

POVERTY, ENGLISH AND EVANGELISM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF YOUNG  
ADULTS IN A CHURCH-BASED ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM IN  
CAMBODIA

by

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## ABSTRACT

LORI BETH KRZESZEWSKI. Poverty, English and Evangelism: a qualitative study of young adults in a church-based English language program in Cambodia. (Under the direction of DR. ROSLYN MICKELSON)

This qualitative case study explored the motivations and experiences of thirty young adults enrolled in a free church-based English program in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Data include the researcher's field notes from six months of participant observation and transcribed in-depth interviews with thirty self-selected Cambodian English language learners who identify themselves as either Christian, Buddhist or religiously unaffiliated. A critical Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) perspective served as the conceptual framework for this study's research design, data analysis, and interpretation of findings. Using a critical TESOL perspective, the researcher interrogated the approach to the recruitment of students, the curriculum, and the pedagogy employed by an Evangelical church where participants studied. The broader issue of teaching of English as a second language in a developing nation, like Cambodia, is examined in terms of its potential beneficial outcomes and/or harmful consequences. Findings indicate that poverty and religion play important roles in participants' experiences. Participants seek out multiple English learning opportunities. The motivation and commitment to learning English among young adult Cambodians are very strong due to a belief that the learning of English is necessary (and in some cases, sufficient) for social mobility for themselves and their families. Learning English increases some individuals' potential access to employment opportunities in Cambodia's globalizing economy, although the nation remains one of the poorest in the world. But

on a broader societal level, individuals' reliance on learning English as a means to upward mobility leaves untouched the social, economic, and political forces that underlie the intergeneration reproduction of social inequality. Findings offer implications for TESOL practice in US urban schools and recommendations for future research.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Simon and Tuy, who unknowingly serve as inspiration. To the students in Cambodia and your amazing perseverance. To immigrant and refugee students in Charlotte and across the United States, may you enter learning environments that celebrate your culture. To every individual, around the world, who believes in the power of education, may your efforts be rewarded.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CLC	Community learning center
CORDE	Cambodian Organization for Research, Development and Education
CSAJ	Contemporary Southeast Asia Journal
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EKCC	Evangelical Khmer Christian Church
EFA	Education for All
EFL	English as foreign language
ELL	English language learner
ELT	English language teaching
ESL	English as a second language
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
GDI	Gender-related Human Development Index
GER	Gross enrollment rates
GED	Global Education Digest
GMSP	Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Plan
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
GNP	Gross national product
GPI	Gender parity index
HDR	Human development report
HEI	Higher education institution
LLSP	Local Life Skills Program

MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoEYS	Ministry of Education Youth and Sport
NC	The National Curriculum
NFE	Non-formal education
NGO	Non-government organization
PAP	Priority Action Plan
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
SBM	School-based Management
SWAp	Sector Wide Approach
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages
TNGA	Tinath New Generation Academy
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESS	UNESCO National Education Support Strategy
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USDS	United States Department of State

## CHAPTER 1: NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

### Prelude

Immigration has become a controversial topic in present day United States. Physical barriers and government patrols serve to protect the nation from the hundreds of thousands of individuals that attempt to enter the country each year. There are dangerous criminals smuggling drugs and weapons across the border, but there are also countless women, children and men sneaking across in hopes for a better life for themselves and their families. Danger and death are worth the risk for some people to escape a life of poverty and hardship in their native countries. A country developed by immigrants must contend with the prevalent anti-immigration sentiment among some of its citizens. The backlash and anti-immigration rhetoric impacts the educational, economic and social policy in the United States.

Immigrant and refugee children that live in the United States are deeply affected by policy creation and reform. They and their families often face discrimination and prejudice in a society that values white, middle class norms. Students attend schools in which they are forced to speak English only and their native language and culture are devalued by the policies and organization of educational institutions. However, they have come here because the United States of America is equated with freedom, democracy and social and economic progress. Many immigrant families believe in the American dream.

They believe that hard work and education will lead to social mobility for themselves and their children.

Versions of this American dream are alive and well in Cambodia and other developing nations. Speaking English has become associated with modernity, globalization and social progress. Even though many Americans are highly critical and ignorant of immigration issues in our own country, as a nation we tend to perceive the global spread of English as triumphant and evidence of other nation's choice to adopt a language that is connected to concepts of power, capitalism and democracy. The highly critical, although often uninformed, concerns that some Americans have about the impact of immigrants on language, culture and the economy in the United States should be applied, in an informed manner, globally to developing nations embracing English as a part of their social policies.

Cambodia is a nation struggling to rebuild after years of war and devastation. Cambodia relies heavily on foreign aid and expertise to develop the infrastructure and human resources deemed necessary for social and economic progress. English has become a significant factor in Cambodia's rebuilding process and the nation's efforts to participate more actively in the global economy. However, little attention has been given to the impact of English and TESOL programs on individuals and their families in Cambodia. This dissertation is an attempt to include Cambodian students in the dialogue about learning English and the impact that it has on their lives.

## Introduction

“If thinking about Cambodia evokes a sense of “tragedy,” then thinking about Cambodian education evokes a sense of crisis” (Ayres, 2000).

Cambodia faces many challenges as a nation that significantly impacts the academic and social experiences of Cambodian students. Poverty, gender inequalities in school, unequal access to education, limited foreign language instruction in public schools, domestic violence and substance abuse present significant challenges to Cambodia’s large population of English language learners (ELLs). Despite these obstacles, many young adults in the nation continue to pursue opportunities to learn English. Why? What factors motivate these students to learn English? What are Khmer students’ educational experiences? What are the most prevalent challenges to obtaining an education in Cambodia? How are students’ efforts to learn English supported?

This qualitative case study answers these questions and begins to address the lack of qualitative research available on education in Cambodia. Participant observation and in depth interviews were used to collect data in the study. Globalization and the unprecedented popularity of English internationally makes this is an important study for the Teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) field. A critical analysis of the findings has important implications for the TESOL field worldwide and in the United States.

Cambodia’s educational system faces a multitude of issues that have been historically ignored by the nation’s governing body, but deserve the attention of social researchers. Little educational progress can be made if the government ignores the other external factors that contribute to the social context of schooling, such as poverty. In this



chapter, I describe the current educational crisis in Cambodia and the study's purpose. The necessity of a qualitative study related to the experiences and motivations of young, Khmer adults is explained. The role of education in relation to globalization and social progress is highlighted. The chapter concludes with the research questions and topics explored in the study.

### *The Cambodian educational crisis*

Education operates in a complex social context that is influenced by the nation's history, culture, and social spheres. Cambodia's fairly recent emergence on the international stage and participation in globalization raises questions about economic and social development, as well as policy creation and reform. International organizations such as United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have raised concerns regarding equality and human rights in the nation (Bernard, 2005). Cambodia continues to struggle significantly with issues of poverty, poor health care, and illiteracy, which directly impact social progress (Escott, 2000; Gollogly, 2002; Sokhom, 2004). Human rights are a concern, but perhaps more pressing, are the economic implications because a substantial amount of Cambodia's social development is funded by international aid.

In general, Cambodian rates of absenteeism, grade repetition and dropouts are alarmingly high. The survival rate to grade five has fluctuated between approximately 55% in the late 1990s, peaked at 70% in 2001 and has remained in range of the low 60% up to 2005 (World Bank, 2009). Children take an average of 10.8 years to complete six years of primary school (MoEYS, 2004). Poorly trained teachers and low wages have

created a culture of corruption, which often demands that students pay teachers for instruction that should be free (Tan, 2008).

Cambodia's educational system does not meet international benchmarks for instructional hours and teacher to student ratios. The number of instructional hours per year is much lower in Cambodia in comparison to developed countries; students average between 450-650 instructional hours per year compared to the international benchmark of 850 per year (UNESCO, 2009). Teacher to student ratios are often greater than 1 to 55 in Cambodia, a ratio much higher than the 1 to 40 recommended by UNESCO (EFA, 2010). There have been expansions of education, which have increased enrollment rates, but have contributed to classroom overcrowding, shortage of materials and textbooks, overworked teaching force and a decrease in educational quality (Nonyama-Tarumi & Bredenberg, 2009). The nation is undergoing substantial reforms in social and educational policy, and would benefit greatly from a broader research base on issues specific to Cambodia and the Southeast Asia region.

#### *Study purpose and goal*

The purpose of this research investigation is to explore the motivations and experiences of young, Khmer adults studying English as a Second Language (ESL). There is a plethora of research available on students learning strategies, behaviors, and motivations for learning ESL or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Chamot, 1995, 2004, 2005; Masgorey & Gardner, 2003; Koul, Roy, Kaewkuekool & Ploisawaschai, 2009). However, the majority of it is quantitative in nature and only minimally acknowledges the socio-cultural context in which ESL students operate. Moreover, the vast majority of studies focus on ELLs in the United States. Very little has been written

in English about ELLs in Cambodia. The very nature of quantitative investigations limits the amount of participant input in the research due to highly structured data collection methods. This study addresses this lacuna in the literature by presenting a qualitative investigation of ELLs in Cambodia.

Students are active agents in the learning process, but can also contribute to the reproduction of the status quo. Exploring the way students engage in learning English and what motivates their actions can provide valuable data for informing educational policy and practice. There is a need for more studies that explore ESL students' experiences, motivation, attitudes, and behaviors. Qualitative research permits further exploration of the role of the learner's socio-cultural context (Cid, Grañena & Tragant, 2009; Courtney, 2007; Lamb, 2004; Littlejohn, 2008; O'Sullivan, 2006 ). Specifically, I asked: How young, Khmer adult students' motivations and lived experiences influence their approach to learning English? The study explores students' educational experiences in relation to the political, economic and cultural context within students operate.

The goal of this study is to utilize a qualitative research design to collect rich and detailed data from the thirty participants about their motivations and experiences in relation to education and ESL in particular. This study is unique to the participants and their location in the larger social context of Cambodia, but the findings are valuable to researchers, the TESOL field, linguists, educational and social psychologists, and individuals involved in policy development and reform. The findings are especially important considering the role of non-government organizations (NGOs) in Cambodia and other developing countries. The study provides a space for students to share experiences and invites the experts (the students) on ESL into a critical dialogue about

the influences, challenges, and supports that create the context in which they live and study English. The study's findings and participants' narratives can be used to inform social policy, practice, and educational pedagogy and methodology in Cambodia and wherever students learn ESL. Perhaps more importantly, the findings may inspire social transformation at individual, local and national levels.

The increased demand for English and improved educational systems is most often documented in theoretical reviews of the literature or quantitative studies, rather than qualitative studies (Clayton, 2008; Nonyama-Tarumi & Bredenberg, 2009; Sokhom, 2004). Research pertaining to the experiences of Cambodian students as English Language Learners (ELLs) is virtually absent from the literature, a fact highlighting the importance of this qualitative study. This study employs strong methodology and the thick description that is characteristic of ethnographic research.

Ayres (2000) specifically acknowledges the distinct lack of scholarship pertaining to the Cambodia beyond the policies, practices, and aftermath of the Khmer Rouge stating, "References addressing Cambodian social and cultural life are rare. There are few scholarly books or articles dealing with Cambodia's development or social policies and even fewer seriously addressing education" (p.440). Although there have been some recent studies devoted to Cambodian education, policies and reforms, there is still a lacuna in the research base (Clayton, 2008; Courtney 2007; Nonyama-Tarumi & Bredenberg, 2009; Sokhom, 2004; Tan, 2008). Moreover, the absence of voice from Cambodian students, parents and teachers should be a great concern to international organizations if they are committed to eradicating poverty and inequality.

*Globalization, English and education*

The concept of globalization has penetrated nearly every economic, social, and political aspect of policy development and reform in developed and developing countries (Stiglitz, 2002). Globalization processes can result in positive or negative outcomes for developing nations, and are often a result of how nations adjust their social and economic policies in relation to their participation in the global marketplace (Hartungi, 2006). The relationship between education and globalization must be continually explored to reduce exploitation of subordinate groups that have been marginalized by dominant groups. Carnoy & Rhoten (2002) argue, “In assessing globalization’s true relationship to educational change, we need to know how globalization and its ideological packaging affect the overall delivery of schooling, from transnational paradigms, to national policies, to local practices” (p. 2). As a result of globalization, many countries are promoting learning the English language because it is currently deemed “the international language.” The particular push among developing countries to learn English, to participate in the global economy, and to progress toward modernization must be examined to identify sources of power, oppression and agency.

Modernization and development are themes intertwined throughout the discourse of globalization (Ayres, 2000; Escott, 2000; Tan, 2008). Acquiring the English language and improving levels and quality of education are key components of developing human capital for economic purposes. Many developing countries, like Cambodia, believe strongly in the goals of human resource development and modernization theory. Impoverished nations are dependent upon the economic assistance of developed nations, a relationship that makes them vulnerable to exploitation by more dominant countries.

Learning English can be emblematic of these processes. In the case of Cambodian young adults, this study illustrates the ways the Cambodian state and NGOs operate to provide access to English. TESOL inherently alters traditional cultures, but also gives the illusion that ELLs are acquiring usable skills for participation in the global economy. However, the question remains whether TESOL and globalization ultimately result in economic opportunities that provide jobs with living wages for ELLs.

Development or “modernization” can be understood as a continuum of progression, which associates high levels of economic growth and integration into the global economy with advanced levels of technology, rational thought, Western or Eurocentric values and attitudes, and the capitalist modes of production (Ayres, 2000). Educational institutions often serve as sites of ideological transmission and abandonment of traditional culture. Schools are at the center of the “modernization” movement. The World Bank promotes modernization as essential to the economic progress of developing countries via their integration into the world economy. Developing nations are striving to become a part of the global market place, but at what cost? Has globalization become a form of colonization? Is TESOL a form of imperialism? Countries are being developed and industrialized, processes that alter traditional cultures and impacts the lives of individual human beings.

#### *International aid and educational reform in Cambodia*

Cambodia continues to struggle significantly with issues of poverty, poor health care, and illiteracy (Escott, 2000; Gollogly, 2002; Sokhom, 2004). Cambodia’s slow recovery from the conflict that has plagued the country for the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has made international aid a necessary supplement to their efforts at rebuilding their

nation's infrastructure. The United States, Australia, France, and the Asian Development Bank have invested heavily in the country's rebuilding efforts (Maskall & Garang, 1998). Acquiring outside funding to assist with efforts of reconstructing social systems, such as health care and education has been imperative for development; however, the aid often requires Cambodia to incorporate the international donors' ideologies and practices in its social policy development.

A result of accepting aid from international donors has been the requirement of learning English in order to communicate with the workers from NGOs and outside agencies that provide and administer funding (Clayton, 2008). There has been a recent shift in the Cambodian students' preferences of second language learning from French to English. The shift has been stimulated by the policies and actions of a range of external sources (Clayton, 2008). Although few question the necessity of English and improvements in the quality of education, many NGOs and researchers acknowledge that infusing English throughout Cambodia presents many challenges (Clayton, 2008; Courtney, 2007; Duggan, 1996; Escott, 2000; Maskell & Garang, 1998; O'Sullivan, 2006; Sokhom, 2004; Tan, 2008).

Despite global efforts and reforms aimed at developing and improving quality of education in developing nations, a disconnect exists between rhetoric and practice. As a result, developing countries often fail to make significant gains in educational outcomes (O'Sullivan, 2006). Foreign and Cambodian NGOs and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) are concerned with the lack of progress reported by various agencies. During the years of 2003 through 2008 there were approximately 113 organizations supporting 233 education projects in Cambodia at an estimated cost of \$225 million US

dollars (MoEYS & UNICEF, 2005 as cited in Tan, 2008). However, the economic and educational spheres have failed to make substantial gains in terms of developing sustainable funding sources and improving the quality of education available. NGOs and other donor organizations, along with the Cambodian government and the nation's people, encounter frustration in implementing their educational reforms targeted at improving quality and equitable access to education for the people of Cambodia.

Currently, policies and reforms are constructed by the Cambodian government along with international organizations that provide funding. A Western/Eurocentric perspective permeates the majority of the reconstruction efforts. This perspective is challenging for several reasons. One arena where tensions exist is the relations between NGOs and government officials. Issues of culture and power make implementing policies and practices entrenched in Western ideology and views problematic (Tan, 2008). Pedagogical issues exist for teachers, learners and parents who are not accustomed to the learner centered pedagogy of the West (Courtney, 2007; Nonyama-Tarumi & Bredenberg, 2009; Sokhom, 2004). Additionally, the gender norms, stereotypes and expectations of students that exist among Westerners and Cambodians permeate the social context within which the policies and reforms are being formulated (Gan, 2009; Lee, 2000; Littlewood, 2000; 2001; Matthews, 2000). Policy reform does not occur in isolation; understanding how policy is informed and implemented is essential for social progress that transforms social structures of oppression, including education more broadly and ESL in particular.



### *Role of TESOL*

TESOL plays a significant role in English speaking nations and in developing countries that offer English as a foreign language. ELLs in the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom rely on TESOL to learn the language and culture of the nation. For, ELLs in English speaking countries, understanding cultural norms and increasing one's ability to communicate are important for cross-cultural social interactions. TESOL is instrumental in the acclimation process for many resettled immigrant and refugee populations. However, most TESOL educators, policies and practices are uncritical in nature. Together, they promote English and Western culture in a manner that devalues native languages and cultures, while perpetuating the types of discrimination, racism and prejudices that exist in the United States. TESOL classrooms typically serve as sites of social reproduction, rather than social transformation. A critical TESOL approach encourages ELLs to develop high levels of awareness regarding language, culture and their roles as agents of change.

### *Research question and sub questions*

The main question that shapes this dissertation is: What are the motivations and experiences of young, Khmer adults studying English? Several sub questions arise from the primary one: What factors motivate Khmer students to learn English? What are Khmer students' educational experiences? What challenges do students face when learning English and how do students address those obstacles? How are students' efforts at learning English being supported?

## Definition of Terms

I developed the following section to provide readers with a clear explanation of key terms. The definition of the terms indicates the way the terms were used throughout this study and written dissertation.

### *Young adults*

Young adults are individuals that are 17-24 years old.

### *Khmer*

The term Khmer refers to the language and culture of Cambodia. The words Cambodian and Khmer can and are used interchangeably in some contexts.

### *Christian*

Christian refers to individuals and organizations that adhere to the doctrine of Christianity. In this study, it refers to evangelical believers in Jesus Christ and is used to describe evangelical Christian organizations and institutions in this context. It is not intended to be applied broadly or to simplify the diversity that exists among Christians in nations like the United States.

### *Buddhist*

Buddhist refers to individuals and organizations that adhere to the doctrine of Buddhism as practiced in Cambodia. It is used to describe ideologies and traditional practices rooted in the religion.

### *Non-affiliated*

Non-affiliated is used to describe participants that do not identify with one specific religion. Non-affiliated participants may or may not engage in practices associated with Christianity or Buddhism. The term undecided was originally used, but I

chose to replace it with non-affiliated. Undecided implies that there is a decision that needs to be made regarding religious beliefs and at no time in this study were participants asked to make any choices in terms of religion.

#### *Students*

Students are any individuals learning or studying English or any subject in formal, informal or non-formal learning environments.

#### *Peers*

Peers refer to individuals of the same approximate age of participants. Peers include classmates, friends and neighbors.

#### *Family*

Family is highly valued in Cambodia. Family includes biological relationships like parents, grandparents and siblings. It also includes step-parents, step-siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

#### *Educational experiences*

Educational experiences include learning processes that occur in formal, non-formal and informal learning environments.

#### *Learning environments*

Learning environments are any spaces that are utilized for learning. Learning environments include, but are not limited to, public schools, classes at EKCC and any other areas where students study or learn.

*Formal education*

Formal education, or learning, describes learning processes that occur in private or public education institutions. Formal learning includes experiences at primary and secondary school, post-secondary training programs, and higher education institutions. It also includes private, paid part-time English classes.

*Informal education*

Informal education, or learning, refers to learning experiences created by individuals or small groups. Informal learning includes student study groups, individuals teaching community members in their homes, or forms of small group instruction led by older children or young adults.

*Non-formal education*

Non-formal education, or learning, includes organized education offered by community groups or organizations. The organizations may be secular or religious in nature and include programs at churches and pagodas.

*Motivation*

Motivation refers to the impetus or inspiration to act. In this study it refers to the drive to act based on internal thought processes and ideologies and external factors in the socio-cultural context.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Introduction*

Critical theory encompasses participatory, pedagogical and action oriented theories that focus on critical inquiry of sources of power and oppression within social, political and economic systems (Cho & Lewis, 2005; Held, 1980; Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010; Freire, 1970; 1985; 1998; Giroux, 1996; Shor & Freire, 1987 ). Critical analysis is widely applied in the field of urban education to deconstruct deficit discourses of that serve as hegemonic forces perpetuating social reproduction (Anyon, 1997; 2005; Delpit, 2006; Fine, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999). Such analyses highlight the contradictions that exist in the social rhetoric and the inequitable treatment individuals and groups in society based on socially constructed concepts such as race, ethnicity, class and gender (Barak, Leighton & Flavin, 2007; Delpit, 2006; Fine, 1991; Giroux, 1996; Hochschild, 2003; Lee, 2005; MacLeod, 1995; Omi & Winant, 1994). Critical theorists identify how the dominant groups' control and use of language, communication and information is used to maintain power, and as a consequence oppress people (Freire, 1970; 1985; 1998; Giroux, 1996). Critical theory provides a theoretical lens to assess individual and groups relationships with social structures and institutional practices to analyze the impact of these relationships on people's beliefs, ideologies and actions (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). Developing a critical consciousness and eliminating forms of oppression are key components of a critical theory.

### *A critical TESOL stance*

TESOL in an international context has not been widely analyzed through a critical framework (Pennycook, 1999, 2008; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003). Although,

scholars have adequately addressed curricular, methodological and policy issues facing English language learners in the United States (Abedi, 2006; Abedi & Gándara, 2006; Collier & Thomas, 2002; Espinosa, 2005; Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Fillmore, 2001; Gutiérrez, Asato, Pacheco, Moll, Olson, Hornig, Ruiz, García & McCarty, 2002; Gutiérrez, Asato, Santos & Gotanda, 2002; Lee, 1994, 1996, 2001; Lee, 2007; Macswan & Rolstad, 2006). A critical approach must be applied to the field of TESOL internationally in the same manner that it has been applied to urban education and to TESOL in a lesser degree, in the United States. TESOL, ESL, EFL and ELT are not neutral processes, therefore they must be analyzed critically to deconstruct the potentially disempowering discourses that exist in the field and identify the ways TESOL serves as an oppressive and hegemonic force when coupled with globalization (Barry, 2011; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Eoyang, 2003; Kubota & Lin, 2006; Lee, 2011; Pennycook, 1999, 2008; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003 ).

Critical TESOL is the location and analysis of aspects of TESOL in the larger social and political context. It focuses on issues of power, inequality, discrimination, resistance and struggle (Pennycook, 1999, p. 332). Critical TESOL builds upon critical theory and pedagogy, applied linguistics, and post-colonial theory to examine the role of English in post-colonial societies (Barry, 2011). Critical TESOL deconstructs the hegemonic ways that English is used to oppress people and maintain social hierarchies by highlighting existing contradictions within the discourse of global English. Soudien (2005) reminds us that knowledge is constantly in a state of interpretation and never absolute, even though it is often presented as such, which is why all forms of knowledge must be viewed critically. Soudien states:

No knowledge is absolute. Globalisations as universalism and homogeneity, and standardization as a new form of totalisation, are therefore problematic. Knowledge itself must therefore be made the object of inspection and not simply be accepted or rejected because of where it comes from. What is its history, its objective, and its scope? (p.155)

Language is not neutral, but rather it is intertwined with power, culture and ideology (Fillmore, 2000). Ives (2010) argues that the politics in language learning have been minimized and warns that the imposition of a global language, like English, has the potential to further oppress subaltern groups. Language plays a powerful role in the construction, legitimization and distribution of knowledge (Jordão, 2009). This is essential to understand because teachers of language are teachers of culture. Teachers play an instrumental role in either perpetuating patterns of power and oppression or in creating spaces for individuals to become active agents of social transformation (Delpit; 2006; Freire, 1998, Ladson-Billings, 1994). Schools can serve as sites of social reproduction that maintain power relations or spaces to create knowledge and increase cultural awareness (Freire, 1970; 1985; 1998; 2008). Since learning institutions serve as ideological battle grounds, it is essential to examine who controls the knowledge that is created, how it is transmitted or produced, and the agenda of those maintaining power.

#### *A Freireian perspective*

Paulo Freire's concepts of banking, problem-posing, conscientization, praxis, critical consciousness and cultural action provide a framework for transformation and empowerment (1970). Freire contends that banking approaches to education are implemented by dominant class with the intention to oppress students and maintain social class hierarchies. A banking approach, common in developing nations and in urban classrooms across the United States, assumes that students are passive vessels awaiting

deposits of knowledge from teachers, who are the owners of the knowledge (1970). Such an approach is inherently oppressive. It silences students and isolates them by denying them the opportunity to participate in dialogue and co-construction of knowledge. Students are considered passive agents in a banking classroom that utilizes a hidden curriculum to implement goals of social immobility and hegemony. Freire contends that the teacher should act as a facilitator, rather than a depositor of knowledge, and guide learning through problem posing approaches (1970). A problem posing approach scaffolds questions around assumptions and understandings, in way that encourages students to discover and co-construct knowledge (1970). Students and teachers become co-creators of knowledge, an act that is empowering and transformative.

Education can be transformative when conscientization and praxis occur for learners. Conscientization is the process in which people become conscious and reflective of their position in the world, which includes the recognition of the ways one's consciousness has been conditioned by dominant language, social relations, and institutions (Freire, 1985). It occurs when individuals are able to analyze the location in society from an objective perspective that acknowledges the role of social conditioning. Praxis can occur as a result of conscientization. Praxis is the reflection upon the world in an effort to transform it (Freire, 1985). According to Freire, a critical consciousness must be developed and coupled with agency in order for humanizing transformation to occur (1985; 1998). A critical consciousness results in an individual's constant questioning of the superstructures that perpetuate social inequities. English alone is not emancipatory. Rather, transformation occurs when individuals from dominated and dominating groups engage in discourse surrounding the "issues and practices that place values on languages



and cultures into a hierarchy that functions to dictate their place in society” (Olivios & Quintana de Valladolid, 2005).

*Bourdieu's concepts of capital*

Freire's stance complements Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and fields. Bourdieu's concept of capital has been widely used to explain the academic and occupational attainment of various groups of people (Lareau, 2003, Portes, 2000; Zhou & Bankston III, 1994). Bourdieu defines three forms of capital: economic, social and cultural (1997). An individual's economic, social and cultural capital can determine the amount of access available to various fields. Bourdieu's work suggests a model of structural inequality that requires researchers to situate capital in different contexts to analyze the social and cultural reproduction that occurs as a result of individuals' and groups' interactions with social institutions (Lareau, 2003).

The concepts of economic, social and cultural capital are useful in analyses and discussions involving educational and occupational experiences. Forms of capital acknowledge the social, political, economic and cultural context in which interactions between individuals or groups and social institutions occur. Economic capital is fairly straightforward and more easily understood compared to forms of social and cultural capital. Bourdieu (1997) defines economic capital as that “which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights” (p.47). Economic capital can be thought of as financial resources available to individuals and groups. Social capital refers to the relationships, social connections or more simply put membership in a group that allows one to secure benefits through network membership and other social structures (Bourdieu, 1997; Portes, 2000).

Of the three forms of capital Bourdieu developed, cultural capital has received the most attention (Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Kingston, 2001). Lamont & Lareau (1988) define cultural capital as “institutionalized, i.e. widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion” (p.156). MacLeod (1995) highlights the role of capital in educational institutions, “By embodying class interests and ideologies, schools reward the cultural capital of the dominant classes and systematically devalue that of the lower classes” (p. 13).

Some scholars suggest that there is a relationship between cultural capital and academic achievement (Dimaggio, 1982; Lareau, 2003; MacLeod, 1995; Mickelson & Heath, 1999). Lareau’s ethnographic study among families of varying socioeconomic classes indicates that the cultural and social capital that was generated among families contributed significantly to the reproduction of social classes and different academic outcomes (2003). Linguistic cultural capital plays a powerful role in classrooms and society by rewarding those who possess it, while punishing those whose language and speech patterns do not meet the norms of “standard English” (Gutiérrez, et. al, 2002; Gutiérrez, et. al, 2002). If increased levels of capital have a positive effect on academic achievement, then speaking logically, decreased amounts of capital would have a negative impact on academic achievement.

Low academic achievement and social immobility has been attributed to the lack of economic, social and cultural capital among poor and working class whites, African Americans, Hispanics and some Asians (Fine, 1991; Lee, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). Fine’s (1991) work with African American students and Lee’s (1994, 1996, 2001) studies

of Southeast Asian students' school experiences are examples the way economic, social and cultural capital are used by structural forces to oppress students who are not from the privileged class. Fine (1991) revealed the systematic processes in place at the school level that forces high school students out of the system. Here, the social structure of the school limits the agency of individuals, but much of the discourse on high school achievement refers to students like these as “drop-outs” and assigns blame to individuals, rather than structural inequalities.

Lee (1994, 1996, 2001) has focused her efforts extensively on deconstructing the model minority stereotype, a myth perpetuating beliefs about the intelligence and work ethics of Asian American students. The model minority label thrives based on the occupational achievements and assimilation ability of professional and entrepreneurial immigrants (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Asian students are often perceived to be “good” students and especially smart in mathematics and science (Chang & Au, 2007/2008). However, this broadly applied stereotype, although positive in nature, has had a negative impact on more recently arrived Southeast Asian immigrants and refugees that come from significantly different backgrounds than their earlier counterparts. When Southeast Asian students, like the Hmong, struggle academically and socially in school, they are blamed by teachers and administrators who cannot understand why they fail to fulfill the stereotype (Lee, 2001). The notion that Asians are supposed to be smart and well behaved contradicts the reality in some schools. The model minority myth focuses the attention on the individuals and the groups, rather than the structure of schooling that is the cause of many educational difficulties.

*Replacing social capital with social capacity*

Language and ideology penetrate theoretical frameworks and therefore shape the way in which we view and analyze the world. According to Smith and Kulynych (2002), the use of social capital diminishes the emphasis on the political and grounds social activity in the economic. It depoliticizes and valorizes capitalism so acquiring the “needed” social capital takes precedence over the means to which the capital can be applied, which is to inform policy and impact structural change. “Economistic implications of the language of capital reflects the hegemony of capitalism,” (p.166) which I do not intend to support. Smith and Kulynych (2002) highlight the analytical and ideological consequences of using the terms capital and social capital in their theoretical sense. Both have become key words around which the meaning of social experiences are negotiated and contested and have essentially served a hegemonic function in academic circles further centering economic discourse across disciplines and perpetuating the ideology of capitalism in addition to its accompanying ideals of individualist, capitalist, democratic, American.

Appropriate terms are essential otherwise we are participating in the perpetuation of hegemonic discourse that further oppresses groups and strengthens the power disguised in language, which is used to dominate marginalized groups. The language of capital undermines empowering oppressed groups because it links everything back to economics. Theories of capital perpetuate the deficit perspective that critical theorists aim to deconstruct. Smith and Kulynych (2002) argue that the term social capital oversimplifies relationships and their effects and contributes to the masking of power differences, and as a result “The term *social capital* helps legitimate capitalism” (175). In

an effort not to contribute to the transcontextual discourse that legitimizes capitalism and places Western hegemony at the center, throughout this discussion the term social capacity will be used to replace the term social capital as suggested by Smith and Kulynych (2002).

In conclusion, a critical TESOL framework that utilizes theoretical constructs developed by Freire and Bordieu is applied to the findings. A specific focus on the role of power in relation to English and the TESOL field is examined in relation to the broader sociopolitical and historical context. Social, political and economic sources of oppression are identified and discussed in relation to human agency and social transformation. The experiences of young, Khmer adults striving to learn English are discussed through, what Giroux has described as, “Freire’s fusion of the language of critique and language of possibility, rather than discourses of domination or despair” (1985).

#### *Overview of chapters*

In chapter two, I provide a brief summary of Cambodian history spanning from the nineteenth to twenty first centuries to provide a socio-historical context of education in Cambodia. I describe the history of the nation’s educational system and a detailed description of the present system including issues of educational access and equity. Key factors impacting education combined with historical events illustrate the current context in which the study is situated.

I explain the qualitative design of the study and data collection and methods in chapter three. I give special attention to issues related to cross-cultural research, especially those involving research assistants, because together we shaped the study by our worldviews, behaviors and language. I provide mini-biographies of the participants

and others that played key roles in the study. I discuss critical TESOL as a conceptual framework and the complimentary theories that guided my investigation and are used in subsequent chapters to analyze and discuss the findings.

I organize the findings from participant observation and interviews into five interconnected themes in chapter four. Each theme contains smaller sub-themes that illustrate participants' motivations, strategies and experiences learning English in a church-based program. The organization of the findings highlights contradictions in relations between individual beliefs and the social structures. In chapter five, I critically analyze the contradictions that emerged in the findings and discuss the ways TESOL can be liberating and oppressive simultaneously, another contradiction. I conclude the dissertation by identifying the limitations of the study, including my role as a participant observer and recapitulating the findings and implications. Lastly, I identify concerns and make suggestions for TESOL practice, pedagogy, policy and future research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Organization of the Literature Review

This investigation of young adult ESL students in Cambodia begins with a review of the relevant literature. The literature review will provide a historical summary of political events and education in Cambodia. The educational systems are situated in the larger political, social and cultural context. I discuss important educational issues related to access, curriculum, school reform and policy. I describe the roles of government, foreign donors and NGOs, and typical urban communities and families because they are all participants in the education process.

### Historical and Social Context of Cambodia

Education whether it is formal, non-formal or informal, occurs within a larger social context and is bound by historical, political and economic conditions. Schooling experiences are not isolated to the interactions within the schools, but are impacted by the myriad of factors that exist within the community, the nation and the world. In this section, I briefly summarize the history of Cambodia and the nation's prior and current educational systems in relation to the social context. I include a discussion of inequities in educational access and the role of government, foreign aid and local communities in education and policy development.

*A brief history of Cambodia*

History and the events of prior generations inevitably shape the current social and political realm in which people's everyday actions and experiences occur. It is essential to understand the present social environment within its larger historical context. This section will briefly identify historical themes and the major events of the past two centuries that have contributed to Cambodia's 21<sup>st</sup> century society. The discussion will be divided by century beginning with the 19<sup>th</sup> century and ending with the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

There is evidence to suggest that people have been residing in Cambodia for as far back as 4200 B.C. Historian David Chandler (2008) identifies four themes that permeate the history of the region. The first theme is vulnerability of Cambodia based on geographical location and size, which has made the country vulnerable to aggression from its more powerful neighbors Vietnam and Thailand over the centuries. The second theme is the relationship of contemporary Cambodians to their past. The French were responsible for deciphering and restoring the historical remains of Angkor Wat, which was the site of the thriving Khmer empire from the 9<sup>th</sup> century until the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Foreign influences played a role in portraying the history of six centuries in the country. The more recent past, primarily the Khmer Rouge, has been considered too controversial to teach thoroughly in contemporary Cambodia. The foreign interpretation of the distant past and the current government's efforts to censor the recent past creates a unique dynamic in which Cambodians relate to their history. Chandler also notes the third theme, the role of patronage and hierarchies in Cambodian thinking that impacts the political and social relations of the people. People in power were thought to be more meritorious than lay people, a claim that couples with the widespread acceptance of the status quo among



the country's citizens. Lastly, Chandler argues that the inertia like quality of rural societies such as Cambodia has slowed economic growth and social progress. The practice of maintaining traditional practices in village, family and royal life is widespread. The country's physical location, a relationship with foreign influences, hierarchal concepts in political and social thought and the idle nature of rural Cambodian society impacts the current social context. The themes are intertwined throughout the history of the country.

### *Nineteenth century*

Cambodia is a Southeast Asian nation situated between Vietnam and Thailand. Since the late 1700s, Cambodia's location has forced the country's leaders to choose an alliance among their neighbors or to appeal to outside nations to neutralize power. Cambodia has been subject to repeated invasions and occupation by the Vietnamese and Thai, which turned Cambodia's landscape into a battleground. The country's ability to control national affairs was limited. The first half of the nineteenth century was deemed the darkest in Cambodia's history until the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s eclipsed events that preceded them (Chandler, 2008).

The second half of the century was marked by yet another foreign country coming to protect and later colonize Cambodia. The French involvement in the kingdom began in the eighteenth century. France established a protectorate in 1863. The French increased their presence in Vietnam in the early 1880s and attempted to dismantle the kingship in Cambodia. They wanted to establish communal officials reporting directly to the French as they had done in Vietnam, but this style of governing was foreign to Cambodia and met with great resistance. In 1885 there was a nationwide rebellion against the French's

efforts. In 1886 the French were forced to accept Cambodia's traditional ruling of their kingdom due to a shortage of resources necessary to sustain French imperialism. The French still maintained power in the region during this period. Still, foreign forces played a paramount role in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is a common theme throughout the last century.

### *Twentieth century*

The early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of increased development in some sectors of Cambodia. The French invested heavily in building roads and railroads, which increased access across the country. The Chinese used the new access to exploit rural areas and the country saw large increases in the number of Chinese immigrants populating the kingdom. French scholars worked with Cambodian laborers to restore Angkor Wat, which is a historical temple of significant importance in Khmer history. The French invested in these efforts, but did not put any money into the educational system in Cambodia until the 1930s. At that time, formal education was only available to a limited number of Khmer elite living in Phnom Penh. A major development in 1936 was the establishment of the *Nagara Vatta*, which was the first newspaper publication in Khmer that provided the Cambodian people with a written form of access to world events. The French were able to maintain control in Cambodia by making concessions to the Japanese during the Second World War. However, the Japanese Coup de Force dismantled the French occupation in 1945.

On March 13, 1945 King Norodom Sihanouk declared independence from France and made several changes in an attempt to reclaim the country. He changed the country's name to Kampuchea, reinstated the Buddhist lunar calendar and returned to using

Khmer titles to refer to the government officials. However, the French insisted that Cambodia needed to earn their independence and in the early months of 1946 a *modus Vivendi*, or written compromise, was signed and the French began to restore their influence in Cambodia.

In the following years, French sought outside foreign aid from the United States to stop the spread of communism in Indochina, which flowed in upon the outbreak of the Korean War. In 1954 the French granted the King authority over the country's armed forces, judiciary and foreign affairs. The Geneva Conference granted Cambodia full independence and military autonomy. After the 1955 elections, Sihanouk worked continually to maintain Cambodia's neutrality among communist and anti-communist nations. He also began to funnel money, much of it from the United States, into education. The United States had serious concerns about Cambodia's ability to protect itself from Vietnamese communist forces. The U.S. developed an annual aid program in 1955 that provided \$50 million a year, which was larger in scope and size than all countries and organizations combined (60 years, 2010). The aid focused on education and infrastructure in the country and continued despite Sihanouk's ongoing relations with China and other communist countries.

Sihanouk worked to maintain Cambodia's neutrality during the onset of the Cold War, which entailed ongoing relations with both communist and non-communist nations. Prince Sihanouk envisioned himself as the father of Cambodia. According to Chandler, Sihanouk viewed the citizens of Cambodia as his children and empathized with their plight of poverty. He worked to increase their political awareness of injustices and self worth by spending a significant time touring the countryside. His significant investment

in education, which was more than 20% of the national budget, is further evidence of his commitment to the people of Cambodia (Prasertsri, 2008).

The 1960s were a tumultuous time in Indochina. The close proximity of the countries meant that major events in one country directly impacted its neighboring nations, which has historically been a theme. The civil war in Laos was intensifying. The United States increased their involvement in Vietnam and defined their foreign policy based on the Cold War. The objectives of the U.S. were twofold: contain the influence of Communist China and secure a victory over the North Vietnamese (60 years, 2010). Cambodia insisted on maintaining neutrality when the United States allied with Thai and South Vietnamese forces.

The relationship between the U.S. and Cambodia slowly deteriorated over the years 1960-1965, Sihanouk officially broke relations with the U.S. in May of 1965 (CSAJ, 2010). His decision was a result of the continual encroachment of U.S. and South Vietnamese troops in Cambodia during the Vietnam War. Anti-American sentiment was spreading in Cambodia and rumors that the Cambodia was cooperating with the Viet Cong were prevalent in the United States.

Sihanouk lost political power in 1967 to Lon Nol and Sisowath Sirik Matak; the two men that eventually fueled a coup against Sihanouk. The Prince allied with North Vietnam and Lon Nol led the efforts to force out the North Vietnamese communist troops, an effort that lasted four years. Lon Nol received support from the U.S. military and economic aid as well as heavy bombing along the Vietnamese border (Chandler, 2008; USDS, 2011). President Nixon authorized a covert bombing campaign, operation Menu, in Eastern Cambodia on March 18, 1969 to slow the progress of the North

Vietnamese. The four month carpet bombing campaign dropped 2,756,941 tons of ordinance in the countryside of Cambodia. Combined with mine laying operations by the U.S., the carpet bombing resulted in civilian deaths estimated to be at least 100,000 - 150,000, but possibly more (Kiernan, 2004; Owen & Kiernan, 2006). Diplomatic relations between the United States and Cambodia were re-established in July, 1969 (CSAJ, 2010).

In 1970, Cambodia with Lon Nol as its leader and support from the United States, ended their neutral stance and allied with South Vietnam. Despite worldwide condemnation, in late April 1970 President Nixon announced that the U.S. and South Vietnamese troops would enter Cambodia to defeat the 40,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong armies that occupied Eastern Cambodia. The carpet bombing and political instability set the stage for a five year long civil war in Cambodia that resulted in the deaths of 500,000 Cambodians (Kiernan, 1985). More importantly, it created opportunities for the Khmer Rouge to seize control over the nation after the U.S. revoked all military and economic aid.

April 17, 1975 marked the three year eight months and twenty days of terror that changed the lives of Cambodians and the nation forever. Saloth Sar, also known as Pol Pot, influenced heavily by the cultural revolution in China, spent the prior decade recruiting students and teachers discontent with Sihanouk and the corruption and conservative tone of Cambodian politics (Chandler, 2008). The Khmer Rouge was intent on creating an unprecedented form of socialism which refuted Western concepts and ideology linked to capitalism. The movement abolished the following things to create a foundation to build their utopian society: money, markets, formal education, books,

Buddhism, private property, clothing styles and people's freedom. The goal of the regime was to utilize Cambodian laborers to transform Cambodian agriculture to increase surpluses for exports and increase money for imports and provide funding to finance industrialization (Chandler, 2008). The lofty goals of the regime had tragic consequences.

Pol Pot led the Khmer Rouge forces in overtaking Phnom Penh and driving over two million city dwellers into the countryside. According to Chandler (2008), the people perceived the migration as a means to grow more rice and break down social hierarchies, but the real intent was four fold. There was a food shortage in the country that needed to be addressed and there was difficulty involved in controlling such a large mass of people, so moving everyone to the provinces to work on rice fields seemed like a viable solution. The Khmer Rouge also had concerns about their personal safety, which could be monitored better if the people were concentrated in controlled environments. Lastly, the Khmer Rouge maintained a desire for empowerment of the poor in the countryside and the citizens living in Phnom Penh posed a threat to their concept of social transformation.

Estimates of the Khmer Rouge's death toll vary. There are reports of between 1.7 million to 3 million people, or one in four or five Cambodians died as a result of the Khmer Rouge reign of terror (Kiernan, 1985; USDS, 2011). Hundreds of thousands of individuals considered class enemies by the Khmer Rouge were killed or died in prison from tortuous conditions. These people were typically the most educated individuals, who posed a threat to the power of the regime. Many others died from the long working days in the field that often lasted more than twelve hours. The lack of food led to a famine and malnourishment was an epidemic. In addition to starving people to death, the Khmer Rouge was known to neglect and mistreat the sick, including the elderly and

pregnant. The number of regime related deaths in Cambodia is one of the highest in recorded world history based on the brief life span of the regime and the per capita basis (Chandler, 2008).

In 1978, diplomatic relations between Vietnam and Cambodia were severed and the Vietnamese initiated a military offensive against the Kingdom. The Vietnamese began grooming Cambodian hostages and refugees, including Hun Sen, for military and government training (Chandler, 2008). On December 25, 1978 the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, with Hun Sen as a leader, and overthrew the Khmer Rouge weeks later. The People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was established in Cambodia under the control of Vietnam, but remnants of the Khmer Rouge party remained active through the mid 1990s.

Thousands of Khmer Rouge defectors joined the Cambodian government and the leaders remained in hiding when the movement was formally outlawed in 1994 (Chandler, 2008). Presently, only one person has been brought to justice for the atrocities of the regime. An International Tribunal tried, Kaing Guek Eav also known as Duch, for crimes he committed as a leader at Toul Sleng, a secret prison where he and others interrogated, tortured and killed at least 12,000 and possibly as many as 16,000 men, women and children ("Day of Reckoning," 2010, p. 1). The reality is that all of the surviving leaders of the regime, except for three, remain free.

The leaders of PRK had monumental challenges before them as the rebuilding of a nation commenced. Many educated elite had fled the country or were murdered. This left the country with a significant deficit of human resources. The survivors who remained continued to suffer from famine, malaria and the shock of the horrific events

they endured. The physical infrastructure of the country had been destroyed by years of conflict and civil war. Overall, the nation was at a dismal starting point in its efforts toward reconstruction.

The PRK introduced a constitution in the early 1980s that was modeled after the one in Vietnam. The government began to function, but remained under the control of Vietnam until 1989. During that time the PRK initiated several important changes. The national anthem was revised, the country's flag was changed and the constitution was revised to name Buddhism as the national religion. There is freedom of religion, although directives aimed at evangelical Christians were issued in recent years to limit proselytizing outside of religious institutions (Bureau of Democracy, Labor and Human Rights, 2010). The age requirements for males to enter monkhood were removed and traditional culture was slowly revived (Chandler, 2008). Free markets were established and means for generating income ensued.

The last two decades have been a period of social and economic development in the Kingdom. The historic peace accord was signed in Paris in 1991 and UN established a temporary government in Cambodia led by Sihanouk. In 1993, 90% of the population went to the polls and voted despite threats of violence by the remaining Khmer Rouge party members (Chandler, 2008; 60 years, 2010). The split vote among competing parties prompted a coalition government with two prime ministers: Sihanouk's son, Prince Rannaridh and Hun Sen. Hun Sen quickly garnered control as prime minister and Sihanouk returned to the throne in the constitutional monarchy. Hun Sen remains as an authoritarian leader in a multiparty democracy, despite his failure to outright win the support of the Khmer people. In 1997, Hun Sen organized an armed takeover of the



government, an action that resulted in the flight of Prince Rannaridh and other politicians and the death of an estimated 80-100 Cambodians (Lum, 2007). He has continued to use force and intimidation to maintain his role as the nation's sole prime minister (Lum, 2007). Sihanouk resigned from the throne in 2004 and was succeeded by his son, Norodom Sihamoni. Hun Sen faces ongoing criticism for his reluctance to address issues of corruption and crime that exist throughout the business, government and religious sectors of Cambodian society (Dawson, 2010; Kent, 2008).

### *Twenty first Century*

Hun Sen remains prime minister and works closely with international donors in efforts aimed at social policy reform. Recently, the government has been prompted by the international community to promote transparency and accountability related to its use of foreign aid. Foreign aid has been instrumental in the economic recovery of the nation since the 1980s. As a nation, Cambodia is heavily dependent on international aid. USAID funded \$ 470 million over the years 2000-2009 for development in areas of: health, education, economy and human rights (USDS, 2011). The government has developed an Anticorruption Commission and an Anticorruption Unit as key components of the Anticorruption law passed in 2010. The government of Cambodia is keenly aware of its dependence on international donors in its transition from a developing to industrialized nation.

Throughout the last century, Cambodia has involuntarily and voluntarily relied on economic and military support of foreign countries. During the colonial period, the nation's infrastructure was developed and the historical Angkor Wat was restored through French financing. After gaining independence, Cambodia accepted aid from the

United States and China among other countries. Cambodia's neutral stance during the Vietnam War may have been influenced by the need for aid from communist and Western countries alike. Since the Vietnamese liberation, Cambodia has continued to seek out foreign aid to rebuild the human resources and infrastructure of the country.

The reliance on outside nations for economic stability and growth places the nation in a familiar predicament. A heavy dependence on other nations limits the autonomy and power of Cambodia, which is reflected in policy development. The role of international aid will be addressed in relation to education later in this section, however it is important to remember that the political, economic and social progress in Cambodia is a direct result of responses from the global community to Cambodia's current challenges. According to the United States Department of State (USDS) website, Cambodia received \$989 million USD in grants and concessional loans from the following major donors: Asian Development Bank, UN Development Program, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Sweden, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States (2011). The principal foreign commercial investors include: Korea, China, Russia, Thailand, U.S. and Vietnam (USDS, 2011).

#### A history of education in Cambodia

This brief summary of the nation's political history serves as the context in which educational practices and policies are situated. The events occurring within Cambodia and the surrounding countries shape the nation's policies regarding social policy, which in turn influences the ideologies and behaviors of the Cambodian people. The discussion

of the Cambodian educational system is divided into four time periods: prior to 1975, during the Khmer Rouge Regime, from 1979-1999 and 2000 until present.

*Education system prior to 1979*

The literature on educational systems in Cambodia prior to the Khmer Rouge is limited and what exists is challenged by a lack of quantity, reliability and adequacy (Ayres, 1999). The French invested very little in Cambodia's education prior to the 1930s and some scholars argue that the later investment was aimed at the socioeconomic exploitation of Cambodians (Ayres, 2000; Bray, 1999). During the colonial era, education and literacy in Khmer was predominantly controlled by Buddhist monks (Dy, 2004).

Kiernan (2004) also notes France's neglect of modern education systems for Cambodia. In the colonial era, privileged Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian students traveled to France to study; the lack of prior education resulted in Lao and Khmer students quick return their nations. Unlike the Vietnamese, they were unable to study at that high level because their prior formal schooling experiences did not adequately prepare them for the demands of higher education. In 1935, after fifty years of colonial rule, only one secondary educational institution existed in Cambodia and primary education only served approximately sixty thousand Khmer youth (Kiernan, 2004). Kiernan argues that the near absence of modern education in Cambodia created a separate, but semi-powerless class of educated individuals in the 1940s and early 1950s. These individuals, including Pol Pot and Son Sen, later used their positions in the educational system over the course of a decade to spread their political agenda in rural areas and within Phnom Pehn's middle class.

King Sihanouk's substantial investment in education over the period of 1955-1970, at times spending up to 23% of the national budget, promoted economic growth (Prasertsri, 2008). The economy flourished and the nation's infrastructure was admired by other developing nations at the end of the 1960s (Ayres, 1999). Cambodia adopted a French model of education which included thirteen years of education (6+4+2+1) and four to five major examinations (UNESCO, 2006). The end of the decade was not entirely problem free. A surplus of educated individuals without adequate economic opportunities ignited unrest among the privileged, but unemployed intellectuals. Chandler (2008) describes the civil unrest of tens of thousands of high school graduates and hundreds of university graduates that blamed Sihanouk for a lack of high paid employment; some of these individuals migrated toward the communist movement (p.243). Kiernan (2004) describes the civil unrest that began to impact the nation's schools in 1967. There were numerous student demonstrations, several of which resulted in violence. Assaults on teaching personnel and merchants were accompanied by the destruction of buildings and property. The actual or perceived role of schools, teachers and students in the spread of communism created civil discord that resulted in violence and division among the Khmer people. The final years prior to the collapse of the Khmer Republic were marked by violence and struggle. The deterioration of the Republic came at the hands of the French educated Khmer intellectuals.

