

# Barriers of student centered approach in cambodia



Attard, Iorio, Geven, & Santa (2010) mentioned that in teaching and learning process, there are always two teaching approaches combined so that the objectives are obtained satisfactorily. Both of them are student-centered approach (SCA) and teacher-centered approach.

But, it is an active-learning style or SCA which helps students to build up their knowledge. Through their peer-collaborative work, real observation, and group discussion, students enable to reach deeper understanding the content of the lesson. In a result, the outcome of learning will be considerably high-reliable. This could reduce dropout rate since they are happy, understand, and also feel confident that they are strong enough for higher education (Nith, Wright, Hor, Bredenburg, & Singh, 2010; Bonwell, Charles, Eison, & Jame, 2000).

After the World Conference on Education for All, Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, Cambodia tried its own effort to improve basic education. It increases not only the enrollment, but also the quality of teaching through technical assistance from some organization such as Save Norway, UNICEF, USAID, and the Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE). Regarding to the quality of teaching, the ministry of education, youth, and sports (MoEYS) applied SCA in instruction and curricula (Ginsburg, 2009).

Even most teachers are already familiar with SCA, the outcome of students' achievement is not satisfied yet. As Noun, former director of Kandal regional teacher training college (RTTC Kandal), mentioned that there were not enough teaching materials for teacher trainers to use for explaining difficult concepts of lesson and that more materials needed to be developed. There

are still some constraints which are challenged in applying SCA such as not-full-understanding the concepts of SCA, low-salary teachers , and having private job of the teachers. (Nith, Wright, Hor, Bredenburg, & Singh, 2010).

This research focuses on the several questions;

How is SCA important in improving the real quality of education?

Why is SCA not fully successful-stimulated to improve the achievement of education quality in Cambodia? What are the barriers?

What are some possible solutions to those barriers?

Body

Student-centered approach and quality of learning

Attard, Iorio, Geven, & Santa (2010) defined the meaning of SCA as written:

“ Student-Centered Learning represents both a mindset and a culture within a given higher education institution and is a learning approach which is broadly related to, and supported by, constructivist theories of learning. It is characterized by innovative methods of teaching which aim to promote learning in communication with teachers and other learners and which take students seriously as active participants in their own learning, fostering transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and reflective thinking.” (p. 5).

SCA requires students to work as in constructivism theory. It helps students to build up their own knowledge through group work, peer teaching,

observation, and self-alliance. It means that knowledge is obtained actively rather than passively, which directly transfers from teachers or textbooks to students (Weimer, 2002).

Attard, Iorio, Geven, & Santa (2010) mentioned that bringing SCA is worth to try

because it gives more benefits to the learning outcome in classroom. First, students can become a part of community through facilitating, deeper-thinking, and analyzing skills. Second, students have strong motivation to study. Since they are more interested in this learning approach and also they have more chance involving in class activities rather than just listen to teacher, they surely deepen their understanding. Third, it gives the independence for student which helps them to be more skillful and creative by group work, communicating, and critical analyzing. Totally, SCA can produce skills for daily life.

#### Student-centered approach in Cambodia

SCA was first introduced in Cambodia via Child Friendly School program set up by the collaboration between MoEYS and international partners. It implemented through pre-service and in-service program, and started from primary school to lower-secondary school. To gain teachers' knowledge on this new teaching method and effectively apply it, the program tried to set up on-job training, workshop, and assist to develop needed materials.

Moreover, some parts of primary school and lower-secondary school curriculum are revised in order to easily fit in SCA. Research shows that there is a good sign on the outcomes of SCA application. Teachers now use

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some educational games and group work activities in class. Students, then, begin to be confident to express their idea during the group discussion and bring it up to the rest of the class. However, the question is that whether the teachers are sure to improve students' critical thinking or problem solving skill or not (Ginsburg, 2009).

