

# Review of Changes of Education Policy for Development in Cambodia: from the 1860s to the 1980s

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## Abstract

This paper reviews the research literature on educational development and changes of education policy for development in Cambodia throughout five historical events from the 1860s to the 1980s. Secondary data such as scholarly journal articles and books were gathered through the search in databases of ERIC, Science Direct, Google Scholar, and library. Content analysis was adopted as the analytical method. The authors argue that even though educational provision has been embraced as the important policy for development, it has been found to be fundamentally misguided. From the 1950s to 1960s, the significant expansion of education brought rapid growth of economic and establishments of schools, universities, and teacher training colleges. However, the crisis of education emerged from the decline of education in the early 1970s and the total dismantle of education during the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) by the second half of the 1970s. It has damaged many of Cambodia development prospects.

**Key words:** Education, Development, Policy, Cambodia

## 1. Introduction

In the history of nation-building in Cambodia, education has been deemed as a key factor emphasizing on developing highly qualified human resources to move Cambodia toward modernization. The central thesis to discuss here are the overall education development and what educational strategies and policies of the previous regimes evolved for nation-building in Cambodia. Thus, this paper covers the important historical events related to the changes of politics in line with the changes of education policy throughout five regimes of different political trends: French Colonization (1863-1953), Post-French Colonization (1954-1969), the Khmer Republic (1970-1975), the Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979), and the People's Republic of Kampuchea (1980s). Basically, the political and educational system of Cambodia were not static throughout those eras, for there were many political changes from the initial *Khmer* (Cambodian)-Indian interactions to the arrival of French and its colonization until the mid-nineteenth century and the other post-colonial regimes.

There are various significances of reviewing education development and the changes of education policy in Cambodia dating from the 1860s to the 1980s. Numerous studies have dedicated to a state of educational development, social development, or policies aftermath of one regime. Beyond these studies, the inclusive study on both educational development and the changes of education policy for the social development of five regimes dating from the 1860s to the 1980s has been reviewed and presented in this paper. Ayres (2000) elaborates that there have not been enough scholarly books or articles discussing with the development or social policies of Cambodia, and especially very few of those scholarly sources dealing with educational development have been

found as a reflection of how education should vitally be considered as the policy for the social development. Therefore, this review paper has included books from the library search and some comprehensive scholarly articles to further examine how education is important for national development in Cambodia from historical perspectives. Furthermore, this study proves how the changes of education policies affected development prospects of Cambodia. It is an informative evidence for policymakers and related educational stakeholders to learn from the past experiences and bring up the alternative and up-to-date education policies to the current education system. To develop a nation, education for its people is a key for sustainable social and economic development. Therefore, this study has argued that the regime adopting the education as the main development policy experiences dramatic social and economic growth compared to those neglecting the significance of education of their people. For instance, from 1953 to 1970, Cambodia experienced the rapid development of the economic and modernization since massive expansion of education was the central tendency for the social development policy in Cambodia (Ayres, 2000; Fergusson & Masson, 1997). However, during the French colonization when education was ignored or neglected (Whitaker, 1973), the Khmer Republic's era, and the Democratic Kampuchea infamous Khmer Rouge were the good reflection to elaborate that the decline of education was one of the main obstacle for nation-building in context of Cambodia.

## 2. Methods

This paper is a comprehensive review discussing on the development of education and the influences of education policy on development prospects in Cambodia throughout five phases of political changes. It also presents the success and failure of the adaptation of education as the policy for national development of each regime. To carry out the review of this study, we conducted the database searching on ERIC, Science Direct, Google Scholar, and library. The researchers categorized the documents based on four key concepts: the history of Cambodia, education development and challenges of each regime, education policy, and politics of those regimes. These four categories were used as a framework for data collection process. The researchers briefly reviewed the contents of books and scholarly articles related to those earlier mentioned concepts and organized them accordingly. Most documents were found in form of books written by well-known authors who contributed significantly to our educational research ground in term of Cambodia education and politics such as Chandler (1983, 1998), Ayres (2000), Burgler (1990), Vickery (1984, 1986), and Whitaker (1973).

Content analysis was used to analyze the data gathered from scholarly sources such as journal articles and books from June to July in 2018. Content analysis consists of two analytical methods: conceptual analysis and relational analysis. In this study, however, the researchers used relational analysis to analyze the texts from various scholarly sources. Relational analysis allows the researchers to explore in-depth relationships between the concepts or units identified through the examination of semantic or meaningful relationships of those concepts or units (Carol et al., 2012). The researchers defined coding units prior to data collection and used referential units (see Stemler, 2001) to categorize data for the analysis. Inferences were extracted from the texts through, once again, the four main concepts or units related to the topic, namely the history of Cambodia, education development and challenges of each regime, education policy, and politics of those regimes. These referential units represented the general situation of educational development and challenges of each regime and how the changes of politics marked the significant changes of development prospects of Cambodia. The concrete results and discussions are presented in the following sections.