#### *Education during Khmer Rouge*

The intent of the Khmer Rouge Regime to eliminate disparities among social classes and stop the historical exploitation of the nation's poor was the foundation of the movement. There was a limited emphasis on education during the period, although the

Khmer Rouge deemed it essential to eliminate illiteracy among the poor. The Four Year Plan developed early on in the regime focused heavily on economics and made little mention of formal education or what types of texts would be made accessible to the people (Chandler, 2008).

Ayres (1999) builds upon Michael Vickery's seminal work, *Cambodia, 1975-1982*, in his thorough analysis of the discourse of destruction. The discourse of destruction claims that the Democratic Kampuchea's policies and practices destroyed everything related to education including classrooms, materials, books, and teachers. Ayres (1999) acknowledges that the discourse is grounded in elements of truth, however he argues that the purpose of the discourse is meant to revisit the nostalgia of the somewhat peaceful past prior to the revolutions and garner international aid for support with the country's rehabilitation and reconstruction. Despite issues of reliability, quantity, and adequacy encountered while conducting historical research on Cambodia's education system, Ayres (1999) argues that the Khmer Rouge did not reject education outright, rather the regime rejected the old system of education, which they believed to be aligned with Western thinking, capitalism, corruption and exploitation.

It is important to recognize the understanding of the regime's impact on education from the perspective of the Cambodian people because their knowledge and understanding of the past informs their current views of education. Ayres (1999) documents Pol Pot's plan for educational development through three central tenets aligned with the party's ideology: students must learn letters and numbers to learn technology, technology must be learned through practice and learning experiences must involve promoting "good political consciousness," which translates to supporting the

party's views. The plan for educational development was not carried out strategically or successfully, leading to a fragmented system of education under the Khmer Rouge.

By 1976, there were some primary schools around base areas, but education was not made available to the new people (a term used by the Khmer Rouge to refer to educated people or those previously living in the city) or their children until 1977 or 1978 and there was no secondary education available until after 1978 (Chandler, 2008). Many experienced school teachers working within the Khmer Rouge had leadership responsibilities to fulfill and many of the others remaining were killed because they were considered potential threats to the Regime's ideology. Lika, a 38 year old Khmer woman shares her father's experience, "My father was a teacher, but he survived. When they (Pol Pot's army) came for my father, the village people say not to take him because he was only a farmer. While he was a farmer, he was a teacher too. Their lies saved his life" (Lika, personal communication, July 20, 2009). The impact of the annihilation of countless educators is still present in the Khmer school system (Dy, 2004).

#### *Education from 1979-1999*

The current system of education is still working to recover from the devastation inflicted by the Khmer Rouge. The educational system in Cambodia collapsed as a direct result of the Khmer Rouge regime and decades of foreign and civil warfare. As a result, in 1980 the country was forced to begin to rebuild its system at the most fundamental levels. The nation lost 70% of teachers and education staff due to the bombings by the United States and the subsequent Khmer Rouge regime (Prasertsri, 2008). Many of the country's buildings, schools and temples were destroyed. The significant loss of physical and human resources has put the nation and its education system at a severe disadvantage

in comparison to other developing nations that did not endure years of Khmer Rouge destruction and U.S. carpet bombing.

The educational system, which is almost entirely state run, has relied on foreign donors to assist with the rebuilding process (EFA, 2010; Prasertsri, 2008; Seel 2007). Rebuilding is challenging because the nation is currently transitioning from an agricultural based society to an industrialized society. Financial resources are limited and spread across other sectors such as health care and human rights. A society wide transition demands significant changes in educational systems and policies. The present system has been reconstructed over the last three decades through the assistance of foreign aid. The country has made significant progress in some aspects of education, which will be discussed in the next section. However, the overall educational system remains a serious concern for the global community and Cambodians.

In 1979, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) implemented a ten year education system (4+3+3) as a foundation for the future twelve year system (6+3+3) adopted during the 1996/1997 school year (UNESCO, 2006). There is a limited amount of available data about education in Cambodia. During the time period of the 1980s, the ongoing political unrest restricted the involvement of organizations such as UNESCO to small scale projects and resulted in minimal data collection (UNESCO, b. 2011). It is sensible that a politically unstable nation would focus efforts and funding in areas other than education, but this changed in the following decade.

The 1990s was a decade of government led policy development that focused on addressing basic educational needs and quality. The education system in the 1990s operated on a “first come, first serve” basis, which primarily benefited the middle and

upper classes; it was replaced in 2000 with more innovative and equitable approaches (Prasertsri, 2008). The first year with a moderate amount of available educational data was 1999. UNESCO compiled statistics, which provide a glimpse into the educational system of the late 1990s (UNESCO, a.,2011). The total enrollment of students in public and private primary educational institutions in 1999 was 2,127, 428 and of those students only 972,686 were female and 691,878 were in the first grade. Thirty two percent of the total number of students enrolled in primary education were in their first year; such a high number in the first grade reflects the recent focus of the government on education, specifically primary education. The latter half of the 1990s has been described as a transition period from emergency relief to reconstruction and development, but criticism exists over the government's lack of attention to financial, social and institutional issues (UNESCO, 2006). Participation in Education for All Conferences has proven to be an important component of educational development in the Kingdom.

The World Conference on Education for All, which took place in March 1990, identified definitive goals for education. "The ultimate goal affirmed by its adopted declaration was to meet the basic learning needs for all children, youth and adults in order to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions and to continue learning" (Shoraku, 2008). Leaders from each country in the United Nations (UN) agreed on Education for All (EFA) goals in 2000. The goals focus on improving early childhood care and education, promoting free and compulsory education of high quality, meeting the learning needs of all young people and adults, eliminating gender disparities in education, and improving all aspects of the quality of education provided to children, youth and adults (UNESCO, 2011). (See



Appendix A for a detailed description of each goal). The target date for meeting set goals is 2015, which was determined at the Dakar 2000 World Education Forum.

The current context of Cambodian education will be discussed through a focus on issues of access to education, the country's progress toward meeting each of the EFA goals and the structure of the educational system. Cambodia is considered part of the East Asia region, but its recent history places the nation in a unique context, which must be remembered when making regional and international comparisons. (See Appendix B for the list of the countries).

#### Cambodia and Education for All

The 2010 EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) identifies Cambodia as significantly further behind than other countries in the East Asia region in terms of reaching the EFA goals. Using the EFA Development Index to assess the four most quantifiable goals and provide a composite measure of progress, the GMR (2010) has identified Cambodia and Laos People's Democratic Republic (PDR) as being far from meeting the EFA goals compared to half of the other countries in the region (with available data) that have achieved or are close to achieving the EFA goals.

The report cites low school participation, poor quality education, high rates of adult illiteracy and marked disparities in gender as significant challenges facing countries' efforts to meet EFA expectations. Seel (2007) notes that of all the countries in the East Asia region, Cambodia, Laos PDR and Myanmar are the only ones that are still considered as low income and low human development. In addition to the challenges mentioned, there are several other factors that impede Cambodia's progress toward achieving EFA goals that are linked to issues of access and equity. Poverty, cultural

norms and gender and geographical location contribute to this complex social system.

Before exploring the current educational system, there will be a discussion of the challenges the nation faces in providing equal access to education. Understanding the role of poverty, gender and geographic location provides a context in which the current system of education is situated.

#### Issues of access and equity in education

##### *Poverty*

Poverty continues to plague the nation twenty five years after the famine that began during the Khmer Rouge Regime and lasted into the 1980s. The number of people living below the poverty line is 34% in Cambodia (Prasertsri, 2008). According to the 2006 Human Development Report (HDR), nearly 80% of the nation's citizens survive on less than \$2 US dollars a day. Poverty has a significant impact on education in developed and developing nations worldwide.

The impact of students' socioeconomic status on education typically results in education poverty. The GMR (2010) defines the term education poverty as young adults 17 to 22 years old that have fewer than four years of education and are unlikely to have mastered basic literacy and math skills. Extreme education poverty is defined as young adults with less than two years of education, who are likely to face numerous significant disadvantages in many areas of life. Cambodia has just under 30% of their population aged 17 to 22 years old experiencing education poverty and slightly more than 10% of the same age group facing extreme education poverty (UNESCO, 2010). Rates of education poverty among young people from the poorest 20% of households range from

1.4 to 3.9 times the average rate (UNESCO, 2010). Family income levels are an important contributor to and predictor of children's educational experiences.

Children and youth from poor families may participate in child labor due to financial hardship. In rural Cambodia, students are often required to assist the family with agricultural demands. In urban areas, youth may work in legal and illegal operations to gain income. It is common to witness children as young as seven years old digging through trash for recyclable materials, begging for money on the street or selling goods in areas heavily populated by tourists. Others choose more dangerous occupations such as selling drugs or entering the sex industry. In a newspaper article, Dene Mullen shares the experiences of two young boys who left the countryside to get an education in the city, but ended up involved in prostitution, pornography and drug related activities because of the financial benefits of these pursuits ("*From the fields to the asphalt jungle,*" 2010). Numerous young females, formerly garment factory workers prior to the global economic recession, have pursued careers in the sex industry. The women acknowledge the risk of violence, alcohol abuse, rape and HIV/AIDS associated with their job, but they also need the money to support themselves and their families ("Ex-garment workers at risk," 2010).

Poverty is often accompanied by malnourishment, inadequate access to clean water and improved sanitation and a lack of health care. Cambodia's rate of infant mortality is 95 babies out of every 1,000 live births die within the first year of life, which is the highest in the region (EFA, 2010, EFA, 2007). Maternal mortality rates are 461 per 100,000 women according to the country's 2008 census (Cambodia Census, 2008). The national census also reported that 83 of every 1,000 children between one and five years

of age die. Poverty limits parents' abilities to meet the most basic human needs for their families. Widespread, severe poverty is a serious concern in Cambodia.

Surviving children face health issues related to malnutrition and disease. Many children under the age of five suffer from stunting, wasting and being under weight. According to UNICEF (2007), stunting refers to a measure of height for age, wasting refers to a measurement between body mass and length related to nutritional status and being underweight is composite index of stunting and wasting recognizing both acute and chronic hunger. The nation has made gains over the last decade, but the poorest children still exhibit these characteristics in the highest percentages. Of children under five years, 37% experience stunted growth, 7% are considered to have experienced wasting and 36% are underweight (UNICEF, 2007). Students that are malnourished risk developmental delays that could impede future learning (UNESCO, 2010).

Children, especially those in poverty, may be subject to cholera, malaria, HIV/AIDS and other preventable diseases that pose life threatening risks. There were 1,300 cases of cholera reported in Phnom Penh over a seven month period from late 2009 until early of 2010 ("Cholera," 2010). Diarrhea and other diseases related to poor sanitation claim thousands of lives annually in the Kingdom. The World Bank (2008) reported that only 29% of Cambodia's population had access to a toilet that hygienically prevents human contact with excrement and that the nation was the only country outside of Africa in which less than 20% of the people had access to improved sanitation. The same report noted that in 2005-2006, only 70% of primary and 75% of secondary schools had toilets and 61% and 58% respectively had access to a water supply. Cambodia is

struggling to meet global goals to improve sanitation and decrease the number of deadly and preventable diseases.

The high rates of infant, child and maternal mortality combined with malnutrition and limited access to sanitation highlight a much larger arena of social concerns in the nation. There is inequity in terms of food consumption among children living in poverty compared to their wealthier peers. Health care is poor and limited in availability to many families. The families that lack access to medical care are often subject to the poorest sanitary conditions. Students living in these environments may not be physically or intellectually prepared for the demands of schooling. In Cambodia being poor limits educational experiences, but it is not the only issue reducing access. Gender is also a determining factor in educational access.

### *Gender*

A significant link between gender and poverty has been widely acknowledged by scholars (UNESCO, 2008). Gender refers to the socially constructed roles and responsibilities of woman and men created in families, societies and cultures, which result in learned expectations and behaviors that contribute to systems of social differentiation (UNESCO, 2003). Gender equality has been designated one of UNESCO's top global priorities. Gender mainstreaming, which is an approach that aims to ensure that women and men benefit equally from program and policies, has become an important component of international policy development (UNESCO, 2008). Gender equality is a significant concern in developing countries because denying women equal access to educational and employment opportunities have a widespread negative social impact on their children and the larger society.

Historically, Cambodia has been a patriarchal society, which has resulted in the social, psychological and physical oppression of Khmer females (Eng et al., 2010). In recent years, the Cambodian government has begun to acknowledge the inequalities and implement policy reforms to promote gender equity. Gender equity is an integral component in the social and economic development of Cambodia. It is essential to understand gender in the larger social context, so that it can be analyzed and applied to education. This section will discuss the traditional roles and responsibilities of women in the Kingdom in relation to education, employment and the family unit. Gender in education will be explored through a discussion of current policy and practice.

In Cambodia, like other nations in the Global South, female roles require women to act as care givers to their children, household and community managers and only recently as income earners (Schech & Vas Dev, 2007). This socially constructed role has placed a significant burden on females while simultaneously disempowering them. *Chhab Srey*, translated as *A Code for Girls or A Code for Women*, has been instrumental in dictating gender roles in Cambodia through written, oral and practiced ideology (Brickell & Chant, 2010; Walsh, 2007). *Chhab Srey*, written in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, emphasizes that women's behavior directly impacts the status of the family unit. Appropriate behaviors for females require women to remain virtuous, passive and obey one's husband in all circumstances; behaviors other than those could potentially to disrupt the entire family structure and bring shame within the community (Walsh, 2007). Specific codes for feminine behavior include: talk softly, walk softly without making noise, sit appropriately with legs to the side, do not scream or yell, and obey and honor your husband (Eng, Li, Muslow & Fischer, 2010). *Chhab Srey* has been and continues to

be a part of the curriculum in lower secondary schools for girls, which promotes culturally acceptable notions of femaleness among adolescent Cambodian girls (Brickell & Chant, 2010).

The expectations of women's behaviors exist alongside notions of a female dress code. There is a growing concern over the Western influence in fashion. On the front page of the March 29, 2010 edition of the *Phnom Penh Post* had a photograph of protestors with the caption: Taking Sexy Back! Rally protestors appealed to teachers, administrators, female students and their families to stop wearing foreign influenced, "sexy" clothing, such as skirts that fall above the knee, because it compromises Khmer traditions ("Ralliers riled at short skirts," 2010). The campaign received male and female support. According to the article, Seang Bunheang, male director of Khmer Teachers Association stated, "I don't force women from wearing short skirts, but I want to take care and improve upon Khmer culture. We have to take care in order for other countries not to look down on us" (p. 4). There is a national concern for maintaining some forms of Khmer tradition, like modest dress and appearance. It exists among the attitudes of men and women in the country and can be oppressive in nature. San Arun, the female secretary of state at the Ministry of Women's Affairs applauded the effort and supported the traditional patriarchal ideology. She said, "Sexy clothes invites rape because all men, when they see white skin, feel like having sex with them" ("Ralliers riled at short skirts," 2010). This quotation suggests that one of the few women in leadership roles perpetuates an attitude that blames victims for men's violent behavior, rather than holding males accountable for sexual violence. This highlights the deeply entrenched cultural attitudes toward gender in Cambodian culture.

The traditional attitudes toward male dominated gender roles are prevalent nationwide as evidenced in responses to gender related questions on the 2005 Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey (National Institute of Public Health, National Institute of Statistics and ORC, 2006 as cited in Eng et al, 2010). Forty five percent of respondents agreed with the statement: It is better to educate a son than a daughter. In Phnom Penh, 44% agreed while as high as 76% agreed in northwestern provinces. Of participants surveyed, 42% of people agreed that married women should not work outside the home even if they want to do so. These two statistics emphasize how gender roles play out in education and employment. Access to quality education has been an issue for the majority of Cambodians, but it is even more relevant to females. Limiting education for young girls and women reinforces and perpetuates a male dominated, oppressive social, cultural, economic and political system.

In a recent report, UNESCO describes Cambodia's gender inequality in the labor market as endemic due to traditional attitudes toward education and employment for females (2010). The report also highlighted Cambodia's Gender-related Human Development Index (GDI) ranking of 114 out of 177 countries, which is complicated by the nation's shift toward a market-oriented economy. If girls are not educated with the skills they need for employment and married women are denied the chance to work outside the home, the pool of candidates eligible for the labor market is severely reduced. Employment in the Kingdom is divided among three sectors: agriculture, industry and service. A report prepared by the Economic Institute of Cambodia (2008) for the World Bank reviewed labor and employment data over the course of three years, 2004-2007. In 2007, agriculture, specifically rice, constituted 30% of the GDP. Industry, primarily



garment manufacturing and construction, comprised 25% of the nation's GDP. The largest sector was service, which contributed to 39% of GDP based on trade, tourism, transportation and communication.

Although females outnumber males in Cambodia, they have higher rates of unemployment (Economic Institute of Cambodia, 2008). The employment and labor report addresses child labor, but does not provide any gender related data or statistics. According to the report, 12.7% of the labor force in 2007 consisted of male and female children aged 10-14 years old, which included 43.6% of adolescents in that age range. The children's role in the labor market is clearly acknowledged, but the role of women is not explicitly discussed in the report. This may be indicative of how slowly attitudes toward gender appropriate roles in employment will shift.

Females are often engaged in unpaid agricultural labor, especially in the provinces. The garment industry has been a source of employment for females since the 1990s, with 85-90% of the jobs held by women or adolescent girls (Wells, 2006). The crisis in the global economy has seriously affected the 300,000 female employees working in the garment industry. There has been a significant decrease in demand and production, thus employment has decreased (Sullivan, 2009). The industry has also faced ongoing strikes to increase the salaries to a living wage.

Labor unrest has created an unstable employment environment for Khmer women, who have begun to turn to less socially accepted employment. Many ex-garment workers are turning to the sex industry to earn an income. Women work as beer girls and escorts in clubs. They rely heavily on tips because their low salaries of \$30-40 a month are inadequate; this puts them at an increased risk of violence, alcohol abuse and

HIV/AIDS (“Ex-garment workers at risk,” 2010). Employment opportunities for females are not only limited, but are dangerous in many cases. The sex industry, in a nation that approves of males controlling females through verbal and physical violence, has the potential for destructive long and short term outcomes for women. Increased education in terms of general knowledge, job skills and human rights is essential if the nation is going to improve in the area of human resource development. English plays an important role because of globalization and the perception that English is an international language.

The government takes partial responsibility for gender inequality by acknowledging subpar governance, a lack of access to services for the poor and insufficient respect and attention to the rights of women and other marginalized groups (Schech & Vas Dev, 2007). Although Schech and Vas Dev (2007) criticize the World Bank’s strategies and Cambodia’s national plans for gender justice and poverty reduction, substantial changes have occurred to provide increased access to educational opportunities among females and the poor.

The literacy rates and the Gender Parity Index (GPI) among age groups, as indicated in Table 1, illustrate shifts in educational policy, which show substantial progress in terms of reducing gender disparities. Younger generations of females are exhibiting higher literacy rates as a result of increased access to education.

Table 1:

*Literacy Rates in percentages by age and gender*

<u>Age group</u>	<u>Females</u>	<u>Males</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>GPI</u>
15-24	78.9	87.9	83.4	.90
25-34	70	83.5	76.5	.84
35-44	62.4	82.5	71.6	.76
45-54	61.9	85.7	71.6	.72
55-64	38.5	85.3	58.3	.45
65+	15.7	71.4	38.1	.22

Source: National EFA Mid-Decade Assessment Report 2005 (UNICEF, 2007).

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) set by world leaders in 2000, in conjunction with the goals set forth by the Education for All Framework, have been instrumental in policy development in Cambodia (Seel, 2007). Addressing the broader social factors impacting citizens is essential if nations are committed to improving accessibility and equality in education. Room for improvement remains in the struggle for gender equality policy development and reform (Schech & Vas Dev, 2007), but progress is being made. According to UNESCO (2010), the current progress measured by the Gender Parity Index (GPI), puts Cambodia on track to meet the gender parity goals for primary and secondary education by 2015 if enrollment trends continue. However, increased enrollment rates do not necessarily indicate a significant shift in attitudes and gender norms regarding gender roles. An intentional, strategic effort addressing

disparities in gender norms must be maintained over a substantial period of time if gender equality is going to become a reality in Cambodia.

The MoEYS (2009) identified several accomplishments in a recent report in regards to educational access and institutional development and capacity building. The Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Plan (GMSP) was developed in 2006 to address the gender discrepancies in the nation's educational system (EFA, 2007). Training programs on gender and related concepts are being conducted for educational staff at all levels. Physical resources are also being utilized to reduce the gender gap. Boarding facilities are necessary to increase access to education among females in rural and remote areas. Dormitories were also built in five provinces that have limited access to schools. The housing can serve up to 356 girls in secondary schools. Dormitories were also built in all Teacher Training Colleges to accommodate 3,700 teacher trainees, with 1,800 positions designated for females. Additional housing for 560 female tertiary students has been constructed over the last two years. Scholarships were provided for 17, 677 female lower secondary students, although the number of scholarships for males was not included (MoEYS, 2009).

The MoEYS report (2009) identifies several achievements regarding gender, but the descriptions are vague and the details are absent. Gender issues are related to economic development, which is most likely why they have received increase attention in Cambodia. The language of the report is very specific in regards to primary enrollment, promotion, retention and dropout rates; including statistical comparisons of multiple school years. The language discussing gender lacks specificity of any kind, which is

evident in the summary of the gender achievements. The differences in language in the report may reflect the government's level of commitment to certain goals.

The report MoYES report (2009) begins with the development of Quality Standards and Indicators for Gender Mainstreaming, which was drafted in 2006 and scheduled for finalization in 2008. GMSP are currently implemented in Cambodia. This lengthy timeline may indicate the government's commitment to developing a quality plan; or more likely the delays may be related to a male dominant government hesitant to implement policies that challenge the nation's patriarchal ideologies. The report noted a revision of the initial GMSP to increase participation of females in the management and deliveries of educational services at all levels and transformation of gender attitudes. The report does not explain the revision, how the changes were implemented or the participants involved.

The next achievement involves leadership trainings that have been conducted for female vice school directors and upper secondary teachers. The total number of women engaging in the trainings or the number of professional development hours is not provided. The participants do not include primary or lower secondary teachers. There could be a variety of reasons for their exclusion, such as funding or lower education levels among the women teaching in those grades. Offering leadership training to only women currently in higher status positions could potentially perpetuate class inequalities while attempting to eradicate gender differences.

Gender responsiveness is one of the six core dimensions of the child-friendly school initiatives, which is considered an achievement. There is no explanation about how this dimension is implemented in practice. Lastly, the report states that "Different

activities have been implemented at the school level to promote gender awareness and equal and equitable educational opportunities and environments for girls and boys” (p.8). There is no mention of the frequency or types of activities that constitutes this achievement. Increasing representation of women at all levels of leadership and management positions is the challenge stated in the analysis section under gender. The nearly total absence of women in leadership roles throughout all sectors of Khmer society ensures additional challenges in gender reforms.

The vague language of the MoEYS report (2009) regarding gender may be representative of the hesitation and uncertainty that exists within the MoEYS in terms of addressing gender disparities in education. “The MoEYS has tried its best to implement its plan to integrate gender concept with fairness and equity in all school levels from pre-school to higher education including the pre-service and in-service training for education personnel at all levels” (p. 19). The MoEYS best attempts at gender equality cannot be adequately analyzed using this report because there is limited information about the scope, depth and quality of the government’s efforts. Cambodia’s National Education for All Plan (2003) designates five general responsibilities of the Gender secretariat, but does not list any specific strategies to utilize data to reform policy and influence gender equity initiatives. The Education Strategic Plan 2006-2010 uses the word gender seventeen times in more than fifty pages, but fails to include any detailed information about the implementation of policy reform in the educational system (MoEYS, 2005). The National Education Summary Report of performance during the 2007-2008 school year and goals for the 2008-2009 contains the word gender seven times in the forty one page report in

reference to committees, policies and trainings (MoEYS, 2009). The gender issue appears to be addressed on a fairly superficial level in the report.

The lack of any specific policies, strategies and practices related to gender in the reports generated by the MoEYS is a serious concern. There is repeated mention in various MoEYS reports about the need to reform gender attitudes and increase representation of women at all levels (MoEYS, 2005; 2009). However, the Ministry does little beyond stating that a gender secretariat and a steering committee will analyze GPI data and provide gender training. I was unable to identify explicit policy reforms or a detailed explanation of initiatives that address gender in a meaningful manner that promotes equality. Gender is briefly mentioned as an additional component of the government's efforts to increase access to primary education for students in poverty. The Ministry's lack of action beyond verbiage may be a result of the deeply entrenched patriarchal ideology that permeates the nation's social systems and may be a prelude to the slow pace of Khmer people's shifting from traditional attitudes and expectations regarding gender to more contemporary, and inherently Western, ones.

Women's family responsibilities combined with social policy and Cambodia's lack of capacity have denied them access to education. Together these forces essentially create social structures of oppression. Women's rights are becoming a concern for the government. Domestic violence is prevalent in Cambodia and impacts almost a quarter of the nation's population (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2008). Yount and Carrera (2006) found that lower marital resources such as household income, lower levels of education and rural location of residencies predicted increased levels of domestic violence. This finding is especially troubling in Cambodia, because it is one of the world's least

developed countries. Poverty often increases the burden felt by women. It is a physical and mental struggle to provide for families' most basic needs when living conditions are squalid, resources are limited and community services and infrastructure are inadequate (Brickell & Chant, 2010). Many women reported remaining with abusive spouses due to a sense of familial obligation and a lack of financial resources (Eng, et al., 2010). Women bear an extremely heavy burden of existence in developing nations as a result of oppression, a lack of education and limited access to income earning opportunities.

Cambodia's progress in reducing gender disparity at primary and secondary educational levels is the first step toward gender equity. The transition from a patriarchal society to a more egalitarian one is destined to be lengthy and plagued with gender injustices and violence, but educating females is a starting point. Increased empowerment among Khmer women may result in higher instances of domestic violence due to unwelcomed changes in gender norms among controlling males with traditional patriarchal attitudes (Eng, et al., 2010). The government must seriously implement their gender mainstreaming approach in policy reform if women's rights are going to progress to the levels of men.

### *Geographic location*

Geographical location plays a paramount role in terms of educational access and equity in Cambodia. A high percentage of the population resides in rural areas. Rural areas are also referred to as the countryside and provinces. In 2004, 81% lived in rural areas but there has been a steady decrease over the last several years resulting in 78% residing in the provinces in 2008 (UNESCO, 2011). The Local Development Outlook Cambodia Report highlights discrepancies between urban, rural and remote areas in terms



of health care, education, household services and road infrastructure (UNCDF, 2010).

The differences among the three areas are significant. Urban areas provide the greatest access and quality in education. Access and quality in rural areas are considerably less and remote areas face the most extreme limitations. The report states that at the end of 2007, 92% of all poor people or 3.7 million persons lived in rural areas (UNCDF, 2010).

Limited access to educational and economic opportunities has sparked migration within the nation. Some families migrate closer to the city to pursue economic opportunities and provide their children with increased access to education. The percentage of Cambodian migrants, or people that live in a village other than the one they were born in, was 31% in 2004 (UNDCF, 2010). Many adults and youth seek employment in factories, as motor taxi drivers (males), or begin their own small business selling food and household goods along the streets. The extreme poverty in the provinces pushes Cambodians to work legally or illegally abroad. In 2005, there were 243,000 individuals that were documented workers in Thailand (UNCDF, 2010). It is likely that there are a number of undocumented workers employed abroad. Many uneducated villagers have been duped into migrant employment that closely resembles modern day slavery. Stories of men tricked by their neighbors and enslaved on foreign fishing vessels in Malaysia are being reported with increasing frequency. The number of Cambodians going to Malaysia to work in construction, housekeeping and factories have increased 80% since 2005 due to salaries of more than \$200 a month (“Cambodian laborers flock to Malaysia,” 2010). However, the harsh treatment of workers and practices of exploitation are becoming common knowledge among Cambodians. The extreme poverty, especially

in rural areas, is a driving force behind the domestic and international migration of Khmer people.

Living closer to the capital city increases the likelihood that students will have increased access to education. There are stark discrepancies in poverty levels, rate of poverty reduction and educational access across the geographic regions of the country. The divide between urban and rural areas is apparent in school quality disparities (EFA, 2010). Long and dangerous routes to school combined with a lack of transportation are common challenges in rural areas. Schools and their resources are much more limited in the provinces. There are 1621 communes in the nation, but there are only 975 (or 60%) of communes have secondary schools (Prasertsri, 2008). As a result, net enrollment at primary and secondary levels is much lower in rural and remote areas. Indigenous minorities, such as the Jarai and Bunong, inhabit the most remote villages in Modol Kiri and Rattanak Kiri provinces. They face tremendous accessibility barriers associated with their remote, rural location. Overall, they are far more likely to experience extreme education deprivation compared to most Khmer. Literacy rates of women living in these remote areas are a third of those living in Phnom Penh (EFA, 2010). Net enrollment rates for lower secondary students in remote areas such as these are as low as 8.8%, which means 91% of youth ages twelve to fourteen years old are not enrolled in school. Providing access to quality educational experiences has been an ongoing challenge for Cambodia and is reflected throughout the present school system.

## Cambodia's current system of education

The current educational system has made gains over the last decade, especially increasing the enrollment of students in primary education and reducing gender disparities despite the challenges of unequal access. Cambodia's education system serves approximately 3.38 million primary and secondary students and employs over 94,600 teaching and non-teaching personnel (Prasertsri, 2008). The country has made significant progress in education capacity, which will be discussed shortly, but overall the educational system remains a serious concern for the global community. However, the reality is that there are still approximately a quarter of a million children in the country that are not in school (EFA, 2010). It is essential to remember that the devastation from the U.S. carpet bombings, the civil war, the Khmer Rouge, and years of political unrest have left Cambodia at a lower baseline in terms of educational reform compared to most nations. This section will discuss education at the following levels: early childhood, primary, secondary, non-formal, life skills, and tertiary. I observed formal education on a few occasions during the time I lived in Cambodia. I will share my observations alongside the literature when appropriate to provide concrete examples and a context. The role of government, policies, international donors, community and family will also be examined in relation to education.

Cambodia's National Education For All (EFA) Plan 2003-2015 aims to provide universal access to nine years of high quality basic education (UNICEF, 2007). This national plan has aligned its efforts with the goals set forth by the UN's EFA initiative.

The population growth rate of almost 2% and the fact that over 37% of the population is under the age of fifteen, combined with a limited number of educators

surviving the Khmer Rouge, have created a unique dynamic. The large number of youth demanding education far exceeds the supply of teachers and resources. The pupil to teacher ratio as a nation during the 2000-2005 school years was 56:1 at its highest and 50:1 at its lowest, which is substantially higher than the international recommendation of 40:1 (UNICEF, 2007). This imbalance of students and educational resources has been magnified by the country's efforts to meet the EFA standards. The system is plagued with high rates of dropping out, grade repetition and illiteracy.

#### *Early Childhood Care and Education*

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is the first goal set out by EFA, which urges countries to expand and improve early child care and education focusing especially on the most disadvantaged or vulnerable people (UNICEF, 2007). There are many benefits to expanding ECCE, such as increasing school readiness and reducing drop out and grade repetition rates. The MoEYS has been working with NGOs and other ministries to implement programs focused on students ages three to six. The efforts have achieved some success in urban areas, but it is limited especially in rural and remote areas (Seel, 2007).

ECCE national enrollment in the 2000-2001 school year was 78,368 children (6.5% of those eligible) and has grown to 119,893 (or 11.97%) in 2005-2006 (UNICEF, 2007). According to the EFA (2010), the coverage was still limited to less than 20% of the population. This increase is progress, but it is still concerning that such a significant percentage of the population is not being reached. The country's lack of financial and human resources impacts the scope of programs. The main programs implemented after

2000 include state run preschools, community based preschools, home-based early child care development and private preschools (UNICEF, 2007).

Government run preschools are staffed by teaching and non-teaching personnel. The teachers are trained in a two year program at the MoEYS. The students enrolled in state run pre-schools average fifteen hours per week over five days and the program duration is typically 38 weeks (UNESCO IBE, 2006). Community pre-schools are staffed by local females who receive 16 days of training provided by the Department of Early Childhood Education. These pre-schools provide 10 hours a week of instruction and vary in length from 24-36 weeks (UNESCO IBE, 2006). The early child care development is a home-based program and consists of one hour per week over the course of 24 weeks. It incorporates positive parenting practices through literacy programs. In the 2005-2006 school year, 63% of ECCE students were served in government programs, 19% in community pre-schools, 11% in home-based pre-schools, and 7% in private programs (UNESCO, 2007). Instruction is focused on pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills delivered through a work play approach (UNESCO IBE, 2006). Expansion of ECCE in Cambodia signifies the government and local organizations commitment to reaching EFA goals. A great deal of work remains for the programs to reach the students who are considered most vulnerable. Reaching rural and remote students remains a challenge due to a lack of resources.

### *Primary Education*

Primary school in Cambodia consists of grades one through six. The suggested enrollment age is six years old, but students often enroll at older ages. The government has made substantial gains in increasing enrollment rates. Although student enrollment

rates are increasing, timely completion and instructional quality remain a concern. It takes an average of 10.8 years for a child to complete the six-year primary education cycle (MoEYS, 2004). Students attend school in four hour shifts and the annual hours of instruction are around 450-650, about half of the 800 instructional hours recommended (UNESCO, 2009).

I had an opportunity to tour a primary and secondary school in Phnom Penh on February 26, 2010. My firsthand account provides a context for understanding the conditions of education beyond the statistics. My observations were limited and certainly do not constitute a comprehensive representation of the public schools in the Kingdom. My observations were part of a tour, which was provided as an option for presenters at the 2010 CamTESOL conference. The conference offered participants a chance to tour public and private schools in Phnom Penh as an opportunity to observe the Cambodian school system. It is likely that the MoEYS selected the best schools to showcase, which is important to note because my observations of the school conditions could vary drastically from other schools in the same system.

The schools I toured were located in close proximity to an area of the city heavily populated by foreigners and wealthier Khmer. The location impacts the quality of the schools in terms of resources and student body composition. For example, I sometimes saw boys in their early teens riding on expensive new motor bikes in the neighborhood of the schools. The luxury of a new motorbike for an adolescent is something limited to wealthier families. Wealthy families often send their children to public school part-time and private school part-time or to full day private schools. The school experience in the province is much different due to the widespread poverty.

The school campus is surrounded by cement walls and entry is through a large gate. Rows of bicycles are located close to the gate. The buildings have electricity, but no air conditioning so the large windows remain open. The main school building consisted of six classrooms on the top floor and the same number on the bottom floor. Although there is a first and second floor, there is no elevator, ramp, or means to access the second floor if a student is physically challenged in any manner. The class sizes I observed were 25-30 students with one teacher in grades one through three. This is an extremely small teacher to pupil ratio for the nation. The male and female students wore uniforms consisting of white shirts and blue pants or skirts and sat intermixed with each other. The desks were benches and tables made of wood and there was a series of small shelves in the back of the room where students placed their shoes. I did not see a class bookshelf of any kind. Large chalk boards or white boards were located in the front of the classroom. Posters of the Khmer alphabet, fish and plants hung on the walls. In every classroom there was a picture of the royal family hanging above the board. The teachers had small desks in the front of the room and the student desks were arranged in rows facing the board. During the observations, the students were quiet and the instruction was teacher led. There were teachers present in each primary classroom, which was not the case in the secondary schools. As our group entered, the students stood and greeted us in unison with the formal Khmer greeting of folding their hands and bowing.

Upon the conclusion of the classroom tours, we were able to meet with the director of the school and ask questions. She did not speak English with any of us, but communicated through a translator. The office had large wooden tables, cabinets, fans and whiteboards, all of which were donated by students' families or purchased with their

financial contributions. There was a first aid kit that the director happily showed us that was donated by an NGO. This disclosure may have been intentional to open the dialogue so the director could ask the conference members for donations, which she did immediately. One woman donated twenty dollars and the director insisted that she have her photograph taken with her so that it could be framed and hung on the wall. The director shared that she would use the \$20 to buy books. Twenty dollars can provide a lot of books, especially if only a few books are purchased and then copied. There is no copyright law in existence in Cambodia. The absence contributes to a large black market of reproduced books, music and DVDs.

The concept of academic accountability was evident in the director's office. There were large whiteboards that listed students' names, grades, test scores and other measures of progress over the course of two years. The director indicated that she used these boards to track student progress and identify students that were struggling to pass the standardized exams. This accountability piece is most likely a result of the nation's efforts to decrease grade repetition rates and increase completion rates. Students must take an exit exam prior to moving to the next grade. Social promotion is not a common practice here and some students are retained repeatedly. Paying for the exam answers or bribing teachers or administrators are options for promotion for students who can afford it.

The director informed us that the class size is limited to 40 students unless a teacher is well liked by parents; then more students will be placed in that class. Teachers attend one year of school after the university for teacher training, according to the director. She stated that student behavior was not a problem like it tends to be at the



secondary level. The school, like most schools in Cambodia, operates in double shifts. Double shifts require a teacher to instruct one group of students from 7:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. and another class from 1:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. Double shifts are necessary because the nation lacks the teaching personnel and facilities to operate on a single shift basis. The director informed us that teachers make \$60 a month for full time work, which is less than the \$80 a month earned by the front desk staff at local hotels. This brief interaction with the director highlights several of the issues plaguing primary education such as large class sizes, a lack of resources and the role of funding. These are issues at the showcase schools, which are most likely much better than the other schools. I will discuss the low pay of teachers in later chapters of this dissertation.

Cambodia has made steady progress increasing their enrollment in primary education. In 1999, just over 75% of children were enrolled in primary school, but that number grew to almost 90% in 2007 (EFA, 2010). The EFA GMR (2010) acknowledges this improvement, but highlights concerns about drop out, completion and grade retention rates. The report states that the dropout rate among first graders is between 9-14%. The number of students who repeated the first grade was 21% in 2006, which is extremely high when compared to the region's median percentage of less than one. Cohort tracking data from 2006 showed that 82% of students will enter primary school at the appropriate age, 62% of students will survive until grade 5 and 48% will complete primary school (EFA, 2010). Prasertsri (2008) found the low survival rates for students in grades one through six were low at 49%, but the completion rate of the surviving students in grade six was 90%. She also noted that the grade repetition rate at the primary level had decreased over 50% during the years of 2000-2007.

Students who are able to remain in school until sixth grade have a good chance of completing the primary phase of education. Unfortunately, the number of students that continue to lower secondary school after primary school is a cause for concern. The large numbers of students who drop out of grade one or repeat is problematic. It may be an indication of issues related to teaching methodology, curriculum or school environment that lead to students' disengagement. External social factors cannot be discounted either because changes in the family dynamic, such as a job loss or gain, a health problem or birth of an additional child will impact students in some manner.

### *Secondary*

Secondary education is comprised of lower grades: 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> and upper grades: 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. The enrollment rates at the secondary level have risen in recent years, but not at the rates that primary schools have experienced. Cambodia's educational reform has focused on expanding universal primary education, but improvements in secondary education have not received the same attention. In 2006, the nation spent 73% of its education budget on primary schooling and investing at the primary level continues to be a trend (Seel, 2007). The increases in enrollment combined with consistent overage enrollment resulting from late entry and excessive grade retention have created a surplus of students that strains resources and creates social tensions.

The trends in access and equity among urban, rural and remote secondary students parallel those at the primary level, but are more pronounced. In 2000, net enrollment rates of age appropriate students in lower secondary were 17% nationally, 30% in urban areas, 14% in rural and 1% in remote areas (UNICEF, 2007). The 2005-2006 data shows a

national increase reaching 31%, 50% in urban schools, 29% in rural and 6% in remote schools (UNICEF, 2007). It is important to keep in mind the country's high population of young people when analyzing the school context. The reforms implemented over the last decade are most beneficial for younger students.

Increases in gross enrollment rates (GER) in secondary education overall from 17% in 1999 to 40% in 2007 demonstrates progress, but does not provide details about the overage issue (EFA GMR, 2010). The report indicates that in 2007, GER in lower secondary was 56% and 23% in upper secondary. Significant strides have been made in closing the gender gap, especially in urban areas. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) for secondary education overall increased from .53 in 1999 to .82 in 2007, which indicates that there are policies and strategies in place to increase female enrollment. There is a discrepancy in the GPI when looking at lower and upper secondary separately, with the lower having a GPI of .87 and the upper level GPI of .70 for 2007. The female to male ratio is narrowing overall, but as educational levels increase so does the GPI. More females are enrolling, but are not yet advancing in the same numbers as their male counterparts to higher levels of education. The income earning potential of older students is greater and when combined with formal and informal school fees at the secondary level may create a dynamic that encourages students from families experiencing financial hardship to choose employment over education.

There was a positive trend among students transitioning from primary to lower secondary education over the 2000-2006 time period and rates were markedly higher for remote students in comparison to their urban and rural peers (UNICEF, 2007). This may be attributed to the increased number of students reaching and completing grade six and

the expansion of secondary schools being built. Geographical location plays a significant role in secondary education. Urban areas transition 90.1% to upper secondary, rural areas have transition rates of 56.5% and remote areas only 19.2% (UNICEF, 2007). These statistics reinforce the inequities in access among student populations. The government is currently constructing 800 new secondary schools and expanding the number of safe boarding places for females to address this issue (Seel, 2007). The expansion of secondary schooling is essential if Cambodia intends to provide nine years of universal education.

My personal observation of secondary schools indicated that the physical improvement of existing facilities is also necessary. During my tour of the public schools, I observed one high school. It was built by the French in 1907 and used by the Khmer Rouge as a military storage space, but it reopened as a school in 1980. The enclosed, compound like space consisted of several large two story buildings with an open courtyard area in the middle. The open space in the center had benches, a basketball court and large Buddhist shrine that appeared to have been built recently. The single room library, no larger than nine hundred square feet, had eight wooden bookcases enclosed with glass doors. The shelves were filled with old, French books that appeared to have been untouched for years. There was a world map hanging on the wall and an older television in the library. The almost bare classroom walls were sparsely decorated with informational posters about vegetation, agriculture, fish and student test scores. The student test scores were also posted outside the classrooms in glass cases on the walls. Photographs of the Royal Family hung above the whiteboards in each classroom.

The classrooms were extremely crowded. The class averages were said to be between 40-50 students, but can reach up to 70 students. The teachers use a personal loud speaker to teach. Three students were typically sitting at desks designed for no more than two students. The class was divided by gender. The female students all sat together in the front of the class and the males together in the back. Upon our entrance into the classroom, the students stood up immediately, smiled and stared. An older student was teaching in one classroom because the teacher was absent. In this classroom, the students were talking amongst one another, but quieted immediately at the sight of the director. The director asked the student what he was preparing to teach. The director did not seem to know that the teacher was absent and did not show any signs of concern that there was a class without a teacher.

The instructional week at the school observed, runs from Monday through Saturday and the students attend in shifts from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., is the typical schedule in Phnom Penh and in the outskirts of the city. The staff member leading the tour pointed out the number of females enrolled and on staff. This may indicate the MoEYS's efforts to reduce gender disparities. The current enrollment exceeds 6,500 and of those 2,834 were females. The teaching staff consisted of 168 males and 102 females. These statistics indicate that a significant amount of progress remains to be seen in terms of the quality of the educational experience as well.

I was surprised by my emotional response that arose after observing this school.

I documented this reaction in my research journal on February 27, 2011:

The classrooms are temporary spaces. There is no student work. The teacher desks are bare, just a small table and chair. No personal items at all. Is that because they change rooms? Afraid things will be stolen? Or do they not feel like the classroom is their personal space? The space left me with feelings of despair and hopelessness. It was like there was no commitment or investment in the education here. Like teaching was just a job and student learning happening by chance. There was nothing that celebrated student work that I saw or showed plans or progress. It really felt like a zoo. A zoo for students. A place where they come and maybe they learn if the teacher comes and maybe they don't and it doesn't really matter. It may not be this way- this was a super brief glimpse into their classes.

This is the school the MoEYS chose for foreign visitors to see as a representation of their secondary education system. The students I observed were often copying from the board into notebooks. The lack of human and physical resources at school in the center of Phnom Penh, with far more resources contrasts with the more harsh, reality of a near total absence of resources in rural secondary schools. The geographical differences in educational institutions remain a concern for the Kingdom, but new construction efforts in the countryside may change this in the future.

*Curriculum in primary and secondary schools*

The guidelines below for curriculum for the years 2005-2009 are stated verbatim by the MoEYS (2004) by grade level.

### Grades 1-3

- The purpose of the basic education (Grades 1 - 3) curriculum is to ensure that every child has a strong foundation in literacy and mathematics, and that they develop their health, physical appearance, moral understanding, learning skills and life skills.
- The National Curriculum (NC) in Grades 1 - 3 comprises the following subjects with the indicated amount of time allocated to each subject in which there are 40 minutes per period.
- Local Life Skills Program (LLSP) are lessons developed with community organizations. Art education (songs, drawing, dance, music) is included in science and social studies.

Table 2:

#### *Curriculum for grades 1-3*

<b>NC SUBJECTS</b>	<b>NO. of LESSONS</b>
Khmer	13
Mathematics	7
Science & Social Studies (incl. Art education)	3
Physical and Health Education	2
<b>TOTAL NC</b>	<b>25</b>
LLSP	2 - 5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27 - 30</b>

Grades 4-6

- The purpose of the basic education primary school (Grades 4 - 6) curriculum is to expand and consolidate students' knowledge and understanding of Khmer language, Mathematics, learning skills, life skills, moral, and personal development that will enable them to pursue life-long learning and to introduce students to content in the areas of Science and Social Studies.
- The NC in Grades 4 - 6 comprises the following subjects with the indicated amount of time allocated to each subject in which there are 40 minutes per period.
- Art education (songs, drawing, dance, music) is included in Social Studies. In Grade 5 and 6, foreign languages will be introduced to students according to the school availability of local resources. For the first stage (2005-2009), the MoEYS will encourage schools to offer foreign languages using non-MoEYS resources in the LLSP time.



Table 3:

*Curriculum for grades 4-6*

NC SUBJECTS	NO. of LESSONS	
	Grade 4	Grades 5 - 6
Khmer	10	8
Mathematics	6	6
Science	3	4
Social Studies (incl. Art education)	4	5
Physical and Health Education and Sport	2	2
<b>TOTAL NC</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>
LLSP	2 - 5	2 - 5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27 - 30</b>	<b>27 - 30</b>

Grades 7-9

- The purpose of the basic education lower secondary school (Grades 7 - 9) curriculum is to provide all students with a breadth of knowledge, skills, Khmer language, Mathematics, Sciences, Social studies, Life Skills, learning skills, life skills, vocational education, moral education and personal development necessary to enable them to contribute as productive members to the growth of Cambodian

society and be able to further their studies at the upper grades, participate in other vocational trainings or to participate in social life.

- Foreign languages are included as a compulsory subject for all students at Lower Secondary level.
- Pre-vocational Life Skills are taught as part of Social Studies and through the LLSP.
- The NC in Grades 7 - 9 comprises the following subjects, listed in the table. Each learning period consists of 50 minutes teaching, with the indicated amount of time allocated to each subject. 8.5 Students who have successfully completed the Basic Education will sit for the National Examination and be awarded of the Diploma of Basic Education.
- Art education (songs, drawing, dance, music) is included in the Local Life Skill Programs.

Table 4:

*Curriculum for grades 7-9*

<b>NC SUBJECTS</b>	<b>NO. of LESSONS</b>
Khmer	6
Mathematics	6
Social Studies	6
Sciences	6
Foreign languages	4
Physical and Health Education and Sport	2
<b>TOTAL NC</b>	<b>30</b>
LLSP (incl. Art education)	2 - 5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32-35</b>

## Grade 10

- The purpose of the Grade 10 curriculum is to expand and consolidate students' knowledge obtained from the Lower Secondary education. In addition, schools must ensure the provision of a significant subject choice advice for students to study in Grades 11 and 12. The career advice provision must start from the beginning of the school year.
- In Grade 10, students study the following subjects for the time allocation indicated.

- Art education (songs, drawing, dance, music) is included in the Local Life Skill Programs.

Table 5:

*Curriculum for grade 10*

<b>NC SUBJECT</b>	<b>No. OF LESSONS</b>
Khmer	6
Mathematics	6
Sciences	6
Social Studies	6
Foreign languages	4
Physical and Health Education and Sport	2
<b>TOTAL NC</b>	<b>30</b>
Local Life Skill Program (incl. Art education)	2-5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32-35</b>

Grades 11-12

- The purpose of the Grade 11 - 12 curriculum is to provide students with the opportunity for increased specialization through subject choice to develop a depth of knowledge in particular subjects, or to take training-based vocational subjects

in order to continue their study in higher education, or to study vocational subjects or to participate in social life.

- Students choose their program of study following the time allocation indicated from the subjects areas listed below.
- Students study the same subjects in Grade 11 and 12.
- During the initial stage, the MoEYS will endeavor to support the Elective Vocational.

Table 6:

*Curriculum for grades 11-12*

COMPULSORY	HOURS TAUGHT PER WEEK
KHMER LITERATURE 6 hours	
PHYSICAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION, AND SPORT 2 hours	
FOREIGN LANGUAGES • Must choose one	English 4 hours
	French 4 hours
MATHEMATICS • Must choose one	Basic 4 hours
	Advanced 8 hours
<b>ELECTIVES</b> (Each subject is taught for 4 hours per week)	
SCIENCES • May choose none, one or two or three	Physics
	Chemistry
	Biology
	Earth and Environmental Studies
SOCIAL STUDIES • May choose none, one or two or three	Morals/Civics
	History
	Geography
	Economics
EVEP • May choose none, one or two or three	ICT/Technology
	Accounting/Business Management
	Local Vocational Technical Subjects
	Tourism
	Art Education (and other subjects)
<p>Students who choose Math (Basic) must choose 4 subjects from the Electives Total <math>16\text{ h} + (4 \times 4) = 32</math> hours per week</p> <p>Students who choose Math (Advanced) must choose 3 subjects from the Electives Total <math>20\text{ h} + (3 \times 4) = 32</math> hours per week</p>	

The curriculum detailed above includes key reforms to the 1996 curriculum, one of which being that foreign language teaching is a priority (MoEYS, 2004). The MoEYS acknowledges that the resources available will impact the quality and scope of foreign language teaching, but the prioritizing of foreign language indicates the nation's recognition of its importance, even if that recognition is only on paper. Study participants reported enrolling in foreign language classes during lower secondary school years, but the overall consensus indicated that the quality of instruction was somewhat poor. Most participants reported that they did not take their English studies seriously until after ninth grade.

### *Life Skills*

Life Skills are defined as the necessary abilities required for effective personal living, high safety in the family and community, and participation in national development (UNICEF, 2007). The Life Skills curriculum is interwoven in the public school system and provided through other forms of educational outreaches. The third EFA goal aims for equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs for all young people and adults, which is essential in a nation with high rates of illiteracy. Cambodia has experienced some success in the implementation of such programs, but challenges still remain.

The National EFA Mid-Decade report defines life skills, the purpose and the curriculum (UNICEF, 2007). Life Skills and Lifelong Learning focuses on three types of learning: basic skills, psycho-social skills and practical/functional skills. Life skills are defined as related to the mental, interpersonal and vocational skills that can aid in decision making, developing effective relationships and promote self-control. The

MoEYS considers these as basic skills necessary for healthy living and career building. Life skills are taught using a specific curriculum in grades one through nine for two to five hours per week. Curricular topics include health and safety education, and raising awareness of drowning, landmines, HIV/AIDS and drugs. Life Skills aim to promote personal development, self value, teamwork, conflict resolution and peaceful living (UNICEF, 2007).

