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WHY TEACHER CAREER PATHWAYS IN CAMBOIA AND HOW?

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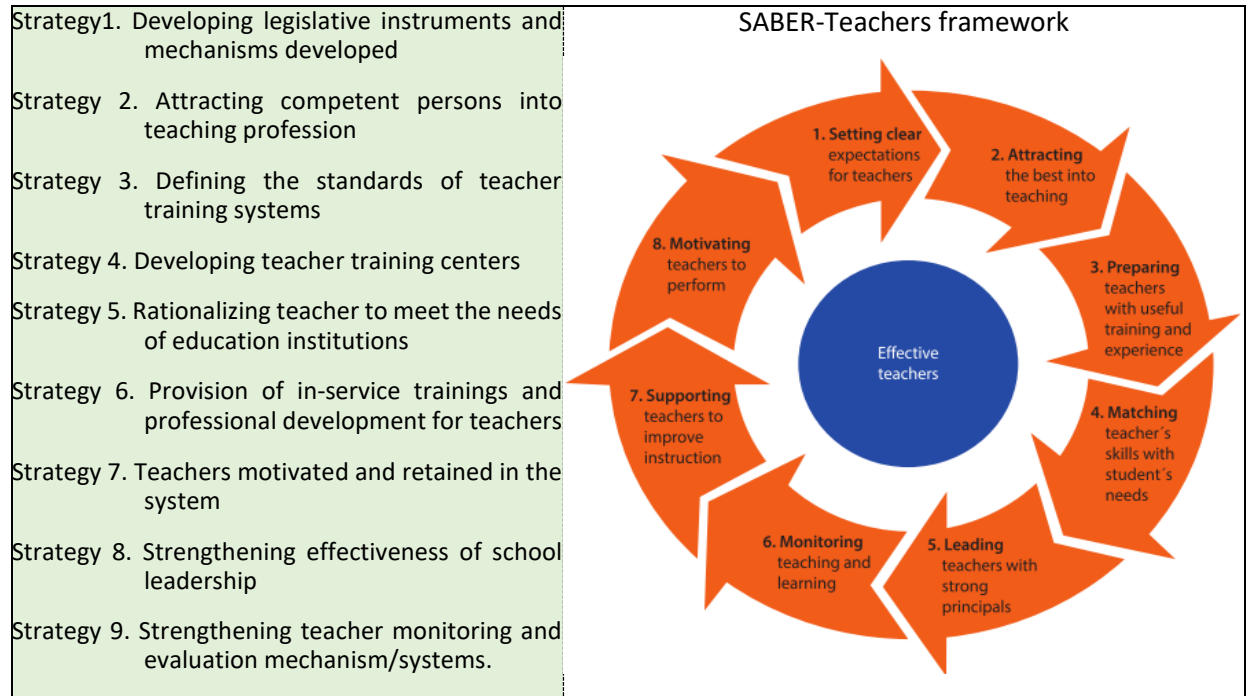
Key messages for successful implementation of Teacher Career Pathways in Cambodia

- The number of steps within Teacher Career Pathways must not too many layers and not fewer as to create the confusion of criteria between each levels.
- Roles and responsibilities of each level in Teacher Career Pathways must be clearly defined with job descriptions and competency framework so teachers are aware of the expectations associated with each level.
- Teacher professional development must be aligned with roles and responsibilities of each level to ensure that professional growth of teachers.
- A robust evaluation system for salary increases or promotions from each level to higher level in teacher career pathways must be in place. The evaluation criteria must be easily understood by and accessible to teachers.
- Ensuring teacher buy-in and participation in the reform process.

