

Poverty and the effects of formal education



It is generally thought that education is the most effective treatment to lessen poverty and to upgrade many aspects of life in modern society. In order to obtain formal education, people are required to attend schools where the achievements are often recognized by the award of certificates from the Royal government. To demonstrate, Cambodia is one among other countries which is considered that education is compulsory to enhance the good quality of human resource for further development of the country. The national education system of Cambodia consists of various transitions from completion of primary school, lower and upper secondary school, college (6+3+3+4), to post-graduate education. The most important stage which the government intensely targets to is the basic education which is to get all people be involved in and fulfill this phase. As it is commonly known, socio-economic status is divided into two main classes- the rich and the poor. Unquestionably, the poor children seem to have less chance to completely participate in getting basic education in school, that is to say, dropout rate remains high which means that children are being lost to the system as they have little opportunity to master the competences in the primary school curriculum. This relates mostly to the demand- side and supply- side factors which are going to be discussed in this paper. This distraction is a serious concern of the Cambodian government who strive to inspire those disadvantaged children to complete the primary education in school. Personally, this topic is interesting owing to two main reasons. First of all, this topic is a major concern of the government and the society as a whole which is needed to solve out for possible solutions in the future. Second, the topic is inspiring as it provides for more investigation which is related to the

demand- side and supply- side factors which may influence to the high dropout rates in basic education.

Given the fact of higher drop-out rates of poor students in the field of basic education in Cambodia, this paper seeks to explore the answers to two remarkable questions: (1). What are these demand- side and supply- side factors which may prevent poor children from staying in school? (2). What does the Cambodian Government do to reduce the influence of these factors on drop-out?

Definition

Before painstakingly discussing the issue, it is better to define the following terms. Basic education focuses on basic learning needs, which is composed of literacy, oral presentation, numeracy, problem solving, knowledge and skills, value, attitudes to develop and participate in growing society (UNESCO, 1998). According to Badloe et. al, (2007: p. 7), supply-side factors refer to the provision of significant resources for the primary education including the share of primary education budget, the government expenditure per primary student, teacher, and the percentage of primary completed schools, whereas demand-side factors focus on the socio-economic characteristics of specific groups of children who are currently most unreachable with primary education including the poverty, geography, and ethnicity.

III. The situation in term of dropout in basic education in Cambodia

In term of dropout in basic education in Cambodia, children from poor families or inaccessible to schools seem to be in most average to dropout.

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The unreached children in the age of getting to primary education are the children from low economic status seem to have low enrolment rate in primary and secondary education (UNICEF, 2007, p. 3). Differently from the children from middle- class or high class families, the disadvantage children mostly in rural areas find it difficult to continue their study when they face a number of obstacles from family condition (World Bank, 2010). Schools located in communes with higher levels of inequality have significantly higher dropout rates. The observable differences in dropout rates by level of poverty and stunting, as well as the differences between remote, rural, and urban areas, disappear once one control for school characteristics.

III. What are these supply- side and demand- side factors?

According to Patrinos (2002), too many children, especially those from poor families and those who are living in rural or remote areas, still lack access to a safe, nearby school or other quality learning opportunities. Working children, indigenous children, street children, refugee children, displaced children, orphaned children, trafficked children, child soldiers, and those who are physically challenged, living in conflict areas, or are affected by HIV or AIDS are not receiving an adequate education. The exclusive of children from basic education causes from two main factors.

First, the demand- side factors which is the major cause to high rates of dropout in Cambodia. This demand- side influence strongly to the children especially the unreached children. It is focused on three fundamental elements- poverty, geography, and ethnicity (UNICEF, 2007). “ Three inter-related factors play a critical role in determining the poor performance in school of the children. First, child labour regarding to poverty is a demand

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from the family to go out to work to support the family expense rather than to be in school. About half of all children in Cambodia aged from 7 to 14 years old were economically active in working which shows the higher rates comparing to other countries with similar income level” (ILO, UNICEF and World Bank, 2006). The main determinant of whether children work or attend school is family income. Most families in poor countries would prefer to send children to school instead of work, but they cannot afford to forgo the income their children bring home. Furthermore, the costs of child schooling is one among the other three sub- factors in the cause of poverty. Sopheak (2005) states that “ sending to and keeping their girls in school entails direct costs including school fee (often hidden in the various forms of contribution), cost of uniform, text books, books, pens and pencils, transportation etc”. According to Bray (1999), schools commonly charged parents for registration charges Grade 1, ranging from 200 to 2, 500riels per pupil and 10. 000 riels in secondary level. Another household cost is spent on the uniform. Most schools in Cambodia require students to wear uniforms although they are in rural and remote area, Bray (1999). A new uniform costs between 14, 000 to 20, 000 riels and students need to buy larger clothes when they get older, Bray (1999). This cost is a distraction for poor children that their family hardly support this cost daily for the completion of the children basic education. Chansopheak (2005) stresses that “ While basic education is supposed to be free, in most cases it is not”. This tangible cost for basic stationary as well as uniform increases with grade and age Unable to withstand the cost at a certain point, parents have a decision of taking their children not to attend schools anymore (Herz et al. 1991). Direct cost of education can be mediated or mitigated by the economic condition of the