Many Life Skills programs target youth and adults considered vulnerable due to circumstances, in addition to the students in public schools. Specific target groups include: out of school children and youth in poor communes, widows, minorities, child laborers and the physically challenged. The number of participants in Life Skills Training Programs reached 763, 295 individuals over the period of 2000-2006 (UNICEF, 2007). The programs focus on job skills training including: hair cutting, sewing, motor bike repair, mushroom planting, raising animals, electronics, computers and foreign language. Other programs aim to raise awareness of high risk behaviors associated with the HIV/AIDS, drugs and the sex industry.

As a component of Life Skills, Cambodia has focused on increasing literacy overall. The national literacy rate in 1998 was 67.3% and has risen to 73.7% in 2004 (UNESCO, 2011). Literacy in this context is defined by the ability to read and write with the understanding of a simple statement related to one's daily life. There has been significant collaboration between NGOs and government ministries, which has resulted in some success. However, challenges remain in regards to financial resources, equity in access to programs and ensuring that the employment training meets job market demands.



Each goal under the EFA framework is important, but in a nation with high rates of illiteracy and a history of inadequate access to quality education makes Life Skills and Lifelong Learning initiatives a necessity. Programs must be in place to address the needs of adults and youths that did not acquire the necessary skills through formal schooling for whatever reason.

*Non-formal education (NFE)*

Non-formal education opportunities exist in Cambodia, but the availability of reliable data on such programs is extremely limited. Non-formal education includes organized education offered by community groups or organizations. The organizations may be secular or religious in nature and include programs at churches and pagodas. NGOs are responsible for a great deal of education initiatives in Cambodia (Sophoan, 1997). More than 60 newly growing NGOs in Cambodia have a presence, but are not necessarily considered to play a particularly influential role (Seel, 2007). NGOs, with government monitoring, are responsible for non formal primary level education, specifically for pre-school aged children, but the overall impact is difficult to determine (Seel, 2007).

Statistics on NFE are mentioned in larger reports, but not in detail. For example, in the UNESCO National Education Support Strategy (UNESS) mentioned their financial and technical support of seven literacy and NFE programs launched in 2003 and their collaboration with government officials and community organizations to support NFE (UNESCO, 2010). UNESCO indicated that 58, 967 adults were enrolled in functional literacy programs, which are life skill courses aimed at building skills to generate income (2010). The same UNESCO report indicated that in 2008, Non-formal Education (NFE)

programs such as Income Generation Program and Quality of Life Programs are being implemented at 117 Community Learning Centers (CLCs) to provide literacy and skills training and enrolled approximately 4,700. The report states, “Nearly 47,000 young people were trained in different equivalency and re-entry programmes at all levels” (UNESCO, p. 24), which refers to the programs at the CLCs, but does not provide specific data regarding the participants or length and type of participation. Seel’s report on a case study of Cambodia and government and donor efforts for improved aid effectiveness in the education sector is another example (2007). Seel (2007) lists three NFE programs and strategies implemented by NGOs for educational progress in terms of improving adult literacy rates, but did not provide any details to indicate the extensiveness of such initiatives.

The MoEYS has a Non-Formal Education policy aimed at expanding NFE opportunities for youth and adults through community organizations and efforts (MoEYS, 2008). A lack of financial and human resources are a significant challenge to NFE initiatives (Seel, 2007; UNESCO, 2010). The current budget for NFE is only up to 2% of Cambodia’s National Education Budget (MoEYS, 2008). The only information available on September 25, 2011 on the MoEYS website regarding NFE is the report: *New trend and present situation of adult learning and education* (MoEYS, 2011). The report summarizes the nation’s NFE policy and makes mention of the community organizations’ role in NFE, which includes mobilizing resources, developing curricular materials and allocating budget to support NFE projects (MoEYS, 2008). The report lists three functional literacy programs that target adult learners, women and girls and ethnic minorities and provide 180-200 hours of instruction on categories of family life, small

business and income, hygiene and health and people consciousness. The report briefly discusses and includes a small amount of data related to the Bilingual Education Bridge program which provides Khmer instruction for ethnic minorities speaking other languages. The overall data available on NFE is minimal and scattered among small paragraphs in larger reports (Seel, 2007; UNESCO, 2010). The reach, quality and impact of NFE in Cambodia are difficult to determine at this point because of a lack of centralized information.

### *Higher Education*

Higher education is a fairly recent development in Cambodia. Tertiary education systems, like all educational systems, are a product of the nation's historical and political past as well as the current social and economic needs of the country. The complex and rapidly changing social dynamics have demanded an increase in tertiary education options. The Kingdom has made significant progress in response to the demands for higher education, but many challenges exist and the outcomes of the rapid development and expansion of such a system remain unknown.

Cambodia's first modern institution of higher education (HEI) was the Royal University of Phnom Penh established in 1960. It remained a tuition free institution until the middle of the 1990s (Chet, 2006). It primarily served the country's elite male citizens. The privatization of HEIs came about in the late 1990s, with the opening of the first private HEI in 1997 (UNESS, 2010). There are currently 32 public HEIs and 45 private HEIs that offer degrees in nearly 100 different fields (UNESS, 2010). This increase from 51 institutions in 2006 to 77 institutions in 2010 is evidence of the nation's growing demand for tertiary education options. The three types of HEIs include academies,

universities and institutes or independent schools. According to Chet (2006) at the time of publication, there was one academy, 26 universities and 24 institutes or independent schools. The Royal Academy of Phnom Penh is the only academy. The academy serves as a national think tank and research institute that offers master and doctoral level degrees. There were 8 public and 18 private universities in 2006, which have multidisciplinary focuses. The 24 institutes or independent schools, 12 public and 12 private, focus on specific fields of training. A grade twelve certificate is required for admittance into any HEI (Chet, 2006).

Statistical discrepancies in Gross Enrollment Rates (GER) for HEIs exist and must be acknowledged. They result from tracking procedures that do not account for individual students in dual programs and the assignment of full time status to all students that must be acknowledged (Chet, 2006). Overall there has been a tremendous increase in enrollment at this level. The GER increases are noted in the UNESS Report (2010), which indicated 31,740 students in 2001-2002 and rose to 110,090 in 2007-2008. The enrollment rate more than tripled over a seven year period, raising concerns about instructional quality. Rapid expansion leaves the HEI system vulnerable to quality and control issues.

There is a significant disparity in access by gender in HEI in Cambodia, with the overall GER at 7% and the GPI of .54 in 2008 (GED, 2010). This is an increase from 5% GER and a slight decrease in .56 GDI in 2007 (EFA GMR, 2010). This is the lowest in East Asia among the nations with available data. Laos PDR, a nation frequently compared to Cambodia, in their similar progress toward the EFA goals has a 12% GER and .72 GPI. There may be a link between GER and GPI rates and countries total public

expenditure on education as percent of GNP, since Laos PDR has begun to increase education spending substantially.

Only 34% of HEI students are female and there are fewer females graduating in all fields of study (GED, 2010). This gap is expected due to traditional gender norms. The social sciences, business and law fields have the highest percentage of female graduates at 30%, followed by education with 24%, science at 10% and engineering, construction and manufacturing at 5% in 2008 (GED, 2010). The traditional perceptions of gender roles combined with limited access, contribute to this large gender gap. However, with the gender parity gains being made at the primary and lower secondary level, it is possible that this trend will reverse over time if policies to reform gender expectations are promoted.

The government has passed the Education Law and other reforms aimed at improving the quality of education at the tertiary level. Reforms include the implementation of the credit system opposed to the previous system that was based on years and utilizing a process of accreditation for HEI, which began in late 2009 (UNESS, 2010). Progress tracking and policy reform are difficult to monitor due to the unprecedented rate of expansion of such programs and the lack of trained researchers in the country (Chet, 2006; UNESS, 2010).

The rapid expansion has left the system underfunded, with a lack of qualified staff and quality curriculum which has resulted in poorly educated students (Chet, 2006). Currently several challenges face the higher education system in Cambodia. There has been repeated identification of a lack of alignment between education programs and labor market demands (Chet, 2006; UNESS, 2010). The quality of instruction and curriculum

remains a concern due to the extremely limited number of qualified professionals and researchers at the tertiary level. The need for reform in the financial and managerial structures in HEIs also deserves attention (Chet, 2006).

### Key Factors in Education

Educational systems are products of nations' historical and political legacies as well as the current social and economic pressures. The complex dynamics that shape education and influence policy and practice must be identified in order to create a more accurate portrayal of education in its current state. The last section described the present state of Cambodian education at five levels as well as the challenges that the systems face. Challenges are often similar at each level. Many obstacles facing the system are related to access and equity, resources and traditional cultural perceptions and practices, all of which are influenced by other social entities such as the government, NGOS and foreign donors, families and communities. In the next section of the chapter, I will outline the role of different social players in relation to education in contemporary Cambodia.

#### *Government*

Political stability and national independence are recent and welcomed developments in Cambodia. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), with the Royal Family serving as figureheads, has been led by Prime Minister Hun Sen for more than 20 years. The nation faces serious issues within its governing body. These challenges directly impact education and all other aspects of society. The international community has urged the nation to address government and business corruption and a lack of transparency at the government level. In response, Cambodia has developed various approaches to governance to increase accountability and communication. They have

implemented the Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) and sought out additional funding to improve education. The government has developed strategies, policies and reforms to address EFA goals, but still fails to politically and financially back development in the education sector in a significant manner. This lack of investment results in diminished resources and limited progress in educational reform and capacity. The role of corruption, the nation's approach to governance, the programs initiated to promote better leadership and address educational goals and over all funding illustrate this situation.

*Anti-corruption and a new approach for policy*

Corruption has infiltrated multiple sectors of Cambodian society from government officials to police officers to school administrators and teachers. The international community has repeatedly urged the nation to address the issue of corruption because it impedes positive growth and economic development in the nation (Feinberg, 2009). In 2010, the Royal Government of Cambodia passed the Anticorruption law and established the National Anticorruption Commission and the Anticorruption Unit. These bodies are intended to monitor the appropriate use of foreign aid as one of their tasks. The Sector Wide Approach, the Priority Action Plan, Fast Track Initiative (FTI) and School-based Management are examples of the RGC's progress toward EFA goals. At the same time, the government's unwillingness to adequately fund education seriously limits the success of the reforms.

The SWAp, introduced in the education sector in 2000, promotes a partnership between the government and donors and replaces the centralized top down approach with a bottom up participatory approach. The government and donors have praised the collaboration and identification of key issues that has resulted from SWAp (Seel, 2007).

Prasertsri (2008) identifies three ways in which SWAp has positively impacted education. First, the collaboration between NGOs, local government officials, schools and communities have been able to increase student enrollment among populations considered difficult to reach. Increased scholarships and food rations have attracted additional students to the schools. Lastly, the creation of a policy that requires the expansion of additional secondary schools will promote access and equity to post-primary education.

The RGC also implemented plans and policies aimed specifically at educational reform. The Priority Action Plan (PAP) which was designed to reduce the cost of education among the least financially secure families and increase participation of children in grades one through nine was introduced in 2000 (Shoraku, 2008). The PAP abolished all formal fees for grades one through nine and established operational budgets aimed at decentralizing the disbursement and expenditure of funds (Prasertsri, 2008; Shoraku, 2008). The cost of families' contributions may have declined, which is questionable, but the loss of income that results from child workers leaving the labor market and entering the classroom may remain a deterring factor for families.

The Fast Track Initiative (FTI) is a multi-layered framework developed in partnership between donor countries and developing nations to deliver educational aid to thirty six countries (EFA, 2010). Cambodia secured a grant from the FTI for \$57.4 million aimed at expediting the nation's progress in education to meet the EFA goal of Universal Primary Education for All by 2015 (Prasertsri, 2008). The government's decision to pursue additional outside funding appears to demonstrate its commitment to education, but a closer look at the nation's spending indicates other priorities. FTI



provided supplemental funding to a sector of Cambodia's economy that is significantly under-resourced. Financial support and human resources are necessary for continued progress.

School-based Management (SBM) is a form of educational decentralization. It was introduced in Cambodia in 1998 in an attempt to shift decision making power and authority from the government to school levels (Shoraku, 2008). The EFA GMR (2009) focused on management governance and financing to overcome inequities in education. The report emphasizes the way good governance can promote increased family and community participation and strengthen accountability, which will improve access, learning outcomes and empowerment. Shoraku (2008) highlights the benefits and challenges of SBM. SBM has the potential to foster educational demand in the community, maintain quality during economic crisis and increase local citizens' awareness of issues. There is a lack of evidence that links SBM with student achievement. Yet, SBM was also introduced too quickly, educators were not prepared, and the roles and responsibilities were not well defined. Lastly, there is concern that such a reform may widen gaps between communities with more resources and those with less.

It is important to recognize the shortcomings of reforms as well as their positive contributions. In the case of Cambodia, SBM could have a tremendous positive impact if it were implemented strategically over time. The themes of community and family involvement are central to Cambodian culture and could create a context in which such a reform could thrive. The problem may center less on the tenants of SBM, but rather on the hasty and poor implementation of it. Effective reform and policy implementation are

heavily influenced by the resources available for such endeavors and resources in the Kingdom are extremely limited.

Reform reflects a commitment to education, yet the Cambodian government has not invested significantly in education development. Cambodia and Lao PDR were the only two countries in the region in 2004 that allotted less than 3% of public spending on education, which is significantly lower than UNESCO's recommendation of 6% of GNP to public spending on education (UNESCO, 2007). Lao PDR increased that percentage from 1% in 1999 to 3.6% in 2007 in contrast to Cambodia's 1.7% in the same year (EFA, 2010). The share of the education budget to national budget was 13% in 2000 and remained around 17% for the following four years, which is lower than the pre-war levels of 23% in the late 1960s; the actual expenditure is always lower than the budget (Prasertsri, 2008). Cambodia invests 73% of their education budget in primary education, which is a reflection of their progress in the early stages of educational development (Seel, 2007). As a result of reliance on foreign aid, Cambodia must contend with the influence of donors.

#### *NGOs and Foreign Donors*

International aid and foreign experts have worked in NGOs in the Kingdom since the 1980s and play a role in shaping social policy and government reform. Poor countries, like Cambodia, cannot meet EFA goals without international funding (EFA, 2010). International aid is an essential component in the reform of the education system in the Kingdom. The donors have urged the government to be increasingly transparent and accountable in their use of foreign funds. Recent studies have found that great improvements in aid effectiveness have occurred since 2000 (Prasertsri, 2008). Risking

reductions in international aid would result in serious delays in social progress, making the maintenance of relationships between funding entities and the government a top priority.

In 2008, there were one hundred and thirty organizations/NGOs supporting sixty educational programs and projects in Cambodia (Prasertsri, 2008). This requires collaboration between the NGOs and the government, which is why the sector wide approach (SWAp) was implemented in 2000. This approach has been instrumental in funneling funds into the school level and for creating scholarship systems to assist students in poverty with secondary education fees (Seel, 2007). The role of donor influence is high in Cambodia educational policy and program development. It is essential to understand the factors that shape policy so that it can be analyzed in the proper context.

Cambodian officials, policy makers, teachers, students and community members are all social beings often operating under the schema of traditional Khmer views. However, it is these same social actors that must interact with workers from numerous international organizations and NGOs on policy reform and implementation. Many of the foreign workers are operating under a very different schema that reflects the tenants of modernization. Foreign workers are often forced to operate within a social context they know little about, but are required to participate in fully. Issues arise between competing worldviews and the educational system currently serves as a place of consolidation of perspectives at times, but domination at other times.

This collision between traditional, local and modern, global views has increased the complexity of the educational system. The traditional pedagogy and practices can be

compared to teaching in the first half of the century in America and still exists in some urban schools. Here, the teacher plays an authoritarian role. It is similar to the banker analogy posed by Paulo Freire, in which the teacher possesses all knowledge and makes deposits of knowledge into passive students (2000). Traditional teaching in Cambodia is didactic in nature, teacher centered and heavily reliant on textbooks (Nonoyama-Tarumi & Bredenberg, 2009; Tan, 2008). The modern teaching view, which is promoted by the MoEYS and outside agencies is learner centered. It is similar to Freire's problem posing method in which teachers act as facilitators in the students' construction of knowledge (2000). Students are viewed as capable of self directed learning without increased dependence upon the teacher (Gan, 2009). Linguistic barriers coupled with educational concepts that are foreign to Cambodia have made the clash between perspectives even more pronounced (Maskell & Garang, 1998). O'Sullivan (2006) identifies the following problems with the learner centered approach: first it assumes a specifically designed environment; secondly it demands teachers and students make the transition from the traditional teaching approach; and lastly, learner centered approaches may not be culturally appropriate.

Cambodia is a nation in the beginning phases of educational development. The MoEYS and foreign donors promote pedagogical and methodological changes that seem unreasonable, unless made in a specific and strategic manner, since the nation faces a serious teacher shortage and low levels of teacher education. Recall Cambodia's high teacher-to-student ratio of 55 to 1 compared to the international standard of 40 to 1 and the regional ratios of 19 to 1 (EFA, 2010). The percentage of teachers with lower secondary diplomas has increased from 26% in 2000-2001 to 36% in 2004-2005

(Prasertsi, 2008). Providing fundamental education and basic teacher training must be first priority. Encouraging teachers to adhere to a novel pedagogical approach in an environment that is not conducive to that type of teaching may repel potential candidates from the profession. The learner centered approach, like many other changes the government proposes, may only be verbiage that appeals to Western donors. A lack of funding and policy support could be indicators of the MoEYS's level of commitment to the shift in approaches. The differences in educational belief systems are one example of ongoing ideological reconciliations that Cambodians must engage in while collaborating with foreign experts from Western nations.

#### *Families and Communities*

The redefining of beliefs, roles and responsibilities among the government and international donors has included a limited focus on the role of families and communities; while some reform efforts like SWAp require community participation (Prasertsri, 2008; Seel, 2007). Research regarding the school based management movement identifies parents' perceived roles and actual behaviors. The SBM approach was designed to increase parent participation in school management. However, parents' perceptions of their roles in relation to education resulted in a very different outcome. Shoraku (2008) argues that parents' limited involvement in schools is due to low motivation. This stance highlights a failure to recognize the relationship between parents' perceived roles and their behaviors. Shoraku found that 90% of parents interviewed in a study considered financial contributions as the main method of participating in the school system (2008). The minimal involvement of parents may be a result of what they perceive to be

appropriate behavior or due external circumstances that are unaccounted for, rather than a lack of motivation.

Most families and community members in Cambodia live in difficult circumstances. Poverty, trauma and domestic violence are common (Eng et. al, 2009; Eng et al., 2010). These circumstances must be recognized as influential components of family life. As policy makers and reforms call for increased participation among families, they must also address the larger social issues that impact the overall mental and physical well being. A mother living in poverty and with domestic violence bears a significant burden of fulfilling multiple obligations at home and in the labor market (Brickell & Chant, 2010). An informed and sensitive outreach attempt will be required to involve parents like her in school affairs. Parent involvement and community empowerment are important and worthy goals. Outreach efforts must respond to the struggle of families to meet the physical needs of the children and the cultural perceptions of their parental duties in relation to education before expecting parents to readily and meaningfully engage in the participation process.

Listening to the needs of students, their families and community members could better inform policy. For example, Cambodia abolished all fees associated with primary schooling, but cost is the most common reason cited for children who are out of school (EFA, 2010). The disconnect between policy and reality deters progress, but informed policymakers committed to education could address this issue. Communication between the community and policy makers could eliminate more than physical barriers to educational growth. Attitudinal barriers in the community often impede educational progress. A top down mobilization campaign or increased school community

partnerships are two approaches to addressing this issue (Seel, 2007). Education for parents about their own role in their children's education is essential if they are going to be expected to fulfill a new role in the education process.

Khmer culture is family oriented and community centered. This has the potential to be of a great benefit in educational reform, but policymakers must address the larger social context in which the family operates. Social policies that address the physical needs of students and their families can serve as a foundation upon which educational reforms can be built. Educational reforms will have limited impact as long as students and their parents are engaged in struggle for survival.

### *Conclusion*

History and culture shape the social context in which education systems exist. This brief discussion of the history of Cambodia, its past and current educational systems, obstacles in educational access, policy reform efforts and the role of various parties in education provide the context of education in the Kingdom. My investigation of young adults learning English is bound by this context.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### *Introduction*

This research is a case study focused on identifying and understanding the relationship between young, adult Cambodian students' motivations, strategies for learning English, and lived experiences in a church-sponsored English program in Phnom Penh. I will use the pseudonym Evangelical Khmer Christian Church (EKCC) to refer to the English program. In July 2009, I spent three weeks teaching ESL and conducting teacher training at EKCC. My experiences and observations of the students' sincere enthusiasm for studying and learning English was the inspiration for the study. After my work there, I found myself grappling with a desire to understand the motivations and learning strategies employed by the students in the program. In this chapter, I explain why a qualitative design was chosen for the study, the methods used, the data collected and the data analysis methods I employed. I also discuss validity and reliability issues that arose as I interpreted findings and drew conclusions.

Researchers use qualitative methods when they are interested in understanding social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved. This approach allows the researcher to contextualize issues in terms of socio-cultural-political locations (Glesne, 2006). Glesne (2006) highlights the existent relationship between a researcher's methods and her/his views on what qualifies as valuable knowledge. Gaining an understanding,



contextualizing, and interpreting how Cambodian students' experiences and motivations related to their English language study requires a qualitative approach. Denzin & Lincoln (1994) describe qualitative approaches as multi-method, interpretive, and naturalistic. A qualitative approach supports the goal of interpreting social phenomena within the natural setting of occurrence through the use of a variety of data collection methods, such as participant observation and interviews. By employing qualitative methods, I enable participants to share their perspectives, something I found largely absent in the extant quantitative research pertaining to education in Cambodia.

Kilbourn (2006) reminds researchers that the aim of qualitative inquiry is the quality and texture of the events rather than the frequency of occurrence. The current study was not interested in quantifying participants' experiences and English language learning, but rather understanding the relationship between the experiences and students' efforts to acquire English from the participants' points of view.

There is no doubt regarding the high demand for English in Cambodia; as Clayton (2008) recounts:

Whilst working in Cambodia, I encountered numerous Cambodians studying English including market stall holders, usually female, in the expatriate/tourist market of Phnom Penh; moto drivers who wanted to communicate with tourists (often state employees in their second or third job); street children in Phnom Penh selling English language newspapers; staff and students from schools and colleges; officials from various government ministries studying English for current or future employment prospects, as many others (p.145).

It is clear that there is a strong desire on the part of the government and economic sector for learning English in Cambodia, which is related to the development of human resources and globalization (Ayres, 2000; Escott, 2000; Tan, 2008). However, previous researchers have failed to ask the experts, the students themselves, about this strong

commitment to learning English. The absence of participant perspectives and voice, combined with the research question and theoretical framework, steered me toward a qualitative research design.

My preference for qualitative methods is not an effort to dispute the findings of the numerous quantitative studies that have been conducted pertaining to English language learning in Cambodia (Clayton, 2008; Nonyama-Tarumi & Bredenberg, 2009; Sokhom, 2004). It is an effort to complement the existing research by providing qualitative data that shares the participants' experiences. Erickson & Roth (2006) warn against the problematic nature of polarizing quantitative and qualitative research approaches by claiming: 1) all phenomena have quantitative and qualitative dimensions 2) the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity is inaccurate and not useful and 3) generalizability is a descriptor for the tendency of inferences to go beyond the context and participants involved. They suggest more integrative approaches. However, it is my stance that prior to integrating approaches, the perspectives of the participants as well as the context must be sufficiently explored and described. This study accomplishes these ends.

I contemplated many designs while conceptualizing this study, including narrative research, phenomenology, ethnography and case studies. After identifying the benefits and limitations of each design, I chose to employ a case study using ethnographic methods, specifically participant observation and in-depth interviewing. A case study approach focuses on the issue, rather than the individuals, which was central to this investigation. The design lends itself to an analytic approach that provides a detailed description of the cases and the setting of the cases within the contextual conditions (Yin,

2003 as cited in Creswell, 2007). Ethnographic methods, such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and field notes are common to the tradition of ethnography and appropriate in this study because of the focus on culture, cultural patterns and perspectives of participants in their natural setting (Gay, Mills & Airasian 2006; Creswell, 1998).

As a researcher, I immersed myself in Cambodian culture by studying the language and living there for six months. My experience provided me with an opportunity to explore the culture and language that undoubtedly influenced interpretation of the data. However, my role as a teacher of English as a second language made the decision to use participant observation approach appealing. During the study, I assumed multiple roles in the research setting. I was there as a curriculum consultant for the church's English program. I participated in monthly staff meetings and collaborated with the church staff on the creation and implementation of a new English program and placement tests. I assisted with the selection of a new curriculum for the program. I also worked as a teacher educator and conducted a methodology course and workshops. The focus of the teacher training was on pedagogy, methodology, and the implementation of the new curriculum. In addition to consulting and teacher training, I worked as an ESL teacher at the church program, at the central office of the orphanage organization and at the local orphanage. I worked one-on-one with the pastor's adopted Cambodian daughter. These individual tutoring sessions involved an American home school curriculum, specifically language arts. I was a student as well, which was a highly visible role at the research site because that is where I studied Khmer language regularly with my research assistant and the students on the campus.

Participant observation focuses on several aims (Silverman, 2001) related to perspective, description, contextualization, process, and flexibility in design. Ongoing observation allowed me to see behaviors, events, norms and values through the eyes of the participants. I was able to record, describe, and understand the immediate and local context in which participants interacted as well as the larger socio-cultural context. It is essential to recognize the larger social context in order to describe, analyze and interpret the interactions of the culture-sharing group (Creswell, 1998). This approach also allowed flexibility in the research design, which was necessary when I decided to expand the criteria and number of participants to broaden the scope of the study.

#### Realities of Conducting Research in Cambodia

Several barriers, both anticipated and unforeseen, were encountered while conducting research in Cambodia. Physical obstacles interfered with the study at times. There were also personal challenges that I underestimated, which when combined with cultural issues, created challenges to conducting the research.

Although I had traveled to Cambodia on a prior occasion, the three week trip did not adequately prepare me for the realities of living abroad in a developing country for a period of six months. There were various personal and cultural issues that I was forced to work through as I lived and conducted research in Phnom Penh. I seriously miscalculated the amount of time it would take for me to personally adjust to life in Cambodia. Within ten days of my arrival, I had already begun teaching fifteen hours a week, which demanded an additional ten hours of preparation each week. I taught English to the staff of the orphanage organization, where I volunteered, two mornings a week for an hour and a half each morning. After teaching that class from 7:30 a.m. until 9:00 a.m., I made the

thirty minute commute to the outskirts of the city where the orphanage was located. I taught English there from 9:30 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. in the outdoor classroom, which was under a roof, but left the students and myself exposed to the scorching temperatures and incessant assaults from insects. After lunch, there was a time of rest from 11:30 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. I typically spent this time talking with the students in my room. They were eager to practice their English. The staff at the orphanage provided me my own small room with a bed made of plywood and a straw mat. They discouraged students from bothering me during the time designated for rest. At 1:00 p.m., I resumed teaching until 2:30 p.m. and then left to go to the church where I would teach the pastor's daughter her home school curriculum three days a week for an hour at a time. I followed those sessions with an hour long Khmer language lesson. Two evenings a week I taught the grammar class at the church. On Wednesdays, I spent two hours conducting teacher training. This immediate immersion contributed to my feelings of frustration and fatigue.

I was very intentional when creating my schedule because I was aware of my tendency to take on too many tasks. However, even with this knowledge I did not realize how physically and psychologically demanding living and teaching in Cambodia would prove to be. The thirty minute commute to the orphanage and church required me to learn to ride a motor bike on congested roads with chaotic traffic patterns. Commuting in Phnom Penh became a source of psychological stress. The inability to communicate my basic needs due to a lack of Cambodian language was also psychologically demanding during the first six weeks. The intense heat caused my body to tire physically at an unprecedented rate. The routine tasks of boiling drinking water, cooking on a gas burner, shopping at the market, washing dishes and doing laundry by hand consumed an

inordinate amount of my time at home. I did not anticipate the day to day life in Cambodia to be so much more demanding than in the U.S., all of which was compounded by the full schedule I created for myself.

My American tendencies to overwork myself and try to rush right into work were slowly defused by Cambodians' approach to work and time. Cultural differences in regards to work, time, language and research proved to be issues that I had to confront while doing research in Cambodia. I anticipated cultural issues, but it was an ongoing process to maintain perspective, patience and gain understanding of a way of life that is in many ways contradictory to my own. The concept of time proved to be one of the most pressing. Punctuality and adherence to appointments are highly valued in American society. Cambodians, in general, tend to abide to a much looser concept of time, and missed appointments are common. Frequently students were late or missed appointments entirely, which made scheduling and conducting interviews a challenge. My inability to speak Khmer language made daily communications trying, but I found it especially frustrating during interviews because I wanted to hear the students' experiences directly from them. The desire to understand the participants in their language motivated me to study Khmer at a much more intense pace than I originally planned. Over the course of the study, as my language proficiency increased, I found it reassuring to be able to understand some of the students' responses when they were communicating in Khmer.

There were physical conditions that made the data collection difficult. The weather significantly determined students' attendance in classes and at interviews. Sometimes, students claimed to be too tired or too hot to attend during the dry season. During the wet season the roads were often flooded, making travel difficult or impossible

for students whose only means of transportation were riding a bicycle or motor bike. Since most students did not have access to a phone, calling to cancel was not a viable option. The hours of daylight also proved to be a challenge. There is sunlight from around 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day, all year around. The majority of students attended high school or the university in the morning and early afternoon and then English class from 5:30 p.m.- 6:30 p.m. in the evening, which meant interview times were limited to a brief window of time in the afternoons or on Saturdays. Meeting after dark was not an option because it is too dangerous to be out on the unlit streets. Robbery and gang activity are a common concern among students and their families. Once the interview times were secured and the participants arrived, there were still physical conditions that interfered. The church building itself is a busy place, so at times it was difficult to find a free room to conduct the interviews. During the rainy season, the thunderstorms were so severe that it was hard to hear each other speak as the rain pounded down on the tin roof of the building.

The realities of living and conducting research in Cambodia contributed to some changes in the proposed research design. It required me to be flexible in ways that I did not anticipate, but I am confident that the adjustments made to the research design were the best options available at the time. The changes in the proposed research design and data collection included increasing the number of participants, broadening the participant selection criteria, and slightly adjusting data collection methods. These changes are addressed thoroughly in the upcoming sections.

### Research site

The research site, EKCC, is an ESL and computer skills program located in a church/school in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The program is situated in the church building and organized and conducted by Christian leaders and missionaries. The study was conducted over a period of transition time at the school. The pastor asked me to assist with the restructuring of the current English program in terms of scheduling, testing, teacher training, and curriculum. The original program had classes that were open to all students, regardless of religious affiliation. Students ranged in age from adolescence through adulthood. The classes were free and open to the public. The hour long classes were offered in the early evenings on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. The daily attendance at the facility was approximately 350 students, divided into open classes based on proficiency. The seven classes were taught primarily by young Khmer men, eighteen to twenty five years old, who have no formal teacher training and limited English proficiency. The largest class for the most advanced students was taught by the church pastor. The pastor is not a trained educator, but is a proficient English speaker. Attendance was typically between 75-100 students per class.

The original program was structured this way until July, 2010, when the new program began. The goals of the restructured ESL program were to improve the quality of instruction, implement a system of monitoring student progress and attendance, and increase student attendance. The previous program consisted of seven open ESL classes that used a variety of texts. The new program assigned students, using a revised placement test, into closed classes based on English proficiency. It offered three open elective courses: Grammar, English Bible, and Spotlight, a course that teaches English



through the use of newspapers and current events. The program year is divided into two six month terms. Morning classes begin at 6:00 a.m. and run through 12:30 p.m. Monday through Friday for a total of ten courses. Late afternoon and evening classes are offered from 3:00 p.m. until 7:30 p.m. Monday through Friday for a total of twelve classes. On Wednesdays, there is a worship service at 5:00 p.m. so there are no classes after that time.

It is important to note that the church staff desired that the physical campus would become a place where students and the community could come together on a regular basis throughout the day. The staff hoped that the campus could become a place of support, mentoring and sharing Christianity throughout the entire day instead of only in the evenings. The new program, in fact, did change the atmosphere of the campus because more students interacted more frequently each day. Another noticeable change was the number of young students, seven to twelve years in age, who began to come to the campus after or before their regular school day to participate in beginner ESL classes.

#### Research participants

My initial proposal for the study focused on limiting the number of interviewees to ten in an effort to gain a thorough and detailed description of the phenomena, which is difficult to obtain with larger samples (Creswell et al., 2007). Initially, I intended to focus on Christian students only. I found this goal to be problematic on personal and professional levels. As a teacher, I felt that I was being divisive by inviting only Christian students to participate. I did not want to appear to favor one group of students over another on the basis of religion. I was also interested in the experiences of all the students who were in the ESL program, and limiting the participant criteria to solely Christians would not provide an opportunity to fully understand the experiences of non-Christian

students. I am also interested in the relationship between Christianity and English education in developing countries. This topic requires an understanding of the educational experiences of all the students, regardless of religious beliefs. Additionally, Cambodia is approximately 95% Buddhist, and limiting my study to Christian participants would not contribute as significantly to the research base focused on English education in Cambodia.

As a result, I increased my sample size to twenty participants, five from each of the following groups: Buddhist females, Buddhist males, Christian females and Christian males. Silverman (2001) cites the emergence of new factors, a desire to move from a smaller sample to a larger one to test potential generalizations, and the rise of unexpected generalizations in the data analysis as reasons to change the sample size after the study has begun. It was after I began to immerse myself in the community that I recognized the shortcomings of my original sample criteria. The expansion of the sample illustrates how qualitative research design, by nature, lends itself to certain flexibilities as the data generates new questions and potential themes.

The in-depth interviews and participant observation remained the main methods of data collection, but the expanded sample also led to the next change in the recruitment and criteria of participants. Over the course of interviews and observations, it became apparent that several of the participants did not identify specifically with one religion or another. During an interview, Daro said to me, "I say I am Buddhist and many students say they are Buddhist, but they do not follow the traditions of Buddhism. They just say that because their family says that and they do not know." This response confirmed my existing concern about religion as a variable that cannot be easily quantified. Religion is

deeply intertwined within the participants' cultural and social context (Fawthrop, 2004; Kent, 2009). It became clear that an additional category was needed for students who did not identify solely with either Christianity or Buddhism. This third category was labeled nonaffiliated, for a lack of a better term, and it included students who did not identify with a specific faith or had adopted a hybrid approach, combining aspects of Christianity and Buddhism.

The addition of the unaffiliated category required me to increase the number of participants from 20 to 30 in an effort to balance the variables of gender and faith. However, recruiting an equal number of participants that fulfilled the criteria of gender and religion was a challenge. Several students, specifically ones I did not have a close personal relationship with, were apprehensive to discuss their faith with me. I attribute this to a variety of factors, but most likely it had to do with my location as an English speaking foreigner working at a Christian institution. Some students seemed surprised when I explained my interest in talking with participants who identified themselves as Buddhists or undecided. Their surprise is likely due to the fact that the majority of foreigners who interact with the students at the research site are missionaries interested in converting non-Christian students.

I wanted a balanced sample with five participants in each category, but in reality that was not possible. Silverman (2001, p. 252) claims, "In qualitative research the relevant or 'sampleable' units are often theoretically defined. It's inappropriate to sample populations by attributes such as gender, ethnicity or even age because how such attributes are routinely defined is itself the topic of your research." I agree that the relevant units can be defined by theory; however, it is necessary in a case study such as

this to specify criteria for participants to understand the overall phenomena. The number of participants in each category is representative of the research site, and I will discuss this further in the findings section.

As a participant observer, I was able to observe the relationship between a research participant's words and actions, explore patterns of behavior, and develop a sense of trust and relationship among the individuals involved in the setting (Glesne, 2006). I spent six weeks teaching and observing English classes at EKCC to identify possible study participants based on their commitment to learning English, as well as the observable criteria stated below. Once I identified possible participants, I screened them further through individual and small group conversations for unobservable criteria, such as geographic location, religious affiliation and willingness to participate through one-on-one and small group discussions.

I screened and selected participants according to the following criteria:

- Nationality: Cambodian
- Geographic location: Currently living within the city limits of Phnom Penh
- Age: Range of 17-24 years old (referred to as young adults in this study)
- Faith: Christian, Buddhist or undecided affiliation.
- Attendance: Attend an ESL class at EKCC
- Proficiency: Able to engage in basic conversational English
- Willingness: Able to commit to the requirements of the study

The research site provided access to many possible candidates whom I could screen for suitability as participants. I also relied on students' suggestions of possible participants for the categories of Buddhist and unaffiliated. I recruited students by

inviting potential participants to a meeting and explaining the purpose of the study. I distributed a simple form for students to complete to gain basic demographic information such as name, age, religion and availability for interviews. The form also described the purpose of the study. The meeting did not meet my expectations, but provided insight into some of the future challenges I would face doing research in Cambodia. My American assumptions about time, organization, and meeting structure had to be closely monitored and negotiated while working in an Eastern context.

The meeting was scheduled for 5 p.m., which was thirty minutes prior to the beginning of evening classes. My research assistant was there to provide translation. Several students arrived fifteen to twenty minutes late, and some students who were not invited also attended. I distributed the form and explained the purpose of the study and participant requirements, while my research assistant translated for me. The students were curious why I wanted to do the study, what I would do with the data, and why anyone would care to hear about their experiences. Some students seemed to really struggle to understand why I would be interested in researching their experiences. I suggested that the students take one to two days to think about whether they wanted to participate. I asked them to return the form to me if they were interested. The students had difficulties completing the availability portion of the form. There was confusion about whether or not these were set appointments, despite my repeated explanations, which were translated, that these time slots were intended to give me an idea of their availability to schedule future interviews. This experience highlights the cultural perceptions of time that occurred between myself, my research assistants and the study's participants that proved to be challenging. Many non-Christian students left the space

reserved for identifying religion blank, which may be an indication of the apprehension present among participants in terms of discussing their religion with me.

#### Data collection

The intent of rigorous data collection is to develop in-depth understanding of participants and the context in which they operate (Creswell et al., 2007). Access to the research site is often an issue, but in this case it was not since I had volunteered at the site in the past and was invited to return to teach and work with the staff. My prior presence as a teacher made the transition to teacher/researcher fairly smooth. I used multiple methods of data collection including: participant observation, in-depth interviews, content analysis of documents, and personal reflexivity monitoring.

Participant observation requires the researcher to carefully observe, systematically experience and consciously record the details of various aspects of situations while simultaneously analyzing her/his own observations for meaning and personal bias (Glesne, 2006). I was regularly present at the research site, but systematically scheduled observations. Observation can be considered a research tool when it “(1) serves a formulated research purpose, (2) is planned deliberately, (3) is recorded systematically, and (4) is subjected to checks and controls on validity and reliability” (Kidder, 1981, p. 264, as cited in Merriam, 1998). I used the following steps suggested by Wolcott (1981, as cited in Glesne, 2006) to guide my observations: 1) observations by a broad sweep, 2) observations of nothing in particular, 3) observations that search for paradoxes, and 4) observations that search for problems facing the group.

Observations focused on interactions between students, teachers and church leaders as well as the physical space. The student interactions were observed during the

class I taught as well as during classes taught by other teachers. I also observed students on the EKCC site before and after class, on the weekends, during church services and school and church events. I monitored the way students interacted with one another, other teachers, other foreigners and visitors to the research site, and myself. I observed the teachers and church staff during the classes they taught, in teacher training, and during staff meetings and social gatherings on and off the EKCC campus. The campus is essentially a compound, like many schools in Cambodia, it is a large building surrounded by a high concrete wall lined with barbed wire and glass. A large metal gate in the front serves as the entrance and exit. Inside the walls, there are grassy and tiled areas, and two small buildings, one with toilets and another that has been converted to a library.

The physical space was also observed in terms of the classroom and campus. In the classrooms, I looked at the available resources, seating arrangements, and the ways the layout influences student-student and student-teacher interactions. I recorded who gathered in what areas and for what purposes to gain insight into the relationships among students and staff. I used the observations to supplement the interview data, the main method of data collection.

Participants were asked to take part in one to two in-depth interviews that consisted of some demographic questions, but predominantly open ended questions based on those stated in Chapter Two. Initially, I intended participants to be part of one to two focus group interviews, which would be facilitated as a means of triangulation (Fontana & Frey, 2005), but after increasing the sample size, the data became saturated and a focus group was no longer required. I recorded each interview using a digital voice recorder

and took detailed notes. I transcribed the audio with assistance from two trained transcribers.

I kept in mind the fact that the researcher and the participant speak to each other from various perspectives, which embody their social positions (Ezzy, 2001; Warren, 2002). As a researcher, teacher, English speaker, and American, I intentionally remained cognizant of the role I played in the interview process. In the eyes of Cambodian students, I occupy a position of power and authority that requires that I be treated with respect according to their cultural norms. Also, I had to purposely deconstruct the perception of me as a missionary among the students. My volunteer work at the church was a humanitarian effort, but the majority of foreigners who volunteer at EKCC are missionaries. This perception likely influenced what experiences the participants were willing to share and how in-depth they were when providing details.

My cross-cultural experiences include a significant amount of time teaching and doing social work within immigrant and refugee communities. My work with refugee and immigrant students in the U.S., combined with my pilot studies using interviews as a data collection technique, aided during the interview process. I remained aware that cultural misunderstandings occur between members of different social and cultural backgrounds, regardless of significant experience and knowledge of cross-cultural interactions. I monitored these possible misunderstandings diligently and made many considerations in an effort to ensure my interpretation of participants' actions and words aligned as best as possible with their intended meaning. I rephrased and repeated what I heard participants saying in the interviews to provide an opportunity for clarification and discussed the interviews with my research assistants. Despite my prior experiences and research, I was



not fully prepared to handle the language and translation issues that arose throughout the course of the study.

Initially, I planned to conduct member checks for accuracy by transcribing the interviews and returning the transcripts to the students to review. However, I was forced to adapt this portion of the data collection as the scope of the study changed due to time constraints. Instead of doing a separate member check with the transcribed interview, I adjusted my questioning techniques to consciously attempt to clarify participants' statements. After answering a question, I would repeat what I had heard and recorded to provide students with an opportunity to refute the response if necessary. I also paused during interviews to clarify responses through the research assistant any time I sensed there may be miscommunication or inappropriate interpretation of a response on my part. I also informed students that they could clarify a response or provide additional information at anytime during or after the interview, this was a practical solution since I was typically at the research site five days a week. On several occasions, this option proved to be a valuable technique for students to provide clarification or more information about their responses. I was able to go back and clarify responses with students after the interview. I also spoke with the research assistants after each interview to see if what I heard was what she/he had heard as well. However, it is important to remember the cultural practice of saying yes, even when uncertainty exists, is prevalent among Cambodians and is a challenge to the validity and reliability of this approach. I intentionally used open ended questions to minimize the impact of this practice, but it still must be taken into consideration.

The original design included weekly writing prompts for participants to respond to regarding their experiences and their process of learning English as a second language. The prompts could be written on paper in a journal form or completed via email using an electronic format, depending on the participants' preference and access to technology. The individuals were encouraged to respond to the prompt in two paragraphs, but could write more if they desired. Participants had the option of responding in English or Khmer. The responses written in Khmer would have been translated to English by one of the research assistants if this option had been selected and the prompts implemented. The prompts were intended to allow me to follow up the interviews or participant observations with specific questions that arose as data was collected and analyzed.

After the scope of the study changed, I attempted to modify the prompts by reducing the number and frequency of them. It became clear, after only six students returned the initial prompts, that written responses may not be a feasible form of data collection. Students cited several reasons for not completing the prompts, including: anxiety about writing, not knowing what to write, a lack of time to write, and a disdain for doing writing in addition to their formal school work. I became concerned that retaining the written response piece of the study may act as a deterrent for student participation and decided to eliminate it. However, since I spent a great deal of time at the research site, I was able to follow up the students on an as-needed basis when questions and inconsistencies arose.

I conducted content analysis of documents in addition to participant observation and interviews. The documents analyzed included: staff meeting agendas, submitted student writing prompts, EKCC documents related to enrollment and demographic

information. The documents provided information about the population of the student body, ideologies, and student beliefs that illustrated the context in which students interacted. Understanding the context is essential to gathering rich, detailed data from participants and comparing my observations to other forms of data for validity purposes.

Table 7

*Data collection and analysis*

Data	Description	When	Frequency & duration	Analysis
Participant observation/ Field notes	Observations at EKCC including, but not limited to the classroom, outside area documented through field notes	Initial, prior to sample selection and ongoing February-July 2010	Ongoing, 1-3 days/week	Field notes were written, transcribed and coded using Atlas ti
Individual interviews	In-depth open ended interview questions	March-July 2010 July 2011	1-2 interviews, 45-90 minutes in length*	Interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded Written notes were taken as well
Documents	Written documentation and communication such as agendas, memos and schedules that provide data related to the context of the program	ongoing	Not applicable	Documents were collected, scanned and coded using Atlas ti

\*One undecided male student conducted his interview during the follow up interviews of two other male students (one Buddhist and one undecided). Three female Buddhist students conducted their interview together as a group at their request.

### *Cross-cultural interviewing*

There are many barriers in conducting cross-cultural research that if left unaddressed, threaten the credibility of the researcher and the validity and reliability of the study. The interview process is one such area that must be given careful consideration. Sandis, Bourjolly and Roer-Strier (2007) make the following suggestions for conducting cross-cultural interviews:

- Create a research team that has members of the cultural group being interviewed.
- Involve key informants in gaining access.
- Be transparent and outline the topics that will be discussed.
- Incorporate choice in where and how the interviews are conducted.
- Time and order personal or sensitive questions accordingly in the interview.
- Acknowledge the cultural differences.
- Be cautious of positionality and style of interviewing.
- Build on commonalities between researcher and participant.
- Open a space in the interview for the sharing of painful or emotional experiences.

I gave these suggestions careful consideration at the onset of the interview process and throughout the process. The interviews were always conducted with a Cambodian research assistant unless the interviewee asked otherwise. Six students, three Christian males, two Christian females and one male in the unaffiliated category, opted to interview without an interpreter.

I was not overly concerned with the quality of data collected because of the students' advanced level of English language proficiency. The research assistants were members of the community at the research site. The study itself and the general questions were shared prior to the interviews. At the onset of the interviews, I tried to help participants relax and reassured them that I did not expect perfect spoken English (which was a major concern). I encouraged them to use their native language as much or as little as possible. I acknowledged my position as a foreigner, teacher and researcher, but reminded them that they know me as a person. This reminder seemed to relieve some of the initial anxiety that some participants exhibited. The first interview was done primarily to build rapport and record demographic information. The second interview involved more personal and sensitive questions related to students' experiences and feelings. I used an active interview approach, which resulted in the participants and I co-constructing meaning through dialogue (Warren, 2002).

My status as an insider rather than an outsider permitted me easier access to the research site and participants. It also created a context in which participants could be more at ease and share more freely (Shah, 2004). The insider status, along with my experiences as a student studying Khmer, provided additional opportunities to build rapport prior to and during the interview process. The relationship building process also created a space in which several students were able to share intense emotional experiences. The disclosing of these experiences seemed to be cathartic and was welcomed by the participants.

*Situating myself in the research*

As a researcher, I cannot separate myself entirely from my research, which requires diligent monitoring of my own subjectivity. My personal struggles with my own religion and spirituality over recent years play an important role in my life. My intent is to share some thoughts, concerns and struggles regarding faith to position myself within the study and account for the ways my perspective may have influenced the study.

Prior to designing this study, I had some concerns about traveling with a mission group to Cambodia because I did not feel comfortable with evangelism. I perceived my role as teaching English, rather than proselytizing. Being raised Catholic and having respect for all religions, I feel comfortable praying with others and participating in Christian traditions. I decided to go with the mission team despite my reservations and the overall experience was positive. However, at one point during the trip, the director of the orphanage where we were visiting explicitly requested that all individuals refrain from speaking about religion in any manner. Several members of the team chose to continue sharing their religious beliefs. This experience incited cognitive dissonance for me regarding evangelical Christians' methods for sharing their religion.

After the trip in 2009, I began to struggle more with my own religious beliefs. I thought a great deal about my personal beliefs before accepting the pastor's invitation to assist the church-based English program. I felt comfortable teaching English and working in a Christian community, but over the course of the study my own personal struggle with Christianity began to intensify and my inquiries of the church increased substantially. Many questions arose, such as: If individuals discover hope in the church and that is a good thing, does it matter how people are brought into the church? Is it ethical for

missionaries to be less than forthcoming with information to appeal to non-Christians?

Why do evangelical groups in Cambodia and the U.S. tend to focus their efforts on vulnerable populations, like children and people living in poverty? Is serving the community as important as converting people to the evangelical church or is it a means to an end in terms of spreading Christianity?

I spent a great deal of time while living in Cambodia and working at the church feeling as though I “wasn’t Christian enough” for many members in the community that questioned why I did not participate more actively in the church’s religious activities. Some Christians seemed to resent my tolerance for religious diversity, while others, especially non-affiliated and Buddhist students appreciated it. These interactions and experiences left me with many more questions regarding evangelical Christians’ influence on the beliefs, attitudes and actions of non-Christians.

These questions and my struggle to identify my evolving beliefs certainly shaped the study. I dedicated a great deal of time to monitoring my subjectivity through formal and informal written responses and conversations with colleagues within the research community and the church. I expanded the sample size to be inclusive of non-Christian students and be more representative of young, adults in Cambodia. I added additional questions to the interviews to explore the role of religion in participants’ experiences and chose a theoretical framework that is critical of TESOL programs. Religion became an integral component of the study that was not intended initially, but evolved from the data collection and my decision to investigate the role of religion in participants’ experiences.

### *Research Assistants*

Research assistants play a paramount role in cross cultural research (Lopez, Figueroa, Connor & Maliski, 2008). They serve as key informants into the community and provide valuable information about the context for outsiders. Research assistants will be referred to as interpreters and translators in this section because that is the term the cited studies employed. I see their role in the study as much broader. Researcher assistants serve a role as an interpreter during interviews, but also as a co-researcher and cultural informant. In their meta-analysis of cross-cultural studies using an interpreter in nursing, Wallin and Ahlström (2006) acknowledge the sparse attention given to the methodological issues related to working with an interpreter and the limited discussion of the role of the interpreter. They contend that no other previous reviews of cross-cultural interviews studies using an interpreter have been reported. This is problematic because the interpreter is a significant component in the interview process and is undoubtedly involved in the construction of meaning making (Lopez et al., 2008).

Wallin and Ahlström (2006) suggest that only one interpreter should be used, but if more than one is used, the reasons should be discussed because the trustworthiness of the interpreter, as well as competence levels, style and seating arrangements impacts the study's findings. I used a husband and wife research team throughout the majority of the study. In two interviews, I used two other different Cambodian men to interpret with the permission of the participants because of family emergencies with the original research team. My research assistants were not formally trained in interpretation, a fact that likely impacted the study. This limitation will be discussed in a later section.



I followed Wong and Poon's (2010) recommendations for rigor when using an interpreter:

- Acknowledge that translators are not detached from their subjectivity.
- Understand that translation is a specific form of interpretation that is influenced by the interpreter.
- Recognize the concealments of power embedded in research.

The incorporation of these suggestions highlights the significant role the research assistants played in the study. The research assistants are as much a part of the study as the participants and I are. We all contributed to the construction of knowledge and meaning making throughout the interview process. As Ezzy (2002) contends, "Qualitative data analysis is an interpretive task. Interpretations are not found-rather they are made, actively constructed through social processes." A description of the research assistants is included in the Meet the Participants section.

### *Data Analysis*

Transformation is the term Wolcott uses to describe the strategies employed to examine data (as cited in Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). He refers to three types of transformation: description, analysis, and interpretation. Description is the way through which the data tells a story. Analysis refers to how the researcher expands and extends the data beyond the descriptive explanation, and interpretation refers to the researcher's own understanding of the data. It is paramount to acknowledge that the process of data analysis is not a distinct stage of research; rather, it is an ongoing reflexive activity that should inform the other aspects of the research process (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Data analysis is a constant interactive process, often cyclical in nature rather than linear.