Decline in the status of the teaching profession in Cambodia

The World Bank emphasizes that "over the last few decades, the status of the teaching profession has declined across the world in terms of pay, respect and working conditions" (World Bank Group, 2017, p. 138). This phenomenon has been occurring in Cambodia since the 1990s. Teaching in Cambodia is not a particularly attractive profession. It does not attract Cambodia's top graduates. Most teacher trainees are scored in the E, D, and C ranges on the grade 12 exam (Tando & Fukao, 2015, p.2). The Cambodian government also found it difficult to attract and retain capable and motivated teachers, which result in negative effects on the student performance (TPAP, 2015). The decline in the status results from the relatively low wages, highly compressed salary structure and the lack of career progression and clear future direction for the career/professional growth for teachers (TPAP, 2015). Teacher Policy and Teacher Policy Action Plan (TPAP) were adopted in 2015 to address this decline in 2015 (Figure 1 display the nine strategies in the teacher policy and TPAP). Yet with the limitation of the TPAP implementation, Cambodia still faced the issues of unqualified and unmotivated teachers in the system.

Figure 1: Teacher Policy Action Plan strategies and WB SABER-Teachers Framework

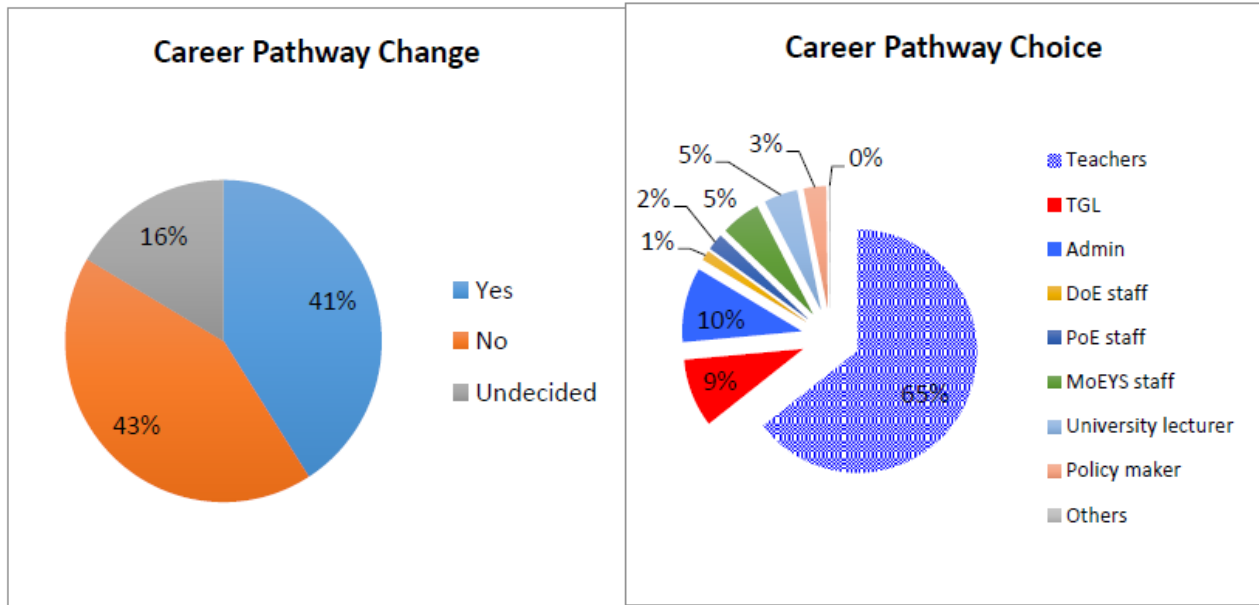


Impact of teacher career ladders on teacher motivation

How can Cambodian government make the teaching profession more attractive to potential candidates and motivate those already in the system? Based on HR theory, creating and managing career structure can be the solution if the structure is attractively designed and implemented. The literatures that advocates career structure reform highlight positive impacts of career structure on the current professional development system, teacher appraisal and reward system, which improves instructional practices in the school and the student learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2019). The Cambodian policy makers and scholars believe that teacher career structure is supporting the implementation of TPAP with regard to the improvement of teacher professional development toward attracting and retaining competent persons into teaching profession (TPAP, 2015; UNESCO, 2019).

According to the Cambodian teacher survey conducted by Fata No & Heng Kreng in 2017, 41% of participants used to think of changing their teaching career to others but interestingly the majority still had teaching profession on their list as classroom teacher, Technical Grade Leader and administrative staff when asking about their career pathway choice (Fata No & Heng Kreng, 2017, p.32). The participants recommended the institutionalization teacher career pathway to motivate teaching profession and stop the career swifts (Fata No & Heng Kreng, 2017, p.50) and to attract potential candidates to enter into teaching profession.