## 3. Results and Discussions

### 3.1 French Colonization: Franco-Cambodian School (1863-1953)

Under the new politics of French protectorate, it brought the modern education system which fundamentally formed the foundation of the public-school system in Cambodia today. The development of education during the colonial period is discussed through various educational and political changes in this section. The first phase was broken to trace the extension and decline of the French protectorate, and the second one was about the widespread of the ideology and practice in term of politics, economic, and education. The last phase would discuss the situation before and after the colonization. This section briefly highlights the establishment of French new education systems and the transformation of Cambodia education from traditional to what so-called "the modern" system.

French put Cambodia under its protectorate for eight decades from 1863, one year after French expanded its colony to Cochinchina known as southern Vietnam (Osborne, 1969), to exploit its strategic geographical location during the world war (Ayres, 2000). Before the 1930s, all national budgets went directly to bankroll French officials and the things they wanted to establish, whereas French administration spent almost nothing on the education sector, and Cambodian only gained what they called "protection" from anyone else during the war (Chandler, 1983). French colonization during the nineteenth century was the

era when education was neglected or ignored, and it failed to enroll a significant number of students until the late colonial period (Whitaker, 1973). To maintain its colonial power, French firstly hesitated to improve the education and later introduced the new system of schooling so-called “modern” Franco-Cambodian school. This schooling system only targeted the small group of elite communities that served the colony (Clayton, 1995; Dy, 2004). Ayres (2000) elaborated that the nature of establishing this school was only for the use by French residents’ children, members of the Cambodian elite, Chinese merchants, and children of Vietnamese immigrants who served under the French tasks of administration in Cambodia. Even though there were some scholars arguing that French did not want to enhance the education, and those schools were exclusive for only the particular groups, many schools and colleges were established during the colonial period. For example, there were the establishments of the French-Language School of the Protectorate renamed later to the Protectorate in 1893, the College of the protectorate, a College for interpreters, and three French-language primary schools in provincial capitals located in urban areas, and it was not sure if there were some kinds of these school in the provincial capitals. Kiernan (1985) claimed that those schools only existed in Phnom Penh (the capital city of Cambodia). On the other hands, the majority of Cambodian who resisted to the new education system kept their children out from Franco-Cambodian schools. Most scholars argued that Cambodian parents intended not to send their children to this school since they wanted to keep away their kids from the contact with Vietnamese immigrants most of whom Cambodian hated and rejected the French development policies. So, only most Vietnamese immigrants’ kids were found dominated in this schooling system, whereas Cambodian continued to send their children to *wat* (temple or pagoda)-school (Forest, 1980 as cited in Clayton, 1995; Osborne, 1969). Chandler (1983) claimed that most aspects of primary education endured in the hands of the *sangha* (a group of Buddhist monks), while the colonizer only subsidized a very little cost to support the development of education. According to Sopheak and Clayton (2007), the enrollment rate of the Franco-Cambodian school was very low, while the achievement of students of *wat*-school was also very poor. It was challenging for them to pass the examination to study in the schools established by French. *Wat*-school students were accepted to study in the modern school as long as they passed the *Certificat d’Etudes Elementaires Indigenes* (CEEI), but a huge number of them could not pass. For instance, only 50,000 to 60,000 children enrolled in primary school in 1936, while only seven high-school students could graduate in 1931 (Whitaker, 1973, p. 125), and in 1933, only 240 candidates among the 4764 pupils could pass the tests to study in the modern schools. The problems were due to the high absenteeism, dropout, the distance to the examination center, and the low instruction given in mathematics (Sopheak & Clayton, 2007). This phenomenon led Cambodian who could not acquire French language and necessary skills for French colonial services to remain less in French administration than those immigrants. It was the failure of new education policy that French administration expected Cambodian to realize the ideas of subordination of its modern education system until the twentieth century when French made this goal possible (Ayres, 2000).

The twentieth century was a remarkable period when French’s school system, Franco-Cambodian school, was rapidly expanded under the monarchy of King Sisowath who came to throne after the death of his father, King Norodom, in 1904, and the existence of resistance to the newly modernized education system by French gradually declined (Osborne, 1969). According to Postiglione (2007), French established four French-language primary schools in the country and the College of the Protectorate in Phnom Penh with approximately 430 enrollments, and about 60 students studied in the other three schools in the three provincial capitals by 1902 (Tully, 1996). The Franco-Cambodian schooling system was operated by the model “3+3+4” with French as the language of the instruction, and it required students to remain in school for three years for elementary level, three years for complementary levels (elementary cycle and three-years complementary cycle of primary education), and four years for advanced primary education cycle (Bilodeau, 1955). The number of schools and enrolments were increasing after the establishment of the Franco-Cambodian Norodom School in Phnom Penh in 1903, and many schools were also opened in most parts of the provincial capitals. By 1907, 18 Franco-Cambodian schools were established, and the number of schools was rapidly expanded to 29 in 1916 (Bilodeau, 1955). To strengthen French union in Indochina, French government decided to change the new policy of controlling and maintaining good cooperation with those colonies. Education policy was one of the important policies that French government prioritized to modify and unify the schooling system as one for all countries under its colony. Thus, in 1918, Albert Sarraut, a governor-general of Indochina, approved an educational blueprint directing that all the children of the five countries of Indochina would get identical schooling. The new system was not without deficiencies (Ayres, 2000). French motivated Cambodian to participate in this modern educational system by requiring all boys living within two kilometers of a French’s school to attend the class (Bilodeau, 1955). Few students seemed to remain at school longer than three years, and the majority of Cambodian children continued going to *wat*-schools. Education at *wat*-school was so problematic due to the exclusion of girls from regular participation, teachers’ shortage, and the insufficient spaces to accommodate a large number of children. Finally, Cambodian became apathetic to the schooling system of French administration. First, French decided to let temples temporarily operate as educational infrastructures before the establishment of the Franco-Khmer public schools. There were major reforms on most parts because *wat*-schools had no curriculums, timetables, inspectors, or even examinations (Ayres, 2000). To deal with the teacher shortage, teacher training

