Highlight the Benefits of Reform in High Schools*

Educational reforms, when effectively designed and implemented, offer significant benefits to students, schools, and society at large. Improved high school education enhances student learning outcomes, reduces dropout rates, and equips young people with the skills and knowledge necessary for higher education and employment. Reforms can also promote equity by narrowing gaps in access and achievement between different regions and social groups. For schools, reforms can lead to better governance, increased teacher professionalism, and more efficient use of resources. Ultimately, high-quality education reforms contribute to national development by creating a skilled workforce, fostering social cohesion, and enabling Cambodia to compete successfully in the regional and global economy.

➤ *Research Questions*

The study centers on three critical areas of educational reform in Cambodian high schools and answer the following three questions.

- What are the educational institutions reform issues related to the quality of achieving the high school reform?
- In what ways can educational institutions reform be effective?
- What are the benefits of educational institution reform in high schools?

➤ *Significance*

This study holds significant importance for a wide range of stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, school leaders, and policymakers, each of whom plays a crucial role in the educational ecosystem. For students, understanding the effects of reforms sheds light on how changes influence their learning experiences, academic achievement, and future opportunities. For teachers, the study highlights how reforms affect their professional development, instructional practices, job satisfaction, and motivation, which are essential for maintaining high teaching standards. Parents gain valuable insights into how reforms impact their trust and engagement with schools, which is vital for fostering supportive home environments and encouraging student success. Moreover, this research contributes to strengthening collaboration between schools and families, which is essential for creating cohesive support systems around students. By identifying both successes and areas needing improvement, the study empowers stakeholders to make informed decisions that enhance teaching quality, promote equity, and improve overall school performance.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Table 1 Leadership Dimensions Derived on Student Outcomes

Leadership Dimension	Meaning of Dimension	Effect Size Estimate
1. Establishing Goals and Expectations	Includes the setting, communicating and monitoring of learning goals, standards and expectations, and the involvement of staff and others in the process so that there is clarity and consensus about goals.	Average ES = 0.35 (SE=.08) 49 effect sizes from 7 studies
2. Strategic Resourcing	Involves aligning resource selection and allocation to priority teaching goals. Includes provision of appropriate expertise through staff recruitment.	Average ES = 0.34 (SE=.09) 11 effect sizes from 7 studies
3. Planning, Coordinating and Evaluating Teaching and the Curriculum	Direct involvement in the support and evaluation of teaching through regular classroom visits and the provision of formative and summative feedback to teachers. Direct oversight of curriculum through school-wide coordination across classes and year levels and alignment to school goals.	Average ES = 0.42 (SE=.07) 79 effect sizes from 7 studies
4. Promoting and Participating in Teacher Learning and Development.	Leadership that not only promotes, but directly participates with teachers in, formal or informal professional learning.	Average ES = 0.84 (SE=.14) 17 effect sizes from 6 studies
5. Ensuring an Orderly and Supportive Environment	Protecting time for teaching and learning by reducing external pressures and interruptions and establishing an orderly and supportive environment both inside and outside classrooms.	Average ES = 0.27 (SE=.09) 42 effect sizes from 8 studies

➤ *Education Reform Experiences*

Strong partnerships between teachers and parents are essential for addressing the holistic needs of students, especially in the context of modern educational challenges such as increased academic pressure, rapid technological change, and limited family time due to economic demands. These partnerships foster mutual understanding, shared responsibility, and consistent support for children’s academic and emotional development. As Epstein (1995) emphasizes, effective and ongoing communication between schools and families is a foundational element in cultivating trust and collaboration. Similarly, Schussler (2003) highlights the importance of these relationships in creating strong, supportive learning communities that contribute to student success and school improvement.

Enhancing the quality and effectiveness of the education sector also requires robust leadership and management at every level—from central authorities to individual school administrators. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), through its Education Strategic Plan (2014–2018), underlines the need for building leadership capacity through systematic, sustainable, and context-sensitive approaches. This includes equipping school principals and educational staff with skills in strategic planning, financial management, data-driven decision-making, and inclusive policy implementation. Strengthening leadership at the grassroots level ensures that reform initiatives are not only well-designed but also executed efficiently and equitably across diverse educational contexts. Moreover, sustainable improvements in education quality demand a comprehensive, system-wide approach. This involves reinforcing institutional structures, investing in human resource development, and cultivating a positive organizational culture that values collaboration, accountability, and innovation. Developing the professional competencies of educators and administrators, aligning school goals with national education objectives, and

implementing clear performance standards are key strategies for building a resilient education system. Efficient leadership and well-coordinated program management are critical to ensuring that reforms are long-lasting and responsive to changing societal needs. Ultimately, such systemic strengthening promotes not only improved student outcomes but also broader national development through a more educated, skilled, and empowered population.

