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Challenges Facing the Implementation of Teacher Education Policy and its Impacts on Teacher Quality in Cambodia

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the impacts of teacher policy implementation on teacher quality in Cambodia by drawing on Tatto's (2008) Teacher Policy Continuum to frame the discussion. The paper argues that despite efforts to restructure teacher education programs to produce highly qualified teachers, issues and challenges remain apparent. Recruitment of low-motivated individuals into the teaching career, ineffective teacher preparation programs, inadequate teacher professional development, and poor incentives and pay for teachers are all significantly accounted for low teacher quality in Cambodia. By identifying these challenges, the paper underlines a number of suggestions for the improvement of teacher quality in Cambodia. The discussion and conclusion are also included.

Keywords: Teacher policy, Teacher quality in Cambodia, Teacher trainers, Student teachers

I. Introduction

Social, political, and economic development as well as the improvement of educational system has stemmed from an influence of globalization and this has led to fierce competition among many nations to advance their economy (Hollins, 2011). In Cambodia, these influences exert constant pressure to alter classroom preparation in public schools. Consequently, the change of classroom characteristics should be coincided with the change in teaching and teacher education so that Cambodia can contend with the challenges emerging from the globalization. Cambodia has formulated a number of education policies, including teacher education policies so that the country is

able to develop human capital for its transformation into an upper-middle income country by 2030 and a developed nation by 2050. Therefore, teacher education policy has been developed with further confidence that student learning outcomes will be maximized when high quality teaching is provided (Ministry of Education, Youths, and Sports (MoEYS), 2015a).

In spite of a growing body of literature in relation to education policies in Cambodia, there has been, to date, little evidence concerned with the implementation of teacher education policy and its impacts on teacher quality. By reviewing government documents and international reports on teacher education policy, it is showed that the policies on teacher education are structural, academic and technical in nature, such as recruiting more teachers for flexible staff deployment, enhancing teacher training system, and attracting highly committed, competent candidates into the teaching professions (MoEYS, 2015a). While these measures are necessary for the current teacher education in Cambodia, the study will help fill the gap and inform educators and policy makers in the planning and implementation of education policy initiatives and programs.

Using Tatto's (2008) Teacher Policy Continuum Framework to frame the discussion, the paper examines how teacher policy implementation in Cambodia impacts on teacher quality. The research data is drawn primarily from document analysis, literature reviews, and unstructured interviews with a pre-service teacher and a vice-director of one Regional Teacher Training Center (RTTC) with whom the researcher is associated. The paper begins with the discussion of the Teacher Policy Continuum Framework and the background information of teacher training in Cambodia. Then it discusses the Strategic Framework and Teacher Education Policy in Cambodia, followed by a discussion on the reality of teacher quality in Cambodia. In the remainder of the paper, the discussion and conclusion are incorporated.

II. Teacher Policy Continuum Framework

A number of studies show that teachers have profound influence on pupil learning, and educators worldwide have suggested reform strategies on the teachers (Anderson, Bemby, Gomez, Jordan, & Mentro, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Kubota & Phin, 2014; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). To seek better solutions for teacher policy reform, Tatto (2008) undertook an analysis on teacher policy within an international and comparative perspective by using the notion of teacher professional life

cycle. She outlined a framework with four policy tools aimed at producing highly-qualified teachers and retaining them in the profession. These four tools are (a) recruitment or selection of individuals that are considered suitable for the profession; (b) education of individuals in the knowledge, skills, and dispositions deemed necessary to produce qualified teachers; (c) induction, further development, or support of practicing teachers; and (d) assignment and permanence in the profession.

According to Tatto (2008), one crucial policy tool is a process of recruiting appropriate candidates for teaching positions. In this sense, potential competition may occur with the candidates who are equipped with strong skills in the labor market. The author proposes that one way to increase the selection of the able candidates is to make teaching as an ideal job in a given context accompanying with ample incentives, such as subsidies for education and development, high salaries, and other benefits including housing, health, improved and safe working conditions, job security, professional autonomy, and support. This proposed idea is also congruent with a study from Darling-Hammond and Berry (1988) who did an analysis of evolution of teacher policy in America. They argued that providing suitable salaries and incentives is a key strategy to make teaching career more charming to potential candidates. This policy tool has gained its popularity among many nations once it is accepted as a workable approach (Tatto, 2008).