program was initiated. There was a first successful teacher training at Kompot province in 1924, and it later expanded throughout the country. The training college system was laid in 1925 with the first establishment of teacher college, Sisowath College, while Cambodia plagued of the extreme teacher shortage and very low standard of teaching by the 1920s (Ayres, 2000; Fergusson & Masson, 1997). Then the successful establishment of the Franco-Khmer public schools brought the significant growth of enrolments as Ayres (2000) claimed that

in 1932/1933, there were 223 modernized temple schools in Cambodia. By, 1938/1939, the number had increased to 908. Franco-Khmer public schools, offering the full primary curriculum, number 18 in 1932/1933, with the same number of establishment in 1938/1939..... The enrolments at the Franco-Khmer primary schools increased by approximately 150% during the period, compared with almost 500% for modernized temple schools. In 1938/1939, only 294 students passed the *Certificat D'études Primaires Complémentaires* (Certificate of Complementary Primary Studies), despite the fact that almost 600,000 students were enrolled at primary schools. Full secondary education was offered for the first time only in 1935..... (p. 25)

Even though the new school system was a hope for the integration for female into the public-school system, only a small number of female pupils enrolled. Tully (1996) argued that among 3700 pupils, only 6% of females were found in 1922. In addition, the number of girls was found decreasing even though the number of primary and secondary schools increased in Cambodia (Eilenberg, 1961) because girls accounted only 15% of the secondary-school enrolment in the early 1960s and 11% of university enrolments between 1952 and 1963 (Fergusson & Masson, 1997). It was until 1942 that the first college, The *Collège Norodom Sihanouk*, was established to stimulate indigenous loyalty and enhance French adherence to the king (Ayres, 2000). The university was not established until the country gained full independence from France in 1953. So, it can be assumed that French government did not consciously develop Cambodia education system, but they established it just to only sustain its colonial power. The initiation of the new education policy that French brought to Cambodia was not so successful. Due to the strong posture of resistance to the French colonization, what Cambodian adopted throughout the colonial era appeared to be only the language (Clayton, 1995).

### 3.2 Post-French Colonization (1954-1969)

March 09th, 1945 was the remarkable period when Cambodia, so-called “*Cambodge*” by French, was turned to be “*Kampuchea*” after eight decades under the French protectorate. Supported by the Japanese party, the newly appointed king, King Norodom Sihanouk, declared the independence from the protectorate of French on March 13th, 1945. Not long after, French officially granted independence to Cambodia on July 03rd, 1953 in Paris (Chandler, 1983). Years before the national election in 1955 were the time when Cambodia experienced the most politically stable in the post-independent era in its history (Ayres, 2000). Cambodia changed its new face, and the new ideology of Buddhist Socialism and the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* (the People’s Socialists Community) of King Sihanouk’s regime were introduced. The change of politics from the protectorate to the monarchy also marked the significant changes in education policy during the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum*. Education system became rapidly expanded until it was declined during the civil war of the 1970s and then totally dismantled by the policy of the Khmer Rouge or Democratic Kampuchea (DK) from 1975 to 1979 (Ayres, 2000).

Like the other developing countries, after gaining independence, Cambodia advanced with the promise of adopting education as the main development policy to boost economic growth and modernization from the 1950s (Ayres, 2000). It was undeniable that Cambodia enjoyed a massive expansion of education from independence in the 1950s to 1970 (Fergusson & Masson, 1997). From the period of the postcolonial era, Cambodia government used the schooling model developed by the French administration and promised to expand more national budget on the education sector. A number of schools rapidly increased with very high enrollment rate. Subsequently, there were establishments of nine universities in the city and provincial capitals, regional teacher training centers, and vocational schools (Bit, 1991). Basically, the public education system was divided into primary, secondary, higher, and specialized education under the management of the Ministry of Education (MoE). The syllabus was established, teachers were paid by the government, and the supplies of materials were greatly contributed. For primary school, for instance, the curriculum comprised of arithmetic, history, ethics, civics, drafting, geography, hygiene, language, science, physical education, and manual work. French language was used in the second year of primary education, while Khmer was widely used as the instructional language (Whitaker, 1973). The central nation-building perspective of King Sihanouk was to embrace formal education as the policy to transform the country to be an industrial and technological advanced modern nation. Therefore, it was claimed that, over the period of 15 years, the government of the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* dedicated more than 20% of the national budget on the expenditure of education, and a multitude of primary schools, secondary schools, and universities was expansively established in the capital and provincial regions. The commitment to provide at least the basic education (grade 1 to 9) to Cambodian pupils