➤ *Teaching Quality and Highly Qualified Teachers*

The author critically examines the contradiction between the expectations placed on teachers and the constraints imposed by standardized educational policies. On one hand, reforms such as the No Child Left behind (NCLB) Act stress the importance of teachers being highly qualified in their subject areas, highlighting the need for deep content knowledge and pedagogical expertise. On the other hand, these same policies often advocate for simplified, uniform, and scripted teaching materials that prioritize procedural compliance over pedagogical creativity. This creates a tension in educational practice: teachers are held to high professional standards, yet are frequently limited to implementing rigid, one-size-fits-all curricula that undermine their autonomy and professional judgment.

Such technical and mechanical approaches to teaching reduce educators to deliverers of content, rather than facilitators of learning. They discourage innovation, responsiveness, and contextual adaptation—all of which are critical for effective teaching, especially in diverse classrooms. True quality teaching is inherently dynamic and interactive; it involves continuous assessment of student understanding, cultural sensitivity, and the flexibility to modify strategies in real time to meet individual and community needs. Reducing teaching to a scripted checklist neglects the social, emotional, and intellectual dimensions of the classroom.

➤ *Teacher Quality*

The study explores the relationship between various forms of teacher education and training and their impact on student achievement, revealing important insights into what truly contributes to teaching effectiveness. It finds that the most significant gains in teacher productivity occur through practical, on-the-job experience, particularly during the initial years of teaching. These early years serve as a formative period, where teachers refine their classroom management skills, pedagogical strategies, and understanding of student needs. Notably, the research indicates that this professional growth continues beyond the five-year mark, suggesting that long-term classroom engagement remains a key driver of

teacher development and effectiveness. In contrast, formal professional development programs show mixed and often inconsistent results in terms of enhancing teacher productivity. While some structured training initiatives yield improvements—especially in content-specific areas such as middle school mathematics—many others fail to translate into measurable student achievement gains. This inconsistency may stem from differences in program quality, lack of alignment with classroom realities, or the absence of sustained follow-up support for teachers after training sessions. The study highlights the need for professional development to be targeted, ongoing, and embedded within the context of teachers’ daily work to maximize its impact.

Table 2 Summary List of Literature Database

Types of Materials	No. of Items
Journal articles	65
Policy document/ Report /Strategic paper	75
Books	100
Research paper	85
Speech / slides/ You tube	8
Total	333

III. METHODOLOGY

The researcher uses a Taro Yamane formula for calculating the sample size of 7 general high schools. Yamane Formula:
 $n = \frac{N}{1 + N [(e)]^2} = \frac{1000}{1 + 1000([0.05])^2} = 286$

Step 1: Yamane Formula (1967)

Where:

- n = sample size
- N = total population
- e = margin of error (MoE)

Given:

- $N=1000$ (Total population)
- $e=0.05$ (Margin of error = 5%)

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1000}{1 + 1000(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1000}{1 + 1000(0.0025)} = \frac{1000}{1 + 2.5}$$

$$n = \frac{1000}{3.5} = 286$$

Sample Size: 286

Step 2: Adjust the Sample Size to 200

Now, suppose for practical reasons, you decide to work with a smaller sample size of 200 (instead of 286). You already have the real participant counts:

Group	Count
School Directors	7
Deputy Directors	7
Teachers/Students/Parents	186
Total	200

Step 3: Percentage Proportion by Group

$$\text{School Director \%} = \frac{7}{200} \times 100 = 3.5\%$$

$$\text{Deputy Directors \%} = \frac{7}{200} \times 100 = 3.5\%$$

$$\text{Teachers, Students, Parents \%} = \frac{186}{200} \times 100 = 93\%$$

Final Output Table: Proportional Allocation Based on Sample Size (N = 200)

Group	Count	% of Total (N=200)
School Directors	7	3.5%
Deputy Directors	7	3.5%
Teachers/Students/Parents	186	93%
Total	200	100%