Another policy tool examining learning opportunities for teachers is the actual arrangements that exist to cater for knowledge, skills, and dispositions to future or current teachers (Tatto, 2008). Tatto presents a kind of teacher preparations which have influenced teacher's knowledge, practice, and presumably pupils' learning; this is an initial teacher preparation program. She has found that the most effective teacher education approaches (pre-service, in-service, and distance education) in influencing teachers' content knowledge and students' learning is the pre-service program. Similarly, in examining whether certified teachers were more effective than those who did not meet the training requirements for certification, Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, and Heilig (2005) found that teachers' effectiveness appears to be strongly linked with the preparation they had received prior to their teaching.

Moreover, there is another way to develop knowledge and skills of practicing teachers. According to Tatto, there are two levels of the expected

outcomes of teacher preparation programs. One is an immediate result of increasing teacher knowledge at the end of the teacher preparation program and another is a long-term effect of improving teaching practice and the presumed effect on pupils' learning. To enhance the effectiveness of this policy, Tatto (2008) emphasizes the necessity of teacher's professional knowledge such as content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, pedagogy knowledge, knowledge of pupils, and knowledge of context. Among these five dimensions of teachers' knowledge, the author found that teachers who are equipped with the first three kinds of knowledge have great influences on pupils' learning achievements. Therefore, she argues for the effectiveness of the pre-service program in broadening teacher's professional knowledge. A study by Hill, Rowan, and Ball (2005) also found that teachers' professional knowledge has a positive effect on students' scores. Likewise, an earlier study by Tatto and Kularatna (1993) in Sri Lanka revealed that pupils' performance on criteria-reference tests and teachers' knowledge and pedagogy in mathematics are significantly correlated.

Tatto's (2008) last policy tool is concerned with how to coax teachers to stay permanent in their job. Despite the fact that there are a number of contextual factors, such as socioeconomic contexts of schooling, school settings, and a change in social economics and politics which all contribute to driving teachers to remain or leave their profession, two other vital factors, attractiveness of the teaching career and good incentives and pay, are considered the most persuasive mechanism. In this regard, Tatto who drew upon studies from Cummings (1990) and Murnane et al. (1991) concluded that the complexity in recruiting suitable candidates into the teaching profession is attributed to low pay and less attractive incentives in the teaching career.

Finally, this teacher policy continuum relies on the cultural, economic, social, and political context. The availability of financial resources to provide teachers with opportunities to learn, a growing number of student population, the oversupply of teachers in certain levels or areas and shortages in others, and the re-organization of teacher education due to globalization forces, to list a few, all have profound effects on this teacher policy framework (Tatto, 2008).

III. Teacher Training in Cambodia

1. Teacher training system in Cambodia

General education in Cambodia consists of 12 years: 6 years for primary, 3 years for lower secondary, and another 3 years for upper secondary education. According to Tandon and Fukao (2015), teacher training centers (TTCs) in Cambodia are categorized into four distinct kinds:

1. One Pre-School Teacher Training College (PSTTC) which trains pre-school teacher trainees for two-year courses and trainees are high school graduates;
2. 18 Provincial Teacher Training Centers (PTTCs) which trains primary school teacher trainees for two-year and trainees are supposed to have at least high school education;
3. Six Regional Teacher Training Centers (RTTCs) which trains lower secondary school teacher trainees for two years and trainees are supposed to complete at least high school;
4. A National Institute of Education (NIE) provides one-year teacher training course to bachelor's degree holders to prepare them for upper secondary school teacher placement.

Individuals who wish to enter TTCs are those who have completed 9-year or 12-year general education. These prospective teachers are recruited once a year through an entrance examination and are posted according to their results of an exit exam and the central ministry who decides to deploy them based on recommendations from Ministry of Public Functions and the quota from provincial offices of education (Kitamura, Williams, & Zimmerman, 2012).

