# An exploration of the interaction between global education policy orthodoxies and national education practices in Cambodia, illuminated through the voices of local teacher educators.

# Abstract

This research is based on a multi-disciplinary and multi-levelled analysis of evidence to present the case that education reform needs to be contextualised far more widely than is currently practised. It focuses on the voices of Cambodian local teacher trainers through interviews over a five-year period. Interview data is triangulated against academic sources, national policy documents and classroom observations.

The research reveals how notions of globalisation and knowledge economy have led to education being driven by measurable outcomes resulting in simplified educational policies that have a negative impact on teacher development. By allowing the Khmer teacher trainers to articulate their opinions on a wide range of themes, the interviews provide evidence to support historical and cultural theories proposed by academics working in the social sciences in Cambodia. This approach identifies that a deeper contextual analysis should enable teacher development programmes to be more closely aligned to national contexts.

**Key words**: Teacher Education, Cambodia, education policy

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# Introduction

This paper provides a focused examination of how global education policy orthodoxies affect the national education system and classroom practice in Cambodia. An analysis of interview data collected from six Khmer mathematics teacher trainers over five years and evidence from historians, project data and field notes enabled me to explore the interactions between global, national and local policies and how these manifested in practice.

Between 2006 and 2011, I was a consultant for the Basic Education Teacher Training programme (BETT) component of a school improvement project, funded by the bilateral donor, Belgium Technical Co-operation (BTC). BTC worked in Cambodia with the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport (MoEYS). The BETT programme focused on both pre-service and in-service teacher training in mathematics and Khmer literacy. I led on the development of training content, pedagogic approach, project structure and implementation which I developed with MoEYS, BTC Cambodia, consultants from England and a group of 20 local BTC trainers. These 20 trainers delivered the BETT in-service mathematics programme and were trained by the English team. The research was conducted from 2006 to 2011 and was indirectly funded by BTC. In 2017, as I was employed as a consultant by an iNGO in Cambodia I have drawn on some additional recent research that supports the evidence presented from the research undertaken on the BTC project.

**Methodology**

Teacher development projects are often short term and detailed qualitative research is limited. This leads to project planners favouring easily implemented quantitative research methods (Wagner 2011). Drawing on the industrialised nations approaches to school effectiveness research, donors began to develop mechanisms to determine the success of their projects (Riddell & Nino-Zarazu 2016) making wide spread use of logframes and measurable indicators that favour quantitative approaches to demonstrate qualitative improvements. Riddell & Nino-Zarazu (2016) suggest that this approach had an effect of undermining longer term development goals.

The favouring of quantitative and generic approaches for measuring teacher development is problematic. Welmond (2002) wrote teacher identity is not the same across societies and therefore must be examined in each individual country. Akyeampong and Stephens (2002, 261) also note that ‘*the values and past experiences are often the lenses through which teachers make sense of their everyday classroom practice’*. Those entering the teaching profession bring with them their understanding of what teaching and learning is, formed over many years of participating in the education system. Coldron & Smith (1999, 712) write that ‘*Being a teacher is a matter of being seen as a teacher by himself or herself and by others; it is a matter of acquiring and then redefining an identity that is socially legitimated’.*

The research presented in this paper is qualitative in nature and original in approach. It is a triangulation of interdisciplinary sources alongside local voice over an extended period. It brings originality to the field of teacher development as it combines several methodological processes at the same time as dealing with complex cross-disciplinary concepts. Whilst I faced significant challenges in developing this approach to the research and writing it up in the confines of an academic paper; I have been able to illuminate the complexity of teacher development and how it manifests itself in global, national and local approaches to teaching and learning; generating findings that are significant for those working in teacher development.

The participant voices were from six of the 20 BETT trainers who were representative of gender, age, working backgrounds and locality. Trainers were predominantly male so no reference to gender is made to prevent anonymity being compromised. Initial interviews focused on the background of the trainers, their professional development needs and the implementation of the programme so are not included in this paper. Later interviews included discussions on the Khmer education system, politics, culture and religion. Interviews were conducted on average two times a year for five years, with an intensive period of interviewing in 2009. Issues raised during the interviews were triangulated against project data, classroom observations, research and policy documents focused on Cambodia. The six teacher trainers are referenced as TT1 to TT6.

The interviews were carried out through interpretation. My Khmer language, whilst functional, does not have the extended vocabulary necessary to understand all that was said. Researching in a different language raises methodological issues. Language influences communication and linguists like Chapman (2006) have suggested that the experience of social reality is unique to the language in which it is expressed. McNess et al (2015) discuss how the researcher is using language in a literal sense but also embedded within the discourse is cultural and historical interpretations. I followed the advice of Berman & Tyyskä (2011) and Nes et al (2010) who discuss these difficulties in detail and make recommendations as to how the researcher can improve the robustness of their data.

