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## **Effective School Leadership and Management in the Primary Education Level in Cambodia**

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This policy brief explores key strategic issues and policy recommendations for effective school leadership and management in the primary education level in Cambodia. The brief draws on two studies on school leadership in the primary education level conducted by the Education Research Council and the Department of Policy of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and body of evidence to date. The first study is on the school directorship towards effective school leadership and management practices in the primary education level in Cambodia in 2018 and the second one is about the linkage between school leadership and management and student learning results in the primary education level conducted by the Department of Policy.

### **WHY IS SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IMPORTANT FOR LEARNING IN THE PRIMARY EDUCATION LEVEL IN CAMBODIA?**

The critical role of school directors in delivering quality of learning has been long recognized (OECD, 2009). Since 1998, the Cambodian government has gradually implemented school-based management approach through different forms such as School Cluster, Child Friendly School, Resource Secondary Schools, New General School and School-Based Management Schools to strengthen the leadership and management at school level. The school-based management is a restructuring approach that focus on the improved student and school performance and relations between schools and communities through the creation of the creation of school committees and the transfer of the authority to develop and implement school plans and budgets. However, the overall student performance results at primary education level are not yet satisfactory as policy promise. Data from national assessments for Grades 3 and 6 over the period from 2015-2017 in the core subjects of Khmer and Mathematics show that achievement levels were at or below 50% (MoEYS, 2015, 2016). These results are not achieved due to the lack of policies and regulation framework, support mechanisms to schools, effective school governance, and school leadership and management capacities (Shoraku, 2009).

The two studies conducted by the MoEYS on the school leadership in primary education level confirm that strong leadership is one the driving forces for the progressive changes in the schools. Based on these studies, to support effective leadership required to improve student and school performance, systems for the selection and appointment, promotion linked to performance appraisal, the clear descriptions of roles and responsibilities and professional development of school directors shall be

consistently and effectively implemented.

## **POLICY LANDSCAPE**

Lifting up Cambodia to an upper-middle income country by 2030 and a developed one by 2050 requires quality human capital. Quality human capital is the driving force in realizing the vision of 2030 and 2050. Quality education is an inevitable tool to be used to develop quality human capital. MoEYS continues reforming all levels of education from pre-school to higher education to produce very high quality of human per permeated by the national education vision. The current "landscapes of education reform" covers broad areas of administration and general management, academic management, education finance management and personnel management (Hang-Chuon, 2017, p.7).

School director standards which have been in place in 2017 set out six standards of characteristics and duties to be complied by the school directors and to prepare prospective school directors: (1) academic qualifications and working experiences, (2) school leadership capacities and characteristics, (3) critical and innovative thinking skills, (4) school leadership and management, (5) leadership on curriculum, teaching and learning 6) school and community connectivity (MoEYS, 2017). The main goal of the Cambodian school director standards is to set criteria to recruit and develop prospective directors (MoEYS, 2017).

## **WHAT DO WE KNOW?**

Based on the study in 2018 on school leadership in the primary education conducted by the MoEYS, there are five key leadership and management practices and attributes that the good school directors at primary schools carry out to promote quality of learning.

- School directors lead the core management function and administration in the schools ensure the effective on-going day-to-day school operation including human resource management, financial resource management, teaching and learning management, administrative management, state property management and community management.
- School directors build school trust and get involved all key stakeholders in various school activities and development.
- School directors must be able to translate the national policy to run and develop the school.
- School directors are willing and committed to upgrade new knowledge and skill as a continuous capacity development. School directors provides and support capacity development to teachers for effective teaching through different approaches.
- School directors have attributes of ‘within or inner drive’ of the leaders, willingness, commitment, common sense and spirituality to lead the people to serve the best needs of children.

The second study conducted by the Department of Policy in December 2017 found that the administrative and personnel management's role of school directors significantly influences student learning outcome. The study also found that the student learning outcome is improved when the school directors can get involved local authority and stakeholders in schooling, teachers' capacities are built and teachers collaborate.

## **WHAT ARE THE KEY ISSUES?**

### **Lack of understanding of management and leadership roles by school directors**

Not all school directors understand their roles and responsibilities with regard to improving the quality of learning and that only few appreciate the urgent need to improve learning outcomes. This is because there is a lack of clear framework on roles and responsibilities of school directors with a focus on both educational management and leadership and the problematic selection and appointment process.

### **Training, selection and performance management**

The policy and regulation on the appointment of school directors are systematically lacking at both schools and technical departments. School director standards are not officially and effectively used in the selection and appointment procedure. In practice, school directors are appointed from teachers and staff in the schools, who are in the line of the about-to-retired school directors. This process is always problematic and corrupted. With this practice, firstly, many school directors are appointed in schools for reasons other than leadership competencies and merit for the position. Secondly, prospective school directors are not trained properly for holding the position of the school director.

The practice of using school director appointments to reward individuals for political support and to punish others for political opposition is regularly happened. This undermines the principles of merit-based promotion and education system in general.

Performance appraisal have not yet been used effectively for developing careers or rewarding and recognizing the achievements of school directors of high-performing schools.

### **No fixed mandate for school directors**

School leadership position is a life-time appointment. The appointed school directors will work until they reach their retirement age without any formal and credible performance evaluation. This practice affects the performance of the school leaders in improving the student and school performance.

### **School directors lack leadership and management capacity**

Leadership and management capacity of school directors remain as the main concern in the current education system. School directors needs capacity development and support from all levels to effectively manage and lead schools.

The self-management capacities at school level are very limited. School capacities in policy interpretation and implementation are still very limited to pursue the educational education goals. School key stakeholders, including directors or board of directors, teachers, parents, and community, are unable to catch up with educational changing context and development trends to effectively implement policies.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Policy recommendations and priorities related to the role and support of school directors include:

1. Consider revising school director standard and developing the frameworks on competencies,

accountabilities and authorities of the school leadership, to take into account the different components of leadership and include a greater focus on teacher management and academic supervision and the role of the principle in enhancing the quality in their school.

2. Consider policy and legal frameworks on school director appointment that prepare prospective school principals and entail the structured performance appraisal for school principals.
3. Consider developing legal framework on the school director mandate. This is also need to be established and linked to performance appraisal.
4. Implement the established Teacher Career Pathway framework to linked to professional development and rewards through a transparent and reliable appraisal system to attract and retain qualified school directors in the education system.
5. School directors need professional development on their practical skills to enable them to exercise their role as educational leaders with the emphasis on the development of teachers' skill, management skills and of mobilizing parental participation in school development and improved learning quality.
6. Consider establishing the Institute for School Leadership to provide external and on-site professional development to school directors.
7. Put in place professional learning communities of school directors as a platform for them to learn and share leadership and management experiences.

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