Because of the lack of teachers in some areas in the country and the needs to send the teachers to those areas the training forms have been varied. The 12+2 (12-year general education plus 2-year pedagogical training) formulation of training is applied for training teachers who will teach in lowland provinces, whereas the 9+2 (9-year general education plus 2-year pedagogical training) is for training teachers who will teach in remote and disadvantaged provinces. This is why teachers' academic level is still generally low. The 2010-2011 education statistics showed that 4.16 per cent of primary teachers do not hold lower secondary school diploma, while 61.58 per cent do not hold upper secondary school diploma (MoEYS, 2011).

Moreover, the education statistics in 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 revealed that among the entire primary and secondary teachers there were 693 and 943 respectively who received pedagogical training (MoEYS, 2015b, 2016).

2. Teaching staff

Cambodia's education system was completely destroyed from 1975 to 1979, during the Khmer Rouge regime. Most teachers at all educational levels were either killed by the Khmer Rouge, sent to forced labor in rural areas, or fled the country as refugees. After the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime, to respond to the immediate needs to re-establish the education system, teachers were recruited from across the country to be trained through a wide variety of short-term courses, lasting one week, three weeks, half a month or one month (Nath, 1999). With tremendous effort, about 32,300 teachers were trained and received various qualifications by the academic year 1982-1983 (Nath, 1999). Despite many obstacles, in-service training was launched and pre-service training was improved.

When the education system reopened in 1979, teachers were (re)employed on the principle of "those who have more education teach those with less" (Fata, n.d.). Thus, teachers who had completed third grade could teach students in grade 1 and 2. Those who had completed junior high school could teach students in the upper grades of primary school, and those who had completed high school education teach in the junior high school. While the current policy requires new pre-service teacher trainees to have a high school diploma, over 75% of primary school teachers in 2003 had completed only lower secondary level or less of formal schooling (MoEYS, 2004).

The situation has gradually improved from year to year but there are still under-qualified teachers. In the academic year of 2010-2011, there were 45,814 primary school teachers and 35,730 secondary school teachers in Cambodia (MoEYS, 2011). Fifty-eight percent of primary school teachers had completed lower secondary school or less, and more than 20% of secondary school teachers had only a secondary or less formal education. In the academic year of 2014-2015, there were 44,292 primary school teachers and 40,020 secondary school teachers. Among these, only 693 teachers received pedagogical training (MoEYS, 2015b).

IV. Strategic Framework and Teacher Education Policy in Cambodia

Cambodia as one of the member states of the United Nations recognizes the necessity to achieve the global initiatives of Education for All (EFA) of the 1990s as well as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which have both placed great emphasis on improving the quality of education globally (Chhinh & Dy, 2009). Subsequently, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has enacted various policies and action plans such as National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) (2006-2010) and (2014-2018), Education Strategic Plan (ESP) (2009-2013) and (2014-2018), Teacher Development Master Plan (2010), Teacher Policy Action Plan (TPAP) (2015) and so forth in order to correspond to EFA goals, Education 2030 Framework, and Sustainable Development Goal 4.

To improve the quality of education and develop human capital to help Cambodia achieve its development goals, MoEYS has acknowledged that a key factor in improving student learning outcomes is high quality teachers. Thus, TPAP has been enacted under the framework of ESP and has essentially demonstrated the needs to adjust the status quo of the Cambodian teachers both the quality of the training and professional development (MoEYS, 2015a). Key strategies include strengthening teacher supply and demand, training more teachers for flexible staff deployment, and reforming current TTCs and higher education institutions. Professional teacher development is also planned for both pre-service and in-service training. MoEYS has also intended to reform the teacher training curriculum and development, upgrade the qualification of TTC trainers, upgrade teacher qualification through BA-Fast Track Program, institutionalize a system of school-based in-service training (INSET), and reward teachers for their excellent performance as part of teacher motivation programs (MoEYS, 2004, 2015a).