Creswell (1998) describes the process as a spiral in which the researcher engages in the process of moving in analytic circles such as: 1) data collection, 2) data management, 3) data saturation, 4) data description, classification and interpretation and 5) representation and visualization.

I engaged in data analysis from the onset of the study. I transcribed the first round of interviews while still in Cambodia. I also read over my field notes and observations and reflected upon them regularly. I checked for consistencies and conflicts between observed behaviors and student reported behaviors. I identified potential themes through this process. One factor clear from the start of the study was the impact of socioeconomic status. I wanted to understand what students would potentially do if money were not an issue. I added a question to the interview protocol to explore the role of money. I asked each student at the end of the second interview what they would do if someone were to give them \$10,000. I asked them to describe how they would spend the money. This question provided some insight into what interviewees would consider doing if they had the necessary resources. Another theme that emerged was students' recognition that changes needed to be made in the educational systems in Cambodia. I addressed this theme by asking the students at the end of the second interview the following two questions: If you were the prime minister of Cambodia, what changes would you make in the education systems and why are those changes necessary? These additional questions provided rich data about the students' perceptions of education, agency, and social responsibility.

After over six months in Phnom Penh, I returned to the United States and began a more thorough analysis of all the interviews, field notes and documents. The interviews

were transcribed by two trained transcriptionists and myself. The field notes and documents were scanned into pdf files. My notes on the interviews were also typed and scanned into pdf files. The interviews, field notes, and documents were imported into the qualitative data analysis program Atlas ti. I coded all of the data for emerging themes. Coding is often described in terms of data simplification and reduction; however, it was my aim to use the data in a manner that expands, transforms, and reconceptualizes the data to open it up to more diverse analytic possibilities (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I used the software to create a comment for each code, which defined the parameters of the code. I checked each interview transcript with my notes to ensure consistency between the interviewee's spoken word and intended meaning. I took extremely detailed notes during each interview to preserve the data because the loud environmental factors made it difficult to hear the students' spoken responses at times. I was also able to note observations about the participants' and research assistants' behavior, my thoughts, behaviors, questions and reactions and the physical environment in the notes as well.

I assigned participants to groups based on gender and faith in Atlas ti. There were thirty interviewees divided into five groups: Female Christian, Male Christian, Female Buddhist, Male Buddhist and Unaffiliated Males (No Unaffiliated Females Participated). I created categories for field notes, observations, and documents. The creation of groups or categories, known as families in Atlas ti, allowed me to make comparisons based on specific variables. I was able to compare interviewee responses with my field notes and with other documents. Through the data analysis process, I developed new codes, renamed codes, and consolidated and expanded codes. I used the memo function in the software to make a note of questions, comments, inconsistencies and connections that

arose. I referred to the memos as new themes emerged and to make comparisons among variables. After coding each interview, I printed and filed it in a notebook. I reread each interview and went back to apply codes that were developed later when applicable. Coding allowed me to divide and segment the data into categories and then expand upon those categories to tease out new questions and levels of interpretation (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I also divided larger codes, such as family into smaller codes such as: parents' view of education, supporting behaviors, and influences. Some codes, such as social mobility and job opportunities, were consolidated.

The themes were compared between groups based on religious affiliation, gender, and parental levels of education. The software program identified relationships among themes and variables through a visual display of the data. I also used large sheets of paper to create-poster sized graphic organizers of data to explore the themes and relationships among variables more thoroughly. I generated numerous reports in Atlas ti based on codes and relationships between variables to read, reread, and further analyze the data.

I created excel tables to manage the data analysis process. I used the table to track which interviews had been transcribed, input into Atlas ti and analyzed. I also used excel tables to manage interviewee demographic data. I documented the following information for all of the participants: age, gender, religious affiliation, educational level, employment, age at the start of primary school, any grade retention or atypical promotion, place of birth and current residence. Family is an integral part of the students' lives, so I also recorded number of siblings, and siblings' and parents': levels of education, employment, ages and places of residence. These tables organized the data and made it more manageable, but also provided a point of reference upon which to compare

concepts such as parents' educational levels, birth order of students, and migration of students from the province to the city.

*Validity, reliability and reflexivity*

Validity and reliability are issues all researchers must deal with routinely.

Qualitative researchers working in a field that was originally positivist in nature must be aware of validity and reliability issues that could challenge their findings. Wolcott (1990) suggests the following guidelines for researchers to satisfy what he describes as the implicit challenge of validity:

- talk less and listen more in an effort to avoid becoming your own best informant
- record accurately, which is best done immediately after events and in combination with notes recorded during observations and interviews
- begin writing early, start a rough draft shortly after field work begins
- let readers “see” for themselves by including primary data in final accounts
- report fully, which includes comments and observations you may not understand
- be candid, reveal personal feelings and reactions relevant to the case while avoiding judgment
- seek feedback continually, not just at time of final draft
- aim for balance in account through revisiting the field and notes
- write accurately by taking time to ensure that the appropriate verbs and descriptions are used to convey what was seen and heard.

Wolcott's guidelines provide an overview of steps a researcher can take to strengthen the validity of her/his work. I used these guidelines, combined with multiple methods of data collection, for validity purposes. I adhered to these guidelines throughout

the process, with the exception of beginning to write a draft early in the study. Time restraints did not permit me to share the data with my participants, but the primary data is incorporated in the final accounts. The use of a constant comparative analysis approach also strengthens the validity of the current study (Silverman, 2001).

Two interview transcripts for two members from each group, for a total of ten transcripts, were given to a colleague with training in qualitative research to code. My goal was to ensure that there were consistencies among the codes and to identify and explain any discrepancies. She and I met and discussed the codes and the themes that emerged from the analysis process. In addition to this reliability check, I sent the preliminary findings to a Cambodian colleague who has experience with research, but more importantly is an expert on Cambodian culture. He has no connections to the church, but comes from a family with similar levels of socioeconomic status and education as the participants in the study. He reviewed the findings with the specific purpose of identifying any observations or findings that are questionable in the context of Cambodian culture.

Addressing subjectivity and reflexivity is essential to the qualitative research process. In the past, subjectivity was a concept that researchers attempted to eliminate from their work. However, in the post modern era, it is acknowledged that subjectivity is a part of the entire research process, which can be monitored for more trustworthy research and can in itself contribute to research (Ezzy, 2001; Glesne, 2006). Subjectivity was monitored through autobiographical field notes documenting my personal feelings and reactions. A researcher's subjectivity can be used to inquire about personal perspectives and interpretations and to shape new questions by challenging one's

assumptions (Glesne, 2006). Subjective awareness requires researchers to be fully conscious of their emotions.

Researchers are not value free, but rather maintain pre-expectations (Glesne, 2006). Reflexivity, as defined by Glesne (2006), means that the researcher is as concerned with the research process as she is with the data being obtained. Reflexivity requires the researcher to ask questions of herself concerning the socio-cultural context in which she is situated to gain insight into personal belief systems, which can influence the research process. Reflexivity requires reflection and should be ongoing. I monitored my reflexivity and subjectivity through regular journaling and communication with other researchers. It was my intent that through careful monitoring, I could better understand how my role shaped the results of the study. Some of the issues I found myself repeatedly examining included, but are not limited to: cultural differences, issues that arose with my role as a researcher/teacher, questions about the role of Christianity and TESOL in developing nations, and changes in the study design. Acknowledging that research assistants are also not value free required me to work with them to employ reflexive strategies as well.

#### *Follow up trip*

I spent several months analyzing the data and organizing the findings. However, I was left with some unanswered questions and some points that required additional clarification. In June of 2011, I returned for a third time to Cambodia to follow up on some research related issues. The two main concerns that I addressed in my last trip were regarding non-formal learning opportunities and the stance of the church concerning their use of English to attract potential converts.

I observed two non-formal English programs. Tinath New Generation Academy (TNGA) is a one-room school located in the slums in Phnom Penh and serves more than 125 students each day outside of the public school's instructional hours. The program is operated by Tinath Em, a 28 year old man, and two other teachers. The other non-formal English program was located in a three-room building and is sponsored by donors in the United Kingdom. It also serves more than 100 students each day in Kantok village, which is in Kandal province. These observations provided me an opportunity to observe additional non-formal English programs and discuss some of the research questions with the students. Their responses were consistent with the responses of the study's participants, serving as an additional reliability check.

The second issue concerned the church's stance on the systematic use of English to attract non-Christian students and provide opportunities for the church's staff and members to evangelize. Prior to the research study, I believed that the first goal of the church was to provide English and that converting Christians was secondary. It became clear over the course of the study that this was not necessarily the case, and questions regarding the moral and ethical behavior of the church arose. For personal and professional reasons, it was necessary for me to clarify the church's intention behind the English program and their strategies for evangelizing. The return trip and the interviews and observations that followed served as strategies for validity and reliability checks.



## Meet the participants

### *Research site*

The research site was an ESL and computer skills program located in a church in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The program and church are referred to as EKCC. The program is situated in the church building and organized and conducted by Christian leaders and missionaries.

### *English Program/Church Staff*

#### *Maron*

Maron is the pastor of EKCC. He is a 32 year old Cambodian. He was born and raised in Kandal Province, but moved to Phnom Penh when he was 19 years old to work as a security guard and study English. He studied English at the main church, of which EKCC is a branch and later became a Christian. He was mentored by an American pastor at the church. He was involved in church planting efforts and later opened EKCC in 2005. He married Joan, an American missionary. They have a twelve year old adopted Khmer daughter and four biological children. Maron is committed to supporting the English students and spreading Christianity. He describes himself as an evangelical Christian. His charismatic personality, fluent English skills, travels abroad and experience moving from a poor rural village to the city makes him a role model for many young Khmer adults. He taught in the English program for several years, but now is too busy with church affairs to continue teaching English. He often mentions how much he misses teaching and interacting with students. He is a sensitive and caring man with a great sense of humor.

*Joan*

Joan is a 35 year old American that moved to Cambodia after a mission trip during her junior year of college. She worked in the mission field in the provinces as well as Phnom Penh. She adopted her daughter in 1998. She speaks fluent Khmer in addition to English. She is very involved with the church, but her participation has decreased over recent years because she has four young children under the age of six. She home schooled their daughter during the study, but as of August, 2011 she enrolled her daughter in school and has begun to home school her son. Joan has taught in the English program in the past. During the study and five years prior, Joan and Maron shared four rooms of the church building as their home and lived on the EKCC campus. However, they currently live in a home close to the campus. They share their home with Hope, a missionary and a student that rents a room from them.

*Thai*

Thai is the director of the English program at EKCC. He is in his early twenties. He takes an organized and intentional approach to his work. He works seven days a week. Saturday is supposed to be his day off, but he explains that he cannot finish his work in the other six days so he works on Saturdays too. He speaks English well and takes his position at the church very seriously. He enrolled in English classes at the main church, of which EKCC is a branch of because his family could no longer support his studies at private school. His mother told him to study English at the church, but not to study about Jesus. He explained that he felt a love at the church that was different than other places where he studied. He began to study the Bible and was attracted to the church because there was a lack of love in his family and violence. He began attending

services despite his parents' disapproval. He initially volunteered to teach English, but later was hired to teach for a small salary. He moved to the community by EKCC church and enrolled in class at EKCC in 2005. His scores on the English placement test were very high and the pastor asked him to volunteer at the church. He volunteered for two and a half years before obtaining a salaried position. He was baptized in 2007. He traveled to the Philippines to study the Bible in 2009. He is proud that he and a few of his classmates have become leaders in the church. He is very passionate about his Christianity, so much so that when our interview went over the time allotted he insisted on continuing despite having other tasks to complete. We continued until he had to leave to teach. His demeanor, expressions and tone of voice exuded his passion for his faith.

*John*

John is a thirty year old American missionary. He and his wife moved to Cambodia in 2008 to teach English at the Royal University. He studied Khmer at the university. He began working at the EKCC in 2009 as the director of the English program. However, he only taught Bible class and was not present during the hours of the English program, which were previously from 5:00-6:00 p.m. He insisted that he needed to be home with his family during that time. He does not enjoy teaching English, but prefers to teach the Bible and lead worship services on Wednesday evenings. He is no longer the director of the English program, but continues to work as support staff for the church. He and his wife Elizabeth have four children. They live near the church in a large home, which is considered expensive by Cambodian standards. They are financially supported by churches in the United States.

*Elizabeth*

Elizabeth is also in her early thirties. She is actively involved with the church. She leads a cell group and organizes church social functions. She often has groups of students over to her home for meals and parties. She believes that Jesus saved her as a teenager from a life of negative influences and suffering. She is committed to sharing her faith and strongly urges others to allow Jesus to influence their lives. She often expresses her perceptions of what is acceptable behavior for Christians and her disapproval for students that do not adhere to her ideals. She invited three female students to live in their home because she was concerned about the negative influence of their peers. She currently home schools her second grade daughter, but she previously attended an expensive, elite Christian school which caters primarily to ex-patriot families.

*Hope*

Hope is an American missionary in her late twenties. She lived at the women's dorm and taught English at EKCC in 2009 for six months. She returned in December of 2010 to live in Cambodia for an undetermined time and continue her work in the mission field. She teaches discipleship classes and an English class. She leads missions in the provinces and handles arrangements for mission teams that come to work with EKCC. She speaks some Khmer and lives with the pastor's family. She was not present during the initial study, but her presence before and after is instrumental in the church community.

*Lori*

I am an American that originally accompanied a mission team to Cambodia in 2009 to teach English. I taught English at a local orphanage and EKCC. I also did some

teacher training at EKCC for their staff. The pastor presented a proposal to me regarding restructuring the English program and providing teacher training. I was interested in Southeast Asia from my work in the United States with immigrants and refugees from the area. After teaching a class of more than 100 students during the three week trip in 2009, I was amazed by the commitment and dedication of the students to study English. I returned to Cambodia to study this phenomenon, as well as to assist with the English program. I taught an English class at EKCC, worked with the staff to choose a curriculum and revise the program, conducted teacher training and developed a new English placement test. During that time, I attended staff meetings that pertained specifically to the English program. My role at EKCC focused on English education exclusively.

Table 8

*Participants by gender and religious affiliation*

Christian Females	Christian Males	Buddhist Females	Buddhist Males	Unaffiliated Females	Unaffiliated Males
Socheata	Sambo	Sotheavy	Bora	None	Daro
Lida	Chetra	Vicheka	Dilen		Auntoch
Akara	Sidorn	Kumpeak	Naro		Ratha
Srey Oun	Keriya	Kongke			Vin
Srey Kouch	Rith	Monika			Pahna
	Samnang	Poline			Vuth
	Prasith	Pisey			
	Chamreoun	Kanha			

## Study participants

*Buddhist participants**Females**Kumpeak*

Kumpeak is twenty one years old. She stopped attending school in the seventh grade to work and support her family. She and her parents agreed that this was the best choice so that she and her older siblings could help support her two younger siblings, which the family believes to be “more clever” than herself. She and her older sister push an ice cream cart through the streets selling ice cream six days a week. She is passionate about learning and always asking questions. She studies English, technology and Chinese. She is certain that her studies will help her find a better job in the future.

*Kongke*

Kongke is eighteen years old and the sister of Kumpeak. She is in the eleventh grade. She is outspoken and determined. In the classes I taught, as well as ones I observed her in, she always sat with her sister and brother in the front row and her hand was usually raised ready to answer or ask a question. During instructional time, whenever she was confused or uncertain, she would turn to others for clarification and then follow up with the teacher. It was as though she couldn't wait for the teacher to pause to ask a question, she was that eager to understand the content. Kongke often waited after class to approach me with questions about English. She, as well as her sister, is very thoughtful. They both presented me with small gifts and thank you cards upon my departure after my first trip.

*Monika*

Monika is seventeen years old and in the eleventh grade. She takes her studies seriously, but has a playful personality. She is usually early to class and prepared with her materials and assignments prior to the start of the lesson. Monika takes advantage of any opportunity to practice her English and was always prepared to role play or respond to questions in class. She repeatedly emphasized in class and discussions that felt that peers and dating could be a serious distraction to her studies, which she would not tolerate. She is organized in her studies and adheres to a study schedule she has set for herself. She hopes to be an engineer some day.

*Vicheka*

Vicheka is a friendly and outgoing seventeen year old and in the eleventh grade. She is the youngest of four children in her family and grew up in the province. She is always eager to have conversations with me in English. She wants to be a doctor someday and work at a hospital, like her older brother.

*Sotheavy*

Sotheavy is twenty two years old and a studying account in her first year at the university. She has two older siblings, one stopped attending school in the ninth grade and the other, her twenty seven year old brother studied at the university level. Her younger sister also stopped attending public school in grade nine, while her brother is in grade twelve. She is confident and highly motivated. She is optimistic about her future and loves practicing English.

*Poline*

Poline is twenty years old and in the twelfth grade. She is the youngest of four children. Her oldest brother is a teacher, but her other brothers stopped attending school in grade nine to work in factories. She wants to attend the university someday, but is challenged because her schooling is repeatedly interrupted when she has to return to work in the factories to support her family.

*Pisey*

Pisey is twenty one years old and in the twelfth grade also. She is the youngest of five children in her family. Her older siblings, with the exception of the second youngest, stopped attending school to work in garment factories, where she also works. She is uncertain about whether she will attend the university, but is focused on completing grade twelve.

*Kanha*

Kanha is the oldest of her five siblings. She is twenty one and in the twelfth grade. She works with Pisey and Poline in a garment factory periodically. All of her siblings are in school. She is somewhat doubtful of her future plans including college because she is the oldest and must contribute financially to the family. She is confident and excited to support her younger siblings' educational efforts. In class, she typically sits with Poline and Pisey in the back. The three students are usually reluctant to participate in class and generally shy when I attempt to engage them in conversations.



*Buddhist males**Bora*

Bora is nineteen years old and in the eleventh grade. He is the brother of Kongke and Kumpeak. He takes his studies seriously. I was impressed by his efforts to engage me in conversations in English, especially during my first visit. His spoken English proficiency was limited, but that did not deter him from attempting to discuss a wide variety of subjects with me before and after class. He often shared his worries about his family and future. He pities his parents and was eager to contribute to the family income to alleviate some of their stress.

*Dilen*

Dilen is seventeen years old and in the eleventh grade. He is the oldest of four children. His younger sister often accompanies to him class at EKCC on the back of his bicycle. He is extremely intelligent and enjoys discussing global political and economic issues that he hears about on BBC broadcasts. After class, he would often approach me with questions about English or to ask my opinion about current affairs. He takes his studies very seriously.

*Naro*

Naro is eighteen years old and in the eleventh grade. He is the oldest of four children in his family. He is shy to speak to me in English during class and outside of class, but he is somewhat of the class clown. I would often observe him joking with other students, who describe him as “a very funny guy.” He is playful and is usually smiling, even after long hours of work and school.

*Christian participants**Females**Socheata*

Socheata is eighteen years old and in her second semester studying accounting at the university. She occasionally asked me for assistance with her assignments in her business courses. She is outgoing, but not confident in her academic abilities. She is actively involved in church activities, such as cell groups and the worship team.

*Akara*

Akara is eighteen years old and is in her first year of an accounting program at a local university. She is the oldest of two children. At times, she seems withdrawn and depressed. She is passionate about her faith and claims that the church, her Christian family, provides her with the love that her parents do not show. In class, she goes back and forth between actively participating and remaining reserved.

*Lida*

Lida is twenty years old and studies computer science at the university. She has a sixteen year old younger brother. She is a confident and assertive young person. She is one of two females in her program at the university. She has many foreign friends from EKCC and admires Western culture a great deal. At times, she seems to be caught between two worlds. In some ways she adheres to Khmer culture and norms, but in other ways she is resistant to them. She is engaged to a Khmer man, a friend of her parents, who lives in Sweden.

*Srey Kouch*

Srey Kouch is a seventeen year old twelfth grader. She is the youngest of four siblings. She converted to Christianity recently after studying the Bible in a cell group for six months. She expresses a strong desire to go the university, but is concerned that is not affordable for her family. She is a regular presence on EKCC campus.

*Srey Oun*

Srey Oun is twenty years old and employed full time cleaning offices at an NGO. She is the oldest of three children in her family and stopped attending school prior to secondary school. She is confident that she will complete the necessary exams for secondary school and study at the university someday. She is a quiet and thoughtful student.

*Males**Sambo*

Sambo is twenty two years old and studies accounting at the university on a scholarship he received from the church. He has three older siblings and two younger siblings. He appears as the “cool guy” on campus, but personal conversations with him revealed that he doesn’t perceive himself that way. He is insecure about his stuttering problem and was often distracted by a fellow female student that he had a crush on at the time of the study. He attributes all of his successes as provisions from God.

*Chetra*

Chetra is a twenty one year old student studying technology at a university. He has three older siblings and three younger siblings. He grew up in the province, but lives with a cousin in Phnom Penh. He spends his free time teaching his cousin's young children Khmer. He attends church services at EKCC regularly.

*Sidorn*

Sidorn is seventeen years old and in the eleventh grade. He is the oldest of three children in his family. His father was an American that worked at an NGO in Cambodia. He has never met his father, which is a subject he brings up often in conversation. He is an outgoing and passionate Christian. He proselytizes to nearly everyone he encounters and volunteers regularly at a Christian orphanage. His religious beliefs have been a source of conflict for him and his family.

*Keriya*

Keriya is nineteen years old and in the tenth grade. He is the oldest of his three siblings. He seems less certain about his future than most participants. He wants to study several subjects at the university, but he also wants to return to the province and raise livestock. He is often at church on Sundays and has participated in cell groups in the past. He came to the church to study computer, but was encouraged by Christian peers to learn more about Jesus. Shortly after, he converted to Christianity.

*Rith*

Rith is twenty one years old and studies computer science at the university. He is the second youngest of six children in his family. He and his youngest sister are Christian, but their mother is Buddhist and strongly disapproves of their participation in the church. Rith teaches a computer class at EKCC. Although he is Christian, he seems to struggle with his decision to convert more than some of the other Christian participants.

*Samnang*

Samnang is twenty one years old and in his second year at the university. He is studying English literature. He is the second youngest of seven children in his family, who still resides in the province. He moved to the church to live in the dorms when he was eighteen. He is a dorm leader and plays an active role in the church. He teaches classes and leads cell groups. He is being groomed to be a pastor. He thinks he will move back to his village to plant a church in the near future. He is a charismatic and caring individual. His sense of humor and genuine concern for others makes him popular among students.

*Prasith*

Prasith is twenty two years old and studies chemistry at the university. He is the second oldest of four children in his family. His older brothers stopped attending school in the tenth grade. His parents are farmers. He moved from the province to live with a friend in Phnom Penh and to attend the university. He became a Christian after he moved from the province and began studying English with a friend at a different church based English program. He has urged his family convert to Christianity and his younger brother currently lives and studies at a church dorm in the province.

*Chamreoun*

Chamreoun is twenty years old and is in the twelfth grade. He has two older siblings that stopped attending school before secondary school. His two younger siblings are still in school. He moved from the province to live with his sister, but moved into one of the church dorms a year ago. He is uncertain what he will major in at the university if he passes twelfth grade, but hopes to work at a Christian organization in the future.

*Nonaffiliated participants**Males**Auntoch*

Auntoch is the eighteen years old and in the ninth grade. He lives at a local orphanage. His parents are deceased and he has one older brother that lives in the province. He dedicates a great deal of his time to learning English and often wanted to practice his conversational skills with me while we waited for class to begin at EKCC.

*Daro*

Daro is eighteen years old and in the eleventh grade. He is five siblings, one of which died during the Khmer Rouge and the other immigrated to Australia. He is extremely intelligent and well spoken in English. He studies English part time at a private school and Korean at a local church, in addition to his studies at EKCC. In class, he often asks complex questions about grammar. He often wanted to discuss global issues that he read about in the newspaper or on the internet.

*Ratha*

Ratha is twenty four years old and is employed full time. He moved from the province a year ago to live and work in a furniture factory. His father and mother passed away when he was a teenager. He has a twenty six year old sister. He stopped attending school in the seventh grade because he needed to work on his parents' farm. He is a determined student and has a strong work ethic. He recently passed his ninth grade high school equivalency exam and is studying and saving money to take the twelfth grade exam. He is often shy and nervous during our one on one interactions, but tends to be more comfortable in small groups.

*Vin*

Vin is twenty years old and in the twelfth grade. He is the third youngest of eleven children. Four of his older siblings studied at the university level. He has some serious health problems that have interfered with his schooling, but he is confident that he will graduate and go on to the university. He actively participates in class and usually asks a lot of questions.

*Pahna*

Pahna is twenty years old and has two older sisters, both stopped attending school prior to sixth grade. He is in his second semester at the university and is studying English literature. He recently moved from the province to study at the university. He often approached me to practice his English and ask questions.

*Vuth*

Vuth is twenty two years old and studies electrical engineering at the university. He is the second youngest of seven children in his family. He has moved from the province to live in Phnom Penh with his uncle and study at the university. He is overly confident and often attempts to correct other students' speaking, but does so inaccurately. He does not have a close peer group at EKCC, but attended classes regularly and actively participated, at times he dominates class discussions.

*Research team (besides me)**Sopheap*

Sopheap is twenty seven years old. She moved from the province to the city to work as a maid and studied English at the church. She fully embraced Christianity when she was seventeen years old. She met her husband, Vibol at the church. They have been married for four years and have a two and a half year old son. She is a teacher assistant at an international preschool that serves the children of foreigners working in Cambodia. Sopheap assisted with the majority of interviews, but Vibol filled in for her when she had to care for their son or had an unexpected work commitment.

*Vibol*

Vibol is twenty nine years old. He also moved from the province in 2002 to study English literature and later earn his associate's degree. He studied at the church and converted to Christianity. He was a lower secondary school teacher for several years, but recently changed careers to work for a marketing company.



*Dilen Hin*

Dilen is a thirty two year old Cambodian male. He spent some of his childhood homeless in the province and later moved to an orphanage in Phnom Penh. He studied English and Humanities for several years at an Australian Institute in Phnom Penh. He has worked for the last eight years for an NGO that is aimed at child welfare and education projects. He read the dissertation and provided feedback during and after the study.

*Beth Salyers*

Beth is a fellow doctoral student. She coded interviews, which we then compared to my coding of the same interviews for purposes of validity. She and I also discussed the findings of the study and research process over the course of the study.

*Elizabeth Hollowell*

Elizabeth assisted with organizing the demographic data into excel tables. She also assisted with reference checks, proof reading and editing of this dissertation.

*Stephanie Sallach and Silvia Ganzo*

Stephanie and Silvia both have experience in administrative tasks and transcription. They assisted with the transcription of the interviews.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The significance of the study has been outlined in the first chapter. The context of the study has been described at length in the review of the literature, which explained the historical and current state of education in Cambodia. The previous chapter identified the challenges facing Cambodia's educational system and the nation's strategies and policies aimed at progress in the education sector.

This chapter will organize the findings into five key areas. First is the perceived necessity of English and education for the future mobility of participants and their families. The next finding highlights participant agency and recounts reported sources of challenges and motivations. The third finding outlines participant agency seeking out learning institutions and employing strategies to learn English and maintain motivation. The fourth finding relates to the role of religion and the evangelical church in participants' ESL experiences at a faith-based program. Lastly, the participants identified what they perceive to be challenges for Cambodian education in general, suggested potential solutions and exhibited their sense of social responsibility.

### Poverty, globalization and social mobility

All of the young women and men in the study are astutely aware of how generational poverty affects their lives. Some study participants recognize the way historical events and globalization shape their current economic conditions and the

demand for English. Participants, their families, and communities perceive education and English as a means of social mobility. Students believe that if they acquire the necessary skills demanded by the rapidly changing, globalized economic sector that it will be “easy to find a good job” and social mobility is possible for them and their families.

Current social conditions are shaped by historical, political and economic factors. Cambodia in the twenty first century is undergoing tremendous change and rapid development. These forces have significantly impact the education systems in the nation. Cambodia’s present high poverty levels, tumultuous history and current era of globalization create a context that values speaking English, advanced levels of education and computer literacy as cultural capital for employment.

### *Poverty*

Poverty is the most significant factor affecting participants’ lives and educational opportunities. High levels of poverty place increased demands on families and participants to earn income to meet their basic needs. In many cases, educational costs are an additional burden for students that they and their families cannot afford (Bray, 1999). Several participants shared their experiences working as children in order to survive.

### *Children and adolescents in public school and the labor force*

If parents are unable to earn enough income to provide for the family’s basic needs, there is pressure for Cambodian children to contribute financially as soon as they are capable. This is a common occurrence in a nation with such alarming levels of poverty. This reinforces participants’ awareness of the significant poverty levels their parents contend with on a regular basis. Naro, as the oldest of his siblings, has had a significant amount of household responsibility since he was a young child. He has

worked jobs and helped with household tasks, such as babysitting, fetching water and chopping wood so that his parents could work. He is one of only two high school students in the study who attend school on a regular basis and work part-time. Sidorn, the other student who works a part-time job, is also the oldest in the family. It is important to note that other secondary students also work, but they typically stop attending school during times of employment. Poline, Pisey and Kanha work at a garment factory when their families need the income, the employment is fulltime and during the school day.

Srey Oun and Ratha are all too familiar with pressure to earn money to support family or themselves. Both of these participants stopped attending school permanently to work. Srey Oun is a reserved young woman with an impressive work ethic. She does not interact much with the other students, but is focused on her studies. I would usually be on the campus in the afternoons when she arrived from work. We often talked for a few minutes before or after class, but she was always in a hurry. She works at an organization from 6:30 a.m. until 4 p.m. She attends computer class weekdays at 4:30 p.m., a grammar class at 5:30 p.m., and another conversation class at 6:30 p.m. She leaves the campus at 7:30 each evening. She is twenty two years old and lives with her older brother and her grandmother. She stopped going to school after the eighth grade because of financial and family problems. She moved from the rural province to Phnom Penh to work in a factory, but she left factory work for her current job. She never talked much about her job despite several of my attempts to engage her in conversation about her workday.

Srey Oun's busy work and class schedule made scheduling the interview difficult. She was the last participant I interviewed at the end of the six month study. I told her that it was not a problem if she did not have time or want to participate in the

study because of her full schedule, but she insisted that this was something she wanted to do for herself as well as for me. She skipped class one evening so that we could do the interview. We sat on a bench under a tree in the courtyard of the church and she shared her experiences, aspirations and questions about life with me.

She grew up in the province as the third youngest in her family. Her mother sells vegetables from their home and her father works as an assistant to a pastor. She is not certain of her parents' levels of education, but predicted that they probably went to school until about sixth grade. She was hesitant to talk about her job. She made me promise that I wouldn't tell anyone what she did for employment. I knew that she worked at an NGO, but I didn't know in what capacity. I assumed she utilized her English skills in some form since she was speaking at such an advanced level, but in reality she cleans the offices. She is ashamed of her cleaning job. She started studying English at a school near her office when she was 16, but at the time she was living with a foreigner from her office and could afford private classes. After the foreigner returned to her country, she began attending the English program at EKCC because she couldn't pay for private school and support herself. She currently earns \$100 a month for 180 hours of work. I asked her if she planned on attending the university someday and she emphatically responded, "yes! yes!" She hopes to work as a receptionist or a translator in the future. She passed and completed the ninth grade exam last year and is eager to take the twelfth grade exam someday. In Cambodia, one can pay to take the ninth and twelfth grade exams without attending school and earn a certificate of completion.

Srey Oun recognizes how poverty shapes her life, but it does not deter her from studying. There is noticeable seriousness about Srey Oun's personality and her

perspective on life. At one point in the interview she asked me, “Lori, do you think money is important?” The question evolved into a lengthy dialogue between us about personal values and the different ways people use money. The question seemed to develop from her personal struggle to understand poverty and the role of money in society. A lack of money stopped her secondary school experience, but she appears confident that it will not prevent her from eventually studying at a university. The cost of studying at the university is a major concern among many participants, but it does not seem to lessen their motivation and passion to learn English.

Poverty is a powerful force that dictates options for Cambodian students. Srey Oun’s story is common among Cambodians her age. Poverty forced her to stop attending school to support the survival of family. She is acutely aware of how poverty has shaped her life and limited her opportunities, but she is determined to persevere because of her belief that hard work and English will lead to social mobility. She is unwilling to passively accept the harsh circumstances that accompany a life in poverty. She exercises agency as she seeks out opportunities to learn English because she has hope that English will help her escape a life of poverty.

Ratha’s life and educational experiences have also been significantly impacted by poverty. He stopped attending school at the primary level, but he is determined to overcome his lack of formal schooling and return to the classroom at the university level.

He highlighted the way poverty impacted his education and his childhood:

Some parents, like mine, don't have education and know that it is important and don't encourage their children. When I was a small boy, my mom told me to find the job to get money to feed ourselves. I worked jobs like taking care of the cows, finding crabs and frogs in the field to sell and farming. I only studied grade three because my school is too far. I had to walk three of four kilometers.

Ratha has one other sibling and both of his parents are deceased. He feels solely responsible for his survival. In 2008, he made the decision to move from the province to the city to find a job. He works eight to nine hours every day of the week in a furniture factory making sofas and is paid \$60 a month. He earns approximately \$.25USD per hour. He lives at the factory, where there is a large room full of beds and mats for the employees. He lives there for free, but he must buy his own food. He began studying English at EKCC in 2008. He explained, "When I started, I did not even know A, B, Cs, but now I scored high enough on the placement test to study computer." He is the only person living at the factory that is studying English. He describes his motivation for learning English as a way to leave life at the factory. He does not think he is qualified to find another job, but believes that if he studies hard that he can have a better job and a better salary, which will enable him to feed the family he hopes to have in the future. He is currently single, but hopes to marry and have children someday. Ratha's perseverance is impressive. He explained that twenty nine people, other than currently enrolled students, took the ninth grade exam at the same site. He is one of the only two people that passed the exam at that time. He is eager to take the twelfth grade exam, but is concerned with the cost. He paid \$80 to take the last test and is saving for the next one. He aspires to study tourism at the university level. He takes sole responsibility for saving money to support his education, but for most others it is a family effort.

Participants shared experiences about how poverty forced them to stop school and work. Their efforts to earn income are necessary to their personal and family survival. Poverty is rampant in Cambodia. In the provinces, children and parents work alongside one another in the rice fields or selling produce. Late in the evening and early in the morning, mothers, children and infants lay asleep on the streets of Phnom Penh with nothing more than mats or cardboard underneath them. Young children walk along the riverside late at night selling their books, jewelry and other wares to tourists. Some children perform through song and dance hoping for tips, while others beg for money to eat. This context creates a scenario in which individuals' choices are limited, but they place their hopes in the possibility of education and English. The discourse of English and education's potential for a better life is as widespread in Cambodia as poverty. The poverty is a result of the nation's tumultuous past, a lack of resources, high levels of government corruption and exploitation by developed nations in the West.

*A destructive past and future of globalization*

Many participants only briefly acknowledged the impact of the recent past on current social conditions, while others did not recognize the historical influence or downplayed the importance it had, when I asked them to share their thoughts about Cambodia's history. Present day Cambodian society is deeply impacted by the legacy of destruction resulting from the Khmer Rouge regime. The Khmer Rouge regime lasted over three years and is responsible for the deaths of more than 1.7 million Cambodians. As noted earlier, the regime's intention was to eliminate social class inequalities and develop a new form of socialism. A lengthy description of the movement can be found in chapter two. The Khmer Rouge fell more than thirty years ago, but the first person was



not brought to trial for the horrendous war crimes until 2010. The international community is working with Cambodia to bring justice to survivors through an International Tribunal, but these efforts have been plagued with delays and corruption. A lack of education on the history of the Khmer Rouge has created attitudes of anger, fear, disbelief and denial among many Cambodian youth (Münyas, 2008).

It is necessary to remember that participants' parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles are survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime. Education was not an option for most survivors and the trauma they endured was significant, although no participants reported any relationship between family problems and the Khmer Rouge regime. Daro lost one sister during the regime and another moved to Australia to live with a resettled Khmer refugee there, whom she married. Dilen's father fought against Pol Pot's army and survived. Although I did not ask questions specifically about the Khmer Rouge period, in general, participants did not speak in depth about the regime.

#### *Reflections on the past and connections to the present*

Some participants reported that they either were unsure of, or did not perceive a relationship between the nation's history and current educational practices, a sign of a semi-transient consciousness (Freire, 1985). These participants are not critically conscious of the way their current social context is shaped by socio-historical events. They indicated that the nation's past is painful to think about and were brief in their responses to the question. Responses usually referred to the horrible conditions and the significant loss of life. Chamreoun said, "Oh, so difficult, I don't think about it really." He seemed somewhat uneasy during the interview at this point. Monika explained nonchalantly that they studied history at school, but she forgets a great deal of it. Other

students, like Socheata, indicated that they are motivated by the educational opportunities available to them, but were denied to their parents. Uncertain responses and responses that did not reflect a connection between the past and the present were fewer in number than those that acknowledged a connection between the historical past and current conditions. Most participants recognize that prior wars and recent regime have stunted Cambodia's development. Bora explained that the long history of wars, especially the Khmer Rouge, created a great deal of social problems in Cambodia and depleted the nation's resources.

#### *The perceived power of English*

Most participants perceive English as powerful and necessary to promote economic growth. They ascribe to globalization discourses that valorize English as a sign of social progress and economic growth (Demont-Heinrich, 2008). Participants are living in poverty due to past and current sociopolitical circumstances. Most students recognize that fact and the role of the global community in Cambodia's economic sector. Speaking English and obtaining postsecondary degrees are marketable skills in twenty-first century Khmer society. These forms of cultural capital provide individuals with the types of language, communication skills, and knowledge valued by society's dominant class. Daro identifies learning English in addition to other languages as essential to maintaining national peace and stability. He explained, "Most famous Khmer writers tell us to study other languages. If our people have knowledge and strong communication than other countries will know that Cambodia is not weak, but educated." Daro continued,

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century no one speaks English, only French because we are under French control. We aren't in peace or freedom. We are colonized so older people always advise younger people to study other languages so that we can learn about their strengths and weaknesses and protect ourselves.

Sotheavy viewed a lack of education as a contributing factor to the war and believes that future conflict can be minimized through education. Daro's and Sotheavy's responses indicate the power they attribute to knowledge. They perceive foreign languages as a means to access a plethora of knowledge that would otherwise be unavailable to them. English is powerful; it provides access to information and knowledge.

Globalization discourses promote economic progress and English. Participants like Bora and Vin believe English proficiency will enable them to work with foreign organizations and investors, who play a critical role in the nation's economy (USDS, 2011). Participants deem foreign funding and support as essential for rebuilding Cambodia. They rely on the international community to assist with the rebuilding and English is important to that process. Sambo stated, "We have lost everything. Now we have foreigners to help us fix things, so we must be able to communicate." Samnang explained, "The USA government felt bad and sent people to help. The government realized that Cambodians needed English to communicate with them and prevent the Khmer Rouge again." The belief that English is necessary for the economic development of Cambodia was repeated by several students. The overdependence on foreign aid and issues of donor dominance serve as oppressive forces (Dy, 2004), but these issues were never mentioned by participants. Participants view their nation through a deficit lens, which can lead to them becoming participants in their own oppression rather than working toward social transformation. This exemplifies how education can be used to dehumanize, rather than humanize beings (Freire, 1985).

There is a strong emphasis on tourism in Cambodia. The nation hosted over 2 million tourists over the years 2007-2008 (CIA, 2011). Many are interested in visiting Angkor Wat, which is considered a historical and archaeological wonder. Others are interested in touring S-21 also known as Toul Sleng, which was a detention center in the city where many people were imprisoned, tortured and killed by the Khmer Rouge leaders. An overwhelming number of students in the study as well as other Cambodians that I have spoken with perceive tourism as a vital component of Cambodia's economic growth. Vicheka believes, "My country and my culture are good and English helps us to share that." Bora is certain that English will enable Cambodians to share their history through tourism and improve the economy as a result.

Participants never used the word globalization, but the concept emanated from their discussions. Participants believe that English and globalization will improve their personal circumstances as well as those of society. Three female participants periodically worked in garment factories where they manufactured clothing to send abroad. They were happy when the garment factories opened because it provided jobs for women. Many participants mentioned working at domestic and international NGOs in the future. Vin, like others, believed that learning English will allow Cambodians to communicate with international organizations and investors to develop the country. Naro mentioned that proficiency in English and high marks in secondary school may make him eligible to study abroad, which would in turn provide him with knowledge he could use to help develop his country upon return.

*English and technology*

Computer literacy is a necessity for some jobs in Cambodia and an attractive feature accompanying the English program at EKCC. Participants in this study often used English to access computer skills and work towards technology certification that is internationally recognized. Students at EKCC must earn a specific score on the English proficiency test in order to enroll in the computer classes offered at EKCC because much of the instructional language is English. The computer and office skills classes, in addition to English, are emphasized on the fliers and signs EKCC uses to promote the programs. Many adolescents are drawn to the church by the opportunity to study English and computers. Srey Oun was motivated to study English because she wanted to learn how to use computers. Keriya, Monika, Sidorn and Lida all indicated that they initially came to the church to study computer. Participants recognize the importance of acquiring computer skills as a form of cultural capital to use in their future.

*English, higher education and social mobility*

Education and English proficiency are considered requirements for social mobility among participants living in poverty. Participants spoke repeatedly about their desires to secure employment that pays a living wage in order to support themselves and their families. Cambodia's job market is heavily reliant on tourism and foreign aid (CIA, 2011; USDS, 2011). English as an international language is important in these sectors of the economy. Participants acknowledged desires to improve their families' socioeconomic condition. Most intend on achieving this by pursuing postsecondary education. Others indicated that a strong mastery of English will make them eligible for

higher paying jobs that are not reliant solely on manual labor. Participants seem confident that English and a college degree would make it “easy to find a job.”

Participants repeatedly referenced the challenges their families faced living in poverty. Some of the students are currently employed in jobs that paid minimal wages. Working to survive is a reality for many adolescents and children in the provinces and city. Participants that did not complete secondary school worked fulltime. Ratha earns \$70 per month working in a furniture production factory, while studying to take his twelfth grade exit exam. As a child, he worked on his parents farm catching and selling frogs. Srey Oun works cleaning the offices of an NGO for a salary of \$100 per month. Kumpeak sells ice cream with her older sister for eight hours a day. They earn up to \$10 a day combined. Poline, Kanha and Pisey have worked full time in garment factories, although now they are in school. Sambo worked for one year at a NGO. Chamreoun has had numerous jobs even though he is only twenty years old. He picked up recyclables as a child, but has worked in construction, at a restaurant and as a motorbike taxi driver. Some students work part time and study fulltime. Naro works as a security guard, but has also worked with his father in construction over the last few years. Lida works at a bookstore. The participants vary in their levels of English proficiency.

Most of the seventeen secondary student participants indicated that they planned to attend college or a university if possible. Several reported striving for high marks on their twelfth grade exit exam to increase their chances of a scholarship, which would make higher education feasible. Some students hesitated when asked if they had plans to attend the university. The desire is present, but the current family conditions present economic challenges that created doubt among some students. Participants identified

English literature, accounting, computer technology, engineering, law and medicine as potential majors. Students mentioned possible careers as interpreters, engineers, computer technicians, a lawyer, a doctor and nurses.

The majors and career aspirations of secondary students coincided with those of the nine participants currently attending universities. Socheata and Akara are majoring in accounting, which is popular among female students. Lida is studying computer programming, a predominantly male field in Cambodia. She is one of two females in her courses and hopes to eventually teach the subject at the university level. The five male students are majoring in IT, chemistry, engineering, economics, and English literature.

Three participants were unable to complete secondary education. Ratha and Srey Oun both indicated that they hope to save enough money to pass the required high school exams and pursue higher education. Kumpeak did not mention returning to secondary school or taking the exams. She is currently studying Mandarin in addition to English. She and Srey Oun both expressed desires to be teachers or interpreters in the future. Ratha wants to be a tour guide after he completes his studies.

Participants emphasize the desire to find a good job to support themselves and their families in the future. They did not report wanting various material items, such as a new house, motor bike or computers. Rather, they want to provide for their basic needs and they and their families believe English will assist them. Daro explained, "My parents don't care if I study at a church. They always encourage me to study because they are not well educated people and they want me to be well educated and have a good job in the future." Sotheavy is clear about her plans, "I have a goal, in the future I want to be an

account to earn a lot of money to support my family.” Similar responses were reported by nearly every participant.

Participants were generally confident that speaking English will broaden their employment options. Only a few students acknowledge that speaking English well is not necessarily enough to find a suitable job. Employment opportunities in Cambodia are often related to social networks.

Relationships with influential people can be a prerequisite to gaining employment. Samnang realizes this and explained,

It’s hard to find a job because even though we know English, we have to go through a person that we know. For example, you work for one company and you know me and then your company need employee who know English and they make an announcement, but the way they choose is not through the announcement they choose me because you know me. So I study English, but how can I find a job in the city? It’s very difficult.

Samnang recognizes that finding a job would be difficult because he does not know anyone in the city. Participants did not typically report this concern, but this was a reoccurring theme in conversations with other young adults in Phnom Penh. I had the opportunity to engage in numerous conversations with young adults during the time I lived in and visited Cambodia. The role of social capacity was referred to regularly as essential to finding employment. Many individuals expressed frustration that jobs were not obtained by merit, but rather relationships with influential people within the employment fields.

A couple of participants expressed their perceptions of differences in attitude and effort toward education among themselves and their wealthier peers.



This was not an interview question, but was brought up by the students themselves. Dilen stated,

Some of the rich people, they don't give value to the schooling, but the poor people like my family try to study hard and give value to schooling. We think if we have good knowledge and take exam we could score a good score and the university can discount (the tuition). Rich people think studying is not good. They only go to play and visit somewhere.

This observation was shared by his close friend and classmate Bora. Bora expressed his disdain,

I look at my friend, my rich friends. They don't want to pay attention. (I am) Jealous of them. I want to be like them. They have money to study part-time, but don't want to. They want to buy food, clothes, something. I wonder, if I rich I want to buy books, things to study. They don't care. They only want to go somewhere. I ask myself, why are they like that? Poor people, my friends, always want to study and help their family. The rich students they don't care. They won't pay attention. I'm jealous of them.

All of the participants indicated that education and speaking English were necessary for social mobility in Cambodia. Participants want to learn English because they believe it will help them find a better job. A job that pays a living wage will allow them to support their families, which is their first priority. However, only one student recognizes that English proficiency and a college degree does not guarantee a job in a society where social connections for employment are essential. A few participants contemplated differences in academic habits and attitudes among students from varying social classes, an indication of an emerging critical consciousness. Social capacity plays an integral role in securing employment in Cambodia, but the overwhelming perception is that learning English will increase an individual's chances of finding a "good job." The

next key finding portrays the challenges, motivations and perseverance reported by participants despite the poverty they face daily.

*Challenges, motivations and perseverance*

Education and language acquisition do not occur in isolation, but rather in a larger social context that significantly impacts the learning process. The social context of the classroom plays a significant role in student learning. A plethora of research regarding the impact of culturally relevant pedagogy exists and emphasizes the importance of a learning environment that respects and values all students (Cummins, Chow & Schecter, 2006; Delpit, 2002; Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992; Percival & Black, 2000; Powell, 1996). Scholars note the need for educators to become more reflective and conscious practitioners because their social interactions with students affect learning (Delpit, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2002).

The context of the learning environment can promote or impede language acquisition and learning. Students can learn a language when their affective filter is lowered and they are in a space that respects their language and creates a safe place for learning a new language (Delpit, 2002). The space in which language is learned plays an important role. Informal and formal linguistic environments contribute to different aspects of language acquisition (Krashen, 1976). Teachers' speech and expectations influence student learning and attitudes while shaping the learning environment (Fillmore & Snow, 2000; McKown & Weinstein, 2007; Stubbs, 2002). Institutional pedagogy and the learning context shape students' language learning attitudes, strategies and motivations (Gan, 2009).

Participants perceive English as the key to social mobility. They recognize the challenges and motivations related to learning English and persevere in the face of obstacles. However, since participants' experiences are contextually based, it is necessary to describe the larger social context in which they occur. A trickle-down effect occurs between national social policies and the impact on community, families and individuals. Therefore, this next section addresses the challenges, motivations, influences and individual agency involved in education and language acquisition on each level: community, family and individual.

### *Community*

National policies directly influence local communities. As detailed in chapter two, geographic location and infrastructure impact students' educational experiences. However, individual and community efforts to create formal, non-formal and informal learning institutions to support English education are integral to the English education experiences of students. Formal and non-formal education centers have been set up throughout the country to meet the growing demands for English education. A complete discussion of formal and non-formal education appears in chapter two.

It is important to note that individuals, community organizations and churches have concentrated their efforts on providing English and education programs that increase students' job skills. The motivations, size and scope of the institutions vary, but one common objective is shared: to teach English for social mobility and national economic growth.

*Community members: motivating and challenging*

Community members such as the pastor, teachers and neighbors serve as a source of motivation for participants, but also present challenges for participants studying English. Teachers, neighbors and others within the community often serve as role models and mentors to support students' efforts at learning English. Some students, Christian, Buddhist and non-affiliated, mentioned that EKCC's pastor was a role model for them. They view him as an example of the life changing potential of speaking English. Maron, the pastor, is from a very poor family in the province, but moved to Phnom Penh as a young adult to work as a security guard and study English. He studied at the free English classes offered by the main church, an affiliate of EKCC. He was later mentored and trained by the head pastor there. Maron is now the lead pastor of his own church and a respected member in the community. He works in Cambodia, but also travels abroad for personal and professional reasons. Students admire how he has transformed his life.

Foreign missionaries and visitors at EKCC influence students as well.

Missionaries often give their religious testimony of how God has transformed their lives to inspire students, but their presence, actions and words also encourage students to learn English. Akara first wanted to study English when she was seven years old. She saw foreigners and Cambodians on TV speaking English and thought "I want to speak like them too." A few years ago, she had no friends that were foreigners, but that has changed. "Now many (foreigners) come and I try to connect with them at the church. The first time I feel shy and nervous and worried I'd make mistakes, but now I'm just a little bit shy." Foreigners are a source of motivation for her. When she begins to lose motivation, she

tells herself, “I have to do (study English) because I want to be like foreigners. I want to speak like them.”

Participants reported Maron and foreign missionaries to be influential and inspiring, but they also present potential challenges. It is important to recall the context of the research study. Participants describe Maron and foreigners positively, but these participants are comfortable learning in a church-based English program. An evangelical pastor and missionaries may present challenges to students that are uncomfortable with their proselytizing, but eager to take advantage of free English classes.

During my time living in Cambodia, I spoke with two individuals on separate occasions that reported that they stopped attending a different church-based English because they were uncomfortable with the evangelism and offended by some of the things the staff mentioned during English classes. One young man said, “I went a few times, but he (the teacher) kept talking about Jesus and stuff all during English class, so I stopped (going)” (personal communication with Dilen, July 2010). Maron’s experiences and missionaries’ presence may motivate some participants, but serve as an obstacle for students uncomfortable with evangelism.

Participants are also influenced by people outside of the EKCC campus. Participants are encouraged by their teachers at public and private schools. Teachers emphasize the national need for fluent English speakers who are proficient in reading and writing. They remind students of the importance of education and promote strategies for learning. Some teachers explain vocabulary, grammar and answer questions, which students appreciate. However, many participants expressed frustration with their public school teachers due to a perceived lack of qualified teachers genuinely committed to

students, and widespread corruption among the educational system. Kongke reported that some teachers are “lazy and more concerned with drinking alcohol than teaching.” Public school teachers serve as a source of support and motivation, as well as frustration for students.