To ensure rigour, a project interpreter was present at the interviews known to the participants and to me as the researcher. A written and audio record of the interviews and the translation were taken in case queries arose during the data analysis. There was a loss of rich description in interviews, due to a lack of fluency in the language so the subsequent coding process in this analysis relies on key words and phrases. As I interviewed the same teacher trainers with the same interpreters over five years we developed trusting relationships that enabled freer discussion. Before interviews were conducted there was a prior discussion between the interpreter and the researcher. This enabled the vocabulary in the questions to be considered for accuracy and provided an opportunity to rehearse the questions and to follow-up on the previous round of interviewing. When queries arose during the interview process clarification was sought at the time. This ensured that the data collected and quotations used were accurate.

# Global Policy Orthodoxies in a National Context

Globalisation is often seen in economic terms, but is also associated with the cultural, social and political agendas, all of which have the potential to impact on education systems. Olssen (2004, 263) describes globalization ‘*as a discursive system, pursued at a policy level by powerful states and international capital’.* Globalisation is also defined as existing in a third state, in that it has been created outside of nations (Featherstone 1990, Lechner & Boli 2005). Featherstone (1990) uses the term ‘third culture’, to describe the existence of an entity outside of nation states. This leads to the idea of a global culture influencing how nations behave (Meyer et al 1997). Lechner & Boli (2005) suggest that a world culture exists and grows in parallel to the cultures of nations. Meyer et al (1997) point out that the goals of nations have become remarkably uniform and as they become increasingly interrelated individual autonomy diminishes (McGrath 2001a). McGrath (2001b, 392) writes that the power of globalization: ‘*reduce[s] room for manoeuvre in political and practical decision making by arguing for the primacy of the forces of the global market over any possibility for individual self-determination’.*

Meyer et al (1997) introduce the idea of world education culture which they argue has resulted in a more homogenous philosophy of education. Lingard et al (2005) discuss the emergence of a global educational policy field that operates above the nation and discuss how this field becomes separated from education practitioners. Without exploring culture, Worsley (1990) argues, it is impossible to make sense of the modern world where religion, nationalism and ethnic conflict are more important than internationalism. As Giddens points out (1999): ‘*Most people think of [globalization] as simply 'pulling away' power or influence from local communities and nations into the global arena. Globalization not only pulls upwards, it pushes downwards, creating new pressures for local autonomy ....* Giddens (1999) BBC 1999 REITH Lecture 1. Lingard (2000,80) writes that the ‘*the nation-state still retains some capacity, if it at times lacks the will, to do more politically than simply facilitating economic globalization’*. Lingard (2000) rejects the idea that globalization is simply a top down homogenisation process of politics and culture.

Literature on globalization refers to neoliberalism (Hirst et al 2009, Lechner & Boli 2008, Lingard 2000, Morrow & Torres 2000). Hursh (2005) writes that policies of neoliberalism grew after World War II. There was also a growth in the attention given by economists to the relationship between educational investment and economic outcome (Hanushek 2004, Bonal 2004). Lingard (2000, 84) writes that: ‘*education policy became an element of economic policy framed by a microeconomically focused and rearticulated version of human capital theory’.*

Development literature also reflects these economic policies. Riddell (1999,209) writes: ‘*in economic development literature educational systems or programmes are regarded as effective to the extent that they provide human capital to meet development needs’*. Resnik (2006,175) notes that the: ‘*education-economic growth discourse became the basis of educational policies throughout the world’*. Lingard (2000,98) argues that the ‘*OECD has been an institutionalising mechanism for neoliberal economics and new managerialism’*. Multi-lateral organisations became instrumental in promoting neoliberal policies and a culture of performativity. This ideology is also prevalent in Cambodia. In the preface to the Policy for Curriculum Development 2005 – 2009 it states that: ‘*Education is regarded by each country in the world as an important field in ensuring the development of human resources to meet national needs*’ (MoEYS 2004, Cambodia).

