

# School Dropout Rates in Rural Cambodia: Political, Economic and Environmental Barriers to Education Policy Reform

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When I was 12, I encountered this environment:



# Experience in Cambodia

Taught English at the Tokyo Inspired School

 Kampong Speu province



Became aware of the educational discrepancies



# Historical Context: Khmer Rouge 1975-1979

destroyed over

**90%**

of all school buildings, libraries, and educational materials



**1 million**

executed, mainly educated doctors and teachers

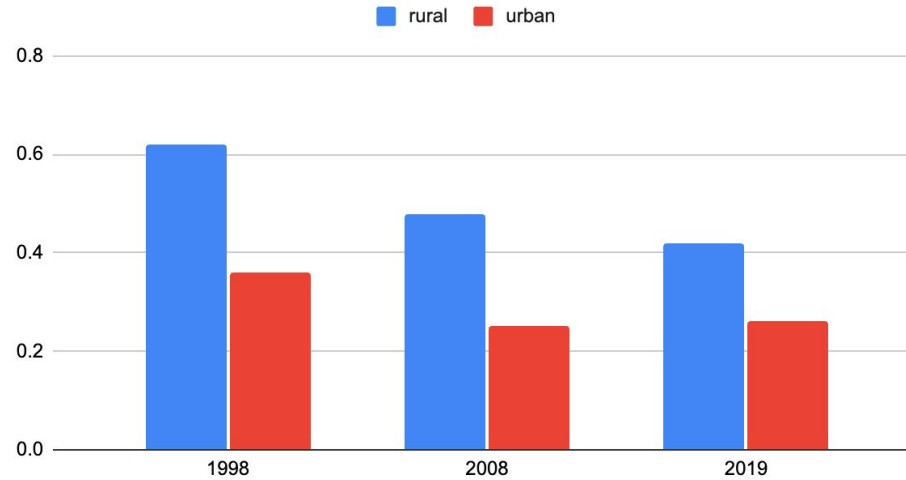


# Student Dropout Rates

data collected by the Department of Education  
Management Information System (EMIS)

**those who leave or can't attend school over  
a particular time period, typically one year**

Cambodians Aged 15+ who did not complete Primary School, by Urban and Rural Area in 1998, 2008, and 2019 (in decimal)



**School dropout rates depend greatly on the environment:  
whether they are in a rural or urban community**

Source: Government of Cambodia, Ministry of Planning, National Institute of Statistics (NIS)

<b>Enrollment by Level of Education, 2020- 2021</b>				
	Primary	Lower Sec	Upper Sec	Total
Battambang	165,957	47,208	23,700	255,335
Kampong Speu	107,169	33,888	15,595	166,343
Kep	5,489	1,577	1,009	8,966
RURAL	1,664,925	500,565	248,712	2,602,653

**Around 70% of students who had enrolled in primary school don't end up advancing to upper secondary school (risk of dropping out)**

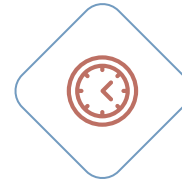
# Research Questions



**RQ1: How do political factors affect student dropouts in rural Cambodia?**



**RQ2: How do economic factors relate to student dropouts in rural Cambodia?**



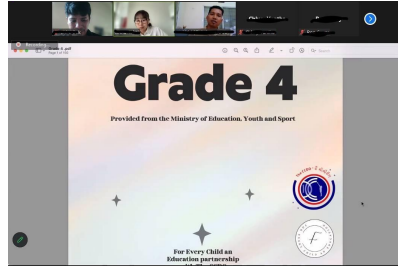
**RQ3: How does the family and community environment affect student dropouts in rural Cambodia?**





# Research Methods

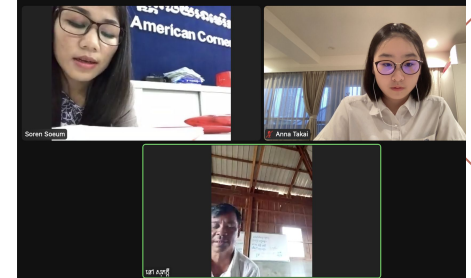
1. Assistant Professor Taku Yamaguchi (University of Tsukuba)