Some participants reported that their neighbors and family friends encourage them to work hard in school and learn English, while others attempt to dissuade participants from studying at the church mostly because of the religious influence. Monika saw some of her neighbors speaking English and aspired to be like them. Naro’s father’s friends strongly influence his efforts to learn English. They provide opportunities for him to practice English. They ask him general questions in Khmer and he tries to respond to them in English. According to Naro, they also, “Give me advice, tell me to study hard and make time to study and try my best to understand.” He explained that they compare their lives as young boys to his life. His father’s friends remind him that they did not have the opportunity to study in the past, but wish that they did, so he should take advantage of the education that is available to him. Rith reported that his neighbors often make negative comments or “say bad words about Jesus” when they see him leave the house on his bicycle to come to church. Rith described the interactions as a challenge. For some participants, neighbors and family friends are supportive and encouraging, but in some instances they present a challenge to participants’ efforts to study English.

#### *Peers as source of motivation*

Participants reported that their peers positively and negatively influence their English learning experiences. Peers can have significant influence on students’ decisions, especially during adolescence and early adulthood. Peers in this context refer to people of

the same age, such as classmates, friends, neighbors, etc. Most students' participation in EKCC's classes originated from friends' recommendations. Peers serve as a point of comparison, motivation and encouragement for students, but they also inhibit students' efforts to speak English by teasing them or distracting them.

Many participants reported that a strong motivator for them was observing a friend or classmate speaking English well. Christian students repeatedly referred to their peers' ability to interpret for foreigners at the church, which motivates them. Peers encouraged one another to speak English to the foreigners they come in contact with, which is primarily at the church. Samnang explained how Mala, his friend, strongly encouraged him to speak with foreigners.

Mala is the best English speaker. He knows English better because he was in the church and he know a lot of foreigners who know English and so me and Titi we know nothing. So when I saw him speak English to foreigners when they come. I saw my friend speak English so it feels a little bit ashamed for me, I am the friend of him and I don't know English and I sometimes try to escape him when the foreigners come. And sometimes let him teach for us, like Titi and me. After that he just encourages me to study and to be brave, be bold to meet foreigners and know they want eat you. Don't be scared, talk, go talk, they like to talk with you. So go and try to learn more and more.

Seeing other people speak English fluently was a significant motivating factor for study participants as well as many other students that I spoke with over the time I spent in Cambodia.

Bora explained, "I hear from my friend, English is important for you. Especially, I hear my friends say English is the international language." For Rith, the fact that some of his friends did not finish their education or learn English and are unemployed or working for low wages motivates him.

Christian participants, especially, reported the desire to maintain friendships with foreigners they met at church and that English was essential to communication. Lida, Akara and Samnang are all actively involved with the church. They reported that maintaining contacts with their friends motivates them to learn English. Lida's first foreign friend, an Australian missionary, greatly influenced her. Lida says she has many foreign friends that she has met through the church. She describes her relationship with her first friend, "In 2006, the first time I talked with an Australian girl, Jen, she was my first foreign friend. After meeting her, I studied more because I wanted to talk with her, have a relationship with her. I really like her that's why one reason I study English." Lida has applied for a visa to go visit her friend in Australia.

The community of learners at EKCC has created an environment where students actively practice speaking English with one another. This is discussed in depth in the following section, learning strategies and institutions. Participants from all groups reported that their peers on the EKCC campus make a point to speak English with one another, even when it is difficult so that they can improve their English. Several participants indicated that a culture that promotes speaking in English did not exist at the private institutions and public schools where they studied. A positive atmosphere that is conducive to language learning and practice is another positive peer contribution that motivates participants to study English at EKCC. Peers encourage participants through their examples, words and actions. Peers also serve a role in the learning process, which is discussed in the section on learning institutions and strategies.



*Peers as a challenge*

Peer groups also present challenges to participants studying English. Participants reported peer interactions sometimes deter their efforts at studying English. Ridicule, potential embarrassment and distracting behaviors were cited as negative influences by students, especially Christians. Socheata, Lida, Sambo and Akara are all Christian participants that revealed instances in which they were ridiculed by their peers for speaking incorrectly or mispronouncing a word. Participants claim that these types of experiences raised their inhibitions and made them reluctant to speak English. Potential humiliation inhibited their attempts to speak English among non-native English speaking peer groups.

Peers are also a source of distraction for participants. A few students reported incidences of peer pressure that deterred their study efforts. Bora and Sambo expressed that it is difficult to study, “when your friends want you to play.” Monika, a Buddhist student, is extremely committed to her studies and recognizes the possible distraction of peers. She began dating a fellow student, but stopped because she worries that talking on the phone and going places with her friends, which is how many young Khmer date, will interfere with her studies. Participants reported more instances of positive influence from their peers than negative, but a significant number of those accounts were related to the EKCC community. The negative influences, or challenges presented by peers, typically centered on participants becoming self-conscious or reluctant to speak English because they feared being ridiculed.

*Challenging family dynamics*

Participants are extremely motivated by their desire for social mobility for their family. Participants' family situations encourage participants to learn English, but the realities of poverty (which were discussed in the previous section) and other issues, like domestic violence present very real challenges to their language studies. Family is a central pillar of Cambodian society. There is a significant emphasis on respecting and obeying one's parents. Family members are expected to care for and support one another throughout their lives. Many parents face significant challenges providing for their family's basic needs, in addition to students' educational aspirations. Some of the challenges serve as motivation for families to do whatever possible to support family members' education. In many instances, the participants are among the youngest siblings in the family and are pursuing educational opportunities that were not available to their older brothers and sisters.

Poverty is one of the most significant obstacles facing Cambodian families. At the same time, interviewees revealed that it serves as a motivational mechanism. Migration from the rural provinces of the country to areas within or on the outskirts of urban centers for economic opportunities is common. Several participants' families moved from their birthplaces in the countryside to live within the city limits of Phnom Penh because they were unable to earn enough income to support themselves in the provinces. Child labor is a common and necessary practice for many families in poverty. As a result, children and adolescents experience interruptions in schooling or are forced to drop out at young ages. The informal and formal fees associated with public school, in addition to a lack of

transportation and home responsibilities also contribute to the epidemic of interrupted and incomplete schooling (Bray, 1999).

Other issues within the family unit also impact the educational experiences of students. Blended families and domestic violence were two common issues within families that participants reported. Family dynamics often interfered with their ability to study English and complete public school requirements. The experiences of Auntoch and Naro exemplify the significant impact of domestic violence on students' educational experiences.

Auntoch is a tenth grade student who lives at an orphanage about one mile from the EKCC campus. He is eighteen and has lived there since October of 2007. I met Auntoch on my initial trip to Cambodia in the summer of 2009. There was one instance during that time when Auntoch was trying to tell me about his life, but it was difficult for him because his English language proficiency was still in the beginning phases of development. I recall taking away two main points from a rather lengthy conversation. The first was that his parents died and his father hurt his mother. The second point was that he really wanted to study English. The formal interviews revealed his experiences in much greater detail. In the first interview, Auntoch was able to share his story more fully because his English proficiency had increased significantly, but he also relied on the research assistant to interpret for him when necessary. His interview was emotionally intense and at one point I contemplated whether my questions were appropriate. I repeatedly stressed to him and other participants that they were free to share as much information or as little as they felt comfortable. Auntoch chose to share freely.

I asked him to tell me about his family. He began by saying that prior to living in the orphanage, he lived in the province. He lived there with his 23 year old older brother. He said casually that his father died when he was thirteen and his mother passed away when he was seven years old. His father worked as a digger in rock quarries and his mother took care of the household. His father died from an accident involving rocks and his mother was ill. He first shared the story of his father's death. His father worked in a rock quarry and was in a deep hole when the rocks caved in and collapsed on him. His coworker, also a friend, pulled his body from under the rocks and rushed him to the hospital. At the hospital, Auntoch's father lay on the bed dying. He asked his friend to look after his sons. He told him to take care of them and encourage them to study. Shortly after he spoke those words, he died.

There was an obvious shift in mood among all of us. Auntoch spoke much softer and his eye contact became infrequent. He began looking down and playing with a zipper on his book bag, which he held on his lap. The more the tears welled up in his eyes the more he avoided looking at me and the interpreter. I reassured him that we could stop or take a break, but he indicated that he wanted to continue. I was reluctant because the stress that the interview seemed to induce, but he insisted that he wanted to continue. Next, he spoke about his mother's death which occurred several years prior to his father's death:

My father was angry with my mother because she asked a neighbor for rice. He hit her in the head with an ax. She bled a lot. She didn't go to the hospital because she had no money. She used leaves for medicine (natural medicine). She was better for a week or so, and then one night she was getting very, very hot and began foaming at the mouth. Then she died. When she died it was only me and my brother at home with her. My father didn't attend the funeral because he was away working in another province and there was no way to contact him. Me and

my brother lived with a neighbor until my father returned a few weeks later. When I told my father, he cried and cried.

As Auntoch shared about his mother, there was another shift in mood. Eye contact resumed and there was a tangible sense of relief. It seemed to be a cathartic experience that he welcomed. Auntoch lived with his brother for a short time, until his brother left to live and study at a pagoda. Then he moved to an orphanage in the outskirts of Phnom Penh. Auntoch quickly recalled the exact date, October 10, 2007, which was the day he arrived at the orphanage. He came to the center because it was a place to live and study. At the center he shares a large room with twelve other young boys. He is one of the oldest. He has shelter and food provided for him, but he still feels the impact of poverty. He is given 10,000 riel, the equivalent of \$2.50, each month to use for school or any other needs, but it is not enough to pay for basic essentials. He expressed that it is difficult for him to study at public school and at EKCC because he lacks the money to buy books, paper and pencils. He said, "It is hard for me when I start here because everyone has a book but me and sometime when the teacher ask me a question, it is hard for me to answer." The orphanage pays for him to study Khmer and other subjects part-time with his high school teacher. He stated that they give him money because they want him to study hard and get a high score and possibly a scholarship to the university.

Auntoch was seven when his mother died and thirteen when he lost his father. Auntoch does not engage in any self-pity, but he recognizes that he does not have a family to support him. Auntoch describes his parents by saying, "My parents push(ed) me. They don't have any money, but they have a love that they want for me to go to study." He explains, "Right now I stay at the center and so I don't have my mother or

father so nobody can help me. So I myself need to grow up and try to study hard so in the future I can have a good job.” He comes to NLLPT four evenings a week and sometimes during the days, whenever he has time. He also studies an additional hour every evening at the orphanage with an older student that teaches English to a small group. I asked him why he comes to study here. He replied that it is free and he needs to study here and on his own to put himself in a position to earn money for the future. For Auntoch, education is not necessarily a means for social mobility, but rather pure survival. He has repeatedly expressed gratitude for the opportunity to live at the orphanage and study because if he remained in the province he would not have the chance to study at all. He hopes that one day he will be employed in an organization or work as an interpreter. Domestic violence within the family, in addition to poverty, is a challenge for Auntoch, who is motivated by his father’s final words and his own survival to learn English.

Naro’s experiences are different, but the permeation of poverty, domestic violence and changes in the family dynamic are prevalent. Naro is the oldest of four children in his family. His mother is married to her third husband, whom he refers to as his father. He explains that his biological father left his mother because he had another wife. His mother remarried another man, but according to Naro “He spanked the children too much.” She remarried a third man, who is also physically abusive to his mother and the children, especially when he has been drinking alcohol. At one point, Naro moved to live with his aunt briefly when his mother could not afford to support him. The move interrupted his schooling and as a result he repeated the first grade twice. He used minimal details to describe the experience:

I never failed, but once I studied grade one twice because I had to stay with my aunt because there were money problems. Our house was so small and there was

only one bed, so I go live with my aunt. She pitied me. I studied there for five months and then returned.

He later revealed that his aunt used him to deliver illegal drugs in her village. As the oldest child in the family, he has always had a lot of home responsibilities. He helped with rice crops, carrying water, chopping wood, babysitting and fishing growing up. He currently works as a security guard, while attending secondary school and working construction with his father during school holidays.

The challenge to obtain basic education among students in poverty is immense. However, all of the participants are determined to learn English and the majority intends to study at postsecondary levels. Poverty, limited educational opportunities for their parents and hopes of a financially secure future are motivating factors for participants to learn English. It may appear that the possibility of becoming proficient in English, earning a college degree and securing a job that provides opportunities for social mobility are unattainable, but participants and their families believe otherwise. They engage in proactive behaviors to ensure that their hopes become a reality.

*Family: a source of motivation and support*

Families often sacrifice a great deal to financially support participants' English and general education studies. In many instances, older siblings have dropped out of school to find work and financially support the family, including the education related costs of their younger brothers and sisters. Kumpeak, the older sister of Kongke and Bora, decided along with her parent, that it would be best for her to stop going to school in grade seven to find a job and help support her two younger siblings. They "are more clever" and better students, so they should attend school. Kumpeak studies English and Chinese in the afternoon and evenings after selling ice cream on the streets all day.

Numerous other participants reported that their parents, siblings and other extended family members support their schooling. Some students indicated that they want to work to help support themselves and their families, but their parents and older siblings prohibit them from working, preferring they focus solely on their studies.

Some parents reluctantly allowed their children to move from their homes in the province to live with family, friends or in the dorms closer to Phnom Penh. Moving closer to the city means leaving home, but being closer to educational opportunities. Samnang lives in the dorms. Prasith lives with a friend. Vicheka lives with her brother. Chetra lives with his older brother and grandmother. Pahna lives with his two sisters. Unlike some countries in which students choose to move away from home to attend college, in Cambodia it is a choice made out of necessity rather than preference.

Parents are willing to allow their children to study at EKCC despite their personal perceptions and apprehensions of Christianity. A lack of financial resources force some parents to send their children to study at an institution, even though they disapprove of the organization's ideology. The English program at EKCC is free and that is a great incentive for parents enduring financial hardships. Several participants reported that their neighbors, family friends and others in the community warned their parents about permitting their children to study at EKCC because the Christians would try to convert them. Buddhist and some unaffiliated students indicated that their parents allow them to study only English at EKCC. They are not allowed to come to the campus for any other purposes. Some of these participants explained that their families are grateful to the Christians for offering free English and computer education, while others simply tolerate it because they cannot afford to send their child to a private school.



Families provide verbal support in addition to financial support for students studying English. In many families, parents did not have the chance to study and they encourage their children to take advantage of existing opportunities that were unavailable to them. Lida describes her parents' views of her education:

My family yes they are happy to see me go to the high level because my family, my brothers and sisters they don't finish grade 12, my sister just grade 11, my brother grade 12, just me, my older brother no, just me go past grade 12, that I can go to University. They are just very happy they can have somebody study at the University. They really happy and they really encourage me. They say that only you can go to University so they say please learn, they hard as you can, cause this is very grateful you have this opportunity to go to University to study English.

Parents and family members perceive a relationship between English and employment prospects, especially in urban areas. They repeat the message that is heard everywhere on the streets of Phnom Penh: if you want to find a good job or any job in some instances, you have to speak English. Participants shared that their parents want a better life for their children and a future that is not burdened by poverty. Dilen's explained that his parents believed English was beneficial, "They think it is good because it helps us, it gives us opportunities to go to better schools, to universities, to find a good job in a company." Commonly, children are encouraged to learn English so that they can help support their families and themselves in the future. Vicheka reiterated the advice she received from her older brother and sister,

They want me to study because in the future, you will depend on yourself. No one is going to help you, but you. When our parents die, I must find a job. They will not help me for forever and in the future I can tell my daughters and sons that English is good.

For participants with family, the family unit is a source of stress, motivation and support. Poverty, changing family dynamics and domestic violence are common obstacles that interfere with students' education. However, it is the possibility of ending the cycle of poverty by seeking access to education and creating an economically more stable family unit that motivates participants to persevere in their pursuits of learning English and studying at postsecondary institutions. Families sacrifice in various ways to support students' efforts. They sacrifice financially by saving for participants' education and not permitting them to earn an income. In several instances they compromise their ideological stances by permitting students to study at a campus where they disapprove of the institution's ideology. Immediate and extended family members believe that English and education are the keys to social mobility and a "better life."

*Individual challenges, motivations and perseverance*

Many of the challenges that participants face in their quest of learning English and obtaining an education have been identified throughout earlier sections of this dissertation. Poverty, family dynamics, domestic violence, shifts in religious beliefs, interruptions in schooling, high retention rates and home responsibilities have been discussed. A few additional issues, such as limited time and physical and intellectual abilities were reported by participants as deterring factors. However, students remain highly motivated by their families, personal relationships, prospects of future social mobility and their faith. Students exercise agency toward achieving their goals through sacrifice and perseverance.

Participants who are employed as well as full time students indicated that they lacked a sufficient amount of time necessary to studying English the way they deem

necessary for progress. Secondary students reported that their course load at the public school often dictates how much time they had available to study English. Courses that students needed additional support in required them to study part time with their secondary school teachers, costing money and absorbing their time. In these instances, students usually still attended evening English and computer classes, but reported that they did not have time to review lessons and study on their own. Participants also reported that part time study of general education subjects is necessary in grades nine and twelve because of the nationwide exit exams. Participants often stopped attending English classes in the weeks and months prior to the exams so that they could focus their full attention on the standardized tests. University students and students that are employed full and part time also cited a lack of time available for attending English classes consistently and studying English independently. Several participants continued to attend English classes, but did not complete assignments.

Physical and intellectual issues were reported by a few participants as interfering with their English and general education studies. Dilen is diabetic and although he has not repeated a grade, he claims that it makes studying difficult because he is occasionally sick and often tires easily. Vin started grade one when he was six years old and has never repeated, but he did stop going to school for 3 years because of a health problem related to his brain that causes severe headaches. He explained, "I stopped study and I'm not happy because I want to have a good future. For me it's difficult because I can do many things, but cannot read (well) because of problems with my brain, ears and eyes." Sambo has a speech impediment that makes speaking difficult for him. He, like a few other students, indicated that learning English is difficult because they are "not that clever." It

is impossible to determine whether these reported learning difficulties are a result of a diagnosed learning disorder. Regardless, participants perceive them to be a challenge to their learning experience.

Participants repeatedly emphasized that English was necessary to get a good job, which is their goal so that they could support their families. Students described good jobs as teaching, working in a bank, engineering, working for an NGO, being a tour guide or interpreter or computer programmer. Participants described a good salary as earning between \$200-500 per month or \$2400-\$6000 annually. Regardless of what type of job students pursue, if it is in the city then they most likely must speak some English, to maximize income earning potential in the service and tourism sectors.

Nearly every young adult that I spoke with over my time in Cambodia, and all the study participants, indicated that English was essential to getting a “good job.” Beyond the rice fields and outside of the villages, English seems to be quickly becoming vital to gaining employment that earns a living wage. Students cited social mobility as the main purpose of learning English, a language repeatedly referred to by participants as an international language. Students highlighted that English is the international language, which made it very important since there is a large foreign presence in Cambodia. A few students commented on the amount of foreign donations, investments and international NGOs operating in the country as factors in the national push to make English Cambodians’ second language.

Students in this study and Cambodians in general perceive English as essential to communicating with foreigners, but a significant contradiction exists for many of these students. Most of them currently have very minimal contact with foreigners. Kumpeak,

like many of the participants, only knows foreigners that are involved with EKCC. So while it seems necessary to learn English to speak to foreigners, how necessary is it really when you have limited, if any contact with foreigners? Young adult students in an English class in Kandal province, located just outside of the city limits, explained that they wanted to learn English to communicate with foreigners. Several students expressed that they were, “Very happy to see me” and “want to practice their English with me.” While I was riding through the village with a British man on the way to the school, people stopped what they were doing and stared, this gave me the impression that they do not have the same level of contact with foreigners that is common for people in Phnom Penh. The students insisted that English is necessary to communicate with the foreigners, but then shared that I was only the fourth foreigner and native English speaker that most of them have met in their lives. The other three are the funding partners of the small part-time school. One of the funding partners said to me, “I don’t know why these kids want to learn English so bad. They don’t have any contact with foreigners and there are no jobs for them.”

Students learn English to speak with foreigners, but they do not have contact with foreigners, Students learn English to find jobs, but the reality is that there are not jobs available for them. The students at the school in Kandal province reported similar experiences as participants in the study. There are many challenges in obtaining education, but there is a common belief that English is necessary for their future studies and social mobility. English is the international language and necessary to find a “good job.”

Participants’ families are a motivating factor beyond future economic stability.

Students recognize the sacrifices that their families made and feel obligated to work diligently at their studies. Bora explains,

When I was young, life was very difficult. My family is poor. I pity my family. My father is motor driver and my sister was a waitress. They want to support my family. When I grow up I want to have a good job and support my family. So right now I want to study because I think if you are poor, your life is very difficult.

Dilen expressed feeling guilty and burdensome to his parents because he needed money to study part time.

I'm not good at math and it's difficult to study at university (which he plans to attend). So it is difficult in my heart, so I think over vacation (from school) I have to study part time and pay a lot, so difficult in my heart. It's difficult to tell my mom and dad. I don't want to tell them because I need a lot of money to pay school. Maybe when I have free time I can do math a lot, but my brain is weak and I cannot remember a lot.

Dilen is intent on learning English and graduating from the university. Like most other students, he believes it is necessary in order to have a good job and support his family. However, at the same time he recognizes the financial strain already present within his family and does not want to compound it. Sotheavy also recognizes that her parents are sacrificing and feels like she needs to work hard at learning English. "My parents try to earn the money to support me. They pay like \$3 or \$5 and I need to be a good child and study a lot." Participants recognize their families sacrifice and are motivated to work toward a better future for themselves and their loved ones. The financial sacrifices that are made in order for participants to study are motivational for students.

Religion is a motivating factor for Christian students, but did not directly influence Buddhist and non-affiliated students. This is addressed in the section on religion, but some additional explanation is provided here. I asked participants the

following question: Is there any relationship between your religious beliefs and your experiences studying English? Buddhist and non-affiliated students did not recognize any relationship and noted that religion and education are two separate entities.

Christian males and females reported believing that “God has a plan” or that God has “blessed” them with provisions that enable them to study, such as scholarships. Sidorn is compelled to work at a job he dislikes because he needs to support his studies. He describes it as “a bad job.” He works at a restaurant where beer is served. He believes that drinking alcohol is a sin. He explains, “It's very hard, but I tried to do it. Salary is very, very little. It is \$30-\$35 per month, but in the Bible it says we start very little and then we go very big.” Sidorn relies strongly on his faith to support him as he works to earn money to pay for his studies. The third finding identifies the way participants maintain motivation, access learning opportunities and develop self-study strategies.

#### Motivation, access and learning strategies

Despite substantial challenges, many young Khmer adults are motivated to learn English. Participants remain motivated to learn English and continue to find ways to educate themselves and acquire the linguistic skills necessary for their future careers. They develop strategies to maintain their motivation, seek out opportunities to learn in formal, non-formal and informal settings and implement learning strategies to enhance their English skills.

#### *Maintaining the motivation to study*

Participants are motivated by a number of factors to study English, which have been discussed. However, students also develop strategies to maintain their motivation to study. Students admitted to feeling lazy and “tired to study,” but many of them have

specific ways to continue studying and not give up on learning English. The two main strategies participants implement to maintain motivation are self talk and taking breaks to relax.

Participants developed mantras or dialogues that they say to themselves to encourage perseverance despite the desire to quit. Several students mentioned their approach to learning English as step by step. They explained that when they experience feelings of frustration or hopelessness, they often remind themselves to go slow, step by step. When Socheata feels “lazy to study,” she looks to her friends,

Sometimes I'm lazy, but I see my friends can speak better than me. I can see my friends is beginning to speak very well, but so it makes me to go on. I cannot stop it. I do not know enough English so I need to study. I say to myself, “Don't be lazy. You need to go on. Keep go on. Study hard. Remember your friends are more good than you. So don't be lazy. Then go, study, study, study! And now their education very far from me. I need to run, run, run!”

Bora also challenges himself to overcome the obstacles that interfere with his studies. He says to himself,

If I don't want to try this problem, what will I do in the future? So I try to overcome the problem and try more and more. I must stand up and overcome all the problems. If I can't do it now, how can I do it when there is a bigger problem in the future?

Participants find sources of encouragement within themselves. Participants reported taking study breaks to maintain their motivation. Some students play soccer with their friends or exercise when they feel tired of studying. Others watch television or listen to music to relax. Most students reported taking short breaks of 15-20 minutes up to one or two days. Participants' perceptions of the importance of learning English as young adults may decrease the likelihood of taking longer break. Several participants reported



that when they were younger, they did not realize the importance of English and therefore did not take their studies seriously. However, now that they realize how important English is, they feel like they must take a deliberate and concerted approach to learning. Students remind themselves about the necessity of English for their future. This reminder, combined with self talk and brief breaks, helps to maintain the motivation to continue their studies.

### Learning Institutions

#### *Participants' primary and secondary public school experiences*

All of the participants attended or are currently enrolled in the public school system. Factors such as migration, late enrollment, interruptions in formal education, retentions and promotions combined with oversized classes, unmotivated teachers and limited instructional hours significantly influenced participants' experiences. School experiences vary geographically between the province and the city. In Phnom Penh, students have greater access to schools and the quality of education is greater in comparison to their counterparts in the rural provinces (Keng, 2004; Escott, 2000).

The research site is located on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, an area currently being rapidly developed. Prior to the last of couple years, it remained fairly underdeveloped with few paved roads, much like the provinces. The addition of paved roads results in increased access to education. The rainy season, which lasts six months, produces flooding conditions on a regular basis. Unpaved roads can be washed away and become inaccessible for days and weeks at a time during the rainy season. A lack of accessible schools in the provinces is a significant issue for Cambodian education because 80% of the nation's residents live in rural areas (CIA, 2011). It must be noted

that students' school experiences in this community are likely to improve as infrastructure is established. Participants that attended primary or secondary school in the provinces reported that physical access to schools interfered with their attendance. Ratha reported that the distance to the school was four kilometers and so significant that he often stayed home as a young primary school student.

Most of the participants attended primary school in the provinces. Formal education in the province is significantly different than that in urban areas, as was discussed in chapter two. Nine participants currently live in the area in which they were born, while the rest of the students either moved with their families for economic opportunities or moved alone for educational purposes. Moving and changing schools was a common experience among some participants.

Children were enrolled in primary school at various ages and no pre-school or kindergarten options were available at the time. Samnang explained that an old method of determining a child's readiness for school was when he could reach his arm over his head and grip his ear on the opposing side. He was enrolled in first grade when he was four years old and able to touch his ear. The typical age ranged from six to nine years old. Late enrollment was reported much more than early enrollment, like in Samnang's case.

Participants who remained in school faced alarmingly high rates of retention. I was informed by an elementary school principal, as well as participants, that students are retained until they pass the end of the grade exam. Twelve of the thirty students reported being retained at least once and several of those students were retained at least twice. Retention and interruptions in formal schooling results in many older students studying alongside younger peers. Auntoch is 18 years old and is in ninth grade and Keriya is 19

and in tenth grade. Chamreoun, Vin, Poline are 20 and Pisey and Kanha are 21. All five are in the twelfth grade. All of these students experienced retention or a significant interruption in schooling. Significant interruptions in schooling impacted twelve participants' educational experiences. Three participants stopped attending school entirely due to retentions and the need to earn an income.

Some participants were able to bypass a grade entirely. Students are able to skip a grade if their teachers make a recommendation, which was the case for Samnang, Vin and Naro. Kongke's father was able to pay an administrator for her to skip to the next grade to study with her brother. Teachers' discretion and financial incentives expedited the school process for a few students. In Kongke's case, a year closer to graduation for her meant a year closer to employment and contributing to her family's income, which is her ultimate goal. Corruption and bribery are significant issues facing the educational system in Cambodia.

Past retention policies are being revised and preschool and kindergarten programs are being developed in an effort to keep students placed age and grade appropriately (UNESCO, 2006). This initiative is aimed at reducing class sizes and increasing completion rates. Participant reports about class size were consistent with the research cited in chapter two and my observations. Primary school class sizes can reach forty students and exceed sixty at the secondary level. Students attend school six days a week for four hours per day, either from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. or 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. The times rotate on a monthly basis. Double shifts are necessary because there is a severe shortage of teachers, resources and funding (Prasertsi, 2008). The nation's approximate 450-650

instructional hours per year are significantly less than the 600-800 recommended as an international benchmark per year (UNESCO, 2009).

Widespread cheating and unethical practices by teachers were reported by participants. A study of corruption in Cambodia found that corruption in the public education sector accounted for \$37 million USD, approximately 55% of the total corruption in the nation's public sectors (EIC 2006, p.7 as cited in Dawson, 2010).

Most students reported about teachers withholding curriculum content during normal instructional hours to encourage students to study part time with teachers as tutors. Part time study of the nation's curriculum and foreign languages, especially English, was a component of the school experience for several participants. Participants also mentioned buying test papers, with exam answers, and supplementary worksheets to reinforce concepts. On exam days for secondary school, it is common to see large groups of students congregating in front of photocopy shops sharing exams answers. This is a phenomenon I observed on several occasions. The government, in their efforts to address corruption at all levels, is addressing these issues more forcefully. Teachers' low salaries at public schools promote these additional, and perhaps unethical, income earning practices.

#### *Formal learning opportunities beyond public institutions*

##### *Private classes*

Formal learning opportunities, in addition to public schools, consist of private institutions and NGO operated projects, both secular and faith-based. Private institutions offering English classes are widespread throughout Phnom Penh and have increased significantly over recent years. This is partially due to the poor quality of formal

education offered by the government (Dawson, 2010). The facilities vary from schools with one or two classrooms to large buildings with many classes. The teachers are a combination of Khmer and native English speakers. The majority of teachers are Khmer, but some classes are taught by native speakers.

The cost of studying with a native English speaker is significantly higher than studying with a Khmer teacher. Participants reported paying between \$2.50 to \$31 per month for hour long classes five to six days a week. The average cost ranged between \$2.50 and \$6.00 per month and the instruction was by Khmer teachers. Rith attended part time classes at a private school for grades eight through twelve. The classes cost \$3-4 each month plus the cost of the book. Akara studied one year in seventh grade and the cost was \$6. Kongke studied at an International Language Training School with her brother part time for grades five through ten. The national emphasis on English has created a market for more affordable English language instruction. Private English classes, as well as free secular and religious based programs, are marketed through banners/signs and flyers passed out on the street. Larger programs advertise in local newspapers.

#### *Formal faith based programs*

Formal faith based English and education programs exist in the community. Some are free, but others are extremely expensive. Asian Hope is an expensive, private school located near the research site. It is a bilingual, Christian elementary school located in the community. It is funded by Asian Hope International, a religious NGO based in Denver, Colorado. The school targets middle and high income Khmer families with tuition costs around \$1700 annually. The target population is supposed to be 90% Khmer students and

10% foreign students, but the principal admitted “We are approximately 23% Korean because these mothers come to me and beg me to enroll their children and I cannot say no” (personal communication with principal of Asian Hope School, July 19, 2011). The school is two years old and relies on foreign teachers to complete two year contracts for a small stipend. The tuition costs make such a school an unlikely option for students of similar socioeconomic backgrounds as participants in the study, but it serves as a relevant example in the context of available English education opportunities in the area.

Don Bosco Foundation in Cambodia, is internationally recognized as members of the Salesians of Don Bosco, which is the second largest order in the Roman Catholic church. It is a religious non-profit organization dedicated to educating individuals living in poverty as well as to evangelism. It is nationally recognized NGO that offers free education to the poor. They partnered with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of Education in Cambodia in 1990 to assist with national rebuilding efforts after the Khmer Rouge. Their widespread initiatives include: primary and English education and technical and vocational training. They have assisted more than fifty thousand Cambodian children and youth in receiving free education from 1991-2010 through their programs and partnerships with other programs (Don Bosco, 2011). Naro reported attending a Don Bosco school for grades three through six.

#### *Non-formal English programs*

There are numerous organizations aimed at increasing quality and access to education and English instruction. NGOs, secular and religious, are an important presence in Cambodia, as discussed in chapter two. One example is Cambodian Organization for Research, Development and Education (CORDE, 2011). The

organization has been working in local communities since 1996. They operate in more than 186 locations with 16 learning centers built on community donated property.

Volunteers also tutor in families' homes and other communal spaces in the villages. Their efforts work in conjunction with the public schools and focus on early childhood education, literacy, English and youth empowerment programs. Despite widespread initiatives such as this, no participants reported involvement with this program or any other NGOs.

Tinath's New Generation Academy (TNGA) is another example of a non-formal, secular educational outreach. In July 2011, I spent the day observing the school and speaking with the founder. Tinath Em began this school ten years ago in the slums of Boueng Salang located just outside of Phnom Penh. Tinath's parents moved here for better job opportunities, but he remained in the province. After coming to visit his parents one night and witnessing the poor and violent conditions of the community, Tinath decided he needed to do something. He began TNGA by renting a small room next to his family's home. He started teaching English and encouraging students to develop good moral character. He does not permit students to drink, gamble or engage in violence. Students must agree to this in order to attend. He and a fellow teacher serve over 140 children from five years old to young adults on a daily basis in the one room school. He also assists families with obtaining medical and dental care. He has dropped out of the university temporarily because he cannot afford to run the school and pay tuition simultaneously. TNGA is free for primary school students, but young adult students typically contribute \$2-3 per month to assist with costs. Mr. Em also relies on a very

limited amount of donations from abroad to support this initiative. He is currently saving to apply for NGO status with the Cambodian government, which costs around \$450.

Faith-based NGOs have emphasized English programs as a means to attract non-Christians to the church (personal communication with Thai, August 2, 2011).

Evangelical Christian and Catholic organizations, like EKCC and Don Bosco, offer English instruction and other vocational and technical programs at significantly reduced fees or free of cost. Most participants reported that their enrollment at EKCC was their first experience studying English at a religious-based organization. However, Daro reported studying Korean at a Korean church in the area. Buddhist institutions also offer free English courses, but no students reported enrolling in any classes at the pagoda. NGO programs promoting English and literacy exist throughout Cambodia, but participants did not indicate personal participation with any such programs.

#### *Informal Learning initiatives*

Informal English instruction is implemented throughout communities in the provinces and Phnom Penh. Family members, neighbors, Khmer and foreign volunteers and adolescents have created informal learning communities to teach English. Several participants recalled that their initial introduction to English occurred through such efforts. The organization of these efforts emphasizes the importance and value that Cambodians have placed on learning English and the sense of social responsibility that exists in many communities.

Family is a significant source of support for students. Several participants reported English instruction within the family. Kongke, Kumpeak and Bora's older brother was their first English teacher and taught them the alphabet and basic vocabulary



when they were young children. He worked with his four siblings teaching them English and Chinese until he became too busy with work and his own education. Vin also reported that his older brother taught him his letters and sounds. Rith teaches the English he has learned in the evenings to his two sisters and nephew. His sisters stopped going to school in sixth and ninth grade to begin work, but are still eager to learn English from Rith. Instances of family members teaching English, especially of older siblings teaching younger ones is limited among participants. This is probably due to the limited number of participants with older siblings that have learned English and had access to educational opportunities. Neighbors in the community have developed informal learning organizations. Participants reported that they studied English in the homes of a neighbor that offered English classes for free or for a small fee. These neighborhood English classes were reported to occur mostly in the provinces; probably due to a lack of opportunities in the rural areas. Samnang briefly studied English for 500-1000 riel (between \$.12 -\$.25) per month in his village. The class of five or six students was started by a neighborhood, who asked his family and others if their children knew English or were interested in learning.

Foreign and Khmer volunteers teach English at many of the orphanages, religious organizations and NGOs in Cambodia. During the course of the study, I taught English at EKCC and at two sites of a local orphanage. My initial plan was to teach at EKCC and one site, but while meeting with the director of the orphanage organization to arrange a schedule, I was asked if I was able to teach the staff members of the organization. I agreed and taught a class of six to eight adult students twice a week. I was also approached after one of my classes by a dentist working at the center. She asked me if I

was available to teach beginning English to her husband. She expressed that she could get a group of five adults to study English in her home. She told me that she could not pay me money, but would provide me dinner. I declined her proposal because my schedule was already full.

The orphanage where I taught children and adolescents had already implemented an informal English program. The children were divided into groups based on their age and proficiency levels. There was an established schedule posted on the wall and two of the older students proficient in English taught daily English classes. These informal classes included homework and quizzes, which were created and scored by the teachers. My teaching supplemented their existing program. In the summer of 2011, when I returned to the center there was an English teacher employed by the organization to teach English daily to the students. The center hosts volunteer groups throughout the year with individuals that teach English as well as French and Korean.

Participants' reports indicated that informal English learning communities have been established by individuals, families and groups that view speaking English as a necessary skill for future generations. The community utilizes the available resources, such as family members, neighbors and volunteers, to teach English through an organized approach. Informal educational opportunities in which interviewees participated supplemented their formal and non-formal learning. Together, the three types of English learning environments, formal, informal and non-formal illustrate young Cambodians' views about the importance of English and their future economic opportunities.

*Learning strategies and resources*

Participants use a variety of print, technological and human resources and employ several different self-teaching strategies to support their English studies. The use of physical resources was often related to issues of access, but participants found ways to use available materials to support their studies.

Participants mentioned that they wanted to read, listen to the radio or television programs, but they did not have books, radios or televisions. Print resources included primarily books and newspapers. Christian participants and a few non-affiliated students rely on faith based texts to study English. Most Christians reported reading their English Bible and other Christian literature to increase their skills. Samnang reported that when he reads the Bible, “Sometimes I don’t understand it all, I just read it. Pastor says readers are leaders so I must read.” Akara reads the Bible and other related books repeatedly to improve her English. The use of the Bible to learn English also serves an additional purpose of indoctrination. Other students primarily used their text book for their classes to practice. Some students used children’s books or other books in English when available. Socheata mentioned borrowing English books from the American missionary children at the church. Participants reported that they also use their computer books and books from the university to practice reading in English. Some university courses use textbooks written in English, which requires the students to interact with English. Postsecondary students reported struggling with content specific vocabulary in their textbooks, but the teachers support their language acquisition by teaching through a combination of Khmer and English.

Participants also used the newspaper to learn English when it was available.

Access it is an issue in terms of physical resources. For example, there are two main daily newspapers in Phnom Penh. The *Phnom Penh Post*, which costs 4,000 riel or \$1 per day and offers two language options, one in Khmer and one in English. *The Cambodia Daily*, which is 1,500 riel offers both languages in one newspaper. Both newspapers include inserts aimed at developing English among readers. *The Phnom Penh Post's* weekly insert *Lift* magazine covers topics of interest to young adults. It offers more activities for readers to improve on their skills as well as provides a Khmer translation along side of each article. Participants that reported using the newspaper never purchased it themselves, but rather used papers that other people were prepared to discard.

The permeation of English through Cambodian society provides numerous resources for students. Various forms of technology and media were utilized by students to study English. Urban streets exude English in written and spoken forms. Billboards, shop signs and menus, especially in areas with high tourist traffic, are written in Khmer and English. Some messages are only written in English. Tuk tuk drivers and motorbike taxis attempt to attract foreign customers by addressing them in English, sometimes by complimenting them or asking them a question. This interaction provides an opportunity for them to have a conversation in English and recruit potential business clients. It is common to see movies or television shows in English or with English subtitles playing in homes and businesses. The music of American pop idols like Britney Spears can be heard blasting from cell phone promotional tents and trendy clothing stores. Each evening, Cambodians of all ages can be seen doing dance aerobics to songs with English lyrics in the public parks. Many teens and young adults enjoy coming to the hip hop aerobic

workout sessions where the latest American billboard top ten tracks are playing. The visual and auditory presence of English in Phnom Penh provides opportunities for individuals to interact with the language in different forms.

Radio, television and the internet were commonly used sources for students studying English. Many students reported listening to a variety of radio programs as a way of immersing themselves in English. Dilen often approached me on campus to ask my opinion about political and global issues that he heard reported by the BBC. He listens to the radio for thirty minutes to two hours each day. Prasith, like several other students, does not have a television, so he listens to English on the radio. There is a popular talk radio program in English that is hosted by Khmers. Christian students reported listening to an evangelical, English radio station.

Movies and cartoons provide entertainment for people, but they also provide language exposure for individuals studying English. Cable television stations offer popular shows like *Law and Order* and *Desperate House Wives* in English. Western movies are voiced over in Khmer with English subtitles or they are shown in English. Cable television is not a luxury most participants enjoy regularly, except when visiting foreigners, wealthier friends or in public places. A few students reported watching *Tom and Jerry* to relax, but view other cartoons with English dialogue as a way to learn. Some students watched news programs in English. Students also watch movies on television or on pirated DVDs in English. Sometimes students would congregate in the small library to watch movies in between their classes and on the weekends.

The internet is a much used resource for students for educational, social and entertainment purposes. Internet cafés, although decreasing in popularity as improved

technology infrastructure lowers the costs and allows coffee shops and other places to offer wireless, are found frequently. In some communities, the police have confiscated computers and shutdown internet cafes because it is illegal for students to be playing online games during school hours, this was the case for the café operated by one of the church members. Several students used Spotlight or Voice of America online radio programs designed for English language learners in class settings and independently. These programs report current events using native speaking hosts that speak slowly and clearly in a manner that makes the language more accessible to speakers of other languages.

Other English programs and websites are utilized by EKCC teachers and students on and off campus. They can use dictionaries to look up word meanings and more importantly pronunciation. They can print worksheets, which is rare because of associated costs, but are used as study guides. Students can play games and complete online exercises and quizzes to expand their vocabulary and practice grammar. Several participants are active on Facebook, which provides a forum for language and communication practice. Student posts, such as status updates and notes, are often done in one of four ways: Khmer script (which seems to be the least popular), Khmer language translated to English, English or a combination of Khmer and English written using the Roman alphabet. Three of these four ways are interactive attempts by students to communicate and practice the English language.

Some students rely on their peers and other people in their lives to help them study English. Participants reported asking their teachers, peers and others about vocabulary, grammar and study strategies. A common question for me at the end of

participant interviews was, “What is a way that I can learn to speak English fast?” or “What is the best way for me to study English?” Socheata and Monika both play games with their friends to practice their English. The rules are simple: speak English only during the game and pay 200 riel, which is just over \$.05 USD to the overall collection if you speak Khmer during the game. Then, the collected money is used to by the group to go out and buy something to eat or to do something fun. This game was also suggested by other students in my English class at EKCC to encourage students to practice speaking in English. Participants also reported greeting each other in English and using English when calling each other on their cell phones to improve their proficiency. Kumpeak reported that she practices her English by speaking to her dog. She is not in secondary school or the university, so she has less opportunities than her peers to speak English with others. Some students designed personal study schedules to ensure that they studied English for a particular amount of time each day. Lastly, Christian participants mostly attended Bible study classes and the Wednesday services to practice their English. However, a few non-affiliated and Buddhist students also attended periodically when they had time in an effort to practice their English.

### *Conclusion*

There are numerous formal, non-formal and informal learning institutions that support participants’ English studies. These schools and programs vary in cost from free to fairly expensive, especially in relation to families’ current income levels. Participants utilize various forms of media to study English. In many instances, participants use what is available and affordable. They employ various self-teaching strategies and use small

study breaks and self-talk to maintain ongoing motivation necessary to learn another language.

Religion: intended consequences, unintended outcomes and perceptions

During the six months of the study, it became clear that EKCC has a specific plan in place to spread Christianity and to convert Cambodians. The plan is centered on using evangelical methods to introduce students to Christianity and eventually convert them. The church uses formal and informal strategies to share the Christian doctrine. Students that converted to Christianity reported similar experiences which were strongly linked to their perceptions and beliefs about learning English. This study's focus was on students' motivations and experiences related to learning English, not on religion specifically, but the paramount role of religion permeated Christian students' experiences and has become an important finding. Therefore, the church's plan to use education to increase the number of students visiting the church and the outcomes for students must be addressed. The church is involved with other outreach efforts, but this discussion is limited to those that relate specifically to students' experiences learning English.

Religion is an integral component of cultures worldwide. Disputes surrounding religious ideologies have spurred conflict locally, nationally and globally for centuries. Power and control are often significant contributors to tensions evolving from ideological differences. Concerns over loss of culture and tradition often permeate communities where shifts in religious beliefs occur. While conflicts vary historically and geographically based on current social climates, there are commonalities worth recognizing. The current and historical role of religion in Cambodia highlights the relationship between educational access, social mobility and faith based institutions.



Buddhist institutions have historically provided educational opportunities for Cambodian young men and some women (Bektimirova, 2002). Buddhism is the religion of more than 95% of the population; however Islam, Christianity, and animism are also practiced. This section focuses on evangelical Christianity and its' impacts on the education and life experiences of young, Khmer adults learning English. The research site location and study population highlighted the role of Christianity in a developing nation eager to join the global economy.

Religion played a significant role in Christian participants' experiences of learning English and moderately impacted Buddhist and non-affiliated participants experiences. Recall the sample of Cambodian students consisted of 3 Buddhist males, 8 Buddhist females, 8 Christian males, 5 Christian females and 6 males that did not report a religious affiliation. The church's primary goal is to introduce and spread Christianity in Cambodia, which is done primarily through the English program. The impact of this religious exposure has intended and unintended consequences upon participants. Christian students reported the most impact from being exposed to Christianity. Converted Christian participants and their families shared similar responses and experiences related to the conversion process. Religion's role will be discussed through three interconnected findings that are explicitly related to participants' experiences learning English: the church's intended consequences, unintended outcomes and the responses of students and their families. The church provides access to educational opportunities and resources, which promote social mobility, but the impact of Christianity on students' lives can result in disruptions in the family unit, strained relationships and deterioration of Khmer culture.

### Intended Consequences

Full disclosure about my participation in the Christian community is necessary. On my first trip to Cambodia, I accompanied a mission team as an English teacher. Although my role was to teach English, I was a member of the mission team and their goal was to spread the Christian faith and work with children at a local orphanage. See Appendix D for a complete discussion of my role in relation to education and Christianity in Cambodia. I returned to Cambodia for research purposes and to assist with the restructuring of the previous English program at EKCC. The church's intended goals for revising the program became increasingly apparent over the course of the study. It is not my intent to condone or condemn the actions of the Christian community in Cambodia, but rather to objectively describe the study's findings.

The study highlighted two primary goals of the church: to spread Christianity and support the local community through an English program, which result in specific, intended consequences. Church staff reported that they work to support both goals simultaneously and one does not take preference over another (Thai, personal communication, August 1, 2011). One goal is to provide resources and support for the local community. The church provides physical, human and financial resources that promote the overall well being of people in an impoverished community. The second aim is to grow the church by converting individuals to Christianity. The church has strategic plans in place to spread Christianity throughout Cambodia using direct and indirect action. These actions support a common experience for many students that will be referred to as the conversion process. There is a direct link between Christian participants' conversion, beliefs and their experiences learning English.

*Providing resources to the community*

The church provides a variety of resources for the community, specifically to young adults. The resources can be categorized as physical, educational, human and financial. The resources are offered for free or at a significantly reduced cost, which is important because of the high levels of poverty in this specific community. The resources attract people from the local community and surrounding provinces. The combination of available resources increases opportunities for educational access, social networks and social mobility among participants.

*Physical and educational resources*

Physical and educational resources include: free classes, housing, transportation, use of musical instruments, classrooms, computer lab, a small library, learning materials and certifications. Free English and computer classes attract a significant number of students because they cannot afford private classes or part-time study. The majority of students cited free classes as the main reason they started to study at EKCC. Rith described his choice to attend classes, “I started at new life at grade 12, which was three years ago. I came to the church because it was free and I don't need to ask my mom for money.” Free and ongoing educational opportunities are rare in Cambodia. Public school teachers often withhold curricular content to require students to pay to study part time with them outside the regular school hours. This practice is deemed necessary to supplement teachers’ extremely low salaries. Bora explained that his attendance at EKCC has been irregular over the last two years because he was studying at his public school where he had to “pay a lot of money,” but he has been attending more regularly now because he can study for free. Numerous students switched from private schools to

studying at EKCC to decrease the burden on their families. Free English and computer classes provide students with a skill set that makes them more marketable in the employment sector and better prepares them to study at the university level.

EKCC offers dormitories for male and female students from the provinces to live in communal quarters at a minimal cost, \$3 a month if you are unemployed and \$5 a month if you are employed. The three male dorms accommodate approximately fifty young men. The female dorm accommodates six women. The dorms are primarily a place to sleep and study. Students from the province have limited access to education, so the dorms provide an opportunity to live in Phnom Penh, closer to colleges and universities. Students can study English, improve their computer skills and learn about Christianity by living at the dorms. The dorms are a means to a better life for many students. Samnang explains,

The Bible says *in Christ*, not in your family. So when I'm in the dorm I feel very different from my home even though in my home I have my family, but when I come here everything changes in my mind, I feel warm and happy in my heart, even though sometimes we have problems I'm still happy living in the dorm because the dorm is a place to grow and get a better life. They teach us to be a good person and teach English. They do whatever to make us be good and a wise man, to be a better man, to get a job so even though we are all boys we still love each other and be with each other and not be lonely. Honestly you know, when I go home I cannot stay even one day, a whole day, can't stay at all, but I really want to come back to the dorm. I don't know why. Because you never know, if everybody is here they go home to their province so at night I also go to my home, but I still miss here. I know no one really stay here. They go home, but I still want to come here and stay here. I feel like my home is here.

Dorm life often provides support and acceptance for students as they learn a new language and religion. There are rules in regard to dorm life that require students to behave in a "Christian" like manner, such as no drinking, gambling or staying out past curfew. Samnang is a dorm leader. Dorm leaders are usually young men, or a woman at

the female dorm, who have been living in the dorm for awhile. They monitor residents' behavior and lead weekly meetings. A few select students at the main dorm have access to the church's motorbikes, which can be used for transportation to classes and jobs.

Life in the dorms is not without challenges for students and church leaders. Some dorm residents struggle to abide by the rules. Students that come to live in the dorms are not necessarily Christian believers upon arrival. This presents some issues especially among the students that have converted and become passionate Christians. During the study, the American missionary couple that works at the church had concerns that some of the female dorm members were negatively influencing some of the committed Christian girls living in the dorm. They invited three of the female students to live in their home in order to avoid potentially toxic influences (female dorm residents that were breaking the dorm rules and less actively participating in the church) that may encourage the girls to stray away from Jesus Christ (Elizabeth, personal communication, June, 2010). These girls went from communal dorm life to living in a much larger home with better accommodations, such as increased privacy, television and regular meals.

Church members, specifically those that join the worship team, have access to the church's musical instruments. The students practice regularly and perform during church services. The church building has classrooms that are used for English classes, Bible studies and for other meeting purposes. There is a small library that consists of books and videos. Students often watch movies or educational videos in English in the library. The students can also purchase photocopied books for English classes at a significantly reduced cost in the library.

The computer lab has more than 30 computers that are available for student use during the computer education classes. The computer courses teach basic computer program skills such as Microsoft Word, Power Point and Excel. Students must receive a specific score on the English Placement Test to enroll in the computer courses because the instruction is in English. Learning computer skills is a motivating factor for students to attend the English classes. Students can work toward a certification, known as the International Computer Driving License (ICDL), which is offered through an Australian institution. Naro, a high school male, insists that he is trying to study very hard in his English classes because he wants to receive the ICDL. Students are also presented with certificates of completion after passing six month long English courses offered through the church's program. Certifications of study are perceived to make students more marketable to potential employers, but it is unclear whether or not they influence prospective employers.

Bible study class is offered daily and taught by John, an American male missionary. John does not like to teach English classes, although that is what the pastor has requested him to do. He prefers to teach the Bible. However, he teaches the Bible through English which appeals to students from all religious backgrounds. I observed his class several times. There were Buddhist and non-affiliated participants there as well. I asked some of the participants why they came to study the Bible and the response from Buddhist students was that it was a way to learn English and non-affiliated students agreed, but also mentioned that they can gain new knowledge about Christianity. The students use the book *Knowing God Study Guide* which has questions to help them

understand the stories from the Bible. This is the text for Bible class. English classes use ESL textbooks.