A model of education based on accountability leads to standardisation and the measurement of performity. Normand (2008,666) discusses how international institutions became a strategic venue for the promotion of the school effectiveness paradigm. ‘*School effectiveness was formalised around a set of knowledge and stabilised mechanisms for the measurement of education… Research programmes on school effectiveness have strategically positioned themselves in terms of access to educational policy makers’*. Neoliberal global education policy orthodoxies underpin both national governments and donor policy approaches to education and extend to global patterns affecting what pupils should be taught and how. This has partly arisen from international testing policies. To compare the performance of schools and nations, standardised tests and competency based curricula are introduced. International tests lead to the global homogenisation of the curriculum and its content. Hanushek & Woessmann (2010) argue that using measurable pupil learning outcomes has therefore partially been driven by international donors and aid agencies. High-stakes international testing already embedded in industrialised nations, is becoming increasingly prevalent in low income countries through assessments, for example the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and more recently Pisa-D. Researchers are beginning to challenge the conclusions made from the analysis of transnational test outcomes as a precursor to changing national education policy (McNess et al 2015, Morris 2012). The outcomes from this research add to this debate.

**Cambodian Culture**

The Education Law in Cambodia states that: ‘*The objective of this law is to develop the human resources of the nation by providing a lifelong education for the learners to acquire knowledge, skills, capacities, dignity, good moral behaviour and characteristics, in order to push the learners to know, love and protect the national identification, cultures and language’* (MoEYS 2007b). This objective suggests that Cambodian education policy is underpinned by the global policy orthodoxies of human capital theory. However, it also suggests characteristics of nationalism, individualism and meritocracy.

Hofstede (1991) describes culture as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group from another and Hall (1996, 439) describes culture as a ‘*grounded terrain of practices representing the languages and customs of any specific society’*. These definitions are useful in thinking about how culture is both propagated and created. Embedded in both definitions is the idea that culture can be identified and therefore developed. Mabbett & Chandler (1995) argue that the building of Angkor Wat in 802, the largest Buddhist temple in the world, could be associated with the beginnings of the development of a Khmer unity. In interviews with the teacher trainers five out of the six of them stressed that it was Angkor Wat and the achievement of the ancestors that gave them a Khmer identity.

Angkor Wat is an achievement of a previous generation and is very important to the next generation, it represents our culture, it promotes our culture and honour to the world, which shows that Khmer are not weak (TT1,January 2011).

When I was in the Soviet Union I told them I was Khmer, ………if we say we are the children of the people who built Angkor Wat we are definitely Khmer (TT4,January 2011).

Angkor Wat is very important to the next generation it represents almost everything… the economy, culture and politics. It shows that the leader was so powerful that he could manage the country (TT3,January 2011).

The quotations from the interviews demonstrate a strong link between what it means to be Khmer and Angkor Wat. Strangio (2014,4) wrote ‘*Angkor Wat was Cambodian’s talisman’.* In a training session with the mathematics teachers in June 2007, TT4 had commented, ‘*of course we know what is correct. We built Angkor Wat’*. A similar comment was made by Pol Pot in 1977 when he stated that if our people can build Angkor, we can do anything. Angkor Wat appears to be a central element of the Khmer culture ‘*… but is also a symbol of a crushing burden, a reminder of past achievements and subsequent decline’* (Strangio 2014,4). The Khmers trace their cultural heritage to an empire that they continue to be proud of despite having experienced centuries of hegemony from the French, Vietnamese and Thai.

In March 2011, the trainers discussed identity again and in these statements more than Angkor Wat is considered.

It is difficult to tell what it means to be Khmer. If we mention culture or tradition, way of life there may be a confusion between Thailand and Philippines, but if we mention Khmer Rouge and genocide they know we are Khmer (TT6,March 2011).

It is not just our ancestors who build the temples but good and bad leaders give benefit to people nowadays. We benefit from tourists who visit our country not just because of the temples but because of their interest in genocide (TT2 March 2011).

The Khmer are nationalist…Some of the notions of being Khmer are fading (TT3,March 2011).

The research interviews and the literature show a strong Khmer identity. It may be that this identity has been strengthened by hegemonic relationships with other countries and the genocide of the 20th century which then led to policies of nation building. Roberts (2001) and Vickery (1982) both argue that the Cambodian system of patronage and clientelism ensures the preservation of the elites by the lower ranks. Hierarchical relationships saturate Khmer society, determining relationships and politics and how language is used. Vickery (1982) writes that everyone below the king had a fixed dependent status and Roberts (2001) points out that the traditional elite prevented modernisation as it would have placed a threat on their positions. Ayres and Chandler also argued that the value given to Angkor Wat and the Cambodian system of patronage have a strong influence on Khmer identity leading to an emerging cultural pattern of tradition and modernity being in a state of constant conflict (Ayres 2000a, Ayres 2000b, Chandler 1996).