The research design for this study is grounded in the qualitative method, which is particularly effective for exploring complex human behaviors, social dynamics, and the deeper meanings behind individuals' actions and beliefs. Unlike quantitative methods that emphasize numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research prioritizes rich, descriptive insights, making it ideal for investigating multifaceted issues like educational reform. It employs data collection tools such as in-depth interviews, direct observations, and content analysis, which allow researchers to engage closely with participants and understand their lived experiences in context. The mixed method approach was originally an outgrowth of the "triangulation of methods" movement. The main goal of triangulation is to confirm a study's results by using qualitative and quantitative methods. A mixed method approach, however, goes beyond the initial goal of triangulation (confirmation of results using different methods or data sets), using multiple methods to also gain a better understanding (comprehension) of results, discover new perspectives, or develop new measurement tools (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998, p.43). Thus, there are two broad goals of using mixed methods—confirmation and comprehension of results (Shih 1998; Thurmond 2001). Confirmation is broadly defined as the convergence of

findings from two different data sets and has been operationalized by two general approaches in the literature.

➤ *Setting and Participants*

This study will be conducted in 7 general high schools in Phnom Penh, carefully selected for their direct involvement in recent educational reform initiatives implemented by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). These schools serve as critical sites for investigation, as they reflect both the diversity of the Cambodian educational landscape and the varying degrees of reform implementation across different regions, including urban, semi-urban, and rural contexts. The research will involve (n=286) including teachers and students. This purposefully selected sample represents a broad and balanced range of perspectives within the school community. School principals and deputy principals are included due to their strategic roles in policy interpretation, administrative leadership, and implementation management. Their insights are invaluable for understanding systemic and structural challenges, such as resource allocation, staff capacity, and accountability mechanisms.

➤ *Data Collection*

This study employs a fully qualitative data collection approach designed to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of stakeholders' experiences, perceptions, and responses to educational reforms in Cambodian high schools. Recognizing the complexity and context-specific nature of reform implementation, the study utilizes three interrelated qualitative methods: case studies, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis. Together, these methods provide a robust framework for capturing the voices of those directly engaged in the reform process. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a diverse group of participants, including school principals, deputy principals, teachers, and students. These interviews, lasting approximately 10 to 15 minutes, are designed to be flexible, allowing participants to express their thoughts freely while still focusing on key themes relevant to the study. Depending on participants' preferences and logistical constraints, interviews will be carried out either face-to-face or via digital platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet. All interviews will be audio-recorded with informed consent to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the data, and subsequently transcribed verbatim for in-depth analysis.

➤ *Data Analysis*

The data analysis process for this study adopts a rigorous qualitative approach, emphasizing the interpretation and contextualization of the rich, descriptive data gathered through interviews and case studies. Following the completion of data collection, all recorded interviews will be transcribed verbatim to ensure the authenticity and completeness of participants' responses. The transcribed data will then be subjected to thematic content analysis, a widely respected qualitative technique that allows for the systematic identification, organization, and interpretation of recurring ideas and themes. To ensure a comprehensive and balanced analysis, data will be examined within and across participant groups—including school principals, deputy principals, teachers, and students. This comparative analysis will highlight areas of agreement, divergence, and unique perspectives, revealing how each stakeholder group experiences and interprets the reforms differently. For instance, school leaders may focus on strategic and administrative barriers, while students may emphasize changes in classroom engagement or learning outcomes. Ultimately, this analytical approach will generate evidence-based insights into the real-world implementation of educational reforms in Cambodia. It will contribute to a deeper understanding of the multi-dimensional factors shaping reform outcomes and offer valuable recommendations for enhancing the quality and effectiveness of future educational policies and practices.

➤ *Findings*

• *Demographic Data of Respondents*

The data reveals a group where males constitute a significant majority (72%) compared to females (28%), indicating a potential gender imbalance within this population. Most individuals are primarily identified as either Teachers, students and parents (93%) suggesting these roles are prevalent within this group, with the same fraction holding the positions of School Directors and Deputy of School Directors (3.5%). The majority of the individuals are

