



RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

M.Ed. In TESL Program Country Informational Reports

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CAMBODIA

Education in Transition

Geographic Location

- Cambodia is location in Southeast Asia bordered by Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and the Gulf of Thailand.
- The terrain is varied, from flat plains mid country to mountainous regions near the borders.
- The climate has both wet and dry seasons. During the wet season, May to October, monsoon rains may occur (Naron, 2012).





It's People

- As of July 2012, the total population Cambodia was estimated at 14,952,655 (Index Mundi, 2012).
- The population rate, since 1998, has been on the decline from a rate of 2.4% to 1.67% in 2011. Primary reasons for the decline are higher HIV/AIDS mortality rates and trend in reducing family size in both urban and rural areas (Naron, 2012).
- Ethnic Groups: 90% Khmer, 5% Vietnamese, 1% Chinese, 4% Unspecified.
- Religions: Buddhist (official) 96.4%, Muslim 2.1%, Other 1.3% and Unspecified, 0.2%
- Languges: Khmer (official) 95%, French, English (Index Mundi, 2012).
- Poverty: 31% or nearly 1/3 of Cambodian families live below the poverty line of \$.61/day (CIA, 2011).

Literacy

- As of 2004, the literacy rate for the Cambodian people defined at those over 15 years was 73.6% (Index Mundi, 2012)
- 84% of men and 64.1% of women were literate. The percentage of literate women saw an increase in the past decade from 50% to the current 64.1% (Naron, 2012). Still, there exists an overall gender gap.
- The literacy rate for children ages 10-14 has also seen growth. In 1998, 67.6% of children were literate and this grew to 87.6% in 2008 (Naron, 2012).
- Goal of education: Students will attain a foundation knowledge of Khmer language, Khmer literature and mathematics (UNESCO, 2010/11).



Tumultuous History

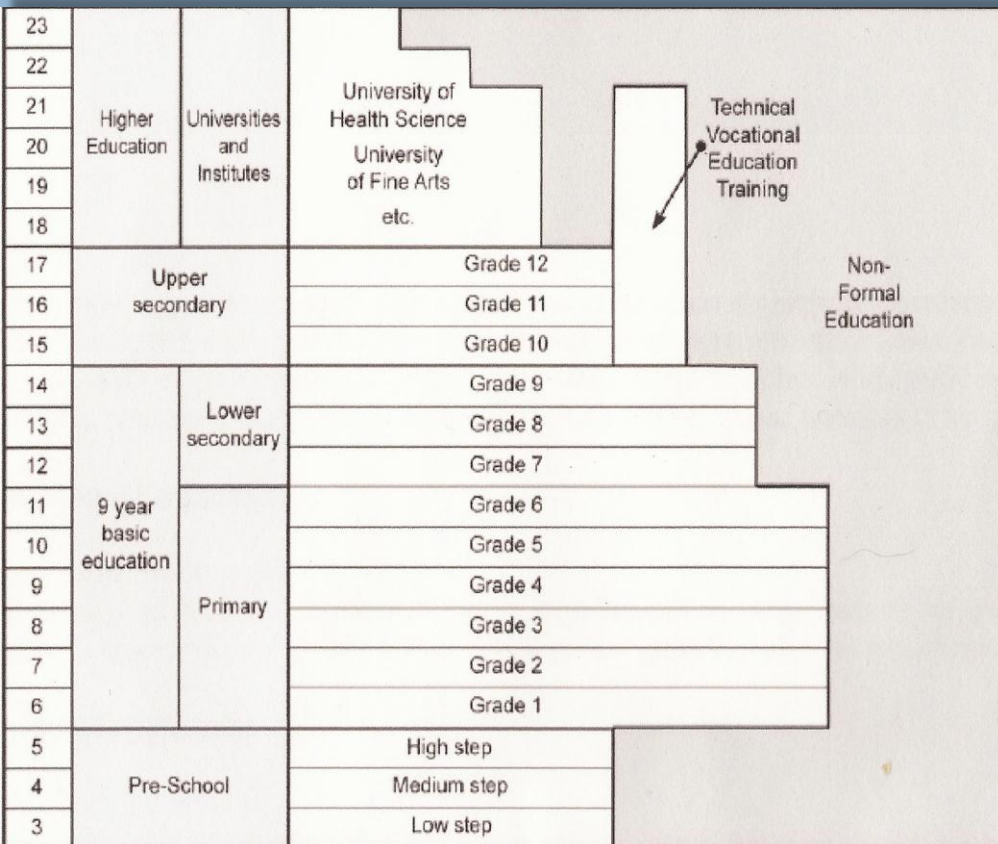
- In 1970's, the Khmer Rouge regime, indigenous Communist guerrilla movement, came to power.
- Their political agenda was to rebuild a nation under the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) against individualism, promoted communal property, the abolition of currency, and a self sufficient rural life. With the abolition of religion and eradication of the educational system, all the traditionally rich forms of Cambodian community were destroyed.
- Khmer Rouge forced millions back into the rural areas, killing nearly 1.8 million in the process. During this time, 75-80% of teachers and higher education students fled or were killed.
- These tumultuous times, left the Cambodian people with an inherent mistrust of government and a missing social element whose effects are still being felt thirty plus years later.