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family. Low economic status of the family actuates negative influence on the opportunity to education. Lastly, late entry into primary school is another cause to dropout in basic education. Both poverty and stunting become insignificant when controls are added for overage intake, (Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, 2006, p. 2). One among other reasons is that about one-third of children in Cambodia aged 5 to 14 work for financial support, leaving them with less time to concentrate on school. There was a statistic of only 10 percent of children aged three to five years have access to early childhood development services (Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, 2006). This small percentage is a cause of late enrollment in school is common, with an average age of 10. 8 years in primary and 15. 8 years in lower secondary school. Children who enter secondary school represent just 26 percent of those of eligible age (Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, 2006, p. 2). According to Bunlay et. al, (2010), dropping out of school may influence from the late school entry which have both a direct and an indirect influence on a child's chances of later in their career. Due to the direct result of late entry, older children are enrolled in classes with younger students. This is their difficulty to be accustomed to study with younger students and lose encouragement if they fail the grade. Indirectly, late school entry may cause dropout rates by increasing the opportunity costs of schooling in relation to child work (Bunlay et. al, 2010). In addition to the poverty, geography is another disruption resulted to dropout. As the less favorable school conditions in remote areas, and together with less job opportunities, parents decide not to enroll or to continue children to complete basic education (UNICEF, 2007). The teacher education in primary school in remote areas is lower than the national average, (World Bank, 2005).

Second, the supply-side factors concern with three features- public expenditure on primary education, pupil- teacher ratio, and school infrastructure (UNICEF, 2007). According to Bray & Bunly (2005), the public expenditure increases for pupils from 26, 050 Riels to 66, 024 Riels between 1997 and 2002. However, some eligible children still do not enroll in primary school due to the distance from school, school infrastructure, and numbers of quality teachers (UNICEF, 2007). What is more, pupil-teacher ratio in Cambodia is high comparing to other countries. This ratio affects to the attendance and learning outcome of the target children in basic education. Last but not least, school infrastructure is another sub-supply-side factor in education. Incomplete schools are commonly occurred in rural areas and remote areas. The lack of classrooms and teachers may be a significant factor in high level of dropout rates (Asean Development Bank, 2004).

V. The current strategies of Royal government to reduce the influence on these

factors of dropout.

In order to reduce the high dropout rates in basic education in Cambodia, a number of strategies have been addressed and processed by the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport (MoEYS) and other contributions. The Cambodian government have established some worthy programs to help all children to complete the basic education in Cambodia including Education for All (EFA), Educational Strategic Plan (ESP), Education Sector Support Program (ESSP), and other essential policy namely the eradication of fee of basic schooling under the Priority Action Programme (PAP) of the government in 2001 (UNICEF, 2007) and the provision of scholarship to the disadvantage children

in basic education, (EFA: p. 41). According to World Bank (2010: p. 1), 36,000 lower secondary and primary students have been receiving scholarships from Cambodia Education Sector Support Project (CESSP) ranging from US\$ 40 to US\$ 60 per year to support study as it helps to reduce their mothers' financial burden of buying their school materials. " The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) is spearheading the government's efforts in the education reform process. Current reform efforts are driven by the country's commitment. Given the pervasiveness of late school entry in Cambodia, and its significant effect on subsequent dropout, it is critical to design policies that facilitate access to school at an early age." (Bunlay et. al, 2010).

" The recently approved ESP for 2004-08 (MOEYS, 2004a) delineates a set of policy priorities that diverges from previous policy frameworks for basic education in three main respects- increased emphasis on demand-side interventions, increased attention to improving education quality, and increased

focus on lower secondary education. Demand-side interventions help to reduce

cost barriers now limiting basic education access of the abolition of all informal/

illegal payments in grades 1-9, and the provision of scholarships for the more impoverished in grades 7-9. Furthermore, Supply-side interventions attempt

to increase the quantity and quality of school inputs and improve processes in

basic education.” (World Bank, 2005)

According to USAID (2008), it is stated that whether attention is focused on secondary or primary education, ensuring access and providing a high quality education is crucial if societies are to achieve their development goals. By providing the strategy of Education for All: National Plan: 2003-2015 and as it was included in a important policy document forward written by Prime Minister Hun Sen, it makes clear the government’s perspective on the education reform process: “ We are also acutely aware that improved education and training systems are a key bridge between economic growth and broad and balanced social development. Increasing equitable access to education and training opportunities, especially for the first nine years of basic education, is a key enabling factor that will help Cambodia’s poorest families to move out of poverty and improve their social well being.”

Additionally, other two programs have been introduced to help increase the enrolment rate and reduce in dropout rate in basic education- Child Friendly School (CFS) and Expanded Basic Education Program 2006- 2010.

V. Conclusion

In summary, the main constraints which mostly cause the high dropout rates are the demand- side and supply- side factors. These factors play a noteworthy role if they are all well- completed and could match with the needs of the target children. In order to make the good both quality and quantity of the reached and unreached children not to dropout, the

government and the citizen in the country should pay more attention to the enhancement for all people to get education and good quality of education in order to increase more human resource in Cambodia.