employed by public institutions (71%), with a smaller percentage working in private institutions (29%). In terms of academic qualifications, most hold a Bachelor's Degree (71%), while the remaining portion has attained a Master's Degree (29%). The age distribution shows that the largest segment is between 21 and 30 years old (22.5%), followed by those aged 31-40 years old (17%), 41-50 years old (18.5%), 51-60 years old (14.5%), and more than 60 years old (16.5%). The primary methods of personal contact are phone (45%) and Telegram (42.5%), with email being less common (12.5%). Professionally, half of the group possesses expertise in TEFL/TESOL (50%), while other areas such as Educational Administration (25%), Human Resources (5%), Management (5%), Finance & Business (5%), Public Administration (5%), and Law (5%) have considerably smaller representations. The participants are affiliated with various schools, with Tuol Prasat Sen Sok High School (19.5%), Cheasim Charnosuroth High School (18%), and Prek Phnoy High School (15.5%) having the highest representation, followed by Russey Keo High School (14.5%), BELTEI International School (15%), The Westline School (8%), and Preak Leab High School (9.5%). In terms of professional experience, the majority of participants have below 5 years of experience (70.5%), with a smaller portion having 6-10 years (27.5%), and very few having 11-20 years (1.5%) or more than 21 years (0.5%).

The study's findings, based on a sample predominantly composed of male teachers (72%) and deputy school directors (42.5%) primarily from public institutions (71%), reveal the substantial impact of a specific leadership style on employee performance within Cambodia's educational sector. This highlights the necessity of employing a highly influential leadership approach to foster improved job performance. Further analysis of group discussions emphasizes the importance of student-centered learning, the use of engaging teaching methods, and the integration of technology in the classroom. However, these discussions also acknowledge key challenges, including difficulties with student focus and engagement, the need for personalized and adaptive instructional strategies, and obstacles encountered during the implementation of educational reforms. Effective management practices, characterized by clear expectations, supportive relationships, and the creation of inclusive learning environments, are identified as crucial elements for overcoming these challenges and fostering a positive educational landscape.

Table 3 Respondents' Demographic Table (Field Data, 2025)

Personal Information	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	144	72%
	Female	56	28%
Position	School Director	7	3.5%
	Deputy of school director	7	3.5%
	Teacher/Students/Parents	186	93%
institutions	Public	142	71%
	Private	58	29%
Professional qualification	Bachelor's Degree	142	71%
	Master's Degree	58	29%
Age	Below 10 years old	22	11%
	21-30 years old	45	22.5%
	31- 40 years old	34	17%
	41- 50 years old	37	18.5%
	51- 60 years old	29	14.5%
	More than 60 years old	33	16.5%
Personal contacts	Email	25	12.5%
	telegram	86	42.5%
	phone	90	45%
Professional expert /area	TEFL / TESOL	100	50%
	Educational Administration	50	25%
	Human Resource	10	5%
	Management	10	5%
	Finance & Business	10	5%
	Public Administration	10	5%
	Law	10	5%
Name of school	Cheasim Chamroeunroth High School	36	18%
	Prek Phnov High School	31	15.5%
	Russey keo High School	29	14.5%
	Prek Leab High School	19	9.5%
	Tuol Prasat Sen Sok High School	39	19.5%
	The Westline School	16	8%
	BELTEI International School	30	15%
Experiences	Below 5 years	141	70.5%
	6-10 years	55	27.5%
	11-20 years	3	1.5%
	More than 21 years	1	0.5%

Table 4 Perspectives on Educational Institution Reforms

Category	Subgroup	Key Findings
Challenges	School Directors	- 5 (71%): Budget constraints, reluctance to change - 2 (29%): Policy inconsistency, limited stakeholder involvement
	Deputy Directors	- 5 (71%): Curriculum implementation, lack of training - 2 (29%): Student assessment, learning material issues
	Teachers, Students, Parents	- Concerns: Access to resources, school transparency, limited voice in reform
Efficacy of Reforms	Instructors, Students & Parents	- 138 (74%): Positive on professional development & resources - 48 (26%): Noted inconsistencies & need for admin support - Support for individualized learning, family engagement, student well-being
	Deputy Directors	- 4 (57%): Collaborative leadership - 3 (43%): Stronger policy frameworks needed
Perceived Benefits	School Directors	- 5 (71%): Improved management, teaching, student outcomes - 2 (29%): Implementation issues
	Deputy Directors	- 5 (71%): Enhanced teacher engagement, participation, admin efficiency
	Teachers, Students, Parents	- 149 (80%): Improved engagement, performance, and school environment