attracted the rapid rise of enrolments in all educational levels with the sharp increase of contract-teaching staffs who received high salary across the country (Ayres, 2000). Even though some studies claimed that there was a high expenditure on education from 17% to 20% of the national budget between 1953 to 1964, Fergusson and Masson (1997) argued that compared to the expenditure on education approximately 17% to 20%, the national budget for the defense was up to 26%, whereas the education expenditure represented only 12.3% and 12.1% of the national budget in 1954 and 1955. However, it was the time when dramatic changes in educational reforms occurred, and it could be explained by the rapid rise of the enrollments at primary, secondary, and higher education. Chandler (1983) claimed that there were some significant differences in educational reform in Cambodia after independence in 1953. Hundreds of thousands of students got through the significantly expanded educational system, and the teaching staffs and experienced older people in the government greatly increased. Especially, the enrollments in primary education extended from 200, 000 in 1952 to one million by the end of the 1960s, and a number of schools were quickly established to accommodate more and more students. It was also remarkable that girls were integrated into the education system and allowed equal right to be educated as they desired (Sopheak & Clayton, 2007). In addition, Vickery (1984, p. 18) maintained that

....by 1954 there were 217,000 in primary schools, 3,300 in secondary schools, and 144 had received the full baccalaureate. Therefore, the numbers increased rapidly until 1970. Primary enrollment expanded to a million, secondary to over 100,000, and tertiary from 350 to 10,000. The percentage increase university students alone were many times the percentage increase in the total population.

The expansion of higher education was also noticeable since it was approximately 2500% increase of the enrolments, particularly in the field of arts and humanities and science, yet there were huge disparities of gender. The number of male pupils dominated in all disciplines of the studies. There was no enrolment for female pupils at all for some subjects and the total enrollments in higher education increased from about 200 in 1953 to 5753 in 1970 (Fergusson & Masson, 1997). By 1970, six universities were completely established, and they enrolled approximately 9,000 students. For example, the University of Phnom Penh accommodated nearly 4,570 male pupils and more than 730 female pupils in eight departments such as the department of letter and humanities, science and technology, law and economics, medicine, pharmacy, commercial science, teacher training, and higher teacher training. The establishments of institutes for higher education were in the capital city and provincial capitals. In the urban areas, there were some universities such as the Phnom Penh-based RKU/UPP in 1960, the Technical University in 1964, the Buddhist University in 1963, the University of Fine Arts in 1966, and the University of Agronomic Science in 1966. Universities at provincial capitals were the University of Kompong Cham in 1969, the University of Battambang in 1968, and the University of Takeo-Kompot in 1969 (Fergusson & Masson, 1997). The high demand for teachers became critical due to a large number of enrolments at all levels. Under the King Sihanouk's government, salary for teachers was significantly raised to attract more people into the teaching job, so there were many people sitting for examination to enter the training at the teacher training colleges every year. For primary and secondary level, trainees were normally trained for one to three years depending on their qualification. For instance, the number of 200 teacher trainees were annually trained at the *Le centre de preparation pedagogique de Kompong Kantout* (the Center of Pedagogic training at Kompong Kontout). Teaching was considered as the primary choice of all other professions among Cambodian during that time, and women seemed to increasingly involve more in teaching. Approximately, 9% to 34% of teaching staffs at the primary school and 14% to 16% at secondary school were females between 1950 to 1964, and for instance, about 50% of the 540 trainees completing their training at the Kompong Kontout teacher training center were also females (Fergusson and Masson, 1997, p.101). According to the high enrolment rate, Sopheak and Clayton (2007) maintained that it was also remarkable for the decline of proportion of female students during the postcolonial era because females appeared to drop out from schools of each successive level of the educational ladder due to many reasons such as the lack attention of gender matters by the new government and the contribution of cultural attitude of Cambodian people's expectation of women in Khmer society. Vickery (1984, p. 176), for example, explained that

The place for women was definitely considered to be in the home, and for peasant women, in the fields; and formal schooling for them had not traditionally been considered necessary. At most, basic literacy was seen as desirable; and as late as the 1960s few girls outside of Phnom Penh persisted beyond the first six years of primary schools. In fact, many got married soon after that, and in Kompon Thom at that time I not frequently heard male students and teachers remark that too much school tended to turn girls into whores.

It was about ten years after Cambodia enjoyed the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum*. The shift of political change by 1970 brought the gloomy tragedy to Cambodia again after King Sihanouk was overthrown by the General Lon Nol and the National Assembly to form a new government known as the *Khmer Republic* (KR) (Chandler, 1983).