### *People and relationships*

Many different types of people are involved at EKCC, such as teachers, foreigners, church leaders and peer groups. The teachers in the English program are church leaders or active members. Active members are individuals that participate in most or all church functions including worship services and cell groups. Prior to the restructuring of the program, which expanded and revised the existing English program, there was one female teacher. At the start of new English program there were four women teaching classes. This change may have been a result of necessity because the number of classes offered increased significantly. Teachers are selected by the church leaders based on their perceived potential. Individuals who are not Christians are not permitted to teach, which makes recruiting quality teachers difficult (Thai, personal communication, August 1, 2011). I conducted teacher training seminars and workshops while I was living in Cambodia. The majority of the teachers reported that teaching is a way to serve God, which is what motivates them to improve their teaching practice.

Study participants are generally very pleased with teachers at EKCC, despite the fact that the teachers have no formal training. Daro, who studies at EKCC as well as at a private school, explained that the teachers are “quality” and the experience at EKCC is “like a private school.” Vicheka said that she began to study at EKCC because the “school is good for me and has good teachers, like you.” Teacher quality appeals to the students, but part of that appeal is that there are native English speakers teaching classes. The presence of two Americans working at the church, in addition to other short and long

term missionaries, means that there are often native English speakers available with whom students practice their English and ask questions about grammar and other English related topics.

Speaking English and the ability to communicate with foreigners is important to participants. Akara recalled wanting to study English when she was seven years old. She saw foreigners and people on TV and thought “I want to speak like them too.” Akara explained that when she was young she had no friends that were foreigners, but now many come to EKCC and she tries to connect with them at the church. Kumpeak has three foreigner friends, all of whom she has met at the church. She describes her experience the following way: “The first time I speak I am very afraid because I cannot speak English. I admire the foreigners because they don't mind I speak wrong. You must speak every day to improve speaking and listening skills.”

Lida is a female student who constantly present on EKCC's campus. In our discussion about why she was studying English she posed the question, “If we didn't speak English, how can we connect with foreign friends?” I asked her about her friendships with foreigners. She explained that her relationship with a foreigner that she met at EKCC motivated her to learn English, “In 2006 the first time I talked with an Australian girl, Jen, she was my first foreign friend. After meeting her, I studied more because I wanted to talk with her, have a relationship with her. I really like her that's why I want to study English.” Lida also expressed that there is a certain sense of comfort obtained from learning English from foreigners and Khmer students at EKCC, “They (Khmer friends outside of EKCC) never speak English to me, only friends in church. They come and speak to me in English a little bit. I have many foreigner friends. My



Khmer friends, if I don't say a word right, they make fun of me. That is not good. My foreigner friends correct me if I say a word wrong." Sambo also cited being comfortable speaking English with native speakers, "I am nervous to speak (English) if there are Khmer people around because they will laugh at me, so I feel shy. I do not feel shy if it's all foreigners."

Church leaders, Khmer and American, serve as role models and mentors to young adults in the community. The pastor, Maron, is thirty two years old. He moved from the province to the city when he was nineteen to work as a security guard and study English, which he did for free at the main church in Phnom Penh. He converted to Christianity, married Joan, an American missionary, and began planting churches in the provinces. He has been the pastor of EKCC since 2005. He is a fluent English speaker and a prominent leader in Cambodia's Christian community. He often shares his story about being a poor boy from the province that moved to the city and "through the grace of God" and his hard work was able to transform his life. He is greatly admired by the students and church members for his kind heart, accomplishments and ability to speak English. Many students, Christians and non-Christians, cite him as a source of motivation for learning English and improving their lives.

Vin, a church leader and teacher, also uses his life experiences to inspire students. Vin was a former gang leader that was heavily involved in criminal activity and drug use. After a motorbike accident, in which he was hospitalized, he met Mala (another church leader) that happened to be visiting someone in the hospital. The two men began talking and Mala urged Vin to come stay at the dorms, study English and Christianity. Vin moved to the dorm and quickly learned English and began working as a drug

rehabilitation counselor for a local NGO. He teaches English classes and leads cell groups. Socheata shared that Vin was the teacher that helped her find God, which was a powerful and important experience in her life. In addition to teaching English and sharing the Bible, Vin has brought several of his extended family members from the province to live and study at EKCC.

Samnang is Vin's cousin. He moved to the dorms at EKCC after seeing how the experience changed Vin's life. Samnang describes the influence of foreigners and church leaders on him:

I know when foreigners come, they like to read. So when they have free time, sometimes they come to the church to help like clean the church, but when they have break time they like to read. I work with them, I see them and I start to learn from them because they like to read and while in Cambodia (the province) I don't like to read, but I want to know and they say the more you read the more you know. So I remember I put it in my mind so I learn from Mala (a former church leader) and what he teaches me. I learn from foreigners.

He (Mala) knows English better because he was in the church and he know a lot of foreigners who know English and so me and Titi, we know nothing. So when I saw him speak English to foreigners when they come, I saw my friend speak English so it feels a little bit ashamed for me. I am the friend of him and I don't know English and I sometimes try to escape him when the foreigners come. And sometimes let him teach for us, like Titi and me. After that he just encourages me to study and to be brave. Mala says "Be bold to meet foreigners and know they won't eat you! Don't be scared, talk, go talk, they like to talk with you."

Students receive encouragement and mentoring from the teachers, church leaders and visiting missionaries. The leaders and students interested in learning about Christianity participate in cell groups, which are small, Bible study groups. Some students eventually transition to cell group leaders after they have demonstrated their commitment to and understanding of Christianity. The cell group leaders participate in retreats and workshops to support their understanding of Christianity and develop their leadership skills.

Staff, students and teachers contribute to an overall sense of community that is fostered at EKCC, which participants' appreciate. An atmosphere of acceptance, friendship and love for students exists on campus. Akara said one reason she comes to EKCC because "there is love here." Ratha comes to the church because "the people here always show me kindness." According to Thai, the campus is a place to show God's love to the students, build relationships with them and teach them about God. Non-Christian students and those that do not participate in the cell groups and other church related events appreciate the acceptance and friendly atmosphere. Many students expressed gratitude that the campus at EKCC provides a space to spend time with their peers and teachers, meet new people and foreigners and practice their English.

#### *Financial Resources*

High rates of poverty plague Cambodia. Poverty is widespread and financial resources are especially scarce. Study participants work diligently on their academics in hopes of achieving some type of scholarship for college. The church directly and indirectly provides financial resources for the students through donations, sponsorship, scholarship, employment and networking opportunities.

The church supports its' members when there is an emergency or crisis. A student, not a study participant, was in a motorbike accident in which she was seriously injured. She broke her leg and required surgery on her foot, in addition to a week stay in the hospital. During a Sunday church service, more than \$200 was collected from church members to give to the student's family to assist with medical costs. The following week, the pastor shared that the family was elated to receive the money and he was grateful because trust has been established between the church and the student's family, who is

Buddhist. The donation promoted a positive image of the church which contrasts with the negative perceptions of it maintained by many of the students' families and the larger, Khmer community.

Sponsorship, like many donations, comes in the form of funding from faith based organizations and individuals abroad. Samnang, for example, has been sponsored by a Lutheran organization based in the United States. He assisted a mission team for two weeks in the summer of 2009. The team leader was impressed with Samnang and his commitment to Christ. He has sponsored Samnang since then by paying for his college tuition and related expenses. He also obtained the donation of a brand new laptop computer for Samnang in 2010. This same organization also sponsors students at a local orphanage, particularly ones that have accepted Christ in their lives, by assisting with the cost of part time English instruction and college tuition.

Sambo attends college on scholarship from an Australian Christian organization. He graduated high school when he was twenty one, but initially his family could not afford to send him to college. His father saved two hundred dollars and was able to send Sambo for one semester, but could not afford the tuition for another semester. He described the experience:

I didn't have the money to continue, but I pray to God and I got a four year scholarship to study financial banking. The scholarship is from an organization that find for poor people. It is a Christian organization that finds smart student. We complete a form that goes to Australia, if they agree, then they call me. Their only request is that I try my best to study and let them know about my result. I try my best to study because it (the scholarship) is from God and not from man. Thank God that he gives me wisdom. I'm not very clever, but I try.

Lida also received a partial scholarship from her university, which has a partnership with the main church of which EKCC is a branch. Her scholarship covers

70% of the \$360 annual tuition and Lida's parents pay the remaining 30% and purchase her textbooks and supplies. Lida works part time at a bookstore to earn income. These examples illustrate the ways EKCC uses English, financial and physical resources, social networking and emotional connections to build relationships, establish trust and ultimately evangelize to young adults.

The job market in Cambodia is poor and applicants often require personal recommendations to be hired. Networking and job opportunities are one way the church provides financial resources to its' members. EKCC church and education programs employ about forty members for a variety of part and full time jobs. Members work as security guards, teachers, drivers, cooks, interpreters and office staff. Church leaders fill the positions of accountants, youth minister, director of education programs, worship team leader and full time teachers. These jobs are available to church members only. Non-Christian, proficient English speaking students are not permitted to teach English classes for pay or as volunteers. There is a distinct separation in available opportunities between Christian and non-Christian students in this aspect. I conducted a teacher training course at EKCC. A student from my grammar class approached me about attending the course. I invited him and he attended one class, but did not return the following week. A church staff member later informed me that he was not a member of the church and therefore ineligible to participate. Although the class was free and I taught without compensation, there were clearly informal, but powerful rules regarding eligibility for participation.

Recommendations for employment by the pastor and other church staff have resulted in job opportunities outside of the church for students who are church members.

One young woman, not a study participant, was hired as a teacher's assistant at a private school despite her limited qualifications. She secured an interview through a recommendation from one of the church's American missionaries whose children attend the school. Job openings are shared among Christian social networks. Church leaders often refer specific individuals for those vacancies. Significant involvement in the Christian community and relationships with leaders often increase the likelihood of job recommendations for students. Some members currently work with a Christian NGO aimed at rehabilitating teens with substance abuse addictions. Social networking through the church provides Christian students with employment opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable.

Foreign missionaries working in Cambodia also employ students. Some females are regularly employed as house helpers or maids. House helpers can live with a family or commute. House helpers are responsible for cleaning, cooking, shopping and childcare. Some employment is temporary such as babysitting or house sitting for a family traveling. Missionaries often hire members to teach them Khmer language or help with small household jobs.

The networking opportunities provided by the church community results directly and indirectly in financial resources for the members. Financial resources combined with the benefits of educational and physical resources and social networks create improved living conditions for students. The three female students who moved in with the missionary couple upgraded from communal living with the barest of necessities to living in a home that rents for \$500 a month. Akara, among others, reported her relationships at the church provided her with love and support that her family did not show. Sidorn, since

moving into the dorms, mentions the challenges of not having enough food to eat and having his sleep interrupted by biting insects. Students that have their basic physical needs for food and shelter, as well as social-emotional needs met, may be better able to focus more fully on their academics and learning English.

#### The plan: Growing the church and spreading the Christian faith

Some participants are students of Christianity while others are Christian students, which is an important distinction. The church community spreads the Gospel to students through organized and informal efforts. The church aims to increase attendance on campus through English and computer classes because it maximizes their opportunity to evangelize. Formal strategies for exposing students to Christianity are primarily regular church services, Bible class, Harvesters' class and cell groups. Informal efforts in which individuals share their testimony or Bible passages occur through mentoring and discussions. Church members did not overtly force Christianity upon students, but there were discussions in which members passionately attempted to convince students of Jesus Christ. However, participants that have converted to Christianity share similar experiences.

It is necessary to disclose my personal, and somewhat naïve, involvement with the implementation of EKCC's plan. As mentioned before, I include an extensive discussion in Appendix D for a complete discussion of this issue. Recall that I accompanied a U.S. mission team to teach English to children at local orphanages, teach ESL classes at a church, and to conduct a teacher workshop in the summer of 2009. During this visit, the pastor and I discussed the possibility of my returning and assisting with the restructuring of the church's English program and teacher training. The purpose of my second trip to

Cambodia during 2010 was to fulfill the pastor's request and to document these processes for my dissertation topic of young Cambodians learning English. Approximately three months into the study when I began to meet regularly with the pastor about restructuring the program, it became clear that the improvement of teaching and overall program had an additional agenda with intentions to increase the number of students on campus and maximize opportunities to evangelize.

The church's plan for the English program was to improve the quality of teaching, increase student enrollment and convert more nonbelievers. The latter was the main goal, but was not presented in that manner. The primary goal was to develop an English program that would implement assessments, curriculum and policies rivaling the quality of private schools. The pastor expected that a successful revision of the English program would boost student enrollment and potentially earn favor and trust among the community for the church. It would then be "harvest time" as described by a church leader (See Appendix E).

Wednesday evening services at the church are conducted in English and Khmer, replacing English classes during the 5:00-6:00 p.m. time slot. This provides the church with an opportunity to expose non-Christian students to the Bible. The timing of the service is intentional. Students with parents who disapprove of their children learning about Christianity can attend without raising suspicion because their parents assume they are at their regular evening English class. Many non-Christian students are prohibited from coming to the church on Sundays because their families know that Sunday is a day of worship for Christians. The church intends to introduce students to Christ through



Wednesday services, followed by their attendance at youth evening services on Saturdays, cell groups throughout the week, and eventually Sunday service.

Significant planning for restructuring the program began in May. The start of the revised program began in July, 2010 during the final weeks of the study. See Appendix F for a description of the English program prior to and after restructuring. The enrollment increased from approximately 375 students to 500 students during the initial year of the revised program. However, the enrollment dropped to between 250-300 students at the onset of the second year. The decrease in numbers was attributed to dissatisfaction with the length of time required to complete it, which the staff changed from the recommended six months per level to one year per level (Thai, personal communication, August 1, 2011). Although it is impossible to conclude definitively without further research, it may be the religious overtones of the program pushed some students away. Regardless, similar formal and informal strategies for sharing the Christian doctrine on campus were used throughout the course of the entire study. In addition, the church added a Harvesters class, which is described later.

### *Sharing strategies*

Students are welcomed into class and onto campus regardless of their religious beliefs. The church staff and members evangelize and disperse information about Christianity in different ways. English classes are not used to directly preach about Christianity, but a staff member informed me that sometimes a lesson lends itself to evangelizing. During their time on campus for English and computer classes, students have multiple opportunities to learn about Christianity, if they are interested. Students are

exposed to Christianity through both formal, organized efforts as well as informal methods.

Formal strategies for sharing the Bible and teaching about Christianity include Wednesday and Sunday church services, a Bible and Harvesters class, cell groups and a retreat. The Wednesday evening service, offered in place of classes, is popular among Christian and non-Christian students because it provides an opportunity to listen to spoken English and the Khmer translation. Youth services are on Saturday evenings for the young adults, which is the majority of the church's congregation. Sunday service is two hours and conducted in Khmer. Occasionally foreign missionaries from countries like Australia, Korea, the Philippines, Singapore and the United States attend and a portion of the service is done in English and translated into Khmer.

The Bible class, called Knowing God, was taught in English five days a week by an American missionary. Students use study guides to accompany their Bibles, which are either in English or Khmer. Studying any subject with a native English speaker is a rare opportunity in Cambodia. Some non-affiliated participants attended the class solely to practice English with a native speaker, while others were interested in the content of the course. Foreigners are often bestowed an elevated status in Cambodia, especially native English speakers. They are perceived to be wealthy and intelligent because they come from developed nations. Recognition of such status is important because foreigners can knowingly or unknowingly have a significant influence on Cambodians, especially young adults.

Harvester classes began after I left Cambodia, but I learned about them when I completed follow up interviews in 2011. A Harvester class focuses on the Bible and

mission work. It is taught by another American missionary who began working at the church in late 2010. The class meets three times a week for two hours and is heavily involved in spreading the Christian faith in the provinces through mission work. The students in this class are all Christians. The Harvester class is designed to develop evangelical skills, participate in social outreach efforts and proselytize to non-believers.

It is essential to recognize the existing power dynamics in the Christian community and how they influence students' belief systems. The high status of English speaking leaders, Khmer and foreign, attributes a certain amount of power and privilege to these individuals, that, in turn, is used to influence Cambodian adolescents beginning to define their identities as adults. The work of foreign missionaries is intended to support the church and the shared mission of spreading Christianity. One Sunday during the study, a Korean American missionary spoke at the service about Korea's historical rise as a nation from poverty to becoming a world superpower. The church pastor then shared a Bible verse about being financially responsible and contributing 10% of one's earnings to the church. His sermon emphasized that financial support of the church will lead to increased blessings for the donating individuals. The more people support the church, the more blessings they will receive in this life and in heaven. This message was reiterated in a slightly different form during Bible class. The teacher explained that people who believe in God receive blessings in their lives, but those that do not believe receive curses. There was an explicit cause and effect dynamic that is taught through sharing strategies. Individuals' beliefs in God and their supporting actions are directly related to life circumstances.

The pastor, church leaders and missionaries utilize church members to formally share the Bible through cell groups. Cell groups are small groups of students that typically consist of two to eight students interested in learning more about Christianity. The small peer led groups are facilitated by church members who have a more advanced understanding of Christianity. As mentioned in the previous section, a cell group is how Socheata “found Jesus” through her studies with Vin. Cell group leaders continue to study Christianity and have the opportunity to attend retreats, often held at the beach, for further religious development. Retreats are designed as a reward for leaders’ work and an opportunity for them to deepen their understanding about God. Cell groups are conducted in English and Khmer.

Mentoring is another way church members work to continue their own understanding of the Bible and to share Christianity with others. No formal mentoring program exists, but members develop informal mentor-mentee relationships. The mentoring occurs among peers and between teachers and students. EKCC’s campus is the site of a significant amount of social interaction. Students congregate there before and after classes, church services and during their free time. Students regularly play chess, volleyball and soccer on campus. They watch movies in the library. They use the space to study, practice speaking English together and generally just pass the time. Students develop relationships with each other, church leaders and members, teaching staff and foreign missionaries. The campus has created a space in which leaders, teachers and active church members have opportunities to share the Bible or how Jesus Christ has changed their lives. The manner of conveying how an individual came to be a Christian is referred to as “giving your testimony.”

In my observations, the direct, informal sharing of religious experiences, testimonies and the Bible rarely appeared to be overtly forced upon uninterested students and participants did not describe contrary experiences in their interviews. However, it is important to highlight that my understanding of Khmer is limited and my physical presence alone may have influenced students' behavior. I observed several instances in which church members passionately debated with their non-Christian peers about the validity of other religions. In these debates, church members contended that all religions are not equal and Christianity is the only acceptable faith. They argued that becoming Christian and following Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation. Maron, EKCC's pastor, takes a less harsh approach when discussing Christianity with students who are not Christian. He regularly comments to fellow staff that they should not discourage students from attending English classes by evangelizing relentlessly.

I observed an experience during a staff meeting of church leaders which supported the pastor's approach to students with different religious beliefs. We were discussing the placement test and registration procedures for the new program. I suggested using the registration form as a tool to determine students' levels of education and instructional interests. John, the American missionary on staff, suggested that we include a place for students to designate their religion. He mentioned that the main church used this strategy to identify beliefs of current and potential students. Maron immediately dismissed the idea and explained that he did not want to push students away. He expressed concern that the question may make non-Christian students uncomfortable. He reassured John that Christian students are easy for teachers to identify because their

tendency to approach teachers and tell them that they are believers in an effort to win their teacher's favor.

This experience combined with the way the pastor spoke about the goals of the English program seemed to imply at times that the pastor would not encourage his staff to push Christianity upon anyone that did not welcome learning about it. There is some contradiction in that approach, since the church service is held at the regular class time to intentionally create a time and space where students with disapproving parents could come and learn about Christianity without raising suspicion among families.

Participants did not report instances in which Christianity was forced upon them, but again, their perception of me and my relationship with church leaders may make them hesitant to share such instances. I also did not directly inquire about students' experiences with the church's sharing strategies. Pahna, a male who does not consider himself Christian or Buddhist, stated that many people are hesitant to study English at churches or other faith based institutions because they fear being forced to believe in something. Pahna describes himself as open-minded. He says he came to EKCC to gain knowledge, study English and learn about other religions. He is comfortable attending classes because he knows that no one will force any beliefs upon him. Although his friends warn him not to come and learn about Jesus because Cambodia is not a Christian nation, he continues to come. He explained, "I keep good morality and don't scold any religion. I just focus on what I need to do to improve my knowledge." At the time of the interview, Pahna explained,

In my mind, I don't believe, but I've got a good experience and knowledge about the church. EKCC is like private schools, but I don't have to pay. I have opportunities to improve my language speaking with friends and foreigners and I can use this to help my family in the future.

Pahna began to attend services and Bible class more frequently over the duration of the study. His increased participation could potentially indicate that he is beginning to accept the Christian doctrine or it may just be an effort to learn about English and Christianity. It is important to note that studying Christianity does not necessarily mean accepting it.

During a follow up interview in July 2011, I was informed by Thai about an annual retreat that is offered to the English students at EKCC. It consists of twenty to twenty five Christian adults and church leaders accompanying approximately eighty students on a three day trip to the beach. Many students have never been to the beach before and this is a free opportunity for them. The church spends \$5000 on the weekend retreat. The students are not informed that the retreat is Christian centered until they arrive there. Thai explained that this is so they can have an opportunity to hear about Jesus and three days without close contact with family and friends minimizes outside influence. Thai said that at times the teachers will go to the homes of students and speak with their parents about the retreat. They do not mention it is Christian based, unless they are asked directly and then they respond honestly. Thai reported that the retreat is an opportunity for the church staff to build relationships with the students, which is important for evangelizing. He admitted that some students are angry and resistant initially when they discover that the adult leaders are talking about Jesus, but their resistance seems to subside over the three day period. I do not know how many students convert as a result of this trip.

*Conversion process for students*

Students who convert to Christianity reported similar experiences of how they learned about Christianity and eventually accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The timeline for students that converted varied, but over the course of the study I observed students at different phases of changing and defining their religious beliefs. The process generally has three parts: an introductory period, a negotiation period and commitment period. The phases are not distinct; rather they overlap and are interrelated. The introduction begins when students are exposed to the Bible's teachings. The negotiation period occurs as students grapple with their changing beliefs. The commitment phase occurs after students have accepted Jesus Christ and Christianity and are baptized.

There is no specific time frame for converting students. A memo from a church leader indicated that it is possible, if not ideal, to have students that are new to the English program involved in formal sharing forums in a matter of months (See Appendix E). Most students reported converting in a year or less, with the exception of Srey Oun. Thai agreed that it typically takes less than one year for conversion. Srey Oun is unique in that it took her three years before she decided to become a Christian. This is the longest conversion process reported by a Christian participant in the study. The length of process of shifting one's beliefs varies, but typically adheres to a similar pattern. Individuals must attend six consecutive weeks of Christian course in order to be eligible to be baptized. In 2011, the church baptized 40 new Christians, which is up from 20 the previous year. Thai estimated that about one third of baptized students leave because of persecution from non-believers and family pressure. He emphasized the importance of



supporting new Christians through cell groups because “those without a (cell) group get away.”

### *The introductory period*

The introductory period occurs initially for students that come to the church to study English and computer. The majority of students study at the church because it is free and they cannot afford tuition at private institutions. Students take an English placement test and enroll in English and computer classes. During their time on campus, they are introduced to teachers, peers and foreign missionaries that share personal testimonies and encourage them to study English. Students are invited to Wednesday evening service, Bible class and cell groups by classmates, teachers and church staff. They are introduced to the Bible and Christian doctrine through these experiences. Students watch their peers and community members speaking English fluently, communicating with foreigner (typically missionaries) and working as interpreters. These observations are appealing to young, Khmer adults and a motivational force for studying English.

Numerous Christian and non-Christian participants cited communicating with foreigners and interpreting as motivational factors for learning English. This will be discussed in the motivation section, but it should be highlighted that the ability to communicate with foreigners has significant appeal to students of different religious backgrounds. Kumpeak, a Buddhist female that stopped attending formal school in seventh grade, explained that communicating with foreigners is important to her. However, the only foreigners she currently communicates with are from the church. Many students reported observing their peers translating and talking with foreigners and

aspire to foster that ability within themselves. On campus students approach foreigners, almost all of whom are missionaries, to practice their English with them. The opportunity to practice with native English speakers and fluent English speaking Cambodians is appealing to students. The potential of interacting with foreign missionaries and English speaking church leaders attract students to the church. The ability to speak English either natively or as a second language gives the speakers status and power within the community. Because they are role models, their interactions with young, Khmer adults can be very influential, especially in the introductory and negotiation periods.

*Wednesday evening services and cell groups*

Students interested in learning more about Christianity and the Bible, while learning English simultaneously, attend Wednesday evening services and/or enroll in the Bible class. They typically join a cell group as the next step in the introduction to Christianity. Students later begin coming to youth night on Saturdays and service on Sundays, depending on their parents' approval and their availability. Church services begin with enthusiastic worship in which attendees sing, dance and praise God. Worship is followed by Bible scriptures, a sermon and prayer. Sometimes members use drama to portray Bible studies. The atmosphere is welcoming and attendees appear joyful. Students' attendance at services is usually sporadic and irregular during the introductory period.

*Seeing the light: a period of negotiation*

Students who continue to participate in services, Bible classes and cell groups begin to do so more consistently. They begin to shift their beliefs and behaviors after seeing the "goodness" that accompanies accepting Jesus Christ. This shift is the

negotiation phase of the conversion process. During this phase, individuals develop an acceptance of Jesus Christ and begin to dismiss their original doubts.

They often struggle with resistance from their family members who do not understand their newfound faith. This period is a time of personal negotiations about religious beliefs, accompanied by behaviors and assuming a new identity within their existing family unit and community. Participants reported feelings of emotional turmoil and uncertainty during this phase. They want to fulfill their Christian obligations, but these are often directly opposed to their parents' wishes. Navigating family and community spaces becomes a challenge. However, converting students manage with different levels of success and eventually profess their Christian beliefs by being baptized, which is the final phase. Baptism serves as the start of students' lives as official Christians. It is followed by responsibilities to spread the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Converted Christian participants identified a relationship between learning English and Christianity that was not reported by other participants. Srey Kouch, Lida and Rith's descriptions of their conversion experiences illustrate the process and their perceived relationship between religion and English education. Srey Kouch is a recently converted Christian. She has happy memories of going to a church a few times as a small child with her cousin, but describes her adult experience differently. I asked her to describe her experience learning about Christianity as a young adult. With raw honesty, she said, "The first time I hear about Jesus I felt not good. I felt hate. I hated because I think Christians don't respect my parents." However, after six months of coming to the church and listening to people teach about God she converted. She claimed that she made the decision to be baptized because the church taught her about life, respect and love.

There initial resistance to Christianity present within Srey Kouch was strong, but quickly disappeared after spending time at the church and learning about Jesus. She explained “ I saw that Christians are good. They teach you how to respect the parents and live a good life. So, I decide to be Christian.”

Lida has been a Christian since 2007. She began studying English at the church in 2006, where she met a young, female Australian missionary. She was motivated to study English to communicate with her. She attended services and participated in cell groups. Prior to studying at EKCC, she heard people say that “Jesus was not good” and that “Christians say not to obey your parents.” She described feelings of confusion and uncertainty, “I came to the church and they say obey (your parents) and I feel confused. I want to know the truth. So I come and study more. She was baptized in 2007. She explained it this way, “In 2007, I gave my life to Jesus. I don’t know why. I feel God gives his love to me. I hear the Gospel and his promise to me. I want to share God to another.” Her parents did not approve initially, but since she “shows God’s love to them” they are okay with her being a Christian. She said prior to becoming a Christian she engaged in negative behaviors like drinking alcohol, lying to her parents and being disrespectful to elders. However, the Bible tells her to honor her parents and now she does, which pleases them. She expressed her gratitude for God’s provisions, which include a college scholarship and a laptop. She believes that these educational resources are a part of God’s plan for her. Lida hopes to attend Bible College and someday work abroad as a missionary.

Rith began studying English at EKCC as a twelfth grader in 2007. Unlike Lida’s parents, his mother and only living parent still does not approve of his conversion to

Christianity. She permitted him to study English at EKCC because she thought it was necessary for his future. Three of his four older siblings work in a factory. They stopped attending school in grades 6, 9 and 11 to financially support the family. His oldest brother studies at a university where he is employed. Rith enrolled at EKCC because he did not want to ask his mother for money to study at private school, although he had studied part time at a private school for four years. He began to attend services more frequently and to study the Bible.

He spoke about his experiences negotiating his beliefs and behaviors with personal and family expectations. In late 2008, Rith was baptized. His younger sister is also a student at EKCC and has been baptized. Although he converted, at the time of the interview in 2010 he reported still dealing with on-going negotiations. His family is Buddhist. According to Rith, his mother and neighbors still pressure him to believe in Buddhism. He struggles to find an understanding between his beliefs and behaviors and those of his loved ones. He remains firm in his beliefs, but acknowledges that it is challenging. He explained how Christianity influences his English studies, “It (being Christian) helps me because before I am not Christian and I go to study and I don’t think it’s necessary, but when I’m a Christian I think I can have a good future. God makes a plan for me and I will have a better life and it urges (encourages) me. I see people come from the village. They can have a good job and good future.” For some individuals, accepting Christ as one’s personal savior means a better future through English proficiency acquired at the church.

Rith was attracted to the church because free English classes were offered. While studying English, he learned about Jesus and was baptized. He associates learning

English and a desirable job with Christianity. He has seen other people from similar socioeconomic backgrounds achieve this success and he aspires to it for himself. Lida and Rith, like many other converted students, are committed to evangelizing. They participate in cell groups and church services. Despite coming from families that are Buddhist, both students converted after attending English classes, spending time on campus and participating in church events. Rith studied English at a private school first, but according to him, he did not think it mattered until he came to EKCC. Converted students are introduced to Christianity through the church's various forums. They negotiate their belief system with themselves, their families and communities. Students then commit themselves to Jesus Christ through baptism. Nearly all converted Christian participants expressed that they perceived a relationship between being Christian, learning English and future income earning opportunities. The question of whether students think that they have to convert to Christianity to have a promising future requires further explorations.

#### *Student Beliefs about Religion and Education*

There was a distinct difference among Buddhist, Christian and nonaffiliated participants' perceptions of the relationship between religion and education. Buddhist students reported no such relationship, while Christian students reported a strong relationship. Undecided students addressed the question in general at first, but followed up with a personal response that varied by individual. There were notable differences in non-Christian students' initial understanding of the question in addition to their verbal responses.

At the end of the second interview, I asked students whether they thought their religious beliefs influenced their educational pursuits in any way. I intentionally placed the question about religion and education at the end of the second interview because I wanted participants to have an opportunity to become as comfortable as possible with me in hopes that they would share openly. I emphasized my role as an educator and researcher to make the distinction from the majority of foreigners that visit the church as evangelical missionaries. My goal was to minimize the likelihood of participants responding in a way they deemed socially acceptable to me based on their perceptions of me.

Buddhist students' physical and verbal responses surprised me. The question seemed direct and clearly communicated, but that is from my perspective having been raised Catholic and currently living in the evangelical Christian southern region of the United States where religion is core component of society for many people. The concept of a person's religious beliefs influencing their educational decisions was a novel concept to most non-Christian participants. I asked the question in English and the interpreter repeated it in Khmer. In the majority of cases students' facial expressions, body language and questions for clarification indicated confusion. Participants tilted their heads, raised eyebrows and paused momentarily as though they were trying to comprehend exactly what I was asking. Students asked for clarification and I rephrased the question. Their responses were immediate, brief and certain. Srey Mom answered, "There is no relationship. Religion and education are two different things." Monika quickly responded that one is not related to another. Kumpeak asked for clarification and after rephrasing

the question, she still seem genuinely confused and responded, “My parents do not mind that I study here.”

Undecided students responded to the question in more general terms and did not show the physical responses in body language like Buddhist participants. They reemphasized that they either were not sure of what they believed personally or indicated that they found value in all religions. Their responses usually included a statement of gratitude for the church because they offer education for students. Ratha explained, “Sometimes I read the English Bible, but I’m not sure I believe. It gives me knowledge and allows me to study. All religions are good.” Panna answered with specificity, “Maybe religion supports Christian students, but it does not support me.”

Christian participants all reported believing that religion supports them. They view their new found faith as significant part of their identity and recognize a relationship between their religion and their educational decisions. Their educational choices and daily routines are influenced by their faith. They make time to pray, study the Bible and participate in the church community. Christian students, as mentioned in the previous section, make a direct connection between being a Christian and education. Lida and Sambo both received scholarships to attend universities. They attribute this as God’s provision for them and a part of God’s larger plan for their lives, so for them, there is a connection.

The church’s goals are to provide students with education and skills that will assist them in finding employment and to introduce Christianity to non-believers. The church provides human, physical and financial resources that support the student body, especially Christian students. However, the process of providing education and



converting adolescents has negative consequences for some students. These consequences are anticipated, but they are not the intended effect that the church desires to have on its members and the larger community.

### Unintended Consequences

Free English and computer classes and an inviting atmosphere attracts students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to the church. Participants regularly commented that everyone at EKCC was nice and reached out to welcome them. There is a large amount of support for Christian students among the church community. However, the church openly acknowledges the challenges converting to Christianity presents to individuals, which come mainly in the form of strained relationships with families, peers and communities. Many Christian students reported negative interactions with their families, peers and other community members resulting from their differing beliefs and behaviors. The interactions consist of arguments, verbal harassment and domestic violence in a few cases. Participants reported emotional turmoil, peer pressure, alienation and feelings of guilt. These are the unintended, but very real consequences of participating in the Christian church in Cambodia.

### *Strained Relationships*

Strained relationships are particularly significant in Cambodia because of the emphasis on the importance of family and community in Khmer culture. Honoring parents and elders is a strong tradition, as is also maintaining cultural expectations aimed at supporting social harmony. Students experience pressure to follow traditional cultural and religious norms, which are deeply intertwined. Cambodian Christians often exclude themselves from traditional practices such as making offerings and going to the pagoda.

This creates a dynamic in which Christians are required to defend their beliefs to disapproving family members and friends. These interactions result in emotional turmoil and alienation. Rith's and Sidorn's experiences illustrate the impact of such interactions.

Rith's personality is usually cheerful and friendly, but he appeared visibly saddened at points as he shared his experiences of becoming a Christian. He described how his mother complains and tells him that he is from Buddha and that he is sinning by believing in other gods. She gets angry when he goes to church on Sundays and she often designates chores for him to do so that he cannot attend church services. He reported feeling guilty about attending church because his mother does not approve. He explained how he felt about these interactions with his mother, "I feel bad, because I know her heart is not happy." He also faces harassment from his neighbors who ridicule him and Christians in general. Rith said that when he goes out of the house his neighbors "say bad words about Jesus." He responds to the harassment by ignoring their commentary, but noted that it is still difficult.

Sidorn also reported strained relationships since he has become a Christian. At the beginning of the study, Sidorn was living with his uncle. He moved in with his uncle as a young boy when his mother remarried and he did not get along with his stepfather. He worked at his uncle's store selling fruit in the evenings. Sidorn's life changed dramatically during the course of the study. During Khmer New Year, it is tradition to go to the pagoda and bring fruit and other items as offerings. This year, Sidorn refused to go to the pagoda because he is a Christian. He stated that visiting the pagoda was sinning against Jesus. His uncle was greatly angered by his refusal and physically assaulted him. He told him that he must move out of the house and will no longer have a job if he

continues to say that he is a Christian. Sidorn called me after this interaction and he was crying. He did not know what to do and where he would live. I listened and tried to be empathetic to his situation, but I did not have any helpful advice. I suggested participating in the traditional family events for the holiday, but he claimed it was not possible because he is a Christian now. He lost his job and housing and was forced to move back to his mother's home. He found a new job at a restaurant, which he openly despised because it involved serving alcohol to "bad people," something he considers a sin. In early 2011, I learned that he moved from his mother's home because the arguing with his stepfather became too intense. He now lives at one of the church dorms. His Facebook posts often reflect how difficult his life is and how much he misses his family, but also that he knows that it is part of God's plan.

Sidorn eagerly shares the Bible with nearly everyone he is around, including classmates and teachers at his public high school. He said they often respond by ridiculing him. He said that his peers and teachers call him "crazy" and "no good" because he is a Christian, but he seemed determined to continue evangelizing at school despite the harassment. I inquired whether anyone at school wanted to talk about Christianity with him. He stated that there were one or two people that listened to him, but "I don't care. I will keep trying to tell them about Jesus." Sidorn's conversion has alienated him from his peers and family. The many strained relationships in his life are a source of emotional turmoil for him.

Many Christian students reported that the disapproval of their families and neighbors caused them emotional pain. The self-imposed exclusion from traditional cultural customs combined with alienation and harassment from disapproving family is

especially difficult during Khmer holidays. The church does not support events and activities at the pagoda, which is an important cultural institution in Cambodia (Fawthrop, 2004; Kent, 2008). It is common for most families to leave their homes in the city and travel to the province to stay with their immediate and extended families. The pastor spoke on several occasions about the challenges Christians face when they return to the provinces. He mentioned that Christians are subject to ongoing verbal attacks and harassment by friends and family. They are pressured to drink and gamble, which are considered sins. The pastor acknowledged the emotional toll it takes, but urged people to stay strong in their faith and live as the Bible tells them.

Almost all of converted Christian participants experienced some level of family rejection and alienation at some point in the conversion process. Christian students find comfort and support among each other and the church community. However, the negative impact on participants' relationships is a part of the experience of becoming a Christian in a Buddhist nation. As Christians, individuals face alienation and humiliation for their choices among their families, peers and in the community. These undesirable interactions have a significant impact on students' life experiences and relationships. This study did not explore whether the alienation from disapproving families and peers led to increased participant involvement in the church community, but that may be a possibility.

#### *Family Attitudes toward Christianity*

Some students quickly gain their family's approval and others begin to find support and understanding within their families over time. However, a portion of converts never achieve family acceptance. The attitudes of students' families varied and changed over time. All of the participants were permitted to study English at the church. However,

the families' stance toward Christianity ranges from disapproving to tolerant to approving. The scope of this study does not make it possible to determine how many students do not participate in the English program because of parental disapproval.

Christian, Buddhist and students who do not identify specifically with either religion reported that most of their families disapproved of Christianity. All students indicated that their parents or guardians permitted them to study English or computer at EKCC, but many stated that they were not permitted to study Christianity or attend church services. Some male Christian students from Buddhist families reported that their parents/guardians disapproved of their faith and implemented strategies intended to deter them from participating in church functions. Female Christian students from Buddhist families reported similar experiences, but more so in the past tense, implying disapproval was most pronounced during the introductory phase of their conversion process. Several of them noted that their parents' current stance has shifted toward tolerance for their Christian beliefs, more so than with the males. Traditional gender roles, along with family dynamics, may be responsible for the disparities in family responses between male and female Christians. Males are held to higher expectations in Khmer society (Eng et al. 2010).

A tolerant attitude toward Christianity was the most common among all participants' families, which is somewhat expected. If parents seriously disapproved of Christianity, they would be less likely to permit their children to study at the church. Keriya reported that Mormons came into his home as a child and taught English, but his mother requested that they stop because they were Christian. The cultural expectation of maintaining social harmony and the importance of family may also play a role in parents'

tolerant attitudes. Families concerned with providing for their family's needs and preserving the family unit, may be reluctant to contest their children's religious choices even if they disagree. English is perceived to be so important to potential upward social mobility that parents are willing to overlook children's religious preferences. Buddhist students from Buddhist families indicated that their parents permit them to study English at the church and are tolerant of Christianity, but it is not their choice for themselves or their children. These students typically only come to the church for English classes and do not attend worship services, Bible class or cell groups.

Religiously unaffiliated participants, who are all male from mostly Buddhist families, reported that their parents allow them to make their own choices. Several of these students participate in Buddhist and Christian related practices. They participate in traditions with their families, which are often centered on Buddhist practices, but also occasionally participate in church functions. Christian students from Buddhist families, especially females, discussed their parents' initial disapproval of Christianity. Over the course of time their attitudes shifted toward tolerance and acceptance. The students shared stories about how their parents disapproved of them becoming Christians. They did not permit participants to attend church services or functions, but gradually allowed them to begin participating in the church community. Students reported that eventually their parents began to tolerate their child's choice after observing improvements in their behavior, an increase in respectfulness or upon "seeing the good in their lives."

According to several Christian participants, their families witnessed the church's influence, which has promoted positive behaviors in their lives. The young Christian

adults began respecting their elders more, obeying their parents and living Christ like lives, which became a catalyst for their parents' shift in their attitudes.

Four Christian students from families where other members are Christian and two undecided students from Buddhist families reported family attitudes of acceptance. Prasith, who openly stated that he wanted his whole family to become Christians, shared that his parents strongly disagreed with Christianity because they thought Christians were bad and encouraged children to disobey their parents. He explained that his parents changed their perceptions once they realized that Christians offered education and help. His parents now approve of their conversion. Currently his two brothers live in church dorm in the province and study English and the Bible. Syleep's grandmother and aunt are Christians and he attends church every Sunday with them. He shared that he did not know much about his parents' religious beliefs, but they accept that he is Christian. Srey Oun's entire immediate family has converted to Christianity. They were strongly influenced by her uncle who encouraged them to believe in Jesus Christ because he will take away your sins. Her father is now employed at a Christian organization. Dilen and Vin maintain an open approach to all religions and explain that their parents have a positive perception of Christians because Christians provide schools for them to study for free. The spiritual and material incentives related to becoming a Christian are nearly impossible to separate. This connection in students' minds appears to be a strategic maneuver on the part of missionaries and EKCC.

The spectrum of students and their families' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions about Christianity is dynamic and constantly changing. Positive experiences with the church, Christians and adolescents that have converted serve as the main catalysts for

changing negative perceptions of Christianity. There is a definite resistance to Christianity and a strong desire to maintain Khmer tradition and culture among most participants' families and community members. The apprehension of accepting a new doctrine may be linked to the nation's history of imperialism and the more recent atrocities of the Khmer Rouge. It is essential to acknowledge the role of the Christian movement in Cambodia and how it influences students' experiences learning English. The Christian movement is not widespread yet; approximately 60,000 (or 0.7%) of Cambodians are Christian (Bauman, 2010). Bauman (2010) commends Way of Hope, a movement organized by World Relief, emphasizing prayer and worship, local ownership, child participation, and relationships. Bauman makes special note of the leveraging or multiplying affect that child participation produces (p.90). Organized approaches aimed at harvesting converts, like Way of Hope, by religious groups may rapidly change the religious landscape in Cambodia.

### *Conclusion*

Christian churches and organizations play an integral role in English education in Cambodia among students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In this study, EKCC church offers numerous free resources in the forms of English and computer education programs, physical materials and human relationships that attract students in the impoverished community to the church. The church's mission is to provide adolescents with marketable job skills and expand the church. There are formal and informal strategies that the church uses to expose individuals to the Christian doctrine. Students who converted to Christianity through EKCC's English language offerings share similar experiences. Converted students acknowledge a causal relationship between their faith,



educational pursuits and future social mobility. Non-converts do not perceive such a correlation. While the church is achieving its goals in many cases, there are also unintended outcomes that impact students' experiences learning English. The intentional and unintentional outcomes of the Christian church's impact on the community have consequences for participants and their families. Questions about the ethics and morality of the evangelical church's approach, and the benefits and disadvantages of their work in Cambodia, including the viability of the myth of English acquisition for social mobility, remain and are addressed in subsequent chapters.

#### Challenges, changes and social responsibility

Participants identified what they perceived as educational challenges in Cambodia and suggest potential reforms. Participants' responses highlighted a widespread sense of social responsibility beyond the family unit. The myriad of challenges facing young adults in Cambodia has been described and discussed in the literature review and through the themes and findings presented in this chapter. These challenges were drawn from literature, observations, and interviews. However, participants shared their own perceptions of general challenges facing their peers related to education. Many of the challenges reported paralleled what has already been discussed, but there were additional insights that deserve attention. Students also made personal recommendations about changes they would like to see Prime Minister Hun Sen and the Cambodian government make in an effort to improve education for all students. Participants from all religious backgrounds maintained a strong sense of social responsibility beyond their family units. An overwhelming emphasis on community and the betterment of all Khmer people permeated students' hopes, goals and beliefs.

*Participant reported challenges to obtaining education*

At the end of the second interview I asked students to tell me what they perceived to be the biggest challenges facing Khmer students trying to obtain an education, English and general. Challenges involve social, family and individual issues. As discussed previously, the most common response was poverty. Families are too poor to support their children's education, which requires children to work in various capacities. Two students, both females, mentioned gender roles as obstacles. Students are forced to work in gender specific jobs. Boys work as security guards and girls work in the garment factories; or they are forced to stay home and assist with household responsibilities. Access to public education is inequitable, especially for students in the province. Significant distances between the home and school, a lack of transportation and a lengthy rainy season make it logistically difficult for students to attend school consistently. Students also report motor bike accidents and dangerous roads after dark as challenges. They cited corruption among teachers and administrative staff. Some felt that their teachers did not care about teaching and they did not speak English well enough to teach it. Other students reported a lack of English being taught in public schools.

Family problems such as alcoholism, gambling and domestic violence were listed as general challenges. Several students reported that some parents in the provinces do not recognize the importance of education and fail to encourage their children to study. Some students believe that this is because the parents are not educated. Other participants thought it may be because they do not see a relationship between education and employment in the provinces. Parents' reluctance to allow their children to leave the

home and move closer to Phnom Penh to study was also mentioned. Students believe that parents wanted to keep their children at home with them.

Participants explained that individuals who were allowed to move from the province to the city also face challenges. The transition between rural and city life is difficult. Moving away from the home requires that you have a connection with someone in the city that will assist with living arrangements. Some students believed that many of their peers do not recognize the importance of learning English. They reported that some of their peers are too old, lazy or “not clever enough” to study another language. Others thought it was more of a self-esteem issue and that students lack self confidence to learn English or they were “too shy.” Students commonly reported high levels of frustration.

*Participant reported recommendations*

I asked participants to imagine that they were asked to make recommendations to the prime minister and government concerning education. They found this to be an outlandish question and many did not feel that they were really worthy to tell the prime minister anything. However, reluctance disappeared once I explained that this was only a scenario, and that they are experts about education because they are students. They provided numerous suggestions about potential policy changes mostly related to access issues and teacher quality.

Participants noted that parents and students in the province needed to be educated about the importance of education and learning English. Bora suggested increasing parent involvement and informing them more about the educational system. Others highlighted that there needed to be more schools in the provinces so that students can improve their attendance. Some suggested creating centers for the elderly, orphaned and those living

with disabilities so they can learn Khmer, English and job skills and have an opportunity for a good future. Komgnet insisted that poor people be treated with more respect by the government and the community.

Several students suggested that teacher salaries be increased and the quality of their training improved. Others insisted that corruption at the school level be stopped and cheating among students be stopped entirely. Daro, an academic overachiever, thought that efforts to reward student achievement would be worthwhile. Many participants recommended that more scholarships to study at postsecondary and private schools be made available or the tuition costs be lowered so that poor students would have an opportunity to attend. Sidorn and Socheata both want English to be named as Cambodia's national second language. Increasing the number of instructional hours designated for English and offering English in the early grades of primary school were also recommendations.

### *Social responsibility*

Social responsibility and providing equitable access to opportunities were reoccurring themes. The value placed on the family in Cambodia as reported by participants highlighted how important taking care of the family and loved ones is for many Cambodians. The importance of helping fellow citizens and those in need, such as people living in poverty, without families or with physical and mental challenges permeated the interviews from early on in the study. I became curious about what participants would do if poverty was not such an oppressive factor in their lives. I decided to ask them another scenario question: If someone were to give you \$10,000 to spend however you would like, what would you do? Participants also found this to be

unimaginable, as did Sopheap the research assistant. The first time I asked it, she turned to me and whispered, “I never saw \$1000 in my life!” Participant responses emphasized education, financial security, and social responsibility. Material items were rarely mentioned.

The first response for most was either to support their education, or to support their family. Many students responded immediately with enthusiasm and smiles: “help my family” or “support my school.” Participants wanted to give the money to their parents to repair their homes and use it to pay for the family’s basic needs such as food, electricity, etc. Several students wanted to use the money to support their education or the educational pursuits of their siblings and friends. Prasith dreamed of using the money to get his Master’s degree or possibly a PhD.

Several male participants emphasized financial responsibility in addition to education. They stated that they would invest in a small business that would generate income for years into the future. Samnang explained, “If you spend it foolishly, you get nothing. If you spend it smartly, it will be coming to you forever. That way it can make us have a better life if money is supporting out family. It is doing business.” Vin claimed that he would give it all to his mom to help him invest because he is “too young” and doesn’t trust himself. Bora also wanted to invest it and save for the future needs of the family. However if the money exceeds what he needs for his family, he would use it to “help in an orphanage” or “for poor people that don’t have opportunities.” Bora really thought a lot about this question and expressed some concern that if he was generous among people living in poverty that there would be resentment by wealthier people and cause negative feelings in the community. A few Christian students mentioned giving

money to the church, while a couple Buddhist students mentioned giving the money to the pagoda.

Female participants did not speak of starting businesses, but did emphasize family, community and education. Sotheavy insisted that after she helped her family, “I would give rice to some people and clothes and medicine.” Srey Oun’s response was serious and intentional. She stated, “I need to help people that don’t have food or anything to eat.” I asked her if there was anything else and she mentioned that she would support her family. She then turned to me and asked, “Lori, do you think money is important?” It was clear that money or the lack of money was an issue she has been struggling with for some time.

At the end of the study, I wanted to thank the students for their participation. I suggested that we go to a restaurant, but I was open to their suggestions. Several of the students began discussing this in Khmer. The words “money” and “expensive” uttered repeatedly. One student suggested that we have a meal on campus and the others agreed. I asked why they preferred to eat on campus instead of a restaurant and they informed me that restaurants are very expensive and they don’t want me to spend “all of my money” on them. I asked them if they eat at restaurants often. A few of the students have never eaten in a restaurant that they could remember. So, I insisted that we go to a restaurant and eventually they complied. However, at the restaurant Lida stood up and spoke in Khmer. She said, “Don’t order expensive food. Order something cheap, like fried noodles and share with a friend.” I interrupted and explained that they could order whatever they wanted and they did not have to share, but thanked them for being so considerate. Every student, but one, ordered the cheapest food on the menu. After we received the bill, a

group of four students analyzed every charge to make sure that we were not being cheated. The total for twenty five of us was \$57.00. The students were thankful, but still thought that I had spent too much money on them.

This experience illustrates two important points that are part of the study's findings. First, poverty is a constant presence in participants' lives. Decisions regarding money must be well thought out and money must be spent wisely. Participants, like Bora and Dilen, expressed frustration at what they perceived to be occurrences of their wealthier peers "wasting money." Social class has profoundly shaped the attitudes and behaviors of participants. Secondly is the sense of social responsibility and concern for others exhibited by participants. Participants expressed concern for me and my financial well being. They did not think that such tokens of appreciation, like a group meal at restaurant or a soda after an interview, were necessary.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### *Introduction*

This dissertation reports on the findings from a qualitative study of English language learners in Cambodia. Five key areas of findings emerged from the case study of 30 young adults enrolled in the English program at EKCC. First, it is evident that local poverty and globalization play a powerful role in shaping students' social realities. Poverty motivates participants to learn English because they believe it is an international language associated with economic opportunities in the global economy. Secondly, participants' beliefs emphasize their perception that learning English is instrumental to future social mobility for themselves and their families, the latter being of ultimate importance. Participants are confident that learning English will help them secure employment that will financially support their families. The third area of findings reflects participants' agency seeking out various opportunities to study English. Participants accessed formal, private English classes as well as free programs, including EKCC and informal learning communities. They employ a variety of self-teaching strategies and peer learning practices that utilize available resources to learn English. The fourth area of findings concerns the threefold role of the church. The church provides English instruction as a systematic plan to convert participants to Christianity, an approach that positively and negatively impacts participants' lives. The fifth and final area highlights



participants' self-reported challenges and recommendations, along with their propensity for social responsibility. Participants acknowledge some of the structural barriers that limit their access and opportunities, such as poorly paid teachers and a corrupt educational system. The changes they suggested include: increasing access by building more schools in provinces, offering scholarships for students to attend universities, and infusing more English language instruction in public schools.