Another important effort is to increase teacher remuneration as it is a key factor to enhance the material reward and occupational security for teachers. A related strategy to adjust the social status of the teachers is to connect them to information and communication technology (ICT). In its plan, MoEYS aims to train 5000 existing teachers and 10,000 new teachers from all levels with ICT training per year. Moreover, it also intends to upgrade as many basic education teachers as possible to reach BA+1 (Bachelor of Arts+ one-year training) and MA+1 (Master of Arts+ one-year training) for senior level teachers by 2020 (MoEYS, 2015a). Another strategy is INSET and

professional development for teachers. Its comprehensive aim is to ensure that teachers at all levels have an opportunity to expand their knowledge beyond pre-service training (PRESET) stage.

Ultimately, to attract the best candidates, MoEYS has utilized a persuasive strategy by automatically admitting those who receive grade A, B, or C in the Grade 12 national exam into TTCs and diversifying the entry points into teaching professions by allowing outstanding students from both public and private higher institutions to receive teaching license (MoEYS, 2015a).

V. The Reality of Teacher Quality in Cambodia

In spite of existing official strategies to upgrade the quality of teachers, the improvement of teacher quality in Cambodia is facing various challenges (Tandon & Fukao, 2015). First, there is still a shortage of a comprehensive teacher education and training system at both PRESET and INSET levels and poor linkages between the two levels. Second, the low qualification of teacher trainers is another issue. Teacher trainers generally fail to supply meaningful content mastery and student-centered teaching method; moreover, much time is spent on academic improvement while less time spent on teaching methodology and teaching practice at school (Tandon & Fukao, 2015). Moreover, teacher standards were approved and incorporated into teacher training curriculum in 2010. However, these teacher standards have not been integrated into TTCs instruction yet. Many teacher trainers, for example, have not heard of the teacher standards and even have not integrated them into their classroom instruction (Tandon & Fukao, 2015).

Third, there is a lack of teachers at all levels in particular in the remote and rural areas. About 34.5% of teachers in remote areas and 6.5% of teachers in rural areas have not studied beyond the primary level (UNESCO, 2010). To address this issue, each year MoEYS plans to recruit 5000 new teachers to fulfill the growing demand. The qualifications of teachers need to be upgraded urgently. Despite this challenge, currently teachers' education levels are now raised substantially, particularly among the younger generation. According to EFA National Review Report 2015, the total percentage of primary school teachers who only achieved a primary level education decreased from 8.54% to 1.31% between 1999-2000 and 2012-2013 school years. This means that there was a decrease of 7.2 percentage points over the 14-year period. This was mainly due to the introduction of the basic education teacher training program in 2006, increasing teacher

recruitment for replacement of retired teachers, and internal examinations for upgrading teachers' salary scales and cadre (RGC, 2014).

The EFA National Review Report also shows that the total number of secondary school teachers who completed only lower secondary education decreased from 52.38% to 11.99% between the same school year periods, meaning that there was a decrease of 40.39 percentage points. Secondary school teachers who completed upper secondary education increased from 26.56% to 56.98% between 1999–2000 and 2012–2013 academic years. This indicated that there was an increase of 30.42 percentage points over the 14-year period. The percentage of teachers who gained a bachelor degree increased from 20.08% to 29.52% between 1999–2000 and 2012–2013 academic years, an increase of 9.44 percentage points (RGC, 2014). However, there is a huge discrepancy of qualification amongst teachers in rural, remote and urban schools. Most primary school teachers who have completed only grade 9 work in remote schools while those who have completed grade 12 work in urban schools (Tandon & Fukao, 2015). In addition to this, the shortage of primary school teachers in rural and remote areas has forced some teachers to teach double shifts, both morning and afternoon, and this has generated more workload for them and downgraded the quality of their teaching (Tandon & Fukao, 2015).

