

# **The Dilemmas of Teaching English in Cambodia Kindergarten**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this was to identify the dilemmas of English teacher in teaching English as foreign language in kindergarten located in Cambodia. The problems are typically comes from the teacher itself and also unsupportive environment. This study is significant as it is an exposure to the outsiders how is it early childhood education in low income country is going.

## **Introduction**

The increasing demand of effective teaching and learning in many world context is because of the English language has been become the lingua franca of the global community in major professional fields such as science, technology, commerce and education. Adherents of English claim that it brings positive social change, economic opportunities, consumer goods, and new technologies (Sartor, 2010). It is true that English language has important role in improving individual achievement and thus is key to success.

Refer to the non-English speaking countries, this situation acquire a reconsideration of teacher's competencies and as a way to increase the effectiveness of English language teaching and learning, expose them into a professional development opportunities. Cambodia is one of the country that struggle in improve English language teaching as a part of its development plan.

## **History of the Cambodia Education**

Cambodia or Kampuchea is one of the Asian country which shares its borders with Thailand, Vietnam and Laos and has been classified as a low income country as reported in Gender Responsive Budgeting in the Asia Pacific Region (Vas Dev, Sharp & Costa, 2010). The country is well known for its rich culture but also the genocidal rule of Khmer Rouge (1975-1978) which almost two million from seven million people of population are died because of overwork, starvation, executions and also disease (Klein 2006).

Cambodia education systems are slightly different from Malaysian education system. According to World Data on Education (2010) Cambodia education system starts from preschool, primary school, secondary school and higher education. Early childhood education is not compulsory for the Cambodian children. Children age three to five years old will have three years of schooling in preschool period. While the primary school takes six years to finish and the children from age six years old. It is a considered as the first stage of basic education. After finishing their primary school, the student have to continue their study in secondary school that have two cycle ; lower secondary and upper secondary. The lower secondary are compulsory to be taken from Grade 7 to Grade 9 and seat for the national examination. Moreover, students have an option whether to pursue their study in upper secondary or enroll in technical and vocational training programmes. For the excellent student they can continue their study in universities which have professional field like medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, engineering and the list goes on.

The early childhood have been supported by the Cambodian government and also the private sector. In 1999, there are 874 of preschool have been built in the public school for 50 000 children, alongside some 10 000 of children in the community centre and private kindergarten (World Data on Education, 2010). Almost 70% of community centre is built by the private sectors. Attendances at the community centre are generally tuition-free compared to the private preschool, which levy a small charge. In the late 90s, the demand of the preschool education appears to be growing slowly as the parent working in urban areas need the daytime childcare service.

As stated above, early childhood education are not compulsory for the Cambodian children. The national curriculum of Cambodia state the objectives are to develop the life skills, emotion values, social, moral and aesthetic values linked to the age the children. Pre-numeracy, pre-literacy and integrated science is taught through play-way method. Other activities are also being implemented to promote gross and fine motor skill, social skills, art and drama, writing skill and pre-literacy.

### **Teaching English for the Children**

Barnett (2008) stated that kindergarten education has significant lasting effects on cognitive abilities, social behavior and further schooling history. Responsive and cognitively stimulating care fosters language and cognitive skills that makes learning process easier in early years (Barnett 2008; Balat, 2014). In a study related to the research question, there is a significant positive relationship between kindergarten children's basic concept acquisition and their learning styles. It was found that visual and auditory learning styles explain 10.6% of the basic concept knowledge level (Balat, 2014). Thus, the basic concept knowledge of the child is predicted by their learning styles. Teacher's teaching style must be compatible to children's learning style to ensure the effective learning.

According to the study of teaching style in teaching English in Saudi's kindergarten, the technique they used, the Word Wall, showed the children can learn the new vocabulary more

effectively when the word are seen during the whole school day and it is improving the child's reading influence which its require intensive exposure to vocabulary and unlimited interaction with language users using senses of hearing, seeing and also interaction (Moore, 2012b). In order to teach children to speak in English, a study in Indonesia finds out that children learn to speak English in many different ways or learning activities such as answering why-questions (most frequent), translating, answering Yes or No question, repeating words and more activities they commonly shared by all the subjects were listening, imitating and repeating a model's speech (Khaled Ahmed, 2013).

In recent study in Singapore, the Chinese ethnic groups shown best performance and is overrepresented in the higher "streams" or educational tracks and in the pre-university courses and universities compared to Malays which have lower educational achievement. Mother's education may stand as a marker for mother's English skills, because English is the medium of education in Singapore (Dixon, 2009). However, the cultural backgrounds of the teachers are significant differently. Teachers often teach student with characteristics and backgrounds similar to their own can help student in gaining knowledge, developing literacy and developing critical thinking skill.