Figure 2: Career pathway change and career pathway choice (Fata No & Heng Kreng, 2017, p.32)



Designing career ladder with clear roles and responsibilities

The career reform will contribute to the enhancement of the status of the teaching profession if the design of teacher career structures is attractive in terms of the number of steps within career ladder and their associated roles and responsibilities, the salary scales of each position and the opportunities for professional development. The steps in career structure must not be so high as it is will be hard to differentiate between each steps but must not be too few because there is insufficient differentiation in terms of salary scales and responsibilities.

In global career reform, the teacher career pathways (TCP) is usually consisted of three pathways : teacher pathway, education management pathway and education policy specialist pathway.

- **Pathway 1 – The Teacher Pathway:**This career path is for those who devote their professional life to classroom teaching in direct and continuous contact to their learners. The teachers follow their learners through important stages of their development. Teachers are very important persons for their students from early childhood, through adolescence to adulthood releasing them into their study and working life. Teachers help their students to grow and to grow up.
- **Pathway 2 – The Education Management Pathway:**The management career pathway provides for individuals, which are interested in education management and administration. This pathway accommodates people, who see themselves as destined educators, but who enjoy administration and school management. They are ready to take responsibility as school directors or senior management staff.
- **Pathway 3 - The Education Policy Specialist Pathway:**The policy specialist pathway provides for individuals, which are interested in analytical thinking, research, curricula development, teaching material and textbook development. This pathway accommodates people, who see themselves as destined teachers, but who also want to contribute to education development through research and education policy making and development.

Cambodia has recently adopted the three pathways that are commonly applied globally such as teacher pathway, education management pathway and education policy specialist pathways in June 2018. Each pathway is consisted of five steps. The roles and responsibilities at each level of the career ladder are yet not explicitly defined with job descriptions and competency frameworks and that it is hard to hold the MoEYS and TCP beneficiaries accountable

for their tasks and to have clear expectations from their roles. The higher positions on the ladder are, the more greater responsibilities are. Few researches conducted by the Education Research Council and the Department of Policy, MoEYS found that the higher the level of the career ladder is, the smaller amount of teachers can reach. This means that the competencies of teachers and school directors cannot meet the criteria standards of each level. Thus, the policy makers need to reconsider the lower criteria standards of each level to make it compatible with teachers' level of knowledge, readiness and capacity and provide teachers with professional development and incentives for them to grow professionally.

Align career structure with continuous professional development (CPD)

A well designed career structure should support teachers to grow professionally and not to hold them accountable solely for the performance of their students.

“... as teachers do not have control over many of the factors affecting their own performance and that of their students... While a teacher policy should emphasize accountability, this should be part of a wider policy to improve teaching and education. It is essential that public and political calls for teacher accountability do not translate into blaming teachers for all of the problems in an education system...” (UNESCO, 2019)

The CPD should equip teachers with skills for them to succeed in their new roles in the career ladder. The Cambodian CPD framework for teachers and school directors has recently been enforced but the implementation mechanism and the clear linkage between TCP and CPD are not yet identified. The career structure reform will yield better results if the CPD clearly articulates the programs that support teachers since the early stage of the career through induction and mentoring by high quality mentors (OECD, 2013) to the appointment of new roles in the career ladder. The mentoring program is provided to teachers by DPs and NGOs in small scale. The actual implementation of TCP will require scaling-up or systematic induction and mentoring especially for the novice teachers. The CPD shall align with promotion criteria for higher levels. For instance, Cambodian TCP highlights the research/action research for promotion to the upper levels of its career ladder but provides few programs for teachers to gain this skill. So for TCP to work, teachers must provide with action research skills so that they can fully benefit from TCP.