Table 5 Challenges and Achievements in Educational Reform – Phnom Penh

Category	Subgroup	Key Findings
Challenges	School Directors	- 71%: Faced resistance to change, policy inconsistencies, and limited resources
	Deputy Directors	- 29%: Reported similar major challenges - 66%: Inadequate budget and insufficient training
	Teachers, Students, Parents (n = 186)	- Reported challenges in reform implementation and lack of resources
Stakeholder Involvement	School Directors	- 57%: Lack of stakeholder buy-in - 29%: Improved collaboration due to better communication and leadership
	Deputy Directors	- 14%: Believed existing resources could support gradual reform
Curriculum Reform	All Stakeholders	- Strong support for reducing focus on standardized testing - Emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, emotional development
Communication	All Stakeholders	- Transparent communication improves stakeholder confidence, collaboration, and reform commitment
Global Preparedness	School Directors	- 71%: Curriculum should meet international standards with critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork
Achievements	All Stakeholders	- 82%: Stressed digital literacy and technological fluency
	All Participants	- Growth in student leadership - Better teacher collaboration - Successful integration of digital learning
	All Stakeholders	- Effective student management seen as vital for a supportive and productive school environment
	All Stakeholders	- Effective student management seen as vital for a supportive and productive school environment

Table 6 Qualitative Insights on Educational Reform in Phnom Penh

Thematic Category	Subgroup	Key Insights & Statistics
1. Student-Centered Education & Pedagogical Needs	School Directors	- 4 (57%) supported student-centered classrooms (relevance, inclusion, engagement)
	Deputy Directors	- 5 (71%) emphasized student-centered teaching strategies
2. Barriers to Effective Learning	Teachers, Students, Parents	- 132 (71%) valued clarity, patience, real-world relevance in teaching- 54 (29%) noted traditional methods still dominate
	School/Deputy Directors	- Identified distractions, irrelevant curriculum, exam pressure, and pacing issues as obstacles
	Teachers, Students, Parents	- 140 (75%) cited mismatches in teaching vs. learning styles, overload, poor assessment alignment
3. Transformational Changes in Education	School Directors	- 6 (86%) observed tech-driven learning transformations
	Deputy Directors	- All 7 (100%) agreed on tech's value in personalizing education
	Teachers, Students, Parents	- 135 (73%) noted global content, inclusive teaching, and diverse assessment improvements
4. Student Achievements in Reformed Settings	School Directors	- 5 (71%) saw enhanced student leadership, peer mentoring, and initiative
	Deputy Directors	- 6 (86%) observed better real-world knowledge application
	Teachers, Students, Parents	- 140 (75%) reported improvements in grades, understanding, and collaboration skills
5. Call for Further Reform	School Directors	- 6 (86%) urged ongoing reform to meet modern needs
	Deputy Directors	- All 7 (100%) stressed urgency of reform
	Teachers, Students, Parents	- 132 (71%) supported reforms for engagement & readiness- 54 (29%) had doubts about capacity/infrastructure
6. Strengths & Weaknesses in Reform	School Directors	- 4 praised modernization & student focus- 3 (43%) cited poor implementation
	Deputy Directors	- 5 (71%) noted weak teacher training, inconsistent application
	Teachers, Students, Parents	- 80 (43%) shared concerns over planning gaps and lack of follow-up
7. Perceptions of STEM Education	School Directors	- 5 (71%) valued STEM for hands-on relevance
	Deputy Directors	- 6 (86%) praised STEM for future preparation
	Teachers, Students, Parents	- 145 (78%) said STEM fosters creativity and critical thinking- Concerns: teacher readiness, funding, access
8. Key Conditions for Effective Reform	All Directors	- 100% stressed ongoing teacher development
	School Directors	- 5 (71%) highlighted student voice in policy/classroom
	Teachers, Students, Parents	- 132 (71%) emphasized: ① Clear, realistic reform goals ② Transparent school-family communication ③ Long-term sustainability ④ Flexibility for local adaptation ⑤ Community ownership and engagement

IV. DISCUSSION

Cambodia's education system faces multifaceted challenges that are often not fully addressed in standard textbook chapters. A major issue is the shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in rural areas, which contributes to low educational quality and high student dropout rates. This is compounded by overcrowded classrooms, even when enrollment numbers are relatively low, which makes effective learning difficult. Poor leadership and weak school management practices further hinder educational outcomes, as does the inequitable allocation of resources between urban and rural schools. Despite multiple waves of educational reform, outcomes remain limited due to inadequate implementation, lack of clear policy indicators, and insufficient oversight. Another critical gap lies in the limited involvement of parents and local communities, which plays a key role in creating a supportive learning environment. Additionally, student engagement and motivation are often neglected in reform efforts, yet they are essential for improving academic performance. The quality of teaching is under scrutiny, with debates on how best to assess and enhance it, especially in a context where many reforms rely on rigid, scripted approaches that can limit teacher autonomy and creativity.

