

# New Generation Schools in Cambodia:

## Innovative School Governance for Sustainable Quality of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning and Instruction

Chankoulika BO\*

Director of Policy Department  
MoEYS  
Cambodia

\*bo.chankoulika@moeys.gov.kh

**Abstract**—Cambodian education is facing the requirements in the new context of industrial revolution 4.0 and 5.0 that require substantial and comprehensive renovation. Teaching and learning requires a strong transformation to embrace this new technological advancement. The New Generation Schools (NGS) reform launched in 2015 is used as a new school governance framework to promote the quality and the relevance of education to equip Cambodian youth with skills in industrial revolution era. As stated in Policy Guidelines for New Generation Schools for Basic Education in Cambodia, the establishment of NGS is based on the vision that ‘New Generation Schools will lead to the emergence of a new administrative framework that ensures the necessary conditions needed for successful educational investment’. The Goal of NGS is to create a new development track within the public education system that will lead to the creation of autonomous public schools, which receive high investment linked to new standards of accountability and governance as well as professional standards for 21st Century learning. This paper analyses the innovative governance features of the NGS focusing on the school autonomy for quality of learning and teaching practices. First, we will discuss the school autonomy in global context. Secondly, we discuss the design of NGS under the school autonomy model. Then, we construct the features of school autonomy in NGS. Finally, we identify lessons learned from NGS which can be leveraged in non-NGS schools in term of innovative good governance.

**Keywords**—new generation schools, school autonomy, innovations, school governance

### I. INTRODUCTION

Cambodian education is facing to the requirements in the new context of industrial revolution 4.0 and 5.0 that require substantial and comprehensive renovation. Teaching and learning requires a strong transformation to embrace this new technological advancement. The New Generation Schools (NGS) reform launched in 2015 is used as a new school governance framework to promote the quality and the relevance of education to equip Cambodian youth with skills in industrial revolution era. As stated in Policy Guidelines for New Generation Schools for Basic Education in Cambodia, the establishment of NGS is based on the vision that ‘New

Generation Schools will lead to the emergence of a new administrative framework that ensures the necessary conditions needed for successful educational investment’. The Goal of NGS is to ‘create a new development track within the public education system that will lead to the creation of autonomous public schools, which receive high investment linked to new standards of accountability and governance as well as professional standards for 21st Century learning’ [1]. By 2017, NGS officially operates at nine school sites in four municipalities/provinces including Phnom Penh, Kampong Cham, Kandal and Kampong Speu. The MoEYS plans to expand NGS to at least two provinces and to 100 schools by 2022 [2].

This paper analyses the innovative governance features of the NGS focusing on the school autonomy for quality of learning and teaching practices. First, we will discuss the school autonomy in global context. Secondly, we discuss the design of NGS under the school autonomy model. Then, we construct the features of school autonomy in NGS. Finally, we identify lessons learned from NGS which can be leveraged in non-NGS schools in term of innovative good governance.

#### A. School Autonomy as Innovative School Governance

The school autonomy model has become a popular paradigm of school governance reform in various countries in the world. This model entails the revisit of the school governance toward the self-regulated school with clear functions and right between the central administration and the school. The school autonomy which teachers and school directors are at core will promote the activeness, initiatives, social responsibility and transparency of public schools. The autonomous schools are fully entitled to develop their basic goals and policies of teaching and learning, stimulate the development of appropriate teaching and learning program, invest in facilities and manage teacher to conduct teaching and learning.

Whatever the feature of school autonomy, there are at least three features (1) the right of a school to run and manage its own activities without the external control, (2) the freedom to

decide about how the school is organized and functioned including the school vision, mission goals and directions and (3) the right to decide on the means to achieve the goals determined by the national education policy. School autonomy concept has been incorporated in school based management models (SBM) discursively permeated in policies and practices in many countries around the global. In US, UK, Australia and Canada, charter schools or independent schools are created to denote SBM [3,4]. In South-East Asia, innovative schools are created in Malaysia and semi-independent schools in Singapore [3,4]. Many research findings have shown that SBM increases participation in decision making which improves student learning outcomes [5,6] and promote innovative approaches of learning and teaching. OECD studies [7] proved that school governance with high autonomy and capacity promote high performance. The good governance and accountability of the school will improve the quality of education [8].