The religion of the nation state is given legitimacy through the monarch. In Cambodia, a monarch is perceived as essential to the well-being of the country and even to the maintenance of Buddhism. Chandler (2000) analyses Kingship from different perspectives and attempts to define the role and relationships that existed. Ayres (2000a) argues that the king was perceived as a God like deity, who had an uncontested right to the throne. Frieson (2000) writes that the Khmer were hindered in their revolutionary potential because of their loyalty to their god-king Sihanouk (reigning 1941 – 1955 & 1993 - 2004). In February 2009, the trainers discussed King Sihanouk. The adjectives they used to describe Sihanouk were a mixture of attributes and achievements. The discussion revealed a consensus in that Sihanouk’s authority was legitimised because he had been born into it from the merit he earned in a former life. This provides some evidence that the social hierarchy is maintained through a philosophy of merit and re-birth.

There are different traditions in Buddhism. Cambodian Buddhism is described as Theravāda Buddhism. Theravāda in Pali means ‘the way of the elders’ leading to Theravāda Buddhism being more monastic, conservative and traditional than other forms of Buddhism. Other Buddhists refer to the Theravādas as the lesser vehicle because of the unlikelihood of a Theravāda Buddhist reaching enlightenment. The purpose of Theravāda Buddhism is to become an ‘*arhat*’, a ‘perfect saint’ who has reached Nirvana and therefore does not need to be reborn. In Theravāda philosophy, Nirvana is perceived as too difficult to attain and therefore the observer tries to attain Nirvana by reaching it in small steps through re-birth. Re-birth into a better life is gained through earning merit.

In January 2008, all six of the teacher trainers expressed a strong belief that how you live your life will determine what happens to you in the after-life. In individual interviews four out of six trainers specifically used the phrase ‘*do evil receive evil, do good receive good’.* Five of them believed they would be re-born. In November 2009, trainers still believed in re-birth, but they were justifying their beliefs by presenting evidence. TT5 said ‘*I believe there is re-birth. My youngest brother remembers his previous life’*. However, TT1 and TT3 referred to external sources such as a psychology book, and while not saying they did not believe in re-birth they were struggling to justify it with evidence. It is difficult to identify what had led to this change in perspective. Access to the education programme may have challenged trainers to think critically and develop reasoning skills, which provides evidence that they were developing agentive capacity.

Ayres (2000a) writes that the Buddhist notion of the helplessness of individuals and their subservience to state and king prepared them to become a ‘slave’ in the system. Cambodia’s core historical literature such as the Reamker, has contributed to keeping the status quo in place. Chandler (1996) draws out two themes from the Reamker; how relationships between rich and poor should be dealt with and that the Khmers must respect the traditions of their ancestors. In this way, the historical literature complements the country’s traditional hierarchy. Hinton’s (1998) work focuses on this hierarchy as forming a basis of a cultural model that he refers to as a model of ‘natural inequality’.

Buddhism is based on an understanding of gaining spiritual merit which is usually linked to power and status. Ayres (2000a) argues that Buddhism with its concepts of merit reinforced this hierarchical cultural model, thus legitimising social status. Vickery (1984) argues that Khmer Buddhism is based on a fatalistic doctrine where the actions of this life determine the rebirth into the next. By doing good deeds Khmers earn merit. This philosophy is exemplified in each village where the walls of the pagoda records lists of names and the size of the donation made. MoEYS expects that the local community will contribute to the education system either by donating money or their labour. Community contributions in Cambodia have always been traditionally substantial (Bredenberg 2002).

**What pupils are taught**

Curriculum is to some extent globally defined but Le Métais & Tabberer (1997) write that curriculum and assessment cannot be separated from the actual aims of a national education system. The Cambodian curriculum aims include: ‘*[have] understanding Cambodia’s system of government and the rule of law, and demonstrating a spirit of national pride and love of their nation, religion and king’* (MoEYS 2004,5). In upper secondary pupils are expected ‘*to have acquired a deep knowledge of the national identity’* (MoEYS 2004,11). These curriculum aims demonstrate a clearly identifiable Khmer culture.

Neau (2010,254) writes that traditionally: ‘*the Khmer always brought their children to be educated by Buddhist monks in pagoda schools. When their children had completely understood how to read, write, solve arithmetic, and memorise the principles of Buddhism, they were ordained as Buddhist monks. They believed that when their children left the monastery, they … would be respected by the whole community because of their education in the spiritual life…, and live in harmony in* society’. Neau is arguing that there was an expectation that the pagoda would provide moral guidance for the community, but now the role of the pagoda has largely been replaced by the school.