2. Mr. Sitha Sok, an English Teacher Trainer from the Cambodian Community Dream Organization (CCDO)



3. Mrs. Soren Soeum, a Cambodian lawyer



4. Principal of the Prey Kol primary school

# Political

Rigid education curriculum:  
advancement examinations

Ministry of Education Youth and Sport has established



# Economic

Low Social status of teachers is low

low teacher salaries



lack of quality teachers  
(corruption)



# Environmental

Distance and infrastructure of schools

Family conditions at home



**All students must pass  
advancement examinations to  
progress to the following  
grade"**

Assistant Professor Taku Yamaguchi (University of Tsukuba)

# 1. Political Factors: Advancement Examination

Out of **17** students, **16** were taking gap years (failed to pass the advancement examination)  
**12** (of the 17) students have fallen behind by **3 years**



Article 68 of the Cambodian Constitution, states that **“Citizens shall receive education for at least 9 years”**



# Urban and Rural Environments

**A two-part system** -> students coming for either morning classes or afternoon classes

Some test questions are "only from the content taught at the cram schools"







Students in rural areas can't advance to the next grade by simply learning what is taught in the classroom



# EXAMPLE

“Some test questions only come from content taught at cram schools”

	STUDENT 1 (Urban)	STUDENT 2 (Rural)
Morning	 <p>SCHOOL (PART 1)</p>	 <p>SCHOOL (PART 1)</p>
Afternoon	 <p>CRAM SCHOOL</p>	 <p>WORK FOR FAMILY</p>

**Tendency to  
PASS TEST**

**Tendency to  
FAIL TEST**

## 2. Economic Factors: Teacher Salary

Min salary \$76 (2013)-> **\$375** (PM Hun Manet, 2023)

v

\$700 to \$1,000 per month= urban schools

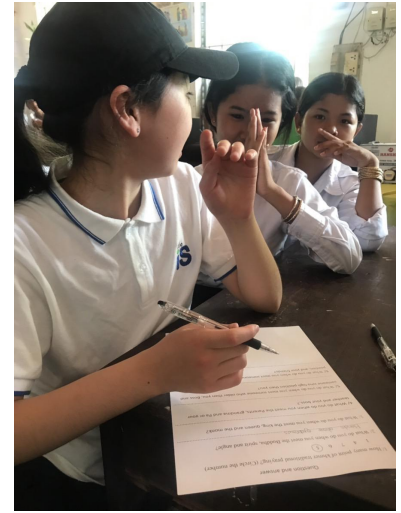
◆ **Engineering, Medicine, Law > Teaching Occupation**

Majority who performed well in school-> better occupations

\$1200 per month > around \$375

↓ **SUPPLY** of teachers -> ↓ **QUALITY** of teachers

Lack of systematic teacher training (set in 2010)