Finally, although the government has committed to increasing the education budget and teachers' pay in recent years, the wages remain low and the wages of a typical married Cambodian teacher with two children are below the poverty line (Tandon & Fukao, 2015). In response to this issue, during Panel Discussion on Education Reform in Cambodia, the Minister of Education has underlined the desires to promote the quality of teachers by taking certain measures such as providing teachers with incentives, increasing their salary and improving the training quality at all TTCs across the country (Naron, 2016).

VI. Discussion

1. A lack of intrinsic motivation to be a teacher

Prospective teachers' motivation to become a teacher should be considered when discussing teacher quality in Cambodia. One study points out that it is individuals' motivation to teach that draws them to become a teacher, sustains their commitment to teach, and promotes their professional

knowledge (Day, Elliot, & Kington, as cited in Gu & Lai, 2012). Other research also shows that people entering pre-service teacher education programs share common motivating factors, including a desire to work with or benefit students, a sense of altruism or a wish to make a difference in their community or society through teaching (Jugović, Marušić, Ivanec, & Vidović, 2012). While these initial characteristics are necessary to select the candidates into teacher training programs, the current Cambodian teacher policy demonstrates a gap in this pivotal point. Previous research studies showed that many candidates chose teaching as their career because they had no other options (Benveniste, Marshall, & Araujo, 2008). According to MoEYS (2015a), more than 2000 existing teachers left their positions per year between 2012 and 2013. This may be caused by a lack of personal motivation to work as a teacher.

In summary, a profound understanding of novice teachers' initial motivation, their perceptions of teaching, and their satisfaction with their teaching career is a sound basis for designing teacher education programs and developing teacher policies and teaching practices. In this regard, it is necessary that the prospective teachers who will be selected be assessed by their enthusiasm or dedication to teaching. As Tatto (2008) noted, to effectively produce highly qualified teachers is to first select individuals with appropriate characteristics for the teaching tasks.

2. Teacher preparation programs

Many studies have shown that teacher education programs profoundly influence teacher trainees' knowledge, skills, and disposition and consequently on their student achievements (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Tatto, 2008). An effective teacher education program therefore rests upon several factors, such as qualifications of teacher educators, school environment, school facilities, and collaboration between student teachers and educators, consistency between theory and classroom practice, and accreditation of teacher education programs (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Hollins, 2011). These crucial indicators are significantly underpinned by research evidence. Darling-Hammond (2000), for example, contended that criticism of teacher preparation came from unresponsiveness to the reality of classroom practice. This can be assumed that traditional teacher preparation programs lack their effectiveness because they have not equipped in-service teachers with adequate subject matter knowledge, pedagogy knowledge, and

other necessary skills enabling them to respond to a wide range of challenges caused by diverse classroom situations.

Similarly, teacher preparation programs in Cambodia have faced two main challenges. First, research findings have indicated that pre-service teacher training programs in Cambodia have suffered from disconnection between theory and practice (Benveniste et al., 2008; Tandon & Fukao, 2015; Williams, et al., 2016). This is partly because of a current shortage of qualified teacher trainers. As stated earlier, many of the teacher trainers are unable to provide meaningful content mastery and they still employ teacher-centered teaching instead of student-centered pedagogy. This is evidenced by my personal conversation with a pre-service teacher who specializes in English language teaching at NIE in an academic year 2016-2017 and is preparing for his practicum. He revealed that:

“My teacher mentions several times about student-centered teaching but in the classroom he never employs it and he always teaches me by using the teacher-centered method. I’ve also never heard of teacher standards and even my teachers don’t tell me about them.”
(Interview, 10 March 2017)

The quotes above could prove that pre-service teacher education programs in Cambodia remain ineffective. Teacher trainers seem to heavily use the teacher-centered approach, undermining the student-centered method. This practice casts a doubt on the teaching effectiveness of prospective teacher trainees. Darling-Hammond (2010) expressed a strong criticism about the traditional teacher preparation program due to its lack of coherence between the coursework and clinical practices. She further argued that substantial evidence of the success of teacher preparation programs came up with strong linkages between theory and practice, through well-designed clinical experiences and the use of case methods, action research, and performance assessment.