When the educators first discussed the role of monks in January 2008 they made some interesting comments. TT3 said that ‘*The community thinks of monks as educators’* and TT5 that ‘*A monk is traditionally viewed as a teacher, but it has changed because now communities have schools’*. TT4 stated that: ‘*Normally the community respects the monks... In the Buddhist philosophy monks educate people to do good things ... they give good advice to the community’*. TT1 pointed out: ‘*school invites monks to give advice because they think schools, families and teachers are connected to each other. Education is not for individuals, but for all’*.

In 2010 the subject of monks arose again. The trainers were discussing a new MoEYS policy which was encouraging monks to lead moral education in schools. TT3 and TT1 were concerned about this practice.

Some of the children who are doing wrong things, they behave like gangsters, so their families send them to the pagoda to be trained as a monk (TT3,September 2010).

On a Thursday each school invites the monks to give advice to the students and the teachers. …. What I can see today is most of the monks in the pagoda are children of families with bad behaviour. Even though they have the Buddhist philosophy after one year the behaviour is worse than before they went. The MoEYS policy that invites monks to give advice in school is a problem (TT1,September 2010).

This national policy appears to be an attempt to re-establish a traditional Khmer approach to education, but locally the relationship between schools and pagodas has changed resulting in an unpredicted outcome.

**How pupils are taught**

Global policy orthodoxies are evident in approaches taken to pedagogy. Pedagogy is defined in policy through curriculum and assessment frameworks. More recently education policies have also included principles that tell teachers how to teach. Global pedagogy orthodoxies can be attributed to the significant role of aid agencies, economists and politicians in education all of whom are looking for quick fix solutions to raise learning outcomes. This has led to the creation of simplified binaries in defining pedagogy. A didactic teacher-centred pedagogy is positioned at one end of the spectrum and a learner centred constructivist approach at the other. Aid agencies, internationally and in Cambodia have invested substantially into learner centred approaches. In the teaching of early reading a binary can also be identified. A whole-word approach is pursued at one end of the spectrum and the teaching of phonemic awareness at the other. Policies on the teaching of reading illuminate the interaction between global and national policy orthodoxies. As Smith (1999,150) points out ‘*Systematic phonics and phonemic awareness instruction is the thin edge of the wedge that is being used to bring about radical changes in education, and its primarily driven by commercial and ideological agendas’*. Sørensen (2015) notes that the impact of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) could create a bias towards phonics and decoding approaches to reading which consequently leads to changes in teacher training and textbooks.

EGRA was adapted to Khmer language and introduced in Cambodia. Research Triangle Institute (2010 website) writes ‘*EGRA can be adapted to fit most alphabetic languages and cultural contexts and is gaining momentum as an instrument for quickly diagnosing children’s literacy….with EGRA, we are taking proven methodologies that have been applied in the U.S. and Europe for about 10 years and adapting that to the needs of developing countries’*. Puthy (2012) describes how World Bank consultant Abadzi, in 2010, recommended that Cambodia should change their approaches to literacy teaching which she considered were too focused on a whole word approach to a phonetical one. ‘*Considering the complexity of the Khmer script the main recommendation was that Cambodia should return to vowel and consonant combinations rather than whole word recognition’ (Puthy 2012)*. Abadzi’s comments have influenced Cambodia’s development of national policy and contributed to the notion of a simplistic binary.

*In Cambodia, an international NGO proudly showed me some beautiful grade 1 books developed and piloted on the “whole-language” approach. The pages are filled with large color photos, but they have only a few words of text and no method for systematizing the combinations of the Khmer script* (Abadazi 2010,3).

The poor results from EGRA 2010 led to a complete review of the grade 1 to 3 MoEYS textbooks. The revised text books were based on the ‘Chet Chhem’ method that had been prevalent in the 1960s. The instruction focuses on the teaching of ‘*grapheme-phoneme and is based on students memorizing all classes of consonants, vowels, …in a particular order’ (USAID 2015,20)*. The experience of Cambodia is replicated in other countries. As Bartlett & Frazier (2016,108) point out: ‘*EGRA exerted a definite, and in the opinion of some, disproportionate influence over the shape these programmes took*’. In a more recent review of EGRA results in Cambodia USAID (2015) point out that opportunities to teach comprehension is limited in the new text books. The classroom observations I made in two rural schools in 2017 indicated that the ‘*Chet Chhem’* approach to the teaching of reading reinforced a teacher centred pedagogy based on repetition and memorisation. Pupils were reciting letter sounds and short texts until they had been memorised, but were unable to answer simple questions about the text.