### *B. Evolution of School Autonomy in Cambodia*

The initiatives of enhancing school autonomy in Cambodian public education system are not new. Since 2001, the Education Sector Plan (ESP) since 2001 has permeated the delegation of autonomy to schools in terms of shared responsibility, participation and cooperation of the state and relevant stakeholders through the decentralization and deconcentration in education and school based management (ESP 2001-2023). To actualize school-based management, MoEYS introduced the Local School Support Committee (LSSC) in 1994 and the Priority Action Program (PAP) in 2000. The PAP has been applied throughout the country to promote decentralization of educational management services, through district-based and institution-based budget management centers, and reduce the cost burden on the poorest families. In addition, the MoEYS established school clusters in primary school for mobilizing local resources, and community involvement; a cluster is a group of schools within an area forming to provide a mutual support network based on guidelines established by the MoEYS. Moreover, the Local School Support Committee (LSSC) are formed; its members include school director as chairperson, local authority (i.e., village chief/commune chief) vice chairperson consisting of school principal, local authority, teacher representative, community representative, parent representative and student representative.

Supported by Global Education Project (GPE), the MoEYS developed the SBM implementation plan 2019-2023 which is mainly focused on providing capacity building for 3,642 primary school principals and follow-up supports to 2,572 schools. This is a massive program to train school directors on the core elements of school-based management, including planning, budgeting and financial management.

Recently, the MoEYS has piloted the SBM in a more comprehensive way than the previous SBM at secondary schools under the Secondary Education Improving Project (SEIP). So the previous school based programs are not obsolete but co-exist with the new piloting program. 100

schools have been selected to implement the SBM with technical and financial supports from the World Bank and the central MoEYS support teams. The MoEYS plans to scale up this SBM model in the next five years.

These initiatives have been undertaken in responding to the long standing criticisms on the weakness of public education system that Cambodian school system is not able to produce full potential learners with relevant knowledge and high thinking skills defined in Bloom Taxonomy as well as behavioral values and human characters to meet the needs of the new trends of internet-driven society in the 21st century [9-11]. World Bank presented its report "Growing Smarter" that Cambodia rural children have to attend ill-equipped schools with underprepared teachers" [9]. School autonomy is likely to improve the quality and relevance of learning and instruction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Without a deep public school reform, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) cannot achieve the vision per permeated in its ESP 2014-2023 that "graduates from all its institutions will meet regional and international standards and will be competitive in the job markets worldwide and act as engines for social and economic development in Cambodia" through its three core policies of equity, quality and life-long learning and effective leadership and management at all levels.

While the attempts for delegation of greater school autonomy are far from new, there is renewed policy commitment of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) to this reform and its capacity to create effective public education system through the creation of New Generation Schools that is expected to improve the quality of learning and spur innovation at school level.

### *C. Innovative Governance in New Generation Schools*

*1) School autonomy and accountability:* The establishment of NGS demonstrates the long term commitment of the MoEYS to provide greater autonomy to public schools. With the greater autonomy, the MoEYS allows NGS to waive several law, rules and regulations related to the curriculum, school organizations, personnel management, teacher recruitment and firing, teacher professional development that are applied to normal public schools. It is to noted that Cambodian education system is highly centralized. The MoEYS hold power in teacher recruitment, training and deployment, curriculum content, instructional time, teacher salary and resource allocation to schools and with minimal power to schools in terms of teaching methods and learning support activities. With this centralized governance paradigm, the school and student academic performance are slow.