The frequency and effectiveness of SCA in classroom are significantly different from schools to schools in Cambodia depending on whether the schools have technical support from local or international partners or not. With the assistance from its partners, teachers try to promote active learning by making lesson plan, creating some teaching materials, inventing new learning techniques, regularly meeting, producing games, and etc. Of course, the study has indicated that teachers likely need more training, workshop, and follow-up activities to enhance their capacity building on both content knowledge and teaching methodologies. They suggest that there should be the strong involvement and support from management team of school as well. Incentive and award should be considered or given to the well-performed teachers (Ginsburg, 2009)

#### Barriers of student-centered approach

Even SCA seems to be very useful and beneficial for learning achievement, there are still some challenges using it in the class. According to some research, the common barriers include inadequate teaching materials, or equipment, or sources, overloaded-student in small class, much preparation time, insufficient and misconception in applying it such as too easy or too difficult discussing questions, which tend to wash away the interest,

confident, and knowledge of the students. Moreover, the content of lesson in curriculum is also considered as the bottle of neck of applying SCA (Bonwell, Charles, Eison, & Jame, 2000). Furthermore, the main challenge should be the financial support to make SCA stand strong. Many administrators think that this active learning method needs more money to make it useful and effective in teaching. It doesn't work well with large class size. So, when a number of students increase, the school needs money to build more classrooms to fill students in appropriate numbers suitable for SCA. Another problem is that the incentive for teacher. Following SCA, teachers have to devote much time in preparing lesson before the class such as lesson plan, materials, hand-outs, and so on. Sometimes, they have to be available to advice or discuss some practical things with students who come to ask questions related to their assignment, or project, or experiment. So, if they get less salary or no incentive, how could they think about the quality of teaching? Beside the above barriers, the uncomfoting with this new method from students is also the challenge in impeding the SCA. They prospectively think that SCA activities make them learn less than teacher-centered approach. They feel risky to learn. The last barrier is the disagreement and different perfectives between the ones who maintain the traditional methodology (rote-teaching) and the followers of new active learning. They defend their favor in term of knowledge, learning process, and role of education (Garvin, 2000).

In Cambodia education, these barriers also take place. Cambodia is the developing country which went through series of civil war since after Angkorean regime. After the 1993 national election, education likely

improves in the support of NGOs and other stakeholders. SCA is then incorporated in lesson to improve the quality of education. However, there are some barriers which decrease the effectiveness of SCA such as teaching materials, unsuitable curriculum, large class, low salary which lets them to concern less on teaching and have private business, unqualified teachers, and insufficient knowledge on active learning (Maeda, Pen, Set, Kita, Sieng, & Naganuma, 2006).

### Possible solutions

UNESCO (2010) stated that

“ In September 2008, Cambodian Prime Minister set out the commitment of the Government to improve the quality of education through providing incentives to teachers, improving curriculum, encouraging outstanding students, training teachers, upgrading teaching methodologies, improving classroom conditions and learning materials, and establishing more libraries and laboratories”. (p. 34)

As mentioned above, I believe that it should be the possible resolution to overcome the barriers in applying SCA.

### Conclusion

SCA is not only beneficial to students, but also to teachers. It provides students with skill for their lives when applying correctly. They will have strong motivation to study because it is more fun and at the same time they understand more the content of the lesson. SCA also can fill the individual need. Moreover, it teaches students to learn to be independent and finally

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they might be self-responsible what they have done. They develop some basic skills such as problem solving, negotiation, thinking skills and so on. To teacher, it upgrades both the content knowledge and teaching methodologies when applying active learning. From lesson learned, teacher continuously gains experience in facilitating skill, particularly it improves his/her professional development. Therefore, SCA helps to improve the educational quality (Attard, Iorio, Geven, & Santa, 2010).

Most research and studies mentioned the barriers to active learning result from the main problems such as lacking of teaching materials, unqualified teachers, school facilities and resources, inappropriate curricula, overloaded student in small class, low salary and no incentive, ignorance from school administrators or management team, lack of financial support, time consuming, lack of SCA understanding, and controversial between the conservers of traditional rote teaching and new active learning (Bonwell, Charles, Eison, & Jame, 2000; Garvin, 2000; Maeda, Pen, Set, Kita, Sieng, & Naganuma, 2006; Ginsburg, 2000).

Responding the barriers which impedes the enhancement of SCA, the government of Cambodia set up plan to increase the numbers of school buildings, provide educational supplies and teaching aids, support the innovative education, create chances through workshop and professional training for teachers to improve capacity buildings and teaching methods, update appropriate curriculum, and increase incentive or salary by increasing the national budget on educational priority sectors (MoEYS, 2003-2015; UNESCO, 2010).