Given the above-mentioned discussion, the quality of teacher training programs in Cambodia should not be overlooked. In order to establish a maximum connection between theory and practice, teacher trainers need to attend to clinical practices and find out how to best help novice teachers develop practical skills through real classroom exposure. Encouraging teacher trainers to do action research is also a critical point here. As action researchers, teacher educators can reflect and feedback on their work and

they will see even greater congruence between theory and practice. Their performance should also be assessed at the end of the training program to identify and address possible shortcomings. Peer collaboration should be encouraged and strengthened among teacher trainers and incentives and motivation to facilitate collaborative practice among trainers should be used.

As mentioned earlier, teacher standards have been enacted in the curriculum to reinforce teacher quality but these standards are not fully implemented. In order to ensure that teacher standards are broadly implemented in TTCs, all stakeholders involved in this process need to disseminate and distribute the copied papers of teacher standards to both novices and experienced teacher trainers. Teacher trainers then need to incorporate the teacher standards in their daily instruction and incorporate them into their course assessment to make sure that their teacher trainees are very familiar with those standards.

As Tatto (2008) argues, the accreditation of teacher education is a way to ensure that student teachers will be well-equipped with useful skills and experiences enabling them to perform their work successfully in the classroom. Teacher preparation programs in Cambodia have suffered from a lack of accreditation and due to minimal support from MoEYS teacher trainers in Cambodia have been working in isolated environment (Tandon & Fukao, 2015). This environment has resulted in poor flow of information between the Ministry and the teacher trainers. Who will then help assess the teacher training effectiveness? This remains a complicated question in the current situation of teacher training in Cambodia. Through my personal dialogue, a vice-director of one RTTC revealed that:

“We have documents from the ministry outlining measures to assess teacher training effectiveness, but in practice the ministry just demands reports about the results of the training. I and other colleagues have to prepare annual reports and submit them to the ministry. The ministry has rarely sent any officials to assess our training.” (Interview, 11 March 2017)

Even at the Annual Education Conference on March 21, 2017, no crucial plan is mentioned about the accreditation of teacher training programs. Thus, a lack of close collaboration between all stakeholders is a major issue facing the pre-service teacher training in Cambodia. Tandon and Fukao (2015) suggest that to improve teacher preparation programs, the community of collaboration amongst peer trainers, TTCs directors, and the ministry

officials should be promoted to ensure the smooth flow of information and communication. Such close collaborations may bring about more timely response to the needs of teacher trainers and the Ministry can also correspond to any issues on time. A lack of commitment from the government to improve the current status of teacher training programs may be another problem. Tandon and Fukao (2015) have found that in all the six RTTCs there were only 11 Math teacher trainers. This shortage of teachers is probably caused by the fact that the salary and the status of teacher trainers in RTTCs and PTTCs are similar to those of the teachers in upper-secondary schools. As a result, there are not many competent candidates applying for the position.

3. Teacher professional development

Based on the education statistics of 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 (MoEYS, 2015b, 2016), there are fewer than a thousand teachers who have already received formal pedagogical training. The statistics have revealed a great challenge to the improvement of teacher quality in Cambodia, that is, a serious lack of qualified teachers at all school levels. A study by Phin (2014) with 173 teachers about their challenges in their teaching jobs showed that some in-service training programs have not been systemized and have been provided to teachers irregularly, which affected professional development among those teachers. Moreover, some in-service training programs have been given by international organizations in order to fulfill their project plans only, not genuinely catering for the teachers' needs (Fata, n.d.).