### 3.3 The Khmer Republic (1970-1975)

The decline of the education began from the birth of the Khmer Republic (KR) after the General Lon Nol, backed by the United State to seize the widespread of communism, overthrew King Sihanouk in 1970 (Chandler, 1983). In 1970, a military coup led by Lon Nol initiated civil war in Cambodia. At the same time, Cambodia fell into the Vietnam war, which made the United State B-52 aircrafts dropped many tons of bombs on Cambodia, particularly in the countryside, in the 1970s to eliminate the Communist North Vietnam forces and their fundamental lines. More than 700, 000 Cambodian were killed, while approximately two million farmers were evacuated by leaving their homes and rice fields to seek for the safety zone as the internal refugees in Phnom Penh and the other urban rehabilitation centers (Curtis, 1993). Under the new politics of the revolutionary, Cambodia was involving in war, and the new government was found to not highly pay attention to foster education sector or initiate new education strategies and policies. The civil conflict took place in the rural area, and the government led by Lon Nol quickly decreased the budget for the education sector to finance military expenditure instead. Many schools were closed, and some students and teachers fled to join the DK revolution (Dy, 2004).

To some extent, Burgler (1990) argued that Lon Nol' coup was welcomed by the people of the middle class, the intellectuals, and the mass of students because it meant to them as the end of the corrupt government led by King Sihanouk. However, people in the countryside who were less visible to the corruption of the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* era viewed the act of overthrowing of the king as the act of sacrilege. Civil rebellions between the unarmed countryside people and the authorities of the new government of the KR broke out violently. The people, police, and troops were injured during the protest, and hundreds of people were killed and arrested by the authorities. The KR's regime was dramatically deteriorated due to the poor leadership of Lon Nol. This regime let the corruption occurred with no prevention and action and only waited to be assisted by the U.S for military assistance. It desperately disappointed many people who welcomed the coup (Burgler, 1990; Chandler, 1983). Phnom Penh was the center controlled by the KR, while some other parts were laid by the U.S bombs and civil war for five years before the communists, the DK, came to power in 1975 (Chandler, 1983). Under the KR's era, education was also claimed by Lon Nol as the prior sector to enhance for the sustainable development of Cambodia. However, it was impossible to maintain the expansion of education because national budget was mostly used for the cost of war and defense, and many educational infrastructures were destroyed. Despite the confirmation by UNESCO that Lon Nol's government was still willing to expand on the education sector, the national budget went exclusively into the war. Schools in the eastern zone were severely damaged, while teacher training and curriculum development were barely existed during then (Burgler, 1990; Fergusson & Masson, 1997). Fergusson and Masson (1997) claimed that on May 01st, 1970, bombardments dropped by the U.S destroyed some universities such as the University of Takeo-Kompot and the University of Kompong Cham. Most parts of the rural area of Cambodia became the bombing campaign for the U. S who tried to postpone a Communist victory during the war in the middle of 1973 before the U. S Congress banned the further bombing (Chandler, 1983). If we take a look at the situation in the country, the continuous civil conflict between students, teachers, and some people who fought against the KR went viral, and the number of enrolments rapidly sank due to the dramatic rise of dropouts. In short, education was not stable during the KR's regime due to the political instability, civil conflict, and the involvement in the Vietnam war which caused severe damages to some parts of Cambodia, especially rural areas. Some students and teachers were fighting against the KR's government, while some others fled to join the revolution. Therefore, most schools were closed, and the enrolment rate dramatically declined during the five-year KR's regime before the arrival of the DK in 1975. There were not any new forms of education strategies or policies found of this regime for the expansion of the education sector.

### 3.4 The Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)

The revolution wiped out millions of lives of Cambodian people as the forest fire or typhoon from 1975 to 1979. The Khmer Republic led by Lon Nol was defeated by the Communists known as the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) led by Pol Pot in April 1975 (Ayres, 2000; Chandler, 1983). The DK's government claimed its realization of the importance of education for re-building Cambodia. Education system appeared so different from formal education during the French colonization and the KR's regime. The education policy of the DK was to only educate children for the revolutionary purposes and eliminated the educated people who were viewed as the enemies for the DK. Bit (1991) claimed that only minimal education at the primary level was provided just to serve the purposes of the revolutionary movements by equipping the ideology to the young. Secondary or higher education was not allowed. The DK's government also provided some educational training related to technical skills to the youth who were recruited from the peasant families. The details of this very unique form of education during the DK's period will be discussed along with some discussion of the people' livelihood in the following paragraphs.

DK's era was what most scholars called "Year Zero" which tracked for three years, eight months, and twenty days (Clayton, 1998; Vickery, 1984). As the central policy of the DK's government to wipe out the educated people and people who betrayed *Angka Padevat* (revolutionary organization) to cast serious discredit to the regime, hundreds of thousands of people were killed