(Pellini, 2005)

General Objectives

- By providing children inclusive, easily accessed high quality education, Cambodia will eventually see a decline in poverty and socioeconomic growth (Pellini, 2005).
- The Education Strategic Plan 2009-2013 provides for the imparting of a culture of peace, respect for human rights, for freedom, democracy and justice while instilling a culture of nonviolence, drug use, human trafficking and social discrimination.
- Education Law promulgated in December 2007, states that every citizen has the right to a free quality education of at least 9 years.
- The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) is charged with gradually developing policy and a strategic plan so ALL students receive the education mandated by law (Pellini, 2005)
- The MoEYS is adopting more Western ideals in it's pursuit of quality education for all.
(UNESCO, 2010/11)

Schooling



Statistics:

13% enrolled in pre-primary school.

95% of girls and 96% of boys in primary school.

80% of children enrolled in secondary education. (UNESCO, 2010)

However, several factors impede education:

Children from rural areas may be a distance from the school thus making communication difficult.

Rural children may be pressed into service on family farms.

Rural families lack the funds traditionally "charged" by teachers to supplement their meager income.

Generally, male student enrollment had been greater, but female enrollment is on the rise.

Currently, schooling is compulsory for all children nine years, primary (grades 1-6) and lower secondary (grades 7-9) (UNESCO, 2010/11)

School Structure

- Starting in 1992, schools begin using a cluster model for education with the intent of improving instruction.
- Clustering is defined as organizing contiguous schools to form a mutual support network.
- This attempt at the decentralization of education, was intended to give schools more autonomy, but then depended heavily on community support.
- Community support for education is high.
- Communities often provide monetary support as well as labor to maintain school buildings.

(Pellini, 2005)





Teaching

- The educational curriculum promotes life-long learning, a strong foundation of the Khmer language and literature, as well as mathematics, responsible citizenship, life-skills and foreign language study is an priority.
- The qualifications for teaching have become more rigorous. Currently, teachers must complete 12 years of school plus one additional year at the National Institute of education.
- Salaries for teachers are low compared to the amount of work required. Teachers were often compensated extra by parents due to the low salaries (Verhoeve, 2008).
- Classrooms are often open air, poorly constructed edifices.
- Teaching and curriculum materials are insufficient or non existent, especially in more rural areas.

(UNESCO, 2010/11)

Viewpoints

- Cambodian/US relations since the 1970's has been on, off and on again. Since 1993, Cambodia and the Us have enjoyed a positive relationship (U.S. State Department, 2012)
- In the 1980's, the United States has seen increased immigration from Cambodia. This is mostly associated with the unrest within Cambodia and people trying to flee the Khmer Rouge (Advocates, 2011).
- The Cambodian people settled in many states: Texas, Pennsylvania, Virginia, New York, Minnesota, and Illinois. The most concentrated areas of settlement were Los Angeles and Massachusetts (Advocates, 2011).

Values

- Today's Cambodian immigrants value education. Not only do they value learning English, but maintaining their native Khmer written and oral language.
- In a recent paper out of University of Massachusetts, Boston, Smith-Hefner reports 95% of Boston area parents are interested in bilingual education for their child.
- In the Cambodian culture, teachers are revered in that parents adopt a 'hands off' policy toward their child's education. The parents entrust the care of the child's mind to the learned teacher.
- However, it is the responsibility of the child to do the learning. Parents are reluctant to push child academically. According to Smith-Hefner, "Many Khmer parents feel that their attempts to direct the course of their children's lives are deeply constrained or limited by the personal character of each child."

(Smith-Hefner, 1990)

How Does Schooling Fit?

- The Cambodian People's social structure is based on a hierarchy and those seen as being above you are afforded much respect. For example, children taught from early age to respect their elders and people in the community, like, teachers (Pellini, 2005)
- Within Khmer families, education is valued, but many be seen as a means to an end. Khmer parents generally want their children to be literate in both English, for advancement in the United States, and in Khmer. Khmer parents stressed that it was important for their children to be literate in

Khmer for communication and with the hopes returning to Cambodia one day (Smith-Hefner, 1990).



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