The NGS are autonomous public schools linked to new standards of accountability and governance and professional standards for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning [1]. Such schools receive greater autonomy in governance and decision-making with regard to matters of finance, staffing and resourcing to stimulate educational innovation, high educational standards, and strong student academic performance that cannot be

generated in normal public schools [1]. To ensure the accountability of the NGS, National Oversight Board created by the MoEYS at national level and Provincial Oversight Board will oversee the implementation of NGS policy and regulations the NGS including the designation and withdrawal of accreditation and the investment [12].

The NGS administrative model allows schools greater control, flexibility and efficiency in the school improvement to respond to the need of local community. Adherent to school autonomy, schools must be accountable for the high performance of teachers and school directors linking to the teacher career pathways and remunerations, and effective use and maintain of high investment facilities. The accountability of NGS challenges the corruption which is one of key problems contributing to low learning performance in Cambodia. Two conventional practices in public schools: private tutoring and mandatory student purchase of teacher goods are abolished in NGS [1,12]. The NGS are more accountable than normal public schools because they have to meet high demand of parents and students and performance management contracts with the Ministry of Economy and Finance that provides annual funding based on the student academic performance.

2) *The right to hire and fire teachers:* The NGS enjoy the right to hire and fire teachers based on its own selection criteria and process. This authority is not found in normal public schools. The selection and training of NGS teachers are managed by the MoEYS and Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE) through the New Generation School Training Center (NGSTC). Teachers employed in the NGS are paid more than teachers in other public schools. Although the NGS is provided this key authority, the NGS is still facing the teacher turn over [12]. NGS teachers were on average younger than traditional public school teachers, which makes them more likely to leave the profession or change schools. Teachers in NGS are not permanent, they are mostly temporary transferred from other public school or contracted teachers. They must come back to their original schools after finishing the employment contract. For contracted teachers, they may not stay at NGS long if they could find another opportunity.

3) *The use of Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE) is institutional innovation:* The NGS creation is linked to Beacon Schools Initiative (BSI) project in Kampong Cham Province implemented by Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE) in 2011. This BSI project aims to provide practical concepts for improving school governance and cooperation between the public and private sector [2]. KAPE has been engaged by the MoEYS to oversight the process of creation of NGS followed the model of BSI in 2014. The use of nonprofit organization like KAPE is a management innovation of the NGS than is not found in normal public schools. KAPE provides a variety of services covered almost all aspects of the schools such as the initial

training of teachers, selection of the competent teachers, day to day management of the school, professional development programs for teachers and school directors, NGS related researches etc.

4) *New strategies of parental engagement:* The NGS involve more parents than other public schools. The rationality behind this involvement is that NGS parents because they choose to send their child to the NGS through a rigorous selection, will be more involved than traditional public school parents whose child are automatically admitted to the schools. With a greater autonomy, the NGS made the available strong parental involvement policies. This creates institutional trust and confidence from the parents. For instances, what can be seen differently from normal public schools are that parents are invited to school meetings and school visits during starting and closed school academic year. The NGS night shows are very popular and attract the participation of parent in the NGS. In this shows, students demonstrate the innovations, the achievements and credentials.

5) *Innovative role of school director in support teacher:* Teachers and school directors in the NGS collaborate effectively in the school's management. The school directors create the professional development of teachers, determines educational objectives of the school, ensure the practical instruction is used to achieve these objectives, propose amendments to improve teaching practices. The school directors at NGS plays effectively role as instructional leaders that motive teachers to improve the quality of their practices and provide professional learning community (PLC) between teachers. The NGS teachers form groups based on the subject area or grade to collaborate, reflect and exchange ideas on their instructional practices to achieve the students learning goals and their professional growth.