outrightly and others died because of starvation, overwork, and diseases. Especially, people who were suspected to have the connection with the previous regime, including students, teachers, engineers, doctors, and other well-educated groups of people whom they called *Kmang* (unnamed enemies), suffered relatively more than others (Bit, 1991; Chandler, 1983; Whitaker, 1973). There was no clear single evidence to support the exact number of the death toll of Cambodian people from 1975 to 1979, but there were some figures given by previous scholarly works. For instance, Vickery (1984) reported that the death toll was ranged between 2 to 3 million, and Whitaker (1973) elaborated that it was approximately three million deaths reported by Vietnam government, 1.4 (20% of the total population) million by Amnesty International (AI), 1 million to 800,000 by Khieu Samphan and Pol Pot, and 1.2 million by the United States Department of State. Despite the killing, strangers were forced to marry each other, kids were taken away from their family to work in the fields, and religion was also prohibited. Monks, approximately 40,000 to 60,000, were defrocked to participate in the labor collectives, while some were killed (Bit, 1991; Whitaker, 1973). Currency and market were demolished, and schools and pagodas were turned to be the storehouses or jails (Ayres, 2000; Clayton, 1998; Vickery, 1984; Whitaker, 1973). Most infrastructures were transformed into the warehouses and used for other agricultural purposes, while students were learning only the ideology which served the determination of the *Angkar Padevat* without pens and books in the open spaces. Chandler (1983) explained the unimaginable implication of the young people trained by the *Angkar Padevat* as the weapons towards their parents and Cambodian compatriots. Many Cambodian youths between fifteen and twenty years old were trained to fight against the “feudalism” and the “Americans” in the early 1970s. They were equipped with the ideology borrowed from Mao Zedong to lead their steps toward revolution defined as “independence, mastery, and self-reliance”. Those young people were viewed by the DK as “poor and blank” pages on which it was easy to inscribe the teaching of the revolution, and they would lead the way to transform Cambodia into a socialist country (Burgler, 1990; Chandler, 1983; Whitaker, 1973). There were 5,275 primary schools, 146 secondary schools, and nine institutes of higher education before the arrival of the DK. However, during the DK’s regime, approximately 90% of schools were demolished. Libraries and laboratories were emptied, burnt, and abolished nearly in all schools. The infamous Toul Sleng Prison, a former high school, was turned to be a place for killing and imprisoning tens of thousands of Cambodians (Clayton, 1998). Chandler (1983) disclosed a chilling phrase known by many survivors as they were often told by the DK that “Keeping you is no profit; losing you is no loss.” Clayton (1998) explained that 75% of teachers, 96% of tertiary students, and 67% of all elementary and secondary students died in the DK’s regime, and some teachers survived by hiding their identities (Whitaker, 1973). Whitaker (1973) also cited that at the beginning of the 1970s, more than 20,000 teachers were serving in the education system, yet only 5,000 of them remained after the end of the DK’s regime ten years later. Clayton (1998) also claimed that among 1,000 academics and intellectuals of the University of Phnom Penh, only 87 of them survived. He cited the words of Iv Thong, the Director of Economics Institute of Phnom Penh, in his interview in 1992 that “under the Khmer Rouge, all structures in the field of education were destroyed and the whole system of education, both infrastructures and human resources, was totally destroyed during the Pol Pot’s regime.” Chandler (1983) stated that the *Four-Year Plan* of Pol Pot to build socialism in all fields in 1977 appealed nothing about leisure, religion, and formal education or family life. Vickery (1984) further explained that

it is fair to say that education in Democratic Kampuchea was at a virtual standstill, and that whatever central policy may have been, most local cadres considered higher education as useless and people who had obtained it less reliable than the uneducated.....people were not killed for being educated, but they might very well be killed for words or actions interpreted as boasting of their education.

There were some schools for young children who were up to ten years old (Burgler, 1990). Students were supposed to engage in three years of half-time primary education according to Khieu Somphan, and schooling happened in the factories, cooperatives, and revolutionary establishments. Students attended one or two hours per day and four hours in some areas, but in most areas, perhaps, there was no schooling at all (Vickery, 1984). Children were taught some reading, writing, arithmetic, and especially the revolutionary songs and dances with Khmer as the only language for instruction. Foreign languages were not allowed, and there were not many schools opened in 1978 (Burgler, 1990; Clayton, 1998). Teachers were people whom *Angkar* (organization) trusted and recruited from the peasant background with little education and no real teaching experience. Students were taught to have no respect for their parents and trained to be spies reporting to the *Angkar Padevat* about their own parents, adults, and those who did not follow the policies of the *Angkar Padevat* (Burgler, 1990; Whitaker, 1973). Besides, from teaching basic knowledge of mathematics and Khmer Language to the students, the main purpose of the DK was to maintain the new education system to instill the revolutionary values in the young (Whitaker, 1973). Furthermore, there were also some other forms of education existing during the DK’s regime. Vickery (1984) argued that besides primary education, there were various technical courses to train skilled workforces for the factory and machine shops which were controlled by a former university student who joined the DK during the KR’s regime since 1970 to 1979. For instance, there was an operation of the Institute for Science Training and Information. It

limitedly educated only the youths whom *Angkar* trusted, and they basically came from the peasant families. Some of those young technicians were also sent to study in some countries friendly to the DK's government such as China, for instance, to learn how to make gunpowder and petroleum refining in 1978 because the DK's government had the ambition to produce rapid numbers of technicians and scientists to build the country in a short period of time (Burgler, 1990; Vickery, 1984). In addition, political education was also provided to the DK's squads and members. They were taught and guided on various topics every evening such as plans for raising dikes, dams, and steps for increasing agricultural production. It was just only to endure the revolutionary vision of the DK's policies. Songs and music were the crucial methods to spread their policies and ideology of the revolutionary to people. To sum up, even though education was minimally allowed for only some students to attend primary schools and technical training in the DK's regime, it served an important purpose for sustaining the revolutionary (Clayton, 1998). As a result of minimal education or no education provided at all, most children were reported illiterate after the collapse of this regime in 1979 (Burgler, 1990; Carney, 1975; Clayton, 1998).