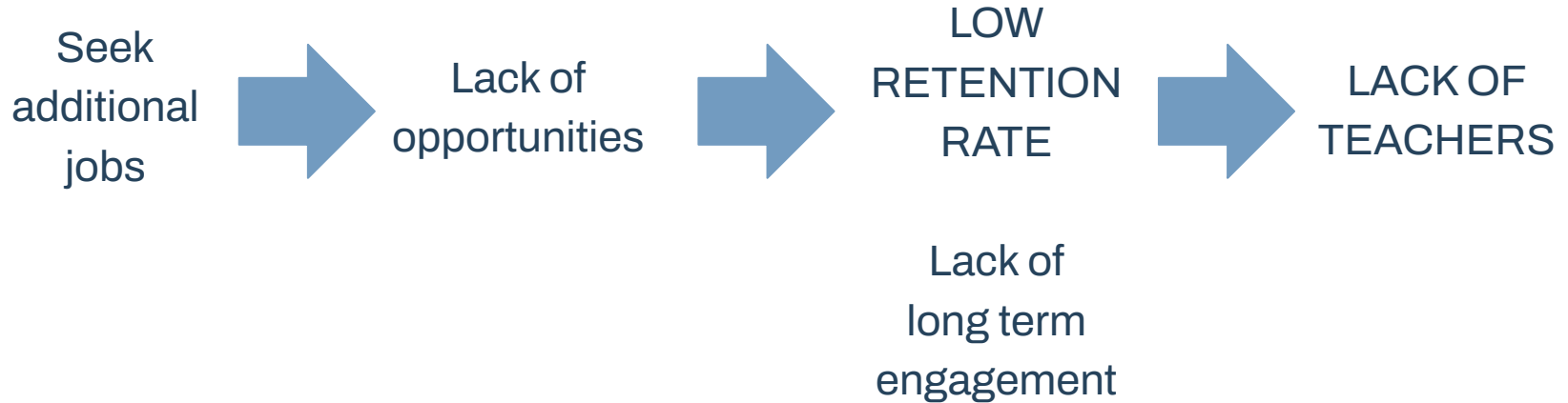


## 2. Economic Factors: Teacher Salary



### ◆ Lack of Opportunities

additional income to supplement their low salaries





### 3. Environmental Factors: Research Result

1. Mrs. Soren Soeum and the principal of the Prey Kol primary school:

students have difficulty in commuting due to far **distance** from their homes.



Prey Kol Primary School



Dropout rate in rural areas “...was **linked to distance** from secondary schools, and the unaffordability of transport” (USAID)

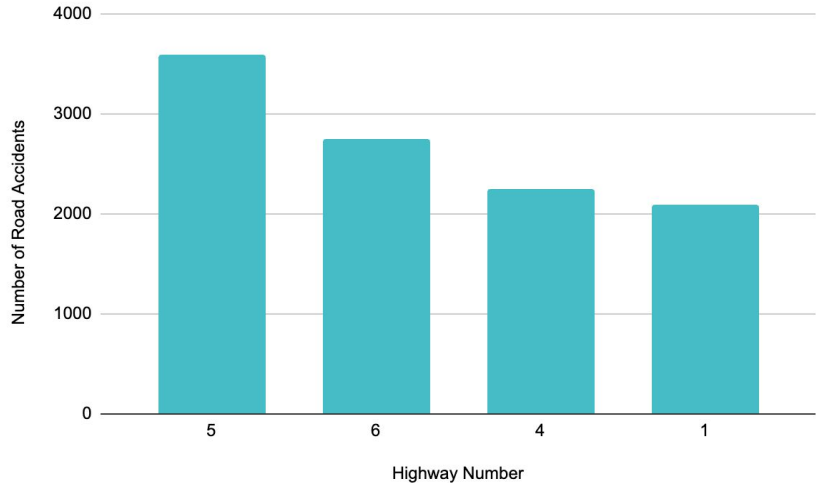
# Dangers of NH 5



Roads = Dangerous

- high rates of traffic accidents
- very limited management control done by officials

2. Rural areas including the Prey Kol Village, are lacking appropriate roads, making it highly difficult for young children to travel long distances to go to school.



# Family Environment

“The rural population has long been falling into the **trap** of the uneducated poverty cycle... They believe **education makes no difference** for their family”

- Dr. Bo, the director of the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports



## Low Economic Status = Higher Dropout Rates

students with parents with highly-educated background tend to stay in school longer



# My Work: For Every Child an Education

Team of 40 young adults, 60 volunteers  
Currently partnering with 7 organizations

## “Leave no one behind” 1 child 1 book

Inclusive Education

ENGLISH EDUCATION

- Rural areas (Kampong Speu province)
- Children with disabilities

DIGITAL EDUCATION

TEACHER EDUCATION



Website

# Acknowledgement: New Prime Minister

4 QUALITY  
EDUCATION



## New Prime Minister

Mr. Hun Manet, new prime minister, from August 2023

“8-point reform in the education sector from 2023 to 2050”

Data presented before his election, which may indicate different perspectives on political factors





30 for 2030

Website: [foreverychildaneducation.org](http://foreverychildaneducation.org)  
Contact: [fecaeducation@gmail.com](mailto:fecaeducation@gmail.com)

# Thank you



Never forget the significance of your voice. Despite being just one among 8 billion people in the world, our voices and actions hold power and are capable of sparking real change in the world. If each of us steps up, we can change the world."

**Anna Takai**

*High school student, UNITAR Youth Ambassador Asia Pacific 2023*