Salary attached to career steps

The concept of career structure reform is that teachers are differentiated based on their performance rather than their qualifications or length of service in terms of payment, professional development and other benefits. The attractive career structure should be linked to attractive salary for each level in the career ladder. Since the idea of TCP was initiated in 2016 and adopted in 2018, the salary for each level has been much debated among teachers and policy makers. The question is that with the new career structure, the teachers should be paid as bonus or salary progression based on evaluation. Bonus pay is "programmes that award teachers one-off financial rewards for desired performance as measured either by student grades in standardized tests, or by teacher observations or as assessed through a broader teacher evaluation" (C.Chimier & B.Tournier, 2019 p.4) and lasts for a period of time. The bonus pay policy is easy to implement especially in Cambodia, where the civil service system is career-based system with many statutes and layers governed by law. The bonus pay is quick and easy to adjust without altering the base salary bill. In current context of Cambodia, this scheme may be applied in the early TCP implementation stage for the quick result of the career reform. However, the policy makers need to prepare well for the transformation of the bonus scheme to the salary progression in the long run.

Salary progression is another model for performance-based remuneration in which the salary increases based on the appraisal result for certain periods. The salary spine is consisting of different levels and that moving to higher salary level in the same spine won't result in additional responsibilities. The model will increase teachers' base pay and pensions but it is seen as long-term rewards for performance. A workable salary progression scheme will depend on the robust evaluation system which is neither available nor effective in Cambodia.

Evaluation system

In Cambodian education system, the evaluation system is neither available effective. The school level, the internal teacher evaluation was still unsystematic planned and conducted. There was still lack of rigorous and comprehensive mechanism to supervise or guide school staff (teachers and administrators) performance evaluation and promotion. Some schools conducted teacher performance evaluation; some of them did not. During the time of survey, the evaluation was conducted mainly based on the commitment, competency and the availability of the school administrators (school principals, subject-head teachers and assessors). The schools, that conducted the teacher evaluation, mainly used the tool guided/developed by the ministry and some of them developed their own additional tools. Also, some schools adjust and/or develop the tools to make them fit with the teachers' teaching levels (i.e. pre-school teachers, primary school teachers...). There were also some schools developed their own additional tools. The TCP implementation requires a fair and transparent evaluation mechanism at the school level. Evaluation criteria must be clear and easily understood by teachers and evaluators.

Transition to the new career structure

The MoEYS is committed to actual implementation of TCP in early 2021 with 100 School Based Management Schools and some selected schools. Transition from the old system to the new career structure is complex and controversial process and may lead to the division among the teachers without appropriate plan and effective communication of the reform to the teachers. The MoEYS needs to consider between two options in the transition process of the new career structure such as (1) a big bang approach in which the new career structure imposed on all teachers or (2) opt-in approach in which teachers voluntarily subscribe to new career structure or the application of new career structure to only new hires. The second option may be fit with Cambodia as it is intended for small scale piloting in order to get feedback, adjust policy or amend the policy if something wrong may be occurred in the implementation.

The opt-in approach and the application of new career structure will create two new teacher careers systems that are hard for the MoEYS and the schools to manage and also result in the tensions between teachers in the old and new system.

By implementing the big bang approach in Cambodia, it means teachers will be reassigned to the new levels of career ladder and thus, some teachers will go down ranks or some will go up ranks. This will result in the discontent between the entry-level teachers and senior teachers. For example, in Cambodia, the entry-level teachers who have more competency in term of research skills, ICT or foreign language may be assigned at the similar rank as the most senior teachers whose teaching experiences are discounted by the new reform.

Conclusion

Implementing a new teacher career structure in Cambodia is a challenge in terms of financial and technical resources to support the TCP implementation, aligned CPD, salary conditions, evaluation mechanism, teacher buy-in and participation in the reform process to avoid the division and tension among teachers. The MoEYS must cautiously design the implementation plan that is feasible and produce the positive effects on teacher's motivation. The successful implementation TCP must create the conditions where teachers can advance career, access to professional development and support and constructive feedbacks. The success of the TCP implementation will depend on the strong engagement of the MoEYS and other ministries such as the Ministry of Economic and Finance and the Ministry of Civil Service. The implementers and the beneficiaries of the TCP must be fully engaged in the process through open communication and dialogue.

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