Apart from the above issues, Cambodian teachers have been recognized as working alone with little support or feedback from their peers (Tan & Ng, 2012). As argued by Hargreaves (2000), colleagues play a key role in giving feedback on peer performance and a lack of this kind of feedback may lead to lower confidence and uncertainty as well as low self-efficacy in teaching. Thus, it is imperative for teachers to cooperate with their peers to adjust their teaching techniques so as to brighten their children's future. What is recommended here is a desire to spread out an idea of professional learning community (PLC). This is perhaps a very fresh idea for Cambodian teachers, school leaders, and administrators although PLC has been prevalent in the literature. Hord (1997) describes PLC, as follows:

a professional community of learners, in which the teachers in a school and its administrators continuously seek and share learning,

and act on their learning. The goal of their actions is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals for the students' benefit; thus, this arrangement may also be termed communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. (p.1)

According to Hord (1997), such a community produces a positive climate for teachers, staff, and students. For staff, they can increase commitment to the mission and goals of the schools, create shared responsibility with teachers toward achieving the total development of students, create powerful learning that defines good teaching and classroom practices, and enhance understanding of the course content and teacher roles. For teachers, they can exchange feedbacks with colleagues for better performance and to achieve the common goals in schools. These concerns provide a critical lens to understand why collaboration is important to enhance teacher quality in Cambodia. An absence of which may deteriorate the quality of teaching.

In short, the opportunities to learn and to enrich knowledge and skills for practicing teachers are extremely crucial to enhance the quality of teaching. If the well-structured training, however, is not established or teachers receive the training which is poorly relevant to their classroom realities, and PLC is not well-constructed, the rhetoric of providing high quality teaching to every student will be hard to achieve.

4. Lower pay for teaching profession in Cambodia

A teaching career in Cambodia is said to have lower wages if compared to other professions (Tandon & Fukao, 2015). Cambodian teachers usually earn less than other professionals, particularly in Phnom Penh. Teachers earn less than health professionals with similar qualifications. The average income of medical doctors, nurses, and midwives is higher than those of university teachers and other education professionals, respectively (Tandon & Fukao, 2015). Although teacher salaries have been raised recently, they are still limited compared to those of other professions. This low-paying teaching profession is therefore unlikely to attract well-performing high school graduates. According to Thmey Thmey (2016), only 1200 grade 12 graduates who received grade B and C in 2015 attended TTCs while those who received grade A went to undertake other professions. Therefore, in order to attract more top graduates to take part in the teaching jobs, a comprehensive approach with attractive incentives is required. If the salary and prestige are adequately upgraded, the TTCs may be able to attract and

recruit outstanding students. In short, if the potentially capable candidates are not recruited for the training and retained in the teaching profession, the success of the teacher policy is highly unlikely.

VII. Conclusion

The case of the teacher quality in Cambodia illustrates many challenges, such as the selection of individuals with inappropriate characteristics for the teaching career, poor preparation programs for pre-service teachers, inadequate professional development and poor incentives and pay. Therefore, it is necessary to go beyond the current structural improvement in teacher education and professional development programs to produce highly qualified teachers. First, with regard to teacher quality improvement the paper has argued that the selection of individuals with appropriate characteristics for the teaching careers should be a priority. Second, teacher preparation programs need to be improved by linking theory and practice and increasing real classroom exposure for novice teachers. Third, the qualifications of teacher educators should also be improved through training opportunities, enabling them to become action researchers and encouraging them to collaborate with their peers. Apart from this, this paper has also argued that pre-service teacher programs need to be officially accredited. Accrediting teacher education programs is a part of setting clear standards to ensure that pre-service teachers will receive quality training. Next, teacher quality will be enhanced when the practicing teachers receive sufficient professional development training and gain more understanding about PLC amongst their peers and other stakeholders. Finally, attractive incentives and good pay for teaching professions should be further provided to attract highly capable candidates and retain them permanently in the job.

The reflection and application of Tatto's (2008) Teacher Policy Continuum Framework serve as an analytical tool and highlight the gaps between policy rhetoric and the implementation of teacher policy in Cambodia. To recruit the most suitable candidates for the teaching professions, good benefits, such as high salaries, professional autonomy, teaching support, and so on, should be in place to attract the outstanding prospective teacher trainees and trainers. However, the limited use of this framework in the Cambodian context should be acknowledged, suggesting a need to undertake empirical studies in the Cambodian context to examine whether this teacher policy continuum framework can be applied in Cambodia.

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