### 3.5 The People's Republic of Kampuchea (1980s)

The DK's regime collapsed on January 07th, 1979 when Vietnamese troops invaded the capital cities and took control of the major provinces. It made all militaries of the DK flee to the border of Thailand. Cambodian welcomed the invasion of Vietnam, yet it did not mean that they preferred to be occupied; in this case, the demand of ending the DK's regime was the central concept of Cambodian people (Chandler, 1983). The new government known until 1989 as People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) and later the State of Cambodia (SOC), backed by Vietnamese administration, was established in Phnom Penh in 1979 (Chandler, 1983; Clayton, 1998). In the 1980s, Marxist-Leninist socialism which also existed in Vietnam was embraced as the ideology for the PRK's government to transform the country from the state of ruin and chaos. In 1982, the DK personnel accepted to enter into the alliance with the PRK resistance forces. Basically, it was the establishment of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) under the leadership of King Sihanouk (Curtis, 1993). After a few years of the bitter and sour time of the DK's era, so-called "Year Zero", all systems were put back to work again. Education system primitively started under the new policy of the PRK's government. It was newly reconstructed with the rapid enrolments by 1980s (Burgler, 1990). The PRK's government set up the education policy for the rapid expansion of education as a central focus for nation-building after a serious loss of human resources in Cambodia during the DK's regime. The re-creation of a modern education system was a promise of the PRK's regime to develop at all educational levels (Vickery, 1986). Schools were re-opened in the very primitive conditions with the poorly equipped facilities throughout the country in 1979 (Chandler, 1983; Vickery, 1984).

Despite the expansion of education, the quality remained very low (Curtis, 1993). Struggling with the development from scratches, the PRK's administration gradually promoted general education through the principle that the pedagogical aspects should have enabled students' learning to link from general knowledge to practice, from learning to production, and from school to the society. Compulsory education composed of pre-school to tertiary levels as well as teacher training and adult literacy programs. In 1984, there were 500 pre-schools which accommodated only the minimal population of 30,366 students from three years old. Teachers were paid by the state, but if they taught children belonging to the factory production group personnel, they were paid by those enterprises. For general primary education, children enrolled at the age of six, and the primary and secondary schooling were combined as a ten-year program which was separated into three levels—four years for level 1, three years for level 2, and three years for level 3. However, it was very limited for tertiary education due to the lack of facilities such as buildings and books. Especially, teacher shortage at this level was the main issue (Vickery, 1986).

The minister of Ministry of Education (MoE), Pen Navuth, made all efforts to initiate the basic schooling regardless of whether there were enough materials, personnel, and teaching forces of whatever degree of literacy. Most educated and highly trained workforces did not survive the DK's regime, or some fled to the other countries due to the resistance of entrusting Cambodia to be backed by the foreigners, Vietnam, or enduring more socialism. At the same time, the remaining populations were traumatized, weak from hunger, and having illnesses. About 60% of the family was headed by widows (Chandler, 1983; Curtis, 1993). There were nearly 25,000 teachers were active before 1975, but only 7,000 returned to teaching in 1979. Approximately, 5,000 of them entered the MoE in 1984. Therefore, most teachers in 1979 were not professional or highly trained (Vickery, 1986) since only 1% of primary school teachers, for instance, had completed high school, and 60% of them had only eight years of education (Curtis, 1993). Short courses of teacher training were always conducted before the schooling year in fall about one to three months. They learnt the policies of the PRK's government and the teaching methods, and over 40,000 teachers completed the course by 1984. To ensure the rapid expansion of education, the MoE recruited teachers from the students who completed education at Level 2 and Level 3. The Level-two graduates were trained for one year, but the Level-three graduates needed to go on for three to four years of teacher training program before they were dispatched to the schools. All Level-three teachers were found as the survivors of the DK's regime, and they used to involve in training before 1975. Teacher training centers for the Level-two