The finding of the present study suggest that teachers in Ontario schools are currently using different approaches to reform English language art curriculum to be more relevant, representative and culturally responsive (Colarusso, 2010). A teacher believed that the issue of English Language Learners and their families were most important aspect of diversity as it is important in positive attitudes of supporting English language teaching (Lee, Butler & Tippins, 2007; Zhang & Peltari, 2013).

According to Patterson (2012), the study of two teachers described children's communication as an integrated part of their behavior, activities and interactions, rather than characterizing the communication skills a child used. In the teachers' descriptions of children's communication, language functioned as a vehicle for children's participation in the life of classroom in ways that reflected the children's individual personal characteristics. This participation framework contrast with a language systems and skills view, in which language form, content and use are the focus (Patterson, 2012).

In a study conducted among teachers, there are gap of teacher's perception of language which language is a subject to be taught, not a medium and the teacher's perception of language teaching at the early stages are language is literacy. Thus, memorization is the way to learn as much as language as possible. When it comes to teacher's belief of teaching English, a teacher would be very shy and less motivated when they keep thinking that they are not good in English, it is psychological barrier of teachers itself (Chu, 2014). Finding in a study suggested that all aspects of classroom discourse (cognitive, academic, linguistic, social and affective) should be taken into consideration (Inan & Yuksel, 2013).

### **Teaching English Dilemmas in Cambodia**

Children can learn and absorb most in their early years and early childhood professionals and curricula have long emphasized the importance of motor development (Abdul Halim, 2014) and kindergarten teachers rate fine motor skills as a key aspect of school readiness. According to Fine Motor Skills And Executive Function Both Contribute To Kindergarten Achievement (Cameron, Brock, Murrah, Grissmer, Morrison, Bell & Morzalla, 2012). The infancy, toddlerhood and preschool period is the relational and rapid learning stage of life (Tayler, 2015). Realizing that children's success in school depends upon their coordination of multiple skill sets, experts have called for an expanded definition of school readiness beyond traditional measures of literacy and mathematics competence (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). In another study, children who could copy designs well at kindergarten entry had higher teacher-rated reading, writing, math and spelling through third grade (Tayler, 2015).

Cambodian government, in the 1980s, state that people who survived from the conflict and who were just able to read or write very little to become teacher so as to meet the need of teacher's number to perform at school. Undeniable thing is that presently, there remains teaching staff that have no pedagogical training experience, particularly teachers who are teaching at the rural areas. Moreover, vast amount of teachers, who are currently teaching at school and those who are not teaching, hold very low level of academic diploma which are lower secondary education level and primary education level only or even not finished primary school level, although there have been few educational personnel hold PhD degree. (Phin, 2014). Educators also faced challenges in teaching social studies as they are concern with the decline of civility in public discourse and public school. It is difficult for students to internalize the virtue of education and practice if they do not see in the politicians, media and other institutions (Moore, 2012a).

The growing number of communication technologies used in organizations has presented college and university level instructors with the major challenges of addressing these topics. Teachers have some barrier on integrating communication technology like lack of time, lack of confidence and resistance to change. School barrier also contributing the factor, as it is lack of access to resources and lack of effective training in solving technical problems (Robert, 2011). Because of the global statues of the English language, and the cultural and linguistic qualities of English literature, English teachers are at the fulcrum of educational debate. The teachers are modelling transformation, revamping course lists, honing dialogic pedagogies for intercultural communication and redefining "English" as multicultural and global (Colarusso, 2010).

The challenges of teaching English as international language (EIL) are teachers' lack of confidence in teaching EIL varieties; teachers have to complete the prescribed syllabus and textbook within a limited approved time frame of three to five hours per week. They also perceive that they need to have proficiency against norms of the native speaker variety (Le Van Canh, 2012). Teacher in Cambodia faced the difficulties when the government revamp the teaching system, basic needs of teachers are ignored, less investment in teacher education and

it is a challenges to encourage teachers in Cambodia to build a culture of trust and accountability (Tan & Ng, 2012).

According to the report of UNESCO-IBE in World Data on Education (2010) when preschool are not compulsory to be attended as it is not require in admission to Grade 1 in Cambodia, kindergarten teachers are ignored. That is why, the teacher that teaches in rural area kindergarten are mostly the youngster of the village. The clear lesson from the research reported here is that, if the government wish to be successful in their introduction of languages into the primary curriculu, initial investment in policy is simply first step. Continued resources are necessary to address the ever changing challenges faced by teachers and to ensure positive outcomes in early language learning.

### **Conclusion**

The case of Cambodia illustrates the challenges and prospects of teacher professionalism in other developing country. Overall, the picture that emerges is quite positive with a number of dilemmas that might affect the teaching process in the kindergarten. The research has revealed the difficulties of the teachers in teaching English with their level of exposure in teaching are inadequate.

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