I discussed early reading in an interview with an official from MoEYS in 2017. He talked about how global policies had been rejected and that Cambodia’s national policy had been a return to the traditional ‘*Chet Chem’* approach. My perception was that Cambodia had embraced an exclusive phonemic awareness approach to the teaching of phonics that embraced global policy orthodoxies. Forestier & Crossley (2015) point out that the motivation to borrow policies is often linked with domestic political agendas and ideological positions rather than a real intent to try new models.

**How teaching quality is measured**

This section focuses on measurable indicators of teacher quality and teacher competency standards to illuminate interactions between the different policy levels. The historian Heder (2004,3) writes of the Khmer as having ‘*a profound sense of formulaicism’* and Maskell (1998) comments on the rule bound nature of the Khmers. BTC Cambodia was expected to define measurable indicators of change in teachers’ classroom practice to demonstrate project impact. This example is adapted from the BTC log-frame, which sets out targets and indicators of success (BTC 2010,30)

*that 50% of all teachers trained through BTC employed improved teaching skills at least 30% of their teaching time, particularly regarding the application of learner-centred (active learning) methods*.

Expected changes in practice included: more use of small chalk boards, paired work and use of formative assessment. BTC developed evidence based approaches to assess changes in teaching practices. See Courtney (2008) for a discussion on the issues associated with observing and measuring classroom practice in Cambodia. The monitoring tools designed allowed for the collection of measurable data to demonstrate where indicators were being met and captured qualitative evidence from the comments of the trainers. The qualitative data enabled an evaluation of how teachers were using the training and materials and how the teacher trainers were developing their subject and pedagogical knowledge to support teacher development.

Despite the open-ended design of the BTC monitoring tools there were still issues of formulaicism. As part of the training the English consultants had introduced the teacher trainers to five teaching tools they could use in the classroom. In a group interview TT4 challenged the consultants on their use of teaching tools.

*I have seen in the manuals the five teaching tools. They are very good. If the teacher can apply them, it will be a success for the project. But when I take part in the training (with you) I have not seen the use of all these tools in each session. You don’t use all the tools* (TT4,January 2009).

This interpretation by TT4 is also evident in the feedback he gives to schools after observation visits. In all seven of the schools he visited in March 2009 he made explicit comments about a teaching tool or the five teaching tools in general. TT4 defined a lesson as good when all five tools had been used. This suggested that the BTC training had unintentionally led to a new rule. When comments were analysed on lesson observations forms made by the other BTC trainers, there was no evidence of this rule being followed. Trainers were providing explanations as to how teaching tools could contribute to the learning in the lessons observed. The trainers’ comments were summarised from 28 school visits and fell into two broad categories: use of materials (22/28) and comments relating to pedagogy (12/28). TT5 comments on the explanation of clear learning objectives in all observations. Teacher trainers justified their comments with evidence demonstrating the connection between the teaching and the learning. TT4 does appear to rely on the ‘rule book’, but with experience, most of the trainers were beginning to make feedback decisions based on a deeper understanding of the teaching and learning process. The development of this professional agency could at least be partially attributable to the length of the training and the many different training components that were used over the five-year period.

In 2017, I made similar observations around the rigidity of process over purpose. In a workshop on language acquisition, MoEYS officials were particularly concerned that story telling should follow ministry guidelines and that the teacher must sit to tell a story. In a ‘*missing words activity’* officials stated that every eighth word should be removed as this was the rule, rather than reflecting on the purpose of the exercise. These examples suggest that moving classroom practice from following specific guidelines to one where teachers can develop professional agency remains a challenge.

Teacher quality is also measured against teacher standards. An OECD (2013) working paper compares teacher standards from several countries, including how they were devised, implemented and used as a measure of performance. There are striking similarities in the content. Teacher Standards were developed in Cambodia in 2007. This development was driven by key stakeholders from donor agencies. The draft policy document was prepared by the Cambodian Education Sector Support Project (CESSP), financed by the World Bank (WB). MoEYS (2007a, draft 6,1) explained that ‘*A standards statement is a brief and clear description of what is valued in one vital aspect of what a teacher knows and does. Each statement is expressed in terms of observable evidence of teacher actions that have an impact on students; this evidence can be used to appraise teacher performance*’. In this example, it would appear the World Bank and donors are driving the Teacher Standards agenda and their implementation in Cambodia therefore supporting the argument that education policy at the national level is driven by global organisations. Like log-frames, Professional Standards can easily lead to formularisation and an emphasis on global policy orthodoxies rather than situating teacher qualitative improvements in the local cultural context. As Alexander (2001) writes separating the teaching and learning process from the culture and classroom behaviour leads to a superficial understanding of the pedagogic practices teachers are using.