## II. DISCUSSION

### A. Innovations

The NGS are well positioned to do something different from what other public schools are doing and develop new idea that help the school to perform in a new way. Their ability to be innovative lies in the regulations that governs the NGS establishment and operation. Different from other public schools, the NGS are entitled to the school autonomy and accountability under the National Oversight Board chaired by the Minister of Education, Youth and Sport in terms of curriculum and instruction, staff management and development, the involvement of NGO and parents and target population. The school governance toward the school autonomy and accountability, stakeholders' engagement and innovative school directorship are innovative. But the central question remains whether the NGS are innovative in term of quality of learning and the efficiency of learning. In other words, do the innovations spurred by the NGS will change the qualitative and quantitative learning outcomes? and do the

amount of time, money and resources are used efficiently to obtain learning result?

As suggested by Peter Serdyukov [13], the purpose of innovation is consistent, which is "to create something different from what have been doing, be it in quality or quantity or both. To produce a considerable, transformative effect, the innovation must be put to work, which requires prompt diffusion and large-scale implementation." He further mentioned that qualitative learning outcomes refer to "better knowledge, important competencies, character development and values..." [13]. The quantitative results refer to "improved learning parameters such as test results, volume of information learned, amount of skills or competencies developed, college enrollment numbers, measured student performance, retention, attrition, graduation rate, number of students in class, cost, and time efficiency" [13]. This conceptual orientation of innovation will be based for analyzing the parameter of innovation in the NGS.

### B. *Quality of Learning in the NGS*

The overall results at two NGS schools were excellent comparing to the national average and non-NGS schools in the same locality. There are currently only two schools with students at the grade 12 level, which is Preah Sisovath High School in Phnom Penh and Hun Sen Kampong Cham High School in Kampong Cham province. Sisovath NGS and Hun Sen Kampong Cham NGS achieved 94% and 84% pass rate respectively comparing with a national pass rate of 68%. Hun Sen Kampong Cham HS. These results show improvement from the results report last year with Sisovath NGS pass rate of 89% and Hun Sen Kampong HS pass rate of 84% [14,15]. 4% of the students at the Hun Sen Kampong HS achieved an A score in comparison to the only 0.4% of students nationally [14,15]. Remarkably, students in the NGS receive the number of medals and awards related to the creativity and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. This proves the promised success of school autonomy and accountability of the NGS toward the improvement of quality of education.

However, with the high investment from MoEYS (at least 30% of the school's operation costs) and the parental contribution based on the negotiation between parents and school (for instance: \$ 280 per student in Preah Sisovath High School and \$250,000 in total, \$100 per student in Hun Sen Kampong Cham High School and in total \$66,000), the NGS are costly in comparing to the normal public schools. Therefore, the equity and efficiency of education are at risk.

### C. *Equity of Education*

The market reform and parental and learner's choice principle of the NGS will create the gap between the NGS and normal school and the gap between the privileged learners and less privileged learners. The normal public schools receive annual funding from the MoEYS much less than the NGS. The high investment cost of the NGS will make the large-scale implementation difficult. The high parental contribution cost of the NGS make its hard for the disadvantaged learners to access

the NGS taking into account the low social resources and capacities of the parents.

## III. CONCLUSION

Cambodia is now preparing its education sector for middle-income country by 2030 and developed country by 2050. Furthermore, Cambodia must prepare itself the challenges of industrial development 4.0 and algorithm and Artificial Intelligent are going to replace human in many forms both at workplaces and in almost aspect of daily life. The development goal and global environment changes will impose many challenges on Cambodia education sector. The New Generation is a promising model of innovative school governance pertaining to school autonomy and NGO's engagement (KAPE) linked to strong accountability to improve the quality of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. Although current evidence suggests the reform is well designed to its promised goal of improving the quality of learning of the public school at this time being, further studies needed to be done in terms of level of innovations, cost effectiveness, equity of learning, the 21<sup>st</sup> competency skill of the student enrolled in the NGS and precise measures of prior student achievement to better explain the accountability measures of the NGS and normal public schools evolved over time.

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