students were established in seven regions—Phnom Penh, Battambang, Kandal, Kompong Cham, Prey Veng, Takeo, Steng Treng, and the last one at the north-eastern ethnic minorities. For the higher level, training happened at the Higher Pedagogical Institute in Phnom Penh (Vickery, 1986). The lack of books and facilities, minimal professional teaching forces, and the absence of curriculum were found as the main barriers to recover quality and access of education in Cambodia. At the same time, the MoE also put high effort to create the new textbooks for both teacher and students. However, it became problematic because it was mainly due to the political orientated constraint (Bit, 1991; Vickery, 1986). Therefore, the syllabus seemed to be traditionally focused on mostly only Khmer language and literature at Level 1 from 1984 to 1985 without foreign language instruction. The Level-three syllabus was expected to call for four hours of foreign languages per week such as Russian, Germany, or Vietnamese, but the problem was about the limited number of teachers who could teach those languages. Under the main aids from Vietnam, the Vietnamese language was dominated in Cambodia during the PRK. Textbooks were printed in Vietnamese before the Khmer Press was ready to produce them in Khmer language, and some Vietnamese people also joint the teaching profession since then (Vickery, 1986). On the other hands, Soviet Union (SU) also played an important role to help development aspects of Cambodia by providing aids to Cambodia through the Kampuchea-Soviet Higher Technical Institute and the scholarships for the secondary technical and tertiary education in the Soviet Union. SU also dispatched over 80 Soviet teachers to teach about 700 students in the field of construction, electricity, irrigation, and mining from 1981 and industrial chemistry in 1985 in Cambodia. Graduates were obliged to serve in the government for at least one or two years, and then they could have a chance to pursue their further study abroad. Among over 2,800 students, 1,500 of them were doing their higher education in SU at the end of 1984, while some were studying in the Eastern European countries, frequently Germany (Vickery, 1986). Every year, almost 1,000 students received scholarships to study in some countries friendly to the Cambodia government (Deth, 2009). Vickery (1986) explained that they

..... distributed at three levels—university, middle technical, and skilled worker; and at the university level about 24% are on industrial courses, 18% on agricultural, 18% on economics, and 18% on pedagogy.....After two years at the Language School, they go abroad for an intensive course, in the Soviet Union for ten months, in Germany for five months, and in Vietnam for three months, which again illustrates the relative importance of the languages in Cambodian objectives.

Even though the PRK seemed to put much effort to develop the education sector in Cambodia after the severe social destruction of Pol Pot's regime, the literacy rate was unlikely to exceed 30%. There was a high primary enrolment rate in the capital city, while the enrolment rate at the rural areas accounted for only 20%. The high repetition and dropout rates were the biggest concern, especially for girls. For example, only 40% of primary school pupils could complete the cycle, and 15% could go to lower secondary level, 3.6% went to upper-secondary level, and approximately 0.5% proceeded to the higher forms of education (Curtis, 1993). Education was deemed as the most important sector to restore after the 1991 Paris Peace Accords at the United Nations (UN). Therefore, the modern education system was initiated under the support of the United States, UN agencies, and other countries. The international development aids started to flow into Cambodia about 500 million dollars or more since the early 1990s. The newly elected government adopted education as the priority goal for the national development by emphasizing on human resource development as the key to poverty alleviation and socio-economic development. According to the Constitution adopted on September 21st, 1993, the right to quality of education was guaranteed as stated in the Article 65, and Cambodian government was rigorously committed to providing compulsory education for nine years for free of charge by 2015 (Sovachana, 1991). After the national election sponsored by the UN in 1993, Cambodia experienced significant stable political and educational development.

#### 4. Conclusion

Since the pre-colonization era to the end of the civil war in 1979, education was minimally considered important for the national development policy. There were a lot of challenges for the development of education in Cambodia from the traditional system to the modern system during the French colonization. The establishment of Franco-Cambodian schools was only the French policy to strengthen the colonial power since French spent only minimal budget on the education sector. Then during *the Sangkum Reastr Niyum*, development policy mainly depended on the expansion of education as a key for nation-building by producing qualified and skillful human resources. There were a lot of schools, including primary schools, secondary schools, technical colleges, and higher institutions, built across the country, and the implementation of the curriculum and teacher recruitments and training policies were also the fundamental indicators for the rapid growth of the education during the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum*. Not long after the enjoyment of the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum*, during the KR's regime, education was not stable due to the political instability, civil conflict, and the involvement in Vietnam war. It caused severe damages to most parts of Cambodia, especially rural areas. Some students and teachers were fighting against the KR's government, while some of them fled to join the revolution.

Therefore, most schools were closed, and the enrolment rate dramatically declined during the five years of the KR's regime before the arrival of the DK in 1975. Severely, the arrival of the DK from 1975 to 1979 wiped out millions of lives of Cambodian, and minimal education was found only in form of praising the DK revolutionary. Only some children and adults were allowed to attend primary education and technical training in some regions, while education was not found at all in some other regions. As the result, most children were found illiterate by the end of the DK's regime. Technical education and political education were provided to only some members of the *Angkar* to strengthen the development of the DK's revolutionary. After the collapse of the DK in 1979, the development of education in Cambodia in the 1980s encountered numerous challenges such as the lack of human resources and social and educational infrastructures. Overall, this study has outlined that education is a vital key for the development of Cambodia. From historical perspectives, Cambodia experienced rapid growth in term of economic and other forms of development through the expansion of education. However, the decline of education also resulted in the decline of national development. Leaders of each regime seemed to embrace educational provision as a key to building the nation-state, yet they only embraced education as the political mean to function their power. Therefore, the significant disparity between the education system and the economic, political, and cultural environments occurred, and it caused serious educational and national development crisis in Cambodia.

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