The introduction of Teacher Professional Standards was intended to upgrade the teaching profession, but they were not embedded in the pre-service system. In 2017 when I was working with 14 trainers from two Provincial Teacher Training Colleges (PTTC) they stated that the Teacher Professional Standards were not used with trainee teachers. The mismatch between how PTTC trainers viewed teaching and the Professional Standards themselves provides further insight into how local educators resist global policy orthodoxies.

Teacher training for primary school teachers in Cambodia takes place in one of the 18 PTTCs. The training focuses almost exclusively on subject knowledge. Trainees work through the pupil Grade 10 to 12 national textbooks to increase their own subject knowledge and the primary school textbooks to understand the curriculum that they will teach after training. Additionally, there is a distinctive Cambodian subject knowledge content which matches arguments that vulnerable countries must ensure nationalism is a part of the educational infrastructure for fear of homogenisation in the global system (Giddens 1999). The teacher training timetable does include pedagogy lessons, but these are usually based on students making materials for practicum independently. The PTTC trainers have been exposed to a plethora of projects from donors and iNGOs over the years and therefore should have been considerably influenced by global policy orthodoxies. However, the pedagogies that have been introduced are not embedded into the practices of the PTTC trainers. There could be several reasons for the lack of impact these projects have made and the local resistance they received. Pedagogy is not given the same value as subject knowledge. MoEYS policy for the appointment of trainers in the PTTCs was based on qualifications only and teaching experience was not necessary. This led to PTTC trainers either being employed directly from the graduating trainees or from the wider community who had attained bachelor degrees. An analysis of the background of 18 trainers from the PTTCs in June 2009 shows that 10 out of 18 of them had never taught in school. None of the trainers in this sample had ever taught primary grade 1 and 2 pupils. Without experience of teaching young pupils, it is not surprising that it is difficult to change pedagogical practice and that trainers felt more comfortable teaching subject knowledge.

The importance of subject knowledge is also evident in the Handbook for Civil Servants (RGC 2010). The salary system in Cambodia rewards the teachers of higher grades who are also expected to have higher qualifications. Part of the WB CESSP programme was based on improving lower secondary education, but they had to overcome teacher shortage. By up-grading the skills of 2500 primary teachers they filled the shortfall in lower secondary schools. However, policies like this affect the status position of primary school teachers. The WB website (2010) refers to the stories of some of the new lower secondary teachers ‘*By being promoted, Sokhunthea also gets better pay and has more time than when he was teaching at primary school to prepare his teaching methods and to continue his university study’.* The WB approach reinforces the perspective that a lower secondary school provides better opportunities and salary.

The BTC trainers also put an emphasis on subject knowledge when discussing the perceptions of teachers in society. This could be related to how knowledge is viewed in society more widely. The Chhab, one of the key historical texts of Cambodia provides a good example. The Chabb presents the relationship between teacher and child as one centred on authority. The role of the authority figure was to impart their knowledge to the child. Mabbett & Chandler (1995, 225) describe teachers as ‘*genteel authoritarian figures, who were generally, but not always monks….. They were teachers and transmitters of normative values… The teacher bestowed, recited and commanded; the student listened, memorised and obeyed’*.

In the Cambodian context Maskell (1998) considers a Buddhist interpretation of the teachers’ role that is like a Therevadan monk, where the teacher is a transmitter of knowledge and the process of discovery and inquiry beyond the traditional is not encouraged. This perspective is evidenced from interviews with the trainers.

*In the pagoda the pupil had to learn by heart. So the knowledge was transferred directly, this means the teacher did not give the pupils a chance to think or analyse. The pupil copies what the teacher taught* (TT1, January 2011).

*The education in the pagoda helped preserve the culture, for example during French colonial years if there were no schools in the pagoda there would not be Khmer letters and literature would not exist nowadays (*TT3,January 2011*)*.

*The boy studying in the pagoda was made to learn by heart. If we look in schools, especially in the rural areas we can see these traditions still exist especially amongst older teachers (TT2,*January 2011*)*.

Further examples of subject knowledge are given by the trainers when they refer to their own experience of delivering the training to the teachers. TT3 in January 2011 talks about how in one of his training sessions a participant had felt the need to test him by *‘measuring his knowledge’*.

‘*For me in urban areas what they think about the teacher is their knowledge, it is lower than others who have been in university’* (TT2,January 2011).