In this chapter I discuss the study's findings using a critical TESOL framework. According to Pennycook (1999), a critical TESOL framework must go beyond locating aspects of TESOL within the larger social and political context, but focus "on questions of power, inequality, discrimination, resistance, and struggle" (p. 332). Critical theory recognizes and analyzes the role of power, structure and agency in the reproduction or transformation of social conditions.

I begin with a discussion of the theoretical framework, education, globalization and participants' beliefs to provide a context for the readers. Then, I draw primarily on the work of Paulo Freire and Pierre Bourdieu to analyze and interpret the findings. In the discussion I use a dialectical analysis to identify and expose contradictions between participants' beliefs and social realities. A dialectical analysis asserts that all assumptions contain contradictions, which when analyzed can identify ideological or hegemonic myths and expose inequalities and oppression. In this discussion, I raise the following questions: What ways are participants and their families exercising agency? Does English proficiency guarantee social mobility? Are the influences of the evangelical Christian movement on English language learners positive or negative? Is TESOL in Cambodia a means of oppression or empowerment for ELLs?

### *Critical Framework*

Critical theory identifies the contradictions in assumptions. Analyses of social trends are done on both a macro and micro level, in this dissertation TESOL and the related facets are analyzed on the local, national and international levels. Critical theory analyzes the way dominant groups or power elites control the use of language, communication and information (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). Paulo Freire (1970), one of the most influential critical theorists in the field of education, developed the concepts of conscientization, praxis, critical consciousness and cultural action to provide a framework for transformation and empowerment. Freire's theory about the ways "power works both on people and through people" acknowledges that domination occurs beyond impositions by the state, but rather through the "way in which power, technology, and ideology come together to produce forms of knowledge, social relations, and other concrete cultural forms that function to actively silence people" (Giroux, 1985, p. xix).

Hegemony is a form of social control employed by dominant groups to legitimize the stratification of power of existing social and political structures, such as schools and churches (Gramsci, 1971). Education serves to control the masses by perpetuating ideological hegemony that maintains the status quo and delegitimizing alternate voices that question the relations between individuals and the power structure. Freire contends that elites employ a banking style approach to education to stifle conscientization and praxis, and this practice further oppresses people (1970). He suggests that a new pedagogy aimed at developing critical consciousness is necessary for liberation and social transformation (1970). People are not passive agents in their own education as

banking envisions, but rather active agents that demonstrate their agency through their responses to their social realities (Freire, 1970). I combine Freire's stance with the tenets of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice to analyze the findings.

#### Education, social reproduction and transformation

This dissertation illustrates that TESOL can be transformative and liberating or reproductive and oppressive. According to Freire (1985), transforming the world can lead to the humanization and growth of man or the dehumanization and diminution (p. 70). Education plays a critical role in oppression and liberation simultaneously. Teachers, pedagogy, curriculum and context are significant determinants of the restrictive or empowering potential of education. For individuals living in poverty in both developed and developing nations, obtaining a quality education is a challenge (Kozol, 2006). Public schooling is often designed and controlled by the state and is directly impacted by the global economy. Classrooms are spaces in which knowledge and culture are constantly being created and reproduced (Freire, 1998). The fields of education and the actors within them play a significant role in the economic, social and political construction of society. This is why TESOL in Cambodia must be analyzed through a critical framework.

English is not an indigenous language of Southeast Asia, but has been recently infused into Cambodia and other developing nations through forces of globalization. Nations in that region are faced with the need to use English; otherwise they are excluded from important international dialogues (Appleby et al., 2002). English is viewed as a prerequisite for social progress and commercial opportunities in developing nations, which creates a context for economic and educational dependency (Samuelson &

Freedman, 2010). Developing nations, like those in Southeast Asia, are accepting English as a requirement for participation in the international community, but are not acknowledging the future social, political, economic and cultural impacts of an unquestioning acceptance of a foreign language on their societies (Appleby et al., 2002). Moreover, the grossly inadequate formal TESOL infrastructure creates the space for non-formal actors, like EKCC, whose English language instruction has the potential to challenge the fundamental norms of family and community in Khmer culture. Changes in social and educational policies that incorporate language adoptions have real consequences on people's lives and demand an analysis that is critical in nature.

### *Globalization and English*

Social, cultural, and economic issues operate within the context of globalization. Language plays a powerful role in social relations. Modernity was defined by colonizers and now globalization incorporates English, the language of colonization. There are concerns about the potential of English and globalization to perpetuate universalism and homogeneity, without fulfilling nations' goals of economic progress (Jordão, 2009; Soudien, 2005). Ives (2010) warns us about the possibility of English's unfulfilled promise, "Thus, it is futile to hope with the proponents of 'global English' that the simple spread of British or American English in the world could foster the inclusion of subaltern social groups in power structures and democratic processes" (p. 530). Developing nations may foster a false-consciousness about the potential of English and economic progress without acknowledging the role of power and superstructures in the global community.

English alone is not emancipatory. Language is not neutral and the global spread of English (and Western ideology), while celebrated by the West, brings up numerous concerns. The spread of capitalism through language and ideology impacts traditional culture and meaning making processes (Jordão, 2009). Millions of people worldwide are subjected to global stigma that is attached to non-native English speakers that devalues native culture and silences speakers of other languages (Appleby, 2002). The unprecedented demand for TESOL sparked by globalization and its effect on ELLs must be analyzed critically. English and Christianity in Cambodia are a reflection of globalization processes and the ideological hegemony they bring to societies and depend upon to spread.

#### Beliefs about English and religion

Male and female participants of all religious backgrounds unanimously reported that one of their primary motivations for learning English was to find a good job and support themselves and their families. They believe the message spread by institutions that English aids in social mobility. Participants' family members also share this perception that English is essential to the economic security of the family unit. As discussed in chapter four, families make significant sacrifices to support participants' study of English. Many participants' study efforts were supported by older siblings that stopped their own education in order to financially contribute to the family. Some parents allow their sons and daughters to leave home and move from the provinces to Phnom Penh and the surrounding areas so that they are closer to educational opportunities. Doing so shatters family life and Khmer traditions. This decision indicates their confidence in the belief that education and English are necessary for social mobility. All but a few

participants were Buddhist or non-affiliated prior to coming to study English at the church. Their parents permitted them to come and study English at the church despite their apprehensions about the church's mission, because they could not afford private English instruction. English is perceived to be such a valuable cultural resource that Buddhist parents, wary of evangelism, permit their children to study at a Christian institution. For some parents, the potential loss of Buddhist tradition and Khmer culture is worth the prospective gains in cultural capital and social capacity, which they have been convinced to believe, can later translate into economic capital and social mobility.

Most participants believe that English is essential to study at the university and their college degree would be the cultural capital necessary to gain employment and become socially mobile. There is notable differences between Christian and non-Christian participants regarding beliefs. English, academic achievement and occupational attainment are deeply intertwined with religion for Christian students and participants could not discuss them as separate entities. Christian participants believe that their educational and occupational opportunities are part of God's plan for their lives. They believe that they will attend college and find a suitable job, if that is what God intends for them. Lida, Sambo, Socheata and Samnang attend universities on scholarships they received from EKCC's affiliates. They believe that God has blessed them with scholarships as a part of his larger plan for their lives. Sambo believes that his scholarship came as a direct result from his prayers requesting God's help to provide him with the financial resources necessary to pay his tuition. For Christians, academic and employment opportunities are determined by God's plan and that is supported by their individual efforts not to waste the resources God provides for them.

Religion is not associated with beliefs about English, education and social mobility for Buddhist and non-affiliated students. Buddhist and non-affiliated participants believe their efforts to learn English will lead to social mobility, but they do not acknowledge religion as playing a role in their academic and occupational outcomes. These participants believe that their efforts and abilities will determine their future social mobility. So, as Christians attribute their success to God first and themselves second, Buddhist and non-affiliated students primarily ascribe their achievements to individual characteristics. If students and their families remain socially immobile, it is likely that Christian students will accept it as part of God's plan, while Buddhist and non-affiliated students will understand it as of individual abilities and efforts. According to such logic, if they (the students) worked harder or spoke better English, then their family would be socially mobile. This mindset ignores the role of the superstructure that is responsible for social inequalities, continued poverty, and the limiting of opportunities for social mobility.

#### Human agency

Study participants and their families exercise their agency in a variety of forms. Agency is an individual's or group's ability to act within the context of their reality. The concept of human agency is partially what separates critical theory from conflict theory and functionalism. Agency refers to individuals' active participation with the structures that shape their reality. Praxis is reflection upon the world in order to transform it (Freire, 1970). I discuss participants' agency and praxis in terms of individual and family sacrifice, approaches to studying English, and critical questioning of social inequalities.

*Agency through individual and family sacrifice*

Participants and their families exercise their agency by making sacrifices that they believe will positively affect their future social mobility. This study reveals that students' agency is motivated by a desire to improve their family's socioeconomic status. Significant importance and value is given to the family unit in Cambodia. Individuals and family members work collectively to financially support and enhance living conditions of the family. For example, Poline, Kanha and Pisey stopped attending school to work in a garment factory when their families needed additional income. Participants' goals for social mobility emphasize family and social responsibility. Participants aspire to find suitable employment to financially support their families and improve their current living conditions. Western themes of capitalism, consumerism and individualism were absent from the study's findings, while narratives emphasizing the family unit and portraying family and individual sacrifice were prevalent. Participants' reverence toward family and community are important aspects of Khmer culture.

Many participants were born in the provinces, but moved either with their family or on their own to Phnom Penh. Some families moved because they could no longer support themselves on the income they earned through agricultural work. Families, like Monika's and Akara's, moved as a matter of survival and in an attempt to improve their current living conditions. Other families, like Panna's, Samnang's and Vicheka's, permitted their children to move in with another family member, friends or in the church's dorms to be closer to the city while their parents remain in the province. Participants, for whom this is the case, report it was not an easy decision for their parents, but their families believe that it was a necessary sacrifice in order to provide their children with increased access to educational opportunities. Parents' decisions to allow



their children to move away from home are an example of how families exercise their agency. Participants also reported that moving was a difficult decision for them because they were not accustomed to life in the city and were forced to develop new relationships and forms of social support. Panna recently moved from the province and shared that leaving his friends behind and making new friends was challenging. I regularly observed him hesitantly approaching other students at EKCC and initiating conversations in attempts to make friends. These sacrifices are examples of agency and praxis.

Families and individuals exercise their agency through sacrificing financially. Older siblings stop attending school so that they can earn money to support the family and the schooling of younger siblings. This is the case for many participants' older brothers and sisters that were forced to join the labor force before they completed secondary school. Families also sacrifice the potential income that could be earned if participants entered the work force. Participants, like Kongke and Dilan, who were not employed reported that it was difficult for them to not work. They reported a desire to contribute financially to the family and be less of a burden, but refrained from working at their parents' request. Participants reported that their families want them to focus their efforts on their education and view even part-time jobs as a distraction. Foregoing potential income while living in poverty is another way families demonstrate their agency.

Families' also demonstrate agency through their decisions to permit their child to study at a Christian institution. Many Buddhist, non-affiliated and Christian participants reported that their families had serious reservations about allowing them to study at EKCC. Family members cautioned participants about Christians' efforts to convert

people, but permitted them to study there because of the high value and importance placed on English and education in Cambodia. Families compromise and sacrifice their peace of mind by allowing their children to study at a church based English program.

Initially participants came to EKCC only to study English, but several became Christians after learning about the Bible and Jesus Christ. In some cases, this has resulted in alienation, domestic violence and emotional turmoil and has negatively impacted the family unit. Sidorn was kicked out of his uncle's home because of his refusal to participate in Buddhist traditions during Khmer New Year celebrations. He engaged in many arguments about his new found Christian faith with his mother and stepfather before he eventually moved into the church dorms. Several converted Christian participants reported that their parents were extremely unhappy with their choice to convert. The willingness of some parents to overlook their fears, disappointments, and apprehensions regarding the church may be the ultimate form of sacrifice, praxis and agency.

Participants' choice to convert to Christianity is also a demonstration of sacrifice and agency. Most converted Christians sacrifice social acceptance in their families and communities as a result of their choice to embrace a new religious tradition that contradicts Khmer culture. Christian participants may choose to become Christian because they truly believe in Christianity, while some students may become Christians as a strategy to increase English proficiency and social capacity so as to enhance social mobility. In either instance, the participants are making a conscious decision about their belief system and behaviors, this illustrates their agency.

*Agency through education and approaches to studying English*

Participants do not allow busy schedules, long bike rides, poor weather, or darkness serve as excuses for not studying English. Participants' approaches to accessing English education regardless of the inconveniences and the learning strategies they employ are evidence of their agency. Rather than passively accepting the limitations of poverty, participants make a deliberate decisions to study English and employ strategies to expedite their language acquisition, which is illustrative of their praxis. All of the participants came to EKCC specifically to learn English and computer skills. EKCC was an unfamiliar environment for Buddhist and non-affiliated participants, but they enrolled in classes despite the unfamiliarity and negative commentary regarding Christianity that existed in their communities. Participants attend English class at EKCC in addition to their public school schedule, university studies or employment.

Secondary school participants attend school during the regular instructional hours, and some often studied general content knowledge part time with their teachers. Despite a full schedule, secondary school participants come to EKCC each evening for English and computer, usually riding their bicycles. Some students, like Monika, Dilen, Auntoch, Kongke and Bora ride their bicycles several kilometers in the stifling heat of the dry season and through the torrential storms of the rainy season. They often study for three hours four evenings a week, attending a computer class, a grammar class and then a conversation class. They expressed concern about their safety riding home after dark, which is the case when they attend the late class, but they often stay and ride home together. Participants demonstrate their commitment to praxis through agency despite the

physical obstacles of their environment. Busy schedules, long bike rides in undesirable weather and darkness do not prevent participants from attending classes.

Some students who are employed fulltime, like Srey Oun, Ratha and Kumpeak, also make time to study as much as possible. Srey Oun attends three classes each evening after working a ten hour day cleaning offices. Kumpeak comes to class after pushing an ice cream cart for eight hours through the busy city streets. Ratha rides his bike from the furniture factory where he lives and works up to seventy hours weekly, whenever his schedule permits. Sometimes he rides to EKCC between shifts and can only stay for part of a class, but he still makes the effort to attend. Despite demanding manual labor jobs and full schedules, participants deliberately choose to exercise their agency in an effort to acquire the social capacity and cultural capital that they believe is necessary to transform their realities. However, the current lack of sufficient employment opportunities in Cambodia denies students the chance to realize their dreams of social mobility.

Cambodia has experienced minimal success in creating jobs in the formal sector and this is a serious concern because over 50% of the population is younger than twenty years old and will be seeking employment opportunities in mass quantities in the next decade (CIA, 2011). Commercial foreign investors may be reluctant to invest in a nation that has considerable problems with widespread corruption. Besides tourism, the garment industry is a significant entity in the economic sector and garment manufacturing does not necessarily require English. Corruption and a job market reliant on manual labor portray a grim outlook for future employment prospects for ELLs in Cambodia.

*Strategies for learning: Exercises in agency*

Participants employ language learning strategies and utilize available human and physical resources to develop their English skills. Some students mentioned games or scenarios they develop with their peer groups to support language acquisition. For example, Monika and Socheata mentioned speaking to certain friends only in English and paying a few hundred riel (around 10 cents) to a collective pot when they inadvertently revert to speaking Khmer. Participants are determined to learn and create their own opportunities to study and practice English, another example of agency and praxis.

Participants interacted with their peer groups, foreigners and teachers at EKCC, families, neighbors and their pets (in one case) in specific ways to practice their English. Many students at EKCC regularly approach foreigners and Cambodian English teachers to practice speaking English or ask a question about grammar or word usage. The students at EKCC and staff have created a safe environment that encourages speaking in English and supports language acquisition. Students mentioned the atmosphere as a benefit of studying at EKCC. Naro practices his English with his stepfather and his friends. They ask him questions in Khmer and he responds in English. A couple participants with English speaking siblings or close friends practice speaking English with them in the home or the dorms. Participants with younger siblings, like Dilen and Vin, practice their English by teaching it to their brothers and sisters. Vin draws pictures on index cards to use as flash cards to teach his younger sister English vocabulary. Kumpeak reported speaking English to her dog, because there is no human being for her to practice with during the afternoon. All of these language learning strategies are exercises in agency and evidence of praxis. Participants are making intentional choices to

engage in activities that they believe will improve their English and in turn transform their lives via occupational attainment.

Participants employ various non-formal language learning strategies in addition to attending English classes at EKCC. Participants rely on available resources like the Internet, newspapers, radio, television and a limited number of books to study English. Although these forms of cultural capital are limited for most participants, they regularly exhibit agency by using whatever cultural resources were available at home or in the community to support their language acquisition. Most participants do not have the internet or cable television at home, but they occasionally frequent Internet cafes or restaurants where they can go online or watch television. Reading web pages, posting status updates on Facebook and watching movies in English or with English subtitles all involve participant interaction with English. Many participants reported repeatedly reading current and old English textbooks to study. Christian students, like Lida, Samnang, Akara and Sidorn regularly read the Bible in English and other religious texts to interact with English. Buddhist students did not mention using any religious texts to study English, while some non-affiliated participants use the Bible or religious texts to study English. This act of agency by non-affiliated students could potentially lead to their conversion to Christianity later. Socheata mentioned borrowing children's picture books from the pastor's daughter to read and study English. Participants routinely engage in language learning behaviors with available people and cultural materials to improve their English skills.

Participants seek out opportunities to learn and practice English because they believe that speaking English is the cultural capital that will enable them to change their

worlds. Participants are aware of the high poverty levels and the struggles their families face as a result. This awareness, or reflection upon their world, inspires them to take action to transform their reality, which is praxis. The young adults in this study are engaging in actions intended to change their circumstances, but most have not yet developed the critical awareness necessary for transformation on a larger scale that addresses the structural inequalities and imbalances in power. Freire contends that critical consciousness is essential for social transformation that is increasingly humanizing (1985). The emergence of a more critical consciousness did surface during interviews and conversations with some participants.

#### Critical questioning

The banking approach to teaching is popular in Cambodia and urban classrooms in the United States. The popularity is partly because of the structural inequalities that result in large class sizes and a lack of adequate resources. The pedagogy and practice in such classrooms often serves to reinforce the types of knowledge, behaviors and language valued by the dominant class and these TESOL spaces act as sites of social reproduction (Freire, 1970; MacLeod, 1995). Many teachers fail to engage students in meaningful ways that foster critical thinking skills regarding issues that are important to students' lives (Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002). My observations of TESOL and general education classes in Cambodia revealed the widespread popularity of the banking approach and deficit perspective. However, participants' questions and responses to what I refer to as the "big money" question indicate the emergence of critical consciousness.

Participants' questions and comments demonstrated the emergence of a critical consciousness despite learning environments that adhere to a banking approach. During

interviews and conversations, Bora, Dilen and Srey Oun repeatedly brought up questions about social class and the importance of money. Their questions and comments indicate that they are critically thinking about poverty and their place in society in a more objective manner that reflects their growing conscientization. Conscientization is the process in which people become conscious and reflective of their position in the world, and includes the recognition of the ways one's consciousness has been conditioned (Freire, 2010). Participants were attempting to objectively analyze their position in the larger social context. In these instances, the dialogue was co-constructed through problem posing by me and the participants. Participants were discovering and developing their own understandings about their location and the world, by questioning the role of social structures in oppressing people living in poverty.

Srey Oun works as a maid cleaning offices and earns \$25 USD per week. She conceals her true job duties by telling people she works at an NGO, but revealed the truth of her occupation to me in an interview, but asked me not to tell anyone. At the end of every interview I asked participants if they had any questions they wanted to ask me. Most questions related to strategies for learning English, but Srey Oun's question, like a few others, indicated that individuals are truly attempting to understand the social context in which they live. As we sat on a small bench in the courtyard at EKCC, I asked Srey Oun after the interview if she had any questions for me. She looked me directly in the eyes and inquired with a great deal of seriousness, "Lori, do you think money is important?" The following dialogue centered on responses to and the posing of questions like, why do some people have so much money and others not have any? How can rich people keep all their money and not share it with poor people? Does money make people



truly happy? In this instance, Srey Oun began to objectively question the structures and power relations that maintain social inequalities. She exhibited signs of conscientization as she tried to understand the larger social contexts that shape social class hierarchies.

Dilen, Bora and Kongke, separately brought up the issue of social class. Bora expressed his jealousy of his wealthier peers that were not as studious as himself. He questioned why poor students work so hard and take education so seriously, while rich students play and spend their money on frivolous things like eating in restaurants. Dilen explained that he struggles to understand why wealthy people place so much value on material goods and poor people place importance on family and community relationships. Kongke expressed her frustration at the differential treatment doled out by the police in her community. She explained that poor people are treated more harshly and with less respect by the police, unlike the rich people who are rarely harassed. She attributes this occurrence to the shared social networks of police and wealthy Cambodians. These young adults are thinking about and trying to understand their location in the larger world in meaningful ways, signifying a shift toward a more critical consciousness.

Some participant responses to the big money question indicated an acknowledgement of the social structures that serve to oppress people living in poverty. The big money question asked: what would you do if someone had given you \$10,000? I developed it in an attempt to understand what ways participants envision agency if poverty did not permeate every aspect of their daily life. The majority of responses focused on social responsibility for people living in poverty, orphans, the elderly, those living with illness and physical ailments, and those living in the provinces. In general, most participants believe that they would address the basic needs of their families and

their education first, but then invest in programs to benefit the community. The development of new and the improvement of existing orphanages, schools and community centers were typical responses to what participants would do with their money. Overall, most participants emphasized the promotion of education and English to assist with national development and progress. Buddhist and non-affiliated participants, much more so than Christians, recognize the role of corruption, the poor quality of education and low wages for manual labor jobs as structural issues that perpetuate the cycle of poverty. This recognition is the beginning of conscientization that must be accompanied by political action if it is going to incite social change.

Buddhist and non-affiliated participants exhibited an emerging critical consciousness regarding social class issues and TESOL more frequently than Christian participants. The fundamental, evangelical form of Christianity in Cambodia inherently limits critical consciousness because the explanation for all occurrences involves God. Many Christians I interacted with in Cambodia were adamant that the only acceptable way of life embodied Christian values and beliefs. Their lack of tolerance for other religions and ways of viewing the world limits their ability to develop a critical consciousness. Buddhist and non-affiliated students demonstrated more critical questioning about their location within society. This is most likely a result of the emphasis Buddhist tradition places on questioning, opposed to the blind faith and unwavering belief in Jesus Christ and God that is central to Christianity.

An interaction between one of the research assistants and myself highlights how religious beliefs impacts critical consciousness for Christian participants. During one of the interviews, a non-affiliated student explained that he believes all religions to be well

intentioned in their beliefs and practices. My research assistant began to tell him that there is only one, true God, the father of Jesus Christ. I interrupted and insisted that I agreed that all religions have value and deserve to be respected. The research assistant strongly disagreed, but her rigid attitude upholding Christianity as an absolute truth is indicative of the difficulty that Christian participants have developing critical consciousness. Christianity as it is practiced in Cambodia, does not leave much space for questioning, opposed to Buddhism, a tradition that embraces inquiry and seeking understanding.

#### Social mobility demands English

Many participants strongly believe that English and education are essential to the social mobility and the survival of themselves and their families. These beliefs are evidence of the false consciousness that has been developed in conjunction with myths about English, meritocracy and social mobility. The myth of meritocracy, English and education for social mobility fosters a false consciousness that can continue to oppress dominated groups because the discourse focuses on the individual, rather than the social structures (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Freire, 1970; 1985; Olivios & Quintana de Valladolid, 2005). Participants are confident that English proficiency will help them find a “good job” or “make it easier to find a job” and hopeful that it will provide the cultural capital necessary to escape the harsh realities of living in poverty. While learning English may be beneficial for job seekers, it is far from sufficient for social mobility.

Globalization has spread individualism and meritocracy, both are popular discourses in Western ideology, especially in the United States. Participants ascribe to these discourses and believe that individual hard work, education and language

acquisition will result in social mobility, which is not entirely true in developed or developing nations. These kinds of myths serve as oppressive forces and prohibit individuals' abilities to view their reality in relation to superstructure that is shaped by the socio-historical context (Freire, 1985). Mass political and social movements that demand economic and political change in Cambodia may be unconceivable at this time because Christianity and social mobility discourses serve as ideological hegemony that operates to maintain an oppressive social order.

Participants' agency follows the logic: if I study hard, learn English and computer skills, I may be eligible for a scholarship for college. If not, I will finance it with the assistance of my family and then I will be able to find a job that supports me and my family. This flawed logic, lacks critical consciousness and reinforces the oppressive relationships between the dominated and the dominators. It attributes academic success and occupational attainment to the individual and ignores the larger social structures that serve as gatekeepers for social stratification.

It is essential to understand the way that a group can be oppressed in one context, but then serve as oppressors in another context. On a national level in this context, the dominated groups in Cambodia include those living in poverty or in rural areas, ethnic minorities, females and non-English speaking individuals. The dominators or power elite include the wealthy, high ranking government officials, foreigners, native English speakers, educated English speaking Cambodians, missionaries and police officers. The hierarchy of power must always be looked at within the context in which relations occur. On a global level, the dominators or power elite are wealthy, politically powerful

developed nations like the United States. The dominated are developing nations, especially those that are heavily dependent upon foreign funding, like Cambodia.

A critical framework infused with a world system theory critical of globalization challenges the relations, structures and discourses that support social reproduction and mask forms oppression. A critical TESOL approach poses the question: Does English really equate to social mobility in Cambodia or does it contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities? The reality is most participants still lack the social capacity and economic and cultural capital necessary to compete in an unstable job market.

#### *The job market in Cambodia*

The following examples indicate the immense poverty and the lack of jobs in Cambodia, but also highlight how a lack of critical consciousness and political power encourage Cambodians living in poverty to contribute to their oppression by believing that their own actions will bring them social mobility. According to the Cambodia Economic Survey (2011), the employment rate in Cambodia was 75% nationally and 60% in Phnom Penh in 2007 and increased to 85% and 69% respectively in 2009. This is evidence of economic progress, but a substantial number of people are still unemployed. High levels of poverty and a lack of job opportunities have forced many Cambodians to migrate to surrounding countries, fall prey to modern day slavery and take dangerous jobs in illegal markets. Since 2009, the number of Cambodians going to Malaysia has risen 80% and the number going to Thailand is up 26%. This emigration is due to increased job opportunities in garment and other manufacturing sectors in these nations (“Cambodian laborers flock to Malaysia,” 2010). The promise of employment abroad has led some people into forms of modern day slavery. This entails forced labor with little or

no pay for individuals being held captive in locations against their will. Incidents of Khmer men being held aboard Malaysian fishing vessels include reports of ill or injured men being thrown overboard have appeared recently in the newspaper (“Slaves,” 2010).

The illegal drug and prostitution industries attract young men and women who are trying to earn money for their families. Drugs and prostitution are more lucrative than employment in the service industry or education sector, and attracts English speaking Cambodians because the market consists of mostly foreigners (“Fields to asphalt jungle, 2010). Former garment workers turn to the sex industry as a result of the global economic crisis; girls sell beer in bars and beer gardens, and are forced into sexual relations to earn tips to supplement their monthly wages of \$30-40 per month (“Ex-garment workers at risk”, 2010). Sex tourism is a serious issue that the Cambodian government and NGOs are working to stop.

I spoke about this issue with a young man working the reception desk at the hostel where I was staying. An older, white foreign man that looked to be in his sixties was eating dinner with a young, Khmer girl that looked to be no older than seventeen. My expression must have indicated my disapproval, but the man working the reception desk pointed out, “You shouldn’t look like that. It is good. She has a way to earn money to send to her family in the province.” The fact is there are very few jobs available and individuals are forced to engage in dangerous behavior to earn income as a result of structural inequalities. Many of these individuals working in the sex and garment industries do not speak English, but it does not matter because there are not high paying jobs available for English speaking individuals.

*Economic dependence on developed nations*

Cambodia is heavily reliant on foreign aid from developed nations. This relationship minimizes Cambodian economic and political power (Appleby, et al., 2002). As a nation, Cambodia is vulnerable to the agendas of more powerful countries because of its lack of financial resources and political capacity. The job market in Cambodia is unstable and reliant on outside forces. Cambodia, like many nations in South America during the 1960s, is a closed society. Freire's explanation of closed societies is worth quoting at length:

Latin American societies are closed societies characterized by a rigid hierarchal social structure; by lack of internal markets, since their economy is controlled from the outside; by the exportation of raw materials and importation of manufactured goods, without a voice in either process; by a precarious and selective educational system whose schools are an instrument of maintaining status quo; by high percentages of illiteracy and disease, including naively named "tropical diseases," which are really diseases of underdevelopment and dependence; by alarming rates of infant mortality; by malnutrition, often with irreparable effects on mental faculties; by low life expectancy; and by a high rate of crime (p. 75).

This description depicts Cambodia with striking accuracy. Freire (1985) contends that in societies such as this the mode of consciousness, termed semi-intransitive, is historically conditioned by social structures and dominated groups are unable to objectify their reality in a way that allows them to critically know it. The masses in dependent countries, like Cambodia, with societies that maintain this mode of consciousness are likely to remain silenced by the culture of power. In Cambodia, this dynamic is embodied by EKCC's and TESOL's roles.

Globalization has created interdependency of economic systems that are subject to the market forces and limits the autonomy of less powerful nations. Cambodia is economically and educationally dependent on developed nations. Cambodia receives \$9.89 billion USD in foreign aid annually (CIA, 2011). Their significant dependence on foreign funds limits their autonomy and directly impacts their society. Donor nations have significant control over the amount of money funneled into Cambodia and have recently pressured the Cambodian government to develop strategic methods to monitor the allocation of funds (“Prime Minister calls for transparent aid,” 2010). This is viewed as a positive intervention aimed at decreasing corruption and the misuse of finances, but it also must be acknowledged that foreign donors maintain positions of power and can dictate the use of their monies. Disagreement between foreign donor countries and Cambodian political leaders has the potential to have a real economic impact. The relationship between the United States and Cambodia serves as a relevant example. Historically, when political discord arose and relations were broken with the United States in 1965, American aid ceased. The economic crisis in East Asia in the late 1990s also exemplifies how international pressure and outside forces shape the social, economic and political conditions in societies worldwide (Stiglitz, 2002).

#### *The role of policy*

Social and educational policies are heavily influenced by political and economic forces. Cambodia’s educational system was once one of the best in the region prior to the Khmer Rouge (Dy, 2004). However, it has become dependent upon foreign aid since its reconstruction in 1979 (Seel, 2007). It is currently struggling to meet minimum standards for education set by international organizations such as the United Nations and World



Bank (EFA, 2010). This is a direct result of the government's failure to adequately invest in education. Cambodia and Lao PDR were the only nations in the region with public spending on education totaling less than 3%, half of 6% recommended by UNESCO (EFA, 2007).

Cambodia's educational policy is not aligned with the current needs of the nation's economy. This is problematic because there will soon be a surplus of educated, English speaking Cambodians unable to find suitable employment. Sandra D'Amico, director of the organization Human Resources Inc. acknowledged the significant mismatch between education and industry needs and the nation's challenge to create jobs for the young adults entering the job market ("Assessing human resource needs," 2010). This mismatch exemplifies the way education and English serve as ideological myths perpetuated by those with power as solutions to structural inequalities. Such myths will most likely disappoint many of the poor and working class families when their educated, English speaking children are unable to find jobs with income high enough to break the cycle of poverty.

The overly optimistic ideology that promotes English and education as sole solutions to Cambodia's poverty is likely to result in a surplus of English speaking Khmers without jobs, as was the case for the nation in the 1960s. Education and the economy flourished under Sihanouk in part due to large expenditures on education. At that time education expenditures consisted of more than 20% of the national budget. The well funded education system graduated thousands of secondary school and hundreds of university students who became angry and blamed Sihanouk when suitable employment was unavailable. The students' discontent drove some into the communist movement and

contributed to the ascent of the Khmer Rouge movement (Chandler, 2008). Nations must exercise caution and foresight for future outcomes when designing economic, educational and social policies because they will have long lasting, irreversible effects on the culture, language and social welfare of citizens.

### *Social capacity and cultural capital*

Scholars argue that students' economic, social and cultural capital impacts their academic and occupational attainment (Lareau, 2003; MacLeod, 1995; Perreira, et al. 2006; Zhou & Bankston III.). Recall that Bourdieu defines three types of capital: economic, social and cultural. Economic capital refers to financial and material wealth. Social capital refers to relationships and networks of influence people can access as a result of their social position. Cultural capital refers to individuals' knowledge base, including preferences and language use. Bourdieu argues that the power in different fields depends heavily on different forms of capital (1997). Cultural capital is central to Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction and serves to explain the stratification of social classes. Individuals develop habitus regarding linguistic and behavioral patterns that impacts their academic achievement (Lareau, 2003).

First, I highlight the role of economic and cultural capital in participants' motivation and educational experiences. Then, I discuss the role of social capacity in the Cambodian job market. I identify how converted Christian participants increase their social capacity and cultural capital in some fields, while decreasing it another, a shift that may impact economic returns.

All participants' had limited economic capital. Some more than others, but in general, the high levels of poverty were evidence of minimal economic capital in

available in all families. Families' lack of economic capital was so significant that older siblings were forced to stop attending school so that they could work and provide income necessary for the survival of the family. In some instances, such as with Chetra, Naro, Poline, Pisey and Kanha, they were forced to interrupt their education to find means of earning money. Some participants, like Rith, periodically took English classes at private institutions when their families could afford it, but that was reported as an actual and perceived burden by participants in their interviews. The lack of economic capital motivates every participant to study at the EKCC.

Free English and technology classes are very attractive in a society where the abilities to speak English and use technology are highly coveted forms of cultural resources. At EKCC, positions of status and power are relegated to foreigners and proficient English speaking Cambodians. Speaking English serves as a cultural resource in the fields of the church, universities and job market in Cambodia. Participants repeatedly emphasized their desire to speak English well, like the pastor or a proficient peer. Speaking English is associated with a higher status, and greatly admired by the participants. English is placed above Khmer in a linguistic hierarchy, which attributes a certain amount of power to speakers of English (Barry, 2010; Lee, 2011; McCullum, 1999). Several participants that took a class at private school noted that they were impressed with the quality of teachers and the English speaking culture nurtured at EKCC. They believe that an environment promoting and encouraging speaking English with foreigners present, like the one at NLLPPT, expedites their acquisition of English. Speaking English and being comfortable interacting with foreigners is increasing cultural capital for participants. The acquisition of some cultural resources coupled with limited

social capacity, will still make it difficult for participants to secure jobs in a competitive market.

Participants overall were not conscious of the way limited social capacity may impact their ability to find a job. Participants generally accepted the ideological mindset that English and education would result in a “good job.” Bora’s statement, “Speaking English makes it easier to find a job” indicates that he may have a heightened consciousness about his role in society. He used the word easier, which implies a certain level of difficulty in getting a job. Samnang is one of the few participants that made an explicit connection between occupational attainment and social capacity when discussing the challenges of students moving from the provinces to the city.

When I was in high school the problem is sometimes we are like hopeless. We think we are the living in a country style, even though we know English it is hard for us to find a job because you know that the city and the countryside is very different. Even though they know English in the province they come to the city it’s new for them so they have to study again. It’s hard to find a job because even though we know English we have to go through a person that we know. For example you work for one company and you know me and then your company need employee who know English and they make an announcement, but the way they choose is not through the announcement they choose me because you know me. So I know and I study English, but how can I find a job in the city? It’s very difficult.

Samnang recognizes that the young adults from the province are accustomed to rural life and have to make an adjustment, even studying additional English, because the behaviors and linguistic patterns that serve as cultural resources in Phnom Penh differ greatly from those in the countryside. He recognizes that adolescents from the province often do not have the social capacity required to obtain employment. The role of social capital in the employment sector is significant. Most of the participants were not

currently seeking employment, but if they were I would predict that their experiences would be similar to the many individuals I spoke with over the time I spent living and working in Cambodia. Many people I spoke to about finding a job shared the same sentiment: the only way to get a job in Phnom Penh is to “know someone” that is influential in the specific field. Social capacity is paramount. Almost all employment opportunities require potential applicants to have some form of social capacity, otherwise they will not be considered for the positions. EKCC provided Christian participants opportunities for the accumulation of social and cultural capital, although their Christian identity may decrease their social capacity and cultural capital in Buddhist and traditional Khmer fields.

EKCC is a field full of opportunities to increase social capacity. Christian participants, much more than Buddhist and non-affiliated participants, acquire economic capital, cultural resources and social capacity as a result of their relationships with influential people and participation within the church. As shared in the findings, the church provides opportunities to build social networks for Christian participants that result in economic resources and employment opportunities. Lida and Sambo both received scholarships at universities that have partnered with EKCC. The pastor or another church leader recommended them for the scholarships, which assists with their university studies. Their university degrees are cultural capital that they will be able to use, in addition to their social capacity, as they search for employment.

Samnang and Sidorn are both sponsored by an American missionary who they met through the church. This relationship with a foreigner, who has the ability to raise money and provide financial resources, is evidence of how social capacity impacts

educational attainment. Without sponsorship, these young men would have difficulty securing the \$400 per year required for tuition. The American missionary benefits from this relationship as well because both adolescents are passionate, committed Christians dedicated to spreading Christianity throughout Cambodia. The fact that the missionary organization only supports Christian students in their educational pursuits demonstrates their use of economic capital and power to further religious agendas.

Christian participants, as a result of their social capacity and cultural capital, have access to employment opportunities at the church and in the larger community unavailable to Buddhist and non-affiliated students. Buddhist and non-affiliated students may be at serious disadvantage in terms of higher education and occupational attainment, but that will vary on an individual basis. This study did not afford me the opportunity to observe participants' social networks outside of EKCC. These participants may be able to secure the economic capital required for the university, if they are one of the youngest family members because they can rely on their older siblings and parents to combine their economic resources. Their lack of cultural capital may put them at a serious disadvantage once in the college classroom. Parents' low levels of education and inability to financially support participants' part-time studies in general content areas during secondary school may leave students ill equipped to handle the cognitive demands of the university.

Christian students gain social capacity in Christian social networks and cultural capital by converting and joining the church community, but they also lose social capacity and cultural capital in non-Christian fields. Their newly formed habitus rewards their Christian beliefs within the evangelical community and they are afforded opportunities within Christian fields. However, they lose social capacity and cultural

capital in non-Christian fields because their beliefs and behaviors contradict Buddhist traditions and worldviews. In this sense, social capacity and cultural capital is lost in the Buddhist, Khmer fields that occupy much of Cambodian society, but gained in the less prevalent Christian fields. Future research is required to determine what type of social capacity and cultural capital will result in the greatest amount of social mobility for participants.

The economic incentives tied to the social capacity and cultural capital for Christian participants demands the following important question be addressed: Is becoming a Christian done out of spiritual or religious desire or is it out of economic necessity? Participants are first motivated to study English at the church because they cannot afford to pay for private instruction or do not want to burden their already financially insecure families with an additional expense. The next section will address this and analyze the role of the church in English education.

#### Evangelism in Cambodia: Blessing or curse?

English education programs in developing nations create spaces of liberation and oppression. Christian organizations in developing countries offer free English education to advance the Christian movement. In Cambodia, the Christian movement provides English and technology instruction to individuals that would otherwise be unable to access such opportunities. This access is an opportunity for students living in poverty to acquire the social capacity and cultural capital necessary, but not sufficient to improve their standard of living. Cambodia's status as a developing nation, or dependent country, makes access to English education of paramount importance. Tourism, foreign operated and funded non-government organizations and international aid have created a

competitive job market in which English proficiency, computer literacy and postsecondary education are required cultural capital. The Christian movement targets individuals from oppressed groups for conversion, in this case those living in poverty, who lack the financial capital and social capacity necessary to improve their social conditions. The contradiction of liberation through English education contrasts starkly with the evangelism that relies on English to proselytize.

### *The church's mission*

The intended outcome for the church is to spread Christianity. The church accomplishes this goal through building relationships with students enrolled in free classes, sharing the Christian doctrine with them, converting them and grooming them to continue the church's mission (Bauman, 2010; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003; Pennycook & Makoni, 2005). The evangelical church in Cambodia has a specific agenda to provide English instruction and job skills to the community and subsequently convert individuals through a strategic plan.

The church offers free physical and financial resources and supportive relationships, which attract young adults living in poverty. All thirty participants indicated that free English or computer classes were the main reason they came to the church initially. The church also provides housing and other physical resources that appeal to students. The Khmer and American teachers, students and church staff have created an inviting campus atmosphere where learning and speaking English is highly valued. The social networks that are developed in the church community often result in income earning opportunities for Christian students. The physical, human and financial resources offered by the church attract students who cannot afford to study elsewhere.



Providing access to education and language empowers individuals, like those living in poverty and females, because they are developing cultural capital and social capacity that can be drawn upon in various fields to promote social mobility.

The church utilizes multiple strategies for sharing Christianity with students once they are on campus. Formal means such as discipleship classes, worship services and cell groups are combined with peer and adult mentoring to inform individuals about the Bible and Christian doctrine. The majority of new Christians are young adults who undergo similar experiences in the conversion process. These participants, unlike Buddhist and non-affiliated students, identify a significant relationship between learning English, Christianity and future social mobility. They also reported access to scholarships and employment opportunities that were unavailable to nonbelievers.

#### *Negative impact of the Christian mission*

The church's plan intends to provide some Christian participants with the social capacity and cultural capital required to increase their financial capital. The study also identified negative effects of the church's work. The unintentional consequences may not be the intent of the church, but the church is aware of the effects and the significant impact they have on adolescents' lives and their families. This is one way that the church further oppresses individuals using TESOL. Adopting a Christian worldview often means disregarding native religious beliefs and cultural traditions.

Christian participants experience strained relationships, emotional dissonance, negative social interactions and alienation. Participants reported widespread resistance to Christianity among their families, peers and the community, which included apprehension about the spiritual well being of adolescents involved with the church and a

genuine perplexity over why individuals choose to convert from Buddhism. Most Christian students experienced emotional conflict and strained relationships as a result of converting. Christian participants, particularly males, reported negative interactions, harassment and humiliation. In one case, domestic violence and changes in living arrangements were reported as a result of a student's conversion.

Attitudes regarding Christianity ranged from disapproval to tolerant to acceptance among participants' families. Most Buddhist and non-affiliated participants cited that their parents did not mind if they studied at the church, as long as they *only studied English*, which is an act of agency. Family attitudes and perceptions were dynamic. Participants, especially female Christians, reported what they believed to be increases in acceptance of Christianity over time. Tension in personal relationships, especially for males, existed prior to and after individuals' conversion. Participants newly acquired beliefs about Jesus being the only "true" God conflicts with Buddhist practices and ideology that encourages questioning. Buddhism is deeply entrenched in Khmer culture, but is changing and perceived to be disappearing by some Khmer (Clayton, 2005; Kent 2008; 2009). These changes have a direct impact of Khmer culture.

#### *Significance of Christianity in Cambodia*

Cambodia's history of colonization, foreign occupation and the recent Khmer Rouge regime combined with a corrupt government and poor economy have the potential to create a context in which fundamentalism of any kind could potentially flourish. English is being used globally by evangelicals to attract nonbelievers to Christian communities (Pennycook & Makoni, 2005). English, Christianity and western ideologies influence the production, reproduction and transmission of knowledge in Cambodian

educational institutions. Ultimately this will have long term consequences that impact Khmer culture, which is rooted in Buddhist tradition.

English is being used to fulfill the nation's economic goals, ones heavily dependent on globalization. However, teaching English in conjunction with Christianity to the masses, especially to populations limited levels of critical consciousness will undoubtedly have very real social, political and cultural consequences in Khmer society. The Cambodian government is aware of this and has issued directives in 1999, 2000 and 2007 prohibiting religious groups from proselytizing outside of religious institutions ("Limit Christian groups," 2007).

TESOL is shifting attitudes, influencing language and transforming worldviews, but according to whose agenda? Is a universal, English speaking, Christian perspective anchored in Eurocentric ideology a desirable outcome? This is a potential consequence if English education in developing nations is viewed without regard to the economic, social and political climate of the countries. A critical consciousness must be developed to analyze how Christianity, English, and globalization intersect with Khmer language, culture, politics, education and social mobility. The potential benefits and consequences of the global rise of English and spread of Christianity in developing nations must be identified. An ongoing, critical analysis of organizations offering TESOL and educational programs to marginalized populations is necessary to determine the broader social implications. English is portrayed as an international language with the potential to empower people, but the reality of this myth fosters a false consciousness that influences individuals' decisions about what to do with their lives. Asserting that English and education alone can result in social mobility without an acknowledgement of the

structural inequalities and unbalanced power relations creates a context for further oppression.

### TESOL in Cambodia: Empowering or oppressive?

Globalization and English's rise as an international language demands that TESOL, now more than ever, be analyzed critically. Education can liberate people and transform society, but it can also oppress individuals and reproduce social inequalities (Freire, 1970). With all education, the knowledge produced and language used are never neutral and requires constant critical analysis to deconstruct masked forms of domination that oppress marginalized groups. If education is a means for economic progress and the betterment of society, then critical approaches to theory, pedagogy and methodology are necessary. TESOL requires the same critical analysis as any other field of education, even though it has not received the amount of attention it deserves thus far from researchers (Kubota & Lin, 2005; Pennycook, 1999; Pennycook & Makoni 2005).

TESOL and the notion of English as a global lingua franca are applauded by many (Demont-Heinrich, 2008). The notion of a common language increases people's access to information and allows for communication across cultures and continents, a definite benefit (Jordão, 2009). However, TESOL, in many cases, serves to further oppress people because of the ideological hegemony that accompanies it. Current TESOL curriculum, pedagogy and ideology often devalue non-Western culture and teach discrimination rather than tolerance, continuing the cycle of oppression. The experiences of young adults learning English at EKCC illustrates some of the potential harms of an uncritical TESOL approach.

## TESOL as empowering

*English and progress*

The global spread of English is often viewed in a positive light and associated with progress (Samuelson & Freedman, 2010; Lee, 2011). The West, America in particular, positively promotes the global hegemony of English (Demont-Heinrich, 2008). The discourse focuses on learning English as an individual choice that provides access to a plethora of resources, and is generally related to universal progress (Demont-Heinrich, 2008). English is often perceived as a critical component of economic progress and essential for developing nations to utilize technology and participate in the global economy (Pennycook, 1999). Many individuals and societies welcome the incorporation of English because of perceived benefits like educational and job opportunities.

*English and technology*

A common language, like English, is favorable because it allows communication across cultures and nations. Increased popularity of English is combined with advances in technology to create opportunities that allow historically marginalized and geographically isolated people to communicate among each other and with the world in an unprecedented manner. Participants in the study shared that English allows them to use the Internet to access information and communicate with people abroad. Participants use Facebook and other technologies to learn and practice English, another benefit of learning an “international” language. Participants combine learning English and technology to exercise agency.

*English as the language of instruction*

TESOL is perceived as empowering especially when English is used as the language of instruction in educational settings, like in Rwanda, South Korea or Cambodia. Policy-makers in Rwanda attribute their language policy, making English the only language of instruction, as a key contributor to the success of their post-genocide reforms (Samuelson & Freedman, 2010). South Korea also strongly associates EFL to their globalization policies, which have impacted the education field and resulted in an increased emphasis on TESOL (Lee, 2011). English is being linked to economic progress in these nations. Khmer is the primary language of instruction in Cambodian public schools, but English has been incorporated into the curriculum (MoEYS, 2004). Learning English has become viewed as a requirement to access curricular content in these countries. In Cambodia, participants reported that learning English is necessary because some textbooks at post-secondary institutions are only available in English. A certain level of English proficiency was necessary at EKCC for students eager to enroll in technology classes, because the curriculum and instructional language is in English. Learning English equates to increased access to systems of information, but as previously stated, English alone is not emancipatory (Olivios & Quintana de Valladolid, 2005).

*English and opportunities*

Globalization discourses present English as a beneficial advancement for developing nations by pairing it with educational and economic opportunities (Demont-Heinrich, 2008). English is equated with increased economic opportunities and improved social conditions (Demont-Heinrich, 2008; Lee, 2011; Samuelson & Freedman, 2010). TESOL is linked to financial incentives in nations like South Korea, Laos and Cambodia

that rely on foreign funding from international business investments and revenue generated through tourism (Appleby, et al., 2002; Lee, 2011). Connections between English and economic progress serve to perpetuate the myth of English for social mobility, without acknowledging the structural issues that restrict social mobility for many English speaking Cambodians living in poverty.

TESOL is highly valued by immigrants living in native English speaking countries like the United States because they, like participants in the study, perceive English as key to social mobility (Louie, 2004; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). American and British English often serve as “correct” or privileged forms of English and ascribe power to the native speakers and reinforce social hierarchies (Jordão, 2009). Therefore, speaking English a specific way and using the appropriate linguistic codes become important. The ability to speak English and the type of English a person speaks can impact future socioeconomic outcomes (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). However, TESOL in an uncritical form can also be detrimental and oppressive for marginalized groups because it devalues native culture and language, while legitimizing discourses that ignore structural inequalities that perpetuate imbalances in social, political and economic power relations.

#### TESOL as oppressing

Globalization has created a context for English language domination, which devalues native languages and silences their speakers (Lee, 2011; McCollum, 1999). TESOL curriculum and pedagogy has the potential to devalue non-Western culture and teach discrimination (Lee, 2011). Language and culture are so deeply connected that ELTs, especially native speakers, cannot teach one without teaching the other. Teaching about other cultures is not inherently problematic, but it is a cause for concern when it is

done uncritically. An uncritical TESOL approach uses a curriculum, pedagogy and methodology that reinforces Western hegemony, perpetuates class reproduction and minimizes opportunities for students to develop a critical consciousness. The promotion of English as an international language inherently gives the language power and priority (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999) and therefore privileges native speakers and ideology. The lack of critical reflection upon TESOL remains a serious issue for the field (Pennycook, 1999).

Incho Lee's (2011) study analyzing EFL and globalization in South Korea highlighted the manners in which textbooks serve to discriminate and perpetuate stereotypes. Lee found that the curriculum promoted four binary themes: legal/illegal action, capability/incapability, equality/inequality and high/low quality of education that favor Western culture and devalue non-Western culture. Only positive aspects of Western culture were promoted, while positive portrayals of Asian and African cultures were excluded. This selective representation of Western culture and exclusion of all other cultures is a core component of a hidden curriculum that promotes a deficit perspective through which teachers view their students and students begin to view themselves. It promotes a message that the dominant culture, in this case Western, is inherently better. This learned form of devaluing native language, culture and knowledge is often perpetuated through education (McCollum, 1999).

The role of native speakers as teachers, curriculum, ideology and pedagogy involved with TESOL are oppressing ELLs through the hegemonic and reproductive functions they serve. TESOL has become a commodity in the current global economy that privileges native English speakers and devalues speakers of other languages (Barry,



2011; Jordão, 2009; Pennycook, 2008). As a result, native English speakers are traveling around the world working as English teachers. The type and length of training and preparation of these individuals varies dramatically, and the actual and potential impact upon the students and their communities is significant (Jordão, 2009).