Leadership in education is also a vital factor, with research showing that transformational school leadership can significantly motivate teachers and improve student outcomes. However, ongoing teacher training and professional development remain inconsistent, limiting the capacity for instructional improvement. A more innovative approach to teaching, focused on student-centered learning and engagement, is needed to make education more relevant and effective. Curriculum development must also be aligned with labor market demands to prepare students for real-world employment opportunities. At the policy level, stronger frameworks and sustainable financial support for schools are necessary to ensure that reforms are implemented equitably and effectively. Lastly, cultural attitudes toward education and parental involvement play a significant role in shaping student success, yet these are often overlooked in top-down policy approaches. Addressing these deeper systemic issues is crucial for improving education in Cambodia and achieving long-term national development goals.

➤ *Explain the Findings*

Educational reforms in Cambodian high schools, led by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS), aim to enhance access, quality, and inclusivity in alignment with national development goals for Cambodia to become an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050. The research findings highlight several key areas of concern and opportunity. One major gap in the current literature is the lack of in-depth exploration of stakeholder perspectives, including those of students, parents, teachers, and community members, whose views are essential for understanding the real impact of reforms. Furthermore, the effectiveness of educational reforms is shaped by cultural, economic, and geographic factors that are often overlooked, resulting in strategies that may not fully meet local needs. Technological integration and inclusive education practices remain under-examined, particularly regarding access disparities and support for students with diverse learning

needs. Although primary education enrollment rates are high, rural areas continue to struggle with teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and resource limitations, all of which affect the overall quality of education.

The study also finds that effective leadership, especially from school principals, plays a critical role in school performance, influencing both teacher motivation and student outcomes. Additionally, collaborative efforts between the government, schools, and civil society are essential for addressing systemic challenges and implementing sustainable reforms. The research was designed to explore the quality and impact of reforms, identify effective implementation strategies, and assess the benefits to school operations and student learning. However, limitations exist, such as a lack of measurable outcome indicators tied to policy goals and reliance on data that may not fully reflect current realities. These limitations point to the need for further research that deeply investigates stakeholder experiences, evaluates the success of reform measures, and examines inclusivity and learning outcomes. Overall, the findings reveal the complex nature of educational reform in Cambodia and emphasize that long-term success will depend on understanding local contexts, engaging stakeholders meaningfully, and strengthening school leadership and collaboration at all levels.

➤ *Compare the Findings to Previous Research*

Recent studies on educational reforms in Cambodia reflect both continuity and progress in comparison to previous research, highlighting enduring themes and evolving strategies within the education sector. A major point of alignment is the focus on human resource development, particularly enhancing the capacities of teachers and school principals—an area consistently identified in past studies as critical for improving educational quality. Similarly, infrastructure remains a significant concern, especially in rural areas where challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and teacher shortages persist, echoing earlier findings. Community engagement continues to play a pivotal role, with both historical and current research emphasizing the value of involving local stakeholders, such as through community teacher boards, to foster ownership and enhance educational outcomes. The shift in policy from supply-side to demand-side interventions signals an important evolution, suggesting that reforms are increasingly tailored to local needs, addressing critiques of past approaches that often failed to consider context-specific factors. School leadership and management also remain central to reform efforts, with both past and present studies underscoring the importance of strategic and proactive leadership in driving school improvement. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges, reinforcing earlier research about the education system's vulnerability to external disruptions and highlighting the need for resilience planning. Additionally, strong correlations between educational reforms and improved student learning outcomes continue to be affirmed, particularly where effective teaching practices are in place. However, long-standing issues such as socio-economic disparities in access and quality remain unresolved, with recent findings reiterating earlier concerns about inequality, especially in underserved communities. In conclusion, current research builds upon and reinforces previous findings, pointing to the need for sustained investment in human

capital, inclusive community involvement, responsive policymaking, and leadership development, while also addressing persistent equity challenges and the evolving demands of a post-pandemic educational landscape.