The teacher trainers’ insights are important. They noted that in rural areas people in the community had a lower level of education and knowledge than the teachers, so the teacher was respected for knowing more than the community. In urban areas teachers generally had lower qualifications than members of the community and therefore did not have as much respect. TT2’s comments also demonstrate how the teacher is positioned in society.

*For me a teacher is an educator, not someone who just passes on knowledge to other people, but it is about morality, knowledge and society. Teachers are given different values depending at which level they are worki*ng (TT2,February 2009).

Interviews revealed that MoEYS and the PTTC trainers’ perspective of the importance of subject knowledge was not the same as the views expressed by the BTC trainers who emphasised the importance of pedagogy and teaching experience. This difference could have arisen from the different starting points for each trainer. PTTC trainers on average, had higher qualifications, but less teaching experience, whereas the BTC trainers had fewer qualifications, but relevant teaching experience. The BTC trainers could also have been influenced by the team of English consultants who valued pedagogy and practical classroom experience as essential to the development of teachers.

How teachers are viewed in society and their positions are also a reflection of the political system. In March 2011 TT2 explained that if you want promotion in school you must be in the Cambodian Peoples’ Party (CPP). The CPP has been the ruling party since 1979, with many criticisms over the years that the voting system is not democratic. All the other educators agreed with TT2’s statement. TT6 added that if you were not in the CPP and you needed something, the local authority made it difficult for you. TT1 and TT4 agreed that from Lon Nol (prime minister in the mid 1960s) onwards the politics in the classroom changed to match the political regime.

The educators disagreed on the level of pressure that a teacher was under to join the ruling party. For TT4 there was a historic reason that there were more teachers in the CPP. TT6 strongly disagreed. He stated that the school director collected a list of party allegiance in each school and those teachers who did not declare themselves to be in the ruling party were in a difficult position. Cambodia Independent Teacher Association (CITA 2010) in their policy on teacher pay recommended that if the government wanted to attract and retain quality teachers then they needed to prevent teachers from using their professional position to serve political parties and political discrimination against teachers must also be stopped (CITA, 16). CITA also point out that while teachers remain civil servants and are not allowed to have contracts or form professional unions they do not have a vehicle for contributing to the development of their own profession.

**Conclusion**

The research presented in this paper is methodologically rigorous in that it has been drawn from a wide range of original sources over an extended period and then triangulated against national policy documents. Analysing the data in the context of a multi-levelled and multi-disciplinary context has been challenging, but the results illuminate a significant and original contribution to the field of teacher development that suggests more detailed and analytical processes should be used before models of educational reform are introduced.

Starting with the argument that there is an increased link between globalisation, knowledge economy and the education system I have shown that the neoliberal principles of competency agendas, standardisation and accountability have led to the dominance of politically motivated education ideologies. The examples from this case study in Cambodia support Harley’s claim that donors are often in a powerful position to impose **conditionalities** on ministries of education to ensure that projects are aligned with a particular model of teacher development (Harley 2005). The introduction of the EGRA tool and Teacher Professional Standards support this argument.

I have shown that in the Khmer culture there is a strong sense of formuliaism. The increased application of log-frames used by development agencies; in combination with education policies focused on measurable outcomes augments the disadvantages already apparent in an inflexible education system. Teacher education should enable and empower professional autonomy and decision making in the best interests of the learners. But global policy orthodoxies are paving the way to simplistic notions of teaching and learning and limiting professional agency. This reduces opportunities both nationally and locally for the development of innovate solutions to specific contexts.

In a positivist research climate, the voices of local educators are often neglected and few organisations invest in longitudinal qualitative research. The interviews conducted with the trainers demonstrate the significance of local voice. The interviews provided an opportunity to track the development of the trainers professionally and personally to understand how they made sense of training and policy and how they responded to it. The interviews also illuminated how national policies were interpreted in local practice. By allowing the Khmer teacher trainers to articulate their opinions on a wide range of themes, it revealed that there was evidence to support some of the historical and cultural theories proposed by academics working in the social sciences in Cambodia. Teacher development programmes should therefore be positioned within a wider multi-disciplinary framework that is nation state specific. This would ensure that government, INGOs and donors could take into account a wider range of factors that could impact on their programmes and that they would be able to better align the programmes to local contexts.

The research in this paper suggests that the issues raised in the context of Cambodia are relevant to all education systems. The political and economic will needs to be found that allows for a much deeper appraisal of how national education systems are positioned in multi-disciplinary contexts and within a multiple levelled analysis.

In 2017, large scale reform of the teacher training system in Cambodia has been initiated. The research in this paper is timely in that it could provide a useful discussion framework for ensuring that stakeholders from all sectors of society are involved.

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