### *Native speakers as teachers*

The commodification of education, specifically TESOL, is highly problematic because poorly trained native speakers easily find employment abroad teaching English. Their status as native English speakers and their role as educators places them in positions of power in English classrooms worldwide. The ease of their employment and the status they garner by virtue of being a native English speaker devalues the English speaking locals working alongside of them (Appleby, et al, 2002). Jordão (2009) contends that their position further reinforces the Western values with the spreading capitalism as a primary goal. She highlights the danger of this beyond the economic realm, “And so we move on, spreading capitalism under the neo-liberal logic of economic profit that governs our ideologies, cultures, identities, languages, and therefore also our interpretive procedures, our ways of making sense of the world” (p. 96). ELTs are doing more than making English deposits into the minds of students eager to learn the language of power. They are, often unknowingly, imposing their ideology and culture through language instruction since the three are intertwined (Barry, 2011; Jordão, 2009). The EKCC’s English program illustrates this by their use of TESOL designated spaces to share their Christian doctrine and western values.

“The colonial construct of the Self and the Other, of the ‘TE’ and ‘SOL’ of TESOL remain in many domains of ELT” (Pennycook, 1998, p. 22, as quoted in Brutt-

Griffler & Samimy, 1999) This binary construct privileges native speaker teachers over non-native English speaking teachers and creates a deficit paradigm non-native English speaking teachers and students are perceived to lack something, in this case is the English language –the language of global economic and political power (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Jordão, 2009). The perception of inadequacy can further oppress individuals who maintain a semi-intransitive state of consciousness because they accept this ideology without a critical perspective on the colonialism and structures that have marginalized them (Freire, 1985). Participants believed that English is necessary because of globalization, but globalization is increasingly becoming Westernization, a process that threatens local languages and cultures (Pennycook & Makoni, 2005).

Cambodian students in this study adhere to the native speaker fallacy: Native English speakers are the best teachers. The native speaker fallacy affords them higher status than their Khmer colleagues (Barry, 2011). This reverence to native teachers is undeserved and disrespectful to the more knowledgeable Cambodian English language teachers. Students were often surprised when I suggested they direct their specific grammar questions to the Khmer teachers. They were shocked that I did not have *all* the answers, but seemed to rethink their stance on native speakers after I posed similar questions about particular uses of the Khmer language. When students were unable to answer my questions about the use of a Khmer word, I asked if it was fair to assume that they were the best teachers of Khmer because it is their native language.

During the over six months I spent living in Cambodia, the native speaker myth was evidenced by the high tuition costs at schools employing native English speakers and students' preferences to study English with them. However, after meeting some native

speaker teachers, I was angered and outraged to share a profession with them, even if it is in name only. Even though they had little or no training in education or TESOL, many of them used their privilege of being born in an a native English speaking country to obtain employment and to secure higher paying positions unavailable to their more qualified, Cambodian colleagues.

In this way, the native speaker fallacy can oppress and silence non-native English speaking individuals because they are ascribed a lower status and often excluded from the dialogue based on this myth (Appleby et. al, 2002). In a nation with poverty as great as Cambodia, it begs the question, should the available jobs and higher salaries go to native speaking individuals just because they happen to be born in the Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom or the U.S.?

#### *Combining TESOL and religion*

A banking approach, ELTs that lack critical consciousness and a Western biased curriculum becomes even more oppressive when religion is brought into the education field (Pennycook & Makoni, 2005, Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003). Pennycook & Coutand-Marin (2003) highlight the “massive global silence” regarding the role of ELT and missionary agendas (p. 337). They argue, “Given that English is also frequently promoted as a language that can bring material gain, we see an unholy alliance here between English, capital and Christianity” (p.344). English is in high demand worldwide and Cambodia is no different. Every participant in the study initially went to the church for the English program and computer classes. No participants reported going to EKCC to learn about Christianity. Free English instruction appeals to individuals living in poverty and seeking opportunities to exercise agency and praxis through education.

Historically, missionaries have fulfilled important roles in developing societies in terms of education, medical and overall aid, however, significant concerns about the way in which TESOL is used in the mission field exist (Pennycook & Makoni, 2005, Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003).

As a teacher and researcher, this study brought up serious concerns about the ethics and agendas at the research site and with church-based English programs elsewhere. Appendix G provides a longer reflexive discussion of this issue, but for the current purpose of discussing evangelism in relation to English education in Cambodia I will focus on ethics, the hidden curriculum of the church, and role of faith. The covert purposes and hidden agendas of missionaries are ethically problematic and must be analyzed critically (Pennycook & Makoni, 2005, Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003).

I agree with the four major concerns Pennycook-Marin (2003) highlights regarding what has been termed Teaching English as a Missionary Language (TEML). The first is the large international scope and scale of TEML programs. In Cambodia, I observed several TEML programs in place. One of these is Asian Hope, a Christian elementary school that recruits foreign, devout Christian teachers to teach English for two years to middle and upper class Cambodian and Korean children. I knew one of the American teachers recently placed at Asian Hope and I also had the opportunity to interview the principal of the school. Both women are foreigners from developed nations working in Cambodia. They are monolingual, white women with no TESOL training. The teacher has minimal experience working with ELLs and the principal's experience is confined to the mission field. The teacher acknowledged her concerns about teaching ELLs because of her lack of training and experience. This example illustrates the issues

mentioned previously, relating to native speakers, curriculum and pedagogy that occur in the field of a Christian-based school funded by an American NGO. The role TEML, power and influence on the classroom level, local level and international level must be acknowledged and critically analyzed.

The second concern is the cultural and global politics that are associated with TEML. Historically, Christianity was the predominant religion of many colonizing countries and is currently the most commonly held religion of the United States, still the most powerful and influential nation in the world. Learning English in conjunction with Christianity, without critical questioning, is essentially adopting some aspects of a Western, capitalistic worldview. The legacy of hegemony tied to colonization and accompanying globalization serves to further Western agendas of capitalism (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Samuelson & Freedman, 2010). Global capitalism thrives on the exploitation of workers and extraction of natural resources by developed nations, resulting in human rights violations and environmental devastation. Global capitalism benefits a few elites in developing nations while exploiting local workers and perpetuating the poverty cycle. ELLs are converting to Christianity as they study English in mission fields to prepare for jobs promised by global capitalism. The conversion experience results in negative outcomes including individual alienation and disruption in the family unit, as this study's findings have shown.

The American NGOs, which are faith based, are funding a significant amount of the efforts at EKCC and Asian Hope. These foreign funded NGOs use their power and financial capital to spread Christianity and Western ideology, which as previously discussed, can undermine and supplant Cambodian culture and language. A critical

approach TESOL and language policies are absent and the long term consequences are not being considered. This also supports Pennycook and Coutand-Marin's (2003) third concern, the way TEML implicitly supports the global spread of English as a priority over all other possibilities for the developing nations.

The prioritizing of English parallels missionaries' agenda to save non-Christian souls at any cost. For example, EKCC's approach emphasizes spreading the Christian faith by whatever means possible, including a lack of disclosure and transparency, if necessary. Lack of trust and disclosure are Pennycook and Coutand-Marin's fourth concern. If missionaries use TESOL to build relationships with students and then spread their Christian message, their strategy takes advantage of their power in the field. For example, the staff at EKCC disclosed to me specific strategies that they used to isolate English students and create a space in which they could build trust, develop relationships, and spread the Christian doctrine without interference from students' families and peers. Thai, the director of EKCC's English program, revealed to me that the English students are invited to the beach for a weekend, a novel experience for the majority of them, under the guise of a friendship retreat. The Christian component is intentionally undisclosed. The church staff accompanies approximately eighty students on the expensive three day trip, presented as a retreat for the English program. The church lures individuals with an opportunity they can provide as a result of their financial capital and social capacity.

However, once the students arrive the staff uses the time to build relationships and to proselytize. The faith aspect of the retreat is undisclosed to attendees until they arrive because the staff wants to isolate them from their families and peers who may interfere with the targeted students' openness to listening to messages about Jesus (Thai, personal

communication, August 1, 2011). Although, as Thai admitted, “Some older students are angry when they realize the intent of the trip, but they relax because they have a chance to get to know us. It is important to have time alone with the students to establish trust and once the students trust us, then we can begin to share the good word.”

According to staff, EKCC’s scheduling of Wednesday evening worship service during the same time as English class is done intentionally so that students who want to attend can come and their parents will assume that they are at English class. Wednesday’s bilingual service is presented to parents as an opportunity for students to practice their English. The actual purpose, though, is to practice English while learning about God (Jesus). I believe the strategies to mask religious agendas are a serious ethical and moral concern. The lack of transparency and covert agenda is one way the church influences individuals and disguises their power and intentions. However, I learned from many discussions and interviews, it is clear that the staff truly believes that such actions must be done in an effort to reach more people.

Missionaries and EKCC strategies to proselytize, like developing nations’ welcoming of any and all ELTs, raise additional important questions. What can be done in instances, such as TESOL and the mission fields, where the oppressors are unaware of their oppression? What can be done in TESOL programs to deconstruct the power relations? What can or should be done in the Christian mission field to unmask abuses of power? As a critical educator, my goal is to explore the sources of inequalities in the education and social fields that contribute to the oppression of already marginalized groups. For evangelical Christians, the goal is to spread Christianity and convert non-

believers. We all come to the field with an agenda, but the ultimate question is who determines what agenda is the right agenda?

*A new approach: Problem posing*

Individuals learning English and technology will not change the structural inequalities that sustain their own economic and political marginalization. Participants' beliefs that learning English, technology, and Christianity will enable them and their families to become upwardly mobile ultimately support the political and socioeconomic status quo in Cambodia. These beliefs and behaviors do not challenge the structural systems responsible for their oppression, and they leave the people vulnerable to future domination. But, the hegemonic ideology that these behaviors *are* the silver bullet needed for upward social mobility is strategically reinforced by an uncritical approach to TESOL, Christian missionaries who employ any tactics that will allow them to harvest souls, and the Cambodian government that provides inadequate public education.

A problem posing pedagogical approach is paramount to combating curricula that serve an oppressive and hegemonic function. Problem posing is a teaching methodology that promotes critical thinking (Freire, 1970). This type of pedagogy is often absent in the fields of TESOL and urban education. My observations of Cambodian and U.S. classrooms confirm the popularity of the banking approach to TESOL. Freire's concept of banking approach perceives students as empty, passive vessels in which knowledge (or in this case language) must be deposited by the teacher who is the owner of the knowledge (1970). This privileges the teacher and oppresses students. This approach silences students and contributes to their further marginalization.



Educators who implement a banking approach deny students opportunities to develop the critical consciousness necessary to analyze materials and structures in a way that empowers them, rather than oppresses them (Freire,1970). Banking instruction diffuses students' development of a critical consciousness and contributes to social reproduction. Banking ensures that individuals are not engaged in a dialogue that allows them to co-construct knowledge with the teacher, but instead is designed so the teacher informs them of their place and role in society through the hidden curriculum. Language deposits and hidden curriculum advance Western hegemony because they impose Western values and norms, without providing a space for students to question their location in a socio-historical context. In banking classrooms, conscientization and praxis are limited by the structure of the field.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In chapter five, I discussed participants' experiences, acts of agency and sources of motivation for learning English. Poverty, family and religion are key aspects of participants' English experiences. Participants seek out opportunities to study English in formal, non-formal and informal learning environments and employ a range of learning strategies to improve their English proficiency. ELLs and their families believe that English, as an international language, will lead to future social mobility in the current era of globalization. Students and their families exercise agency through personal and financial sacrifices, strong commitments to learning English, and in some cases, compromising beliefs and expectations. However, English alone is insufficient in addressing the structural inequalities that maintain social class hierarchies in Cambodia. I deconstructed myths of English for social mobility through a critical TESOL framework blending Freire's theory of power and Bourdieu's concepts of capital. I also addressed the moral and ethical concerns about evangelical Christians' methods utilizing TESOL to attract non-believers to the church community. I concluded by explaining TESOL's ability to liberate students and incite social transformation, but reiterated the necessity of a critical TESOL framework. TESOL requires a critical analysis because of its potential as an oppressive, discriminatory and hegemonic force that can silence populations. The findings illustrate participants' agency and growing conscientization. However, action for

social transformation that addresses the structural inequalities that restrict social mobility in Cambodia doesn't seem likely at this time.

These findings highlight important concerns for critical educators and researchers. First, globalization, English as an international language and TESOL have combined in an unprecedented manner that could potentially and irreversibly alter the cultures of ELLs. Secondly, myths about English, education and social mobility mask the structural inequalities that exist in fields like education and serve to perpetuate the cyclical nature of social stratification. The complex intersections of language, culture, social class, religion and education have important implications for research, policy and practice in developing nations and the United States.

#### *Changing culture in Cambodia*

Cambodia's national slogan: Nation, Religion, King is reiterated throughout the country. It appears on ministry buildings, classroom walls and government documents. The country takes great pride in their nation, Buddhist faith and royal family. Social structures are designed to promote the importance of these three entities. The emphasis on English and its accompanying ideology challenges these tenets of Khmer culture in some ways. ELLs in Cambodia, like those in the United States, are learning a language, but also an ideology that often conflicts with their own culture and traditions. The acquisition of a new language brings many benefits, but significant losses of traditional language and culture can also occur as a result.

This study reveals that participants seek out ESL classes at a Christian church because they are free and English is perceived to be necessary for social mobility. Some participants convert to Christianity as a result of learning English in tandem with the

Christian doctrine. The decision to convert to Christianity impacts participants' families, an essential component of Khmer culture, in several ways. Converted Christians experience alienation and emotional turmoil in their families because they choose to believe in "an American God" or "not the religion of Cambodia." The tenets of Christianity and Buddhism are drastically different. Adopting an evangelical Christian perspective in Cambodia often means abandoning Buddhist traditions and practices.

Buddhist beliefs and practices exude from Cambodian society. Countless numbers of monks in bright orange robes walk the streets of Phnom Penh. It is common to see them approaching homes and businesses to collect offerings and provide blessings to people in the morning and afternoon hours. The same homes, businesses and schools have shrines devoted to their ancestors and spiritual beliefs. Wats, which are monastery temples, and pagodas are important places in Khmer society that serve religious and secular purposes. Many Cambodian holidays and daily practices involve Buddhism. Families attend ceremonies and bring offering to the pagodas. Participants' adoption of Christianity usually entails rejecting Buddhist traditions, an act that negatively impacts the family dynamic. There is an epistemological break in the family unit that results when Christian students show preference to their faith over their family. Over time, this break will change the definition and value of family in Khmer society.

The infusion of English, in a more secular sense, also threatens Khmer culture. English is associated with social and economic progress and is attributed a higher linguistic status. Participants' placement of such high value on English potentially devalues Khmer. Students participate in English classes and at the church because of the opportunities available to improve their language proficiency. However, as some

participants learn English and Western culture, they begin to devalue Khmer language and Khmer culture. Lida, for example, is eager to move out of her parents home because she “is not a baby anymore” and wants to live independent of her family, like her foreign friends. Lida’s desire to adopt a more Western lifestyle is likely a result of the influence of English and Western norms. Placing a higher value on English and Western ideology, devalues Khmer culture and language.

### *Changing culture of ELLs in the United States*

ELLs in the United States are confronted with practices and policies that devalue their culture, threaten their native language and upset the family dynamic. The challenge to maintain culture and native language for ELLs in the U.S. is much greater than in Cambodia because the U.S. is an English speaking country. English is the language of power and becomes essential for survival for many immigrant and refugee students and their families.

Many educational practices and policies in the U.S. promote English only and create a context that devalues the experiences and cultures of ELLs. Society, schools and sometimes their own parents reiterate the message to ELLs that English is more important than their native language. Language and culture are a part of individual and group identities. Messages that devalue students’ language and culture negatively impact students’ perceptions of themselves and their native culture. Acculturation for some ELLs entails the abandonment of traditional language and culture because students do not perceive them as necessarily providing the social capacity and cultural capital essential for academic achievement and social mobility in an English speaking nation.

Educational policies and practices prevalent in school systems nationwide contribute to an epidemic of first language losses experienced by many immigrants and refugees in the United States. English only policies that prohibit instruction in students' first language combine with teachers' beliefs that development of ELLs' first language hampers their development in English, together this creates a classroom that is intolerant of linguistic diversity and therefore intolerant of cultural diversity. As a result, in such classrooms, ELLs are socialized to value English and white, middle class American culture over their native language and culture. This often leads to language loss and the assimilation of students from diverse backgrounds into the culture of the dominant group. Students outside the dominant culture, like ELLs, do not always assimilate to the norms of the dominant class. Some ELLs resist the systemic discrimination through actions that influence their academic achievement like choosing to stop attending school, or conversely, graduating in spite of oppressive circumstances.

Some acculturation processes result in language loss and significant shifts in cultural beliefs and practices, this disrupts the family dynamic. Second and third generation immigrant students may not learn their parents language thoroughly and that inhibits communication with first generation family members. Language and culture are inseparable; therefore to lose language means to lose culture in many aspects. Regardless of the manner and degree of ELLs' assimilation, most still face discrimination and limited access to academic and occupational opportunities due to structural arrangements that systematically deny equal access to all individuals.

*Dangers of the English and education myths*

Widespread beliefs that contend education, English and hard work can solely lead to academic achievement and occupational attainment are dangerous and unfair to ELLs in Cambodia and urban schools in the United States. These educational ideologies perpetuating myths about English, meritocracy and social mobility serve as hegemonic functions that deny the role of structures, decrease opportunities for critical consciousness and reproduce social hierarchies.

Study participants strongly believe that English will lead to social mobility because that is the message emphasized by their government, educational system, and NGOs. Participants work diligently to learn English and increase their cultural capital deemed necessary for future employment. However, the reality is that Cambodia has achieved little success in the past in terms of job creation and is currently not on track to develop properly paid job opportunities for the plethora of English speaking individuals that will soon be entering the job market. The job market in Cambodia is unstable and lacks adequate employment opportunities because of the government's social, political and economic policies. Widespread corruption and minimal investment in education restrict academic and occupational opportunities for students. However, promoting English and education for social mobility purposes distracts attention from the structural inequalities that act as gatekeepers and may leave many young, Khmer adults disappointed if their efforts to learn English do not pay off in terms of social mobility.

ELLs in urban schools are also subjected to such myths about the power of education and English in United States. These myths mask the role of the superstructure in academic and occupational opportunities. Many urban schools operate amidst a

complex array of challenging social issues including poverty, racial and socioeconomic segregation, discrimination and poorly trained teachers. However, students, their families and teachers are socialized to believe that if ELLs work hard, learn English and study enough then they can attend the college of their choice and pursue the career of their dreams. For many students, English and hard work may pay off in some respects, but it does not necessarily result in the equitable access to academic and employment opportunities that society promises. The unfortunate fact remains, many urban schools serve as sites of social reproduction that limit students' potential.

Students' potential to thrive academically and develop critical consciousness is significantly restricted in urban classrooms in the United States and Cambodia. In both nations, the teachers are inadequately paid and overburdened. Insufficient facilities, excessive class sizes and standardized examinations create a context that is conducive to banking styles of education and rote learning. Memorization and following procedures are rewarded on standardized examinations. In such schools, there is little time or space available for teachers to incorporate culturally relevant, problem posing pedagogies that engage students in developing a critical consciousness regarding their realities. Instead, students are taught the skills necessary to pass standardized examinations, rather than promoting awareness of social issues that can be transformed by student action.

Banking style approaches to education minimize opportunities for teachers and students to foster a critical consciousness about the issues affecting their daily lives. The reliance on the myths of education and social mobility create a context that attributes ELLs' lack of academic achievement onto the students and their teachers, rather than the larger social structure within which the school operates. These myths deny the multiple



ways that the superstructure systematically limits the academic progress and occupational attainment through gate keeping mechanisms. Such myths promote standardization and homogeneity while devaluing diversity of any kind.

### *Limitations*

This study provides significant data about the experiences and motivations of young adults learning English at a church-based program in Cambodia. However, several limitations to this study must be acknowledged and used to better inform future research. Major limitations revolve around my role as the researcher and the study's scope and sample size.

Qualitative research is inherently subjective because the researcher cannot separate personal experiences, perspectives and beliefs from herself in a manner that renders the work completely objective. Although I implemented several methods to monitor my personal bias through reflexivity, it is essential to recognize my influence on the study through my roles as a researcher and participant observer (See Appendix G for my autobiography). My role at the church and close relationships with the staff and some study participants must be acknowledged. My extremely limited proficiency in Khmer language forced me to rely on translators and their wording of participants' responses that cannot be detached from their personal biases.

This qualitative case study employed ethnographic methods, but the length of the study was limited to only six months. The research site limited the sample to thirty participants comfortable studying at a church and from families permitted them to do so. This is noteworthy because many students at EKCC, including the participants, indicated that many Cambodians are apprehensive about Christians and Christian organizations.

Participants were limited by their time and availability to participate in the study. The difficulty categorizing participants by religious affiliations was also a challenge and a limitation because I did not establish clear criteria used to determine religious affiliations, besides self-identification. The absence of non-affiliated females is also a limitation. Time constraints limited the focus of the study to one specific site that was Christian and did not allow me to make comparisons to students that studied English elsewhere, such as a Buddhist pagoda or private school. These limitations should inform the design of future research in Cambodia that focuses on similar questions.

*What is the purpose of TESOL and education?*

The purpose of education varies depending on who you ask, but many people, including myself, believe that education is intended to promote social progress that improves the conditions of humankind. The findings that emerge from this study, in addition to the research on ELLs in the U.S., demonstrate that English and education are promoted as a means of social mobility. The global spread of English is celebrated. Refugees and immigrants in the U.S. that acquire English proficiency are admired for their efforts to assimilate. However, the negative realities demand attention in TESOL discourses.

ELLs living in poverty in Cambodia and the U.S. face numerous structural barriers that interfere with their chances to achieve upward mobility. Well-intentioned teachers, missionaries and community workers reiterate the myths that English and education are enough for ELLs in both contexts. The reality is, that in many cases, ELLs still lack the necessary social capacity and cultural capital required to achieve their academic and career goals. ELTs must no longer passively make English language

deposits in the minds of ELLs, rather, they must become facilitators of dialogues that foster the development of critical consciousness among students aimed at changing the structural inequalities restricting access among students outside of the dominant group. If the well-intentioned individuals working with ELLs in Cambodia and in the United States truly want to see students realize their potential and achieve their dreams, then the spaces used for TESOL must cease to serve as sites of social reproduction and become sites of social transformation.

### *Theory and research*

Significant shifts in discourse and research paradigms, a development of critical consciousness and the inclusion of silenced voices in the dialogue are essential first steps toward dismantling the oppressive social constructs that perpetuate social inequalities. Study participants in Cambodia and English language learners in urban communities face many similar challenges that ultimately impact the quality of their educational experiences. Poverty, limited access to resources and structural barriers restrict student opportunities for educational attainment and social mobility. A serious shift that deconstructs the popular myths regarding English and education as the sole requirements for social mobility must occur and the structural sources that marginalize ELLs must be highlighted.

A critical framework must be applied with greater urgency in the TESOL field due to the rapid changes occurring worldwide as a result of globalization. The emphasis on critical theory that exists in urban education discourses must continue and be applied to TESOL. Marginalized individuals and groups are too often viewed as the subjects in the research fields or merely participants in studies. Researchers must create a space for

their authentic participation in dialogues regarding their experiences. Scholars and educators must remember to regularly interact with the students, communities and contexts they are writing about. Marginalized and disenfranchised groups are essential to the dialogue. The works of Michelle Fine, Paulo Freire, and Jean Anyon must serve as examples of scholars working toward social transformation.

Future research specific to this study includes following up on the economic outcomes for participants to determine the impact of learning English on social mobility. Comparative studies of educational policies, TESOL and economic outcomes in developing nations is also necessary to identify the long and short term outcomes of infusing English into non-English speaking societies. Lastly, research that addresses the potential consequences of language loss in a variety of contexts is also important because of the rapid spread of globalization.

### *Practice and policy*

Critical researchers and teachers are essential at all levels of education. Shifts in curriculum and pedagogy toward those that value diversity, foster critical awareness, and are aimed at social transformation are essential. Teachers, ELTs and others, are powerful agents that can facilitate change and spark student agency through problem posing approaches to learning that encourages individuals to question, redefine and construct knowledge. Classrooms can be spaces of transformation that challenge students to develop critical consciousnesses about their socio-historical location. The development of a critical consciousness requires specific changes in teacher education programs that go beyond merely promoting student centered learning.

A critical awareness of the social context that impacts the educational experiences of ELLs and other diverse populations must be integrated throughout teacher training programs. Pre-service teachers need more than one class designated to “diverse learners.” One course centered on educating students from various racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds is inadequate and insulting to the populations that are the course’s intended focus. The dedication of one course to address the vast diversity among all students, including ELLs, is not adequate. Diverse students and the social context of schooling must be integral components in all education courses. Teacher preparation programs must require students to leave the classroom and work within the communities of the students they will serve, while engaging in a critical dialogue about their experiences.

The challenges in TESOL education are substantial within and outside of the fields of higher education. Unfortunately, supporters of transformation in colleges of education must overcome budget restrictions and resistant academics and teacher educators that are comfortable doing things the way they have always been done. However, change is necessary and possible. In TESOL fields outside of academia, the challenges are much greater because of the commodification of ELT, the use of English as a missionary language and the ideological packaging of globalization. However, critical researchers and educators must continue to work to question the policy and practices in these fields and draw attention to the problematic nature of untrained native English speakers posing as teachers in the field. Programmatic changes, including pedagogical shifts, must be accompanied by political action and policy revisions to truly transform social conditions.

Fostering a critical consciousness among individuals and groups must be accompanied by organized efforts by the people aimed at social change. Previously silenced groups can use critical consciousness to find their voices, but other forms of agency are necessary to deconstruct the social inequities that exist in their communities. Conscientization must be accompanied by praxis, an act that must be done by the people themselves. Changes in social and educational policies must be implemented to eradicate the disparities in access that have historically served to oppress groups not afforded the same power and privilege maintained by the dominant class. The work ahead of critical educators and researchers to deconstruct the discourses of power and privilege that have existed for centuries is substantial, but necessary. However, we cannot do it alone or for marginalized and silenced peoples, rather, we must work together toward social equality and the humanization of humanity.

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## APPENDIX A: EDUCATION FOR ALL GOALS

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive <b>Early Childhood Care and Education</b> (ECCE), especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
2. Ensuring that <b>by 2015</b> all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete <b>free and compulsory primary education of good quality</b> ;
3. Ensuring that the <b>learning needs of all young people and adults</b> are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;
4. Achieving a <b>50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015</b> , especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;
5. <b>Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015</b> , with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to, and achievement in, basic education of good quality;
6. Improving all aspects of the <b>quality of education</b> and ensuring excellent of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

Source: Seel, A. (2007). *“Reaching the Unreached” Progress and Challenges in EFA in East Asia, Focusing on China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Philippines and Indonesia*. “Country profile commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, Education for All by 2015: Will we make it?”

## APPENDIX B: LIST OF COUNTRIES IN EAST ASIA REGION

## Countries in East Asia Region

Brunei Darussalam
Cambodia
China
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Indonesia
Japan
Lao People's Democratic Republic
Macao (China)
Malaysia
Myanmar
Phillippines
Republic of Korea
Singapore
Thailand
Vietnam

Source: UNESCO (2008). Regional monitoring report.

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANTS BY RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION  
AND GENDER

Participant Table

Christian Females	Christian Males	Buddhist Females	Buddhist Males	Unaffiliated Females	Unaffiliated Males
Socheata	Sambo	Sotheavy	Bora	None	Daro
Lida	Chetra	Vicheka	Dilen		Auntoch
Akara	Sidorn	Kumpeak	Naro		Ratha
Srey Oun	Keriya	Kongke			Vin
Srey Kouch	Rith	Monika			Pahna
	Samnang	Poline			Vuth
	Prasith	Pisey			
	Chamreoun	Kanha			

## APPENDIX D: REFLEXIVE DISCUSSION

Religion and conducting research at a church-based site invoked a wide array of thoughts and emotions within me over the course of the study. As a qualitative researcher I am trained to monitor my physical, psychological and emotional responses in a reflexive manner. However, to be honest I never expected to experience such a vast range of emotions and thoughts related to this research study. It is critical for readers to understand the processes that I experienced while working on this research because I inevitably shape the research as a participant observer. I use reflections from my field notebooks and personal journal entries to describe the mental and emotional journey that accompanied this research study.

During my first trip to Cambodia in 2009, I was excited about the way the church was helping the community. I believed, as I was told, that the church's main goal was to provide young adults in the community with English and job skills. I attended church services and was moved by the joy and hope that exuded from the Cambodians worshipping there. This was very different from my experiences as a Catholic. I seriously began to contemplate the role of organized religion in my life.

I was excited when the pastor suggested that I return to assist with restructuring the English program. I thought it was a great opportunity to put my education and experience to use. I was confident that in some way, I was "meant" to do my dissertation in Cambodia. I am a believer in destiny. However, I had some doubts about not being Christian enough to work at a church. I did not feel called in any way to tell anyone about Jesus or Christianity, but I did feel like I was meant to teach students in Cambodia.

After moving to Cambodia and beginning my research in 2010, I decided that I did not want to focus my study on only Christian students as suggested by my committee. I was interested in understanding the experiences and motivations of all students, so with approval from my chair, I expanded the criteria for participation. I did not want to exclude anyone on the basis of religion, but determining participants' religious affiliation became much more difficult than I anticipated. It seemed as though all the students assumed I was an evangelical Christian. During conversations, when the topic arose, I explained that I was raised Catholic and I embrace diversity on all levels, including religion. Christian students seemed confused by my tolerance and often tried to convince me that Jesus is the only true God. I responded in these discussions by asking students questions about their beliefs, adopting a problem posing approach.

Over time, during my interactions with the church community, I began to feel as though I was not Christian enough to truly be a member of the community. This feeling probably evolved because I did not entirely believe in the doctrine the church was promoting. I questioned the ethics of the church's recruiting and evangelizing efforts. I questioned my role in the evangelical efforts regarding the English program. I wondered if I was naïve to believe that the church's goal for the English program was primarily to serve the community. I didn't agree with some of the church's strategies, but at the same time students seemed to be finding hope in their new found faith and I didn't think that was a bad thing. I later struggled with my role at the church and often felt uneasy participating in any functions outside of teaching English.

I later experienced feelings of anger, resentment and confusion regarding the church's recruiting efforts. I did not approve of their lack of transparency, but at the same

time, I did not stand up and voice my concerns. I asked casually and later formally about the church's lack of disclosure and realized that the church staff truly believes that they are doing the right thing morally because their efforts may result in converting non-believers.

I also struggled with my own feelings of being less than honest. I attended church, even though I usually did not want to, but because I felt that it was important to my role as a teacher and researcher at the research site. I felt like an imposter at times, as though I was being dishonest with myself and others just by attending church services. However, other times I enjoyed being at church and appreciated the spiritual time and fellowship the services offered me. At times, I found myself wanting to believe in the way the Christians at the church believed. I admired their hope and faith, but the reality was that I did not believe in Jesus and Christianity in the same ways that they believed.

I fully understand the appeal of religion to people. I spend a great deal of time contemplating the role of religion and spirituality. I think about all of the benefits religious organizations bring to society, but I often come back to questions regarding the ethics of some churches' actions. I think in some manner, I hold devoutly religious people to a higher moral standard than secular individuals and that is why I tend to be more critical of their behaviors. I am not sure if that is fair, but it is true for me at this point in my life.

The most important realization that I have had throughout this entire process is how much I wanted to believe in something that I did not entirely accept. I was eager to believe and become a part of the Christian community because it offered so much emotional support to its members, but I did not believe everything the Christians

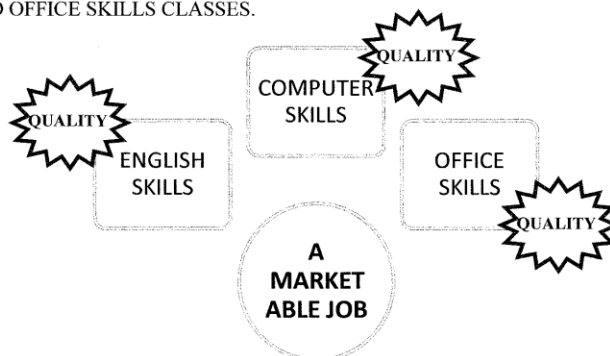
believed. I often ponder the power of leaders and organized groups to influence individuals in various contexts from religious sects to cults to gangs. As a critical educator, I am knowledgeable about power and agendas masked in language and ideology, but I initially trusted the church unconditionally. I did not even consider an alternative agenda at first because I believed solely in the goodness of the church. To me, this highlights the power of the church and their strong influence.

This discussion about the thoughts and emotions I experienced during the research study and afterwards is intended to fulfill two purposes. First, illustrate the reflexive processes I engaged in to monitor to myself as a qualitative researcher. Secondly, to highlight the appeal and powerful influence of religion on individuals, even those that deem themselves to be critical in nature, like myself.

## APPENDIX E: ENGLISH PROGRAM

## English School Process

**GOAL#1:** TO PROVIDE A MARKETABLE SKILLS FOR ALL STUDENTS BY TEACHING ENGLISH, COMPUTER AND OFFICE SKILLS CLASSES.



**There are four factors to achieve English School.**

1. Teacher
2. Course
3. Place
4. Student
5. Controlling

IF we have Good Teacher that teach students in the way that they can learn the most, and he show the good example whether his teaching, speaking, or his attitude toward students, we can guarantee that our school be famous and have potential over the community. Their family will allow their sons and daughters to study here. And they can trust the church, then it is our time for harvest, by leading students through Wednesday Service to Saturday Service and break through to Sunday service or attending a cell group in only a few months. That's where the New Members and Believers came from. Then our Church will grow.

IF we have a Good Course for studying, students will get interested. For what they interested, they will learn quickly and successfully. Make sure that the course is stable, not moving around or no exactly schedule. We must care for these small things like, when they will finish the book, what they will receive from this course. Students always expect something from what they are doing, if we don't provide them something they will leave.

IF we have a Secure and Nice Place for studying. So the students will learn much more than a noisy place and class. They will not stay long especially smart students that try to study. They will leave if the class full of noisy and disturbing sound around the school. So we must make sure that no one makes noise even outside the class during study time. So the students can focus on their subject.

IF the Student know exactly what they need to do, they would get more success rather than wasting their time. Make sure that we give them a high standard of studying by giving some instruction in class, and how they can study well. They must have their own obligation to take part in the class also, like having a good attitude to other students and teacher. Study hard at home and review the lessons.

In any place we have rule or policy to make sure that everything run smoothly and efficiently, so in our school to make sure that these five things work together well we must fellow some rules. And someone will keep track on them to ensure that all things working properly as what we had been set.



## APPENDIX E: ENGLISH PROGRAM PROCEDURES AND EXPECTATIONS

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### 1.1 Teacher Standard

- 1.1.1 **According to Teacher's Job Description**
    - 1.1.1.1 Prepare Lesson Plan in advanced
    - 1.1.1.2 Class Management
    - 1.1.1.3 Give Exercise (Workbook)
    - 1.1.1.4 Provide Test
    - 1.1.1.5 Taking attendant
      - 1.1.1.5.1 Daily taking attendant of student
      - 1.1.1.5.2 Receiving call or Message
  - 1.1.2 **Teacher's Characteristic (Must be a Christian)**
    - 1.1.2.1 **Good Appearance**
      - 1.1.2.1.1 Dressing Well
      - 1.1.2.1.2 Hair Cut
    - 1.1.2.2 **Good Attitude**
      - 1.1.2.2.1 **Teaching Technique**
        - 1.1.2.2.1.1 Arrive 5mn before class
        - 1.1.2.2.1.2 Give a smile and be patient all the time
        - 1.1.2.2.1.3 Review lesson for 15mn
        - 1.1.2.2.1.4 Use your lesson plan to teach
        - 1.1.2.2.1.5 Your voice tone must be clear and heard to all of them
        - 1.1.2.2.1.6 Explain clearly and focus on Student's understanding
        - 1.1.2.2.1.7 Writing on white board
          - 1.1.2.2.1.7.1 Big and clear enough to make sure the students at the back can read well
          - 1.1.2.2.1.7.2 Read while you are writing
          - 1.1.2.2.1.7.3 Do not turn your back to students while writing
      - 1.1.2.2.2 **Leading Activities**
        - 1.1.2.2.2.1 Give them time to do something new
        - 1.1.2.2.2.2 Let them join as part of an activity
        - 1.1.2.2.2.3 Show them example before let them do something
        - 1.1.2.2.2.4 Walk around and assist them to do the activities
      - 1.1.2.2.3 **Encourage students**
        - 1.1.2.2.3.1 Ask poor students to sit at the front
        - 1.1.2.2.3.2 Giving a real life example of success
        - 1.1.2.2.3.3 Show them how important of studying
        - 1.1.2.2.3.4 Give them praise or prize for their achievement
- 1.2 **Teacher Meeting (once a month)**
  - 1.2.1 Come on Time
  - 1.2.2 Bring your report
  - 1.2.3 Bring your requests

### II. Course

- 2.1 Books
  - 2.1.1 Spectrum I > VI
    - 2.1.1.1 Passing English Placement Test to register
    - 2.1.1.2 Dividing into their level of Knowledge
  - 2.1.2 Additional Courses
    - 2.1.2.1 Open class, available for all
    - 2.1.2.2 No limited students
- 2.2 Time Available
  - 2.2.1 Morning
  - 2.2.2 Afternoon

## APPENDIX E: ENGLISH PROGRAM PROCEDURES AND EXPECTATIONS

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- 2.2.3 Evening
- 2.3 Duration
  - 2.3.1 12 Months per Book
- 2.4 Certificate
  - 2.4.1 from New Life Fellowship Phnom Penh Thmey
- 2.5 Test & Exam Schedule
  - 2.5.1 Monthly Test
  - 2.5.2 Midst Term Test
    - 2.5.2.1 Give gifts to smart students #1 to #3
    - 2.5.2.2 One Week-Vacation
  - 2.5.3 Final Test
    - 2.5.3.1 Giving Certificate
      - 2.5.3.1.1 Certificate of Completion
      - 2.5.3.1.2 Certificate of Appreciation (For Teacher)
    - 2.5.3.2 Two Week-Vacation
      - 2.5.3.2.1 Student Retreat for 1day (Lead by Cell Group)
      - 2.5.3.2.2 Student Retreat for 3day (Youth Camp)
    - 2.5.3.3 EPT for New English Class & Computer Class Registration

### III. Place


- 3.1 Reception
  - 3.1.1 Students
    - 3.1.1.1 Welcome New Comers and tell them the information
    - 3.1.1.2 Contact for New Information everyday
    - 3.1.1.3 Good Communication
    - 3.1.1.4 Make Registration
    - 3.1.1.5 Selling Books and Materials
    - 3.1.1.6 Internet Charger
  - 3.1.2 Library
    - 3.1.2.1 Controlling the Borrowing of Books
    - 3.1.2.2 TV program or Video
- 3.2 Safety and Comfortable
  - 3.2.1 Security Guard
    - 3.2.1.1 Wear your uniform during working time
    - 3.2.1.2 Check for students ID
    - 3.2.1.3 Dealing with students outside the class
    - 3.2.1.4 Submit Report
    - 3.2.1.5 Showing direction to New Comer
  - 3.2.2 Safety
    - 3.2.2.1 Make sure are no fighting or gangsters around
    - 3.2.2.2 Make sure that no one steal or take something out
    - 3.2.2.3 Contact the police immediately if there are any problems
    - 3.2.2.4 Make note to Visitors
    - 3.2.2.5 Make note for Staff outgoing
  - 3.2.3 Parking
    - 3.2.3.1 No driving in or blow the horn in school area
    - 3.2.3.2 Park all vehicles well in assign place
    - 3.2.3.3 Check for Ticket all the time
- 3.3 Comfortable for studying
  - 3.3.1 Class Room
    - 3.3.1.1 Enough Lights
    - 3.3.1.2 Fans

APPENDIX F: PROMOTIONAL FLYERS FOR ENGLISH PROGRAM

## កម្មវិធីសិក្សា និងសកម្មភាពសិក្សា

### STUDY COURSE & STUDY ACTIVITIES

ថ្ងៃរៀនអាស័យ បីថ្ងៃក្នុងមួយសប្តាហ៍ ចាប់ពីខែសីហា ដល់ខែមេសា  
 REGISTRATION IS AVAILABLE EVERY 6 MONTHS



**ឧបករណ៍ជំនួយ**  
HELPING MATERIALS

មានឧបករណ៍ជំនួយដូចជា៖ វីដេអូ អូឌីយ៉ូ កញ្ចប់សៀវភៅសិក្សា និងសកម្មភាពសិក្សា។

THESE ARE MANY DIFFERENT LEVELS OF BOOKS FOR RESEARCHING AND VIDEO PROGRAMS IN ENGLISH.

កាលបរិច្ឆេទសិក្សាថ្នាក់កម្រិតសរុប៖ មេសា ៦ខែ

SCHEDULE FOR ENGLISH CLASSES

TIME	BOOK	LEVEL	ROOM
6:00-7:00AM	Part of Speech	II	101
8:00-9:00AM	SPOTLIGHT	II	101
9:00-10:00AM	Conversation	I	101
9:00-10:00AM	Newspaper	II	102
10:00-11:00AM	Spectrum	I-A	102
11:30-12:30PM	Spotlight	II	101
11:30-12:30PM	Grammar Spectrum	I	103
3:00-4:00PM	Spectrum	I-A	102
4:00-5:00PM	Spectrum	III-A	102
4:00-5:00PM	Part of Speech	I	101
5:30-6:30PM	Spectrum	I-A	Top-Roof
5:30-6:30PM	Spectrum	I-B	103
5:30-6:30PM	Spectrum	II-A	203
5:30-6:30PM	Spectrum	II-B	202
5:30-6:30PM	Spectrum	III-A	102
5:30-6:30PM	Spectrum	III-B	104
5:30-6:30PM	Spectrum	IV-A	101
5:30-6:30PM	Let's Go	V	105
5:30-6:30PM	Grammar Spectrum	III	106
6:30-7:30PM	Spotlights	II	101

**សកម្មភាពសិក្សា**  
STUDY ACTIVITIES

**បញ្ហាដោះស្រាយ៖**

ដើម្បីបង្កើនការយល់ដឹង និងការចូលរួមរបស់សិស្សានុសិស្ស ក្នុងការសិក្សា និងសកម្មភាពសិក្សា។

ការបង្កើនការយល់ដឹង និងការចូលរួមរបស់សិស្សានុសិស្ស ក្នុងការសិក្សា និងសកម្មភាពសិក្សា។

- ដើម្បីបង្កើនការយល់ដឹង និងការចូលរួមរបស់សិស្សានុសិស្ស ក្នុងការសិក្សា និងសកម្មភាពសិក្សា។
- ដើម្បីបង្កើនការយល់ដឹង និងការចូលរួមរបស់សិស្សានុសិស្ស ក្នុងការសិក្សា និងសកម្មភាពសិក្សា។
- ដើម្បីបង្កើនការយល់ដឹង និងការចូលរួមរបស់សិស្សានុសិស្ស ក្នុងការសិក្សា និងសកម្មភាពសិក្សា។



## APPENDIX G: AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I am as much a part of the research as the participants, not only because it has been guided by the questions and conceptual framework that I have chosen, but because initially I was a participant in the TESOL program. I designed curricula and provided professional development to ELTs prior to choosing my research site. Since it is impossible to separate the researcher from her research, it is essential to provide my autobiography and description of my experiences to provide readers with an understanding of my worldview and my decision to research this specific topic.

*As a student*

I grew up in the small, blue collar city of Erie, Pennsylvania. I am the oldest of three daughters in our working class family. I am the first college graduate in my family. My parents instilled a strong work ethic in me and the belief in the rewards of sacrifice and hard work. My parents sacrificed financially for me and my sisters to attend Catholic schools for the entirety of our elementary and secondary schooling. As an adult, I discovered the reason I was sent to a Catholic school, instead of the public school a few blocks away, was because of an interaction my mother had with a student at the public school when I was a child. A disheveled, African American kindergarten boy approached my mom during his recess while my mother and I were at the playground. He asked her, “What the fuck are you doing on this playground?” She decided at that moment that her daughters were not going to school with children that behaved that way. Instead, my parents enrolled us in Catholic school located in a low income neighborhood, a few blocks further away from our house than the public school. My class was a mix of African American and white students from working class and poor families.

As a child, I hated school from an early age. At one point during high school, I considered dropping out and spoke to my guidance counselor about a fast track program that would enable me to graduate sooner. I completed my four years of high school, although with an outstanding number of absences. Despite my disdain for school, I knew from the age of seven or eight years old that I was meant to teach. I was called to make school a better place for students, than it was for me most of the time.

I went to Catholic school and was raised Catholic, but church and organized religion is not a part of my family's regular routines. As a child, I received all my sacraments and participated in church regularly by reading at mass or attending services during school or on the weekends with friends. However, as I got older, I found myself questioning the Catholic doctrine more and more.

In high school, I attended a small, private Christian liberal arts school with mostly white working class, middle class and affluent peers. A few teachers there influenced and encouraged me to be a free thinking individual, constantly ready to question the world around me. My religion classes always inspired a lot of questions for me about the Bible and Christianity. In the tenth grade, I made a conscious decision to stop participating in the church, a difficult choice at times since attending mass was a school requirement. I stopped participating in the sacraments as well because I felt a strong questioning and uncertainty about organized religion. I did not agree with the stance of the Catholic church on many issues. I recall thinking, I don't know enough about other religions to say with certainty that I am Christian. Through college and my adult life, I have been on a more unorthodox, spiritual journey that does not significantly involve organized religion.



Issues of social class, race and religion have played important roles in my life and educational experiences. As a graduate school student, I lived alone in an apartment in an African American, low income community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My experiences living there as a white, working class, female were life-changing in the most positive sense. I learned very well what it was truly like to be “othered.” For the first time in my life, I was living in a community where I differed from my neighbors, racially, culturally, and socioeconomically. The perspective I gained from that experience strongly influenced my worldview and teaching career.

*As teacher and advocate*

I moved to Charlotte, North Carolina in 2002 to teach in an urban school. I was confident in my desire to work with students similar to those from my neighborhood in Pittsburgh. I searched for schools that enrolled a high percentage of students on free and reduced lunch. I felt called, by something larger than myself, to work with students in poverty. I began my teaching career at an elementary school in West Charlotte.

The first half of the school year was difficult. I worked diligently to establish trust and build rapport with my students’ parents, who were mostly all African American. I encountered a lack of trust among the students’ families. I attribute it to the significant turnover rate of white teachers at the school. In the spring of my first year, I remember feeling as though I finally had a grip on most aspects of teaching. I was especially proud of some of the relationships I developed with my students’ families.

In the spring of that year, two young Montagnard boys were brought to my first grade classroom. It was March, but they came wearing winter coats zipped all the way up to their noses. They refused to take their book bags off and were not able to speak more

than their name in English. I called the office several times to inquire about these students, but I was met with disregard. They cried and hid under my desk for a good part of the first week. I too went home and cried. I cried out of desperation and frustration. I could not understand why the boys were behaving this way, but I found myself more outraged at my colleagues' apathetic attitude regarding the new students. Over the next six weeks, I spent every moment of the school day with the boys because they refused to leave my side, even for trips to the women's restroom. School was a scary and unpleasant place for them.

Early on I sought out answers at the refugee resettlement agency that worked with the students' families. I was shocked and horrified to hear about the atrocities these children and their families encountered in their native country. I was greatly moved by the families' circumstances and eager to help other families as they resettled in the U.S. I began teaching adult ESL classes at the refugee agency and volunteering. These experiences gave me opportunities to work closely with the students' families. Over time, I began to understand the plight of immigrant and refugee children more deeply, especially those coming from places where violence and oppression were the norms.

The following year, many Montagnard students enrolled at our school. I was happy to have both of my former students in my class again. However, I was disturbed by some of the talk in the teachers' lounge and hallways about "those" students. A few of my colleagues seemed annoyed at the students' lack of English proficiency and inability to follow typical school procedures. I was offended and hurt by the comments, although I realized that my fellow teachers did not understand the circumstances that brought the students to the U.S. and their classrooms. I presented a proposal to my principal, to create



a kindergarten, first and second grade classroom for the Montagnard students enrolled in those grades with myself as a teacher. I felt it was essential that these children have the most positive experience possible when starting school, especially after all the suffering they had already endured. My principal agreed, and I that year I taught thirteen Montagnard students in kindergarten, first and second grade. It was one of the most educational and amazing experiences of my life. I researched, read about, and sought out workshops about best TESOL practices, since I had no prior training.

Over the next two years, I grew increasingly disturbed by the way the refugee students and their families in our school and the district were being treated. I tried to advocate for them at the community and school levels, but was met with disregard. One comment summed up the challenge I faced. A man told me, “You’re a kindergarten teacher. You open milks and wipe noses.” It was as though I was not qualified to comment on the inequitable practices and policies that I observed first hand.

At that time, I knew that a doctoral degree would give me the social status necessary to advocate for marginalized students. I enrolled in the Curriculum and Instruction-Urban Education program at UNCC and left the classroom after five years to dedicate myself to my studies. I focused much of my research on the school experiences of immigrant and refugee children, especially those from Southeast Asia. During that time, I was tutoring for In Goode Company, a company where I am currently employed. The company was started by a colleague from my former school, who shares my passion for immigrant and refugee children. We were teaching in an apartment converted to a classroom in the students’ community in East Charlotte, that we shared with a church.

One Saturday while working late, a woman from the church observed me teaching and suggested that I talk with a mission team that goes to Cambodia about teaching ESL. I was excited by the opportunity and in the summer of 2009 I accompanied the mission team to Cambodia. I taught English to children at an orphanage and young adults at a church-based program. I conducted TESOL training for the teachers at the church-based program. I was impressed by ESL students' dedication and perseverance in Phnom Penh. They sacrifice a great deal to study and believe strongly in the power of education. I was amazed and eager to understand the phenomena better. The church's pastor and the orphanage director both mentioned that it would be a great benefit to have me teach English for an extended period of time. The pastor invited me to return and assist with the restructuring of TESOL program.

After returning to the United States, I contemplated his offer for some time. I researched TESOL in Cambodia and was shocked to learn of the current state of Cambodia's public education system, and the lack of available research on education in Cambodia. Doing my dissertation research in Cambodia was an opportunity to for me to work as a teacher, but also make a substantial contribution to the available research and literature on TESOL in Cambodia. The absence of qualitative studies on the topic disturbed me, and motivated me to use my dissertation to bring Khmer students into a dialogue about education, their experiences and their motivations.

Teaching, doing research and living in Cambodia has helped me to grow significantly as an educator, researcher and person. I have learned countless lessons about life from my students. My time there has humbled and challenged me in numerous ways. I am extremely grateful for my experiences with the people of Cambodia and the

immigrant and refugee families in Charlotte. These interactions and experiences have shaped my perspective, research and work in many ways.

#### APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS

What factors motivate Khmer students to learn English?

- Why do you want to learn English?
- What/who influences your choice to study English?
- Does Cambodia's history influence your choice to study?
- How do you describe your motivation?
- How do you maintain motivation?

What are Khmer students' educational experiences?

- What are your primary, secondary, and tertiary educational experiences?
- Your beliefs about education?
- Families' beliefs about education?
- What non-formal learning experiences do you engage in?
- How much exposure did/do you have to English?
- Role of the teacher in your learning experiences?
- Your role as an individual in the learning experience?
- Role of peers in the students' learning experience?
- Where do you study English and what is that experience like?

What challenges do students face when learning English and how do students address those obstacles?

- Economic?
- Social?
- Cultural?
- Geographical?

How are students' efforts at learning English being supported?

- Who supports your learning? In what manner?
- How do you support your own learning?
- Is there community support for learning English?
- What materials are available to support English language learning?