➤ *Summary of Key Findings*

This study explored the key issues related to educational institution reform in Cambodian high schools, offering a detailed examination of the structural and systemic challenges that continue to hinder progress in educational quality. The findings reveal several interrelated obstacles, including a significant shortage of qualified and professional teachers in public schools, especially in rural and underserved areas. This shortage contributes to inconsistent instruction, larger class sizes, and reduced student engagement. Additionally, weak school-based management and leadership further limit the ability of schools to implement reforms effectively. Many principals and school leaders lack the necessary training and support to drive meaningful changes, resulting in poor accountability and inefficient resource use.

High dropout rates—particularly among students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds—remain a pressing concern, often linked to financial hardship, lack of motivation, and the perceived low value of continued education. Compounding these issues is a persistent shortage of essential teaching and learning materials, which undermines both the teaching process and student learning outcomes.

Despite these challenges, the study also highlights efforts by the Cambodian government to address these issues through various reform strategies. Notably, the Education Strategic Plan 2019–2023 and the Pentagonal Strategy emphasize strengthening human resource development, improving teacher training and professional development, enhancing school leadership, and promoting inclusive and equitable access to quality education. These strategic reforms are designed not only to raise academic standards but also to modernize the education system in line with Cambodia’s broader goals for national development, such as preparing students for participation in a knowledge-based economy and reducing poverty through education. However, the study suggests that the success of these reforms will depend on consistent implementation, sufficient funding, ongoing monitoring, and strong collaboration between schools, communities, and policymakers.

➤ *Implications of the Study*

The implications of the study show that effective educational reform can bring transformative change by significantly enhancing teaching quality, improving student academic performance, and fostering stronger collaboration between schools, parents, and communities. When reforms are well-designed and properly implemented, they create a more supportive and engaging learning environment that benefits all stakeholders.

One of the most important implications is the recognition that teachers and school leaders are not just implementers of policy but key drivers of reform success. Their active participation in the design, adaptation, and execution of reforms ensures that changes are grounded in the real needs of schools and responsive to the unique challenges faced in diverse educational settings—urban, rural, and

remote. When educators are empowered and equipped with proper training, resources, and leadership support, their motivation and professionalism increase, which directly contributes to better teaching practices and classroom outcomes.

The research also underscores that reforms are more effective when they are inclusive and participatory, involving meaningful engagement from students, parents, and local communities. This shared responsibility builds a sense of ownership and accountability, leading to increased trust and cooperation among stakeholders. When families and communities are involved, they are more likely to support school activities, monitor student progress, and contribute to a positive school culture.

Furthermore, the study highlights the need for reforms to be context-sensitive and sustainable. Policies and strategies should reflect the realities of the Cambodian education system, considering economic limitations, cultural values, and geographical disparities. Sustainability requires ongoing capacity building, consistent funding, and mechanisms for monitoring and feedback to continuously refine and adjust the reforms based on evidence.

Ultimately, the implications suggest that educational reform is not a one-time event but a dynamic, long-term process that requires collaboration, adaptability, and shared vision. When all stakeholders are meaningfully involved, reforms are more likely to succeed in raising educational standards, reducing inequality, and contributing to national development goals.

➤ *Suggestions for Future Research*

For future research, it is strongly recommended to include comprehensive case studies from both urban and rural high schools to enable a clearer comparison of how educational reforms impact different contexts. This comparative approach will help identify unique challenges and opportunities faced by schools in diverse geographical areas. In addition, future studies should prioritize collecting direct, first-hand feedback from a wide range of stakeholders, including students, teachers, school leaders, and parents. Their lived experiences offer valuable insights into the practical implementation and effects of reforms, which are often not fully captured by policy reports or administrative data. Moreover, special attention should be paid to the integration of digital technology in high school education, particularly in light of the global shift toward digital learning accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding the effectiveness, accessibility, and limitations of digital tools can help shape more inclusive and modern educational practices. Inclusive education should also be a key focus, ensuring that reforms meet the needs of students with disabilities, diverse learning styles, and marginalized backgrounds. By addressing these areas, future research can contribute to the development of stronger, evidence-based educational policies. These findings will support policymakers and educational leaders in designing sustainable, context-sensitive, and forward-thinking strategies that enhance teaching quality, equity, and learning outcomes across Cambodia’s education system.

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