

History of Education in Cambodia: A Review of Literature From Past to Present

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Abstract: From the beginning until now, education has been a significant factor in the Cambodian setting. The current article examines the origins of education in Cambodia, which dates back to the prehistoric period. Throughout Cambodian history, education has played a variety of meaningful roles. Education played a significant role in shaping the lives of individuals throughout the many eras of Cambodian prehistory and history. In prehistory, children learned by doing and observing the people around them. Education in Cambodia peaked during the Angkor Empire, also known as the Khmer Empire. During that period, hundreds of educational institutions were located across the country, including more advanced educational establishments in the city that served as the capital of Angkor. Thousands of instructors were well-equipped to teach Khmer-speaking students. On the other hand, as the Angkor Empire collapsed, education in Cambodia gradually declined, a trend that persisted until the Khmer Rouge Regime finally eradicated education. During this period, the Khmer Rouge leaders targeted and killed the majority of instructors. Then the Cambodian government and other concerned education stakeholders have been working diligently to rebuild education in Cambodia since the end of that black period, and they have succeeded in doing so to the point where it is now. Finally, the article recommends that the concerned education stakeholders consider the past as the experiences for the present and improve the perspectives of future education.

Abstrak: Sejak awal hingga sekarang, pendidikan telah menjadi faktor penting dalam tatanan Kamboja. Artikel ini membahas asal-usul pendidikan di Kamboja, yang dimulai sejak periode prasejarah. Sepanjang sejarah Kamboja, pendidikan telah memainkan berbagai peran yang berarti. Pendidikan memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk kehidupan individu di berbagai era prasejarah dan sejarah Kamboja. Pada masa prasejarah, anak-anak belajar dengan melakukan dan mengamati orang-orang di sekitar mereka. Pendidikan di Kamboja pernah mencapai puncaknya selama Kekaisaran Angkor, yang juga dikenal sebagai Kekaisaran Khmer. Selama periode tersebut, ratusan lembaga pendidikan berlokasi di seluruh negeri, termasuk lembaga pendidikan yang lebih maju di kota yang berfungsi sebagai ibu kota Angkor. Ribuan instruktur dilengkapi dengan baik untuk mengajar siswa yang berbahasa Khmer. Di sisi lain, ketika Kekaisaran Angkor runtuh, pendidikan di Kamboja secara bertahap menurun, sebuah tren yang bertahan hingga Rezim Khmer Merah akhirnya memberantas pendidikan. Selama periode ini, para pemimpin Khmer Merah menargetkan dan membunuh sebagian besar instruktur. Pemerintah Kamboja dan pemangku kepentingan pendidikan lainnya telah bekerja keras untuk membangun kembali pendidikan di Kamboja sejak berakhirnya masa suram itu, dan mereka telah berhasil melakukannya hingga mencapai titik seperti sekarang. Terakhir, artikel ini merekomendasikan agar para pemangku kepentingan pendidikan mempertimbangkan masa lalu sebagai pengalaman untuk masa kini dan meningkatkan perspektif pendidikan di masa mendatang.



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INTRODUCTION

Cambodia, officially known as the Kingdom of Cambodia, is located on Southeast Asia's mainland. Thailand borders Cambodia to the northwest, Laos to the north, and Vietnam to the east. This country also has a coastline along the Gulf of Thailand

to the southwest. Cambodia has a population of approximately 17 million and covers an area of 181,035 square kilometers (69,898 square miles). Phnom Penh is the country's capital and most populous city (Beck, 2023).

Cambodia shares the historical roots of its culture, religion, traditions, and education as far back as six thousand years, before the birth of Jesus, with the annals of nations in South Asia (Em et al., 2023). As a result, there are many references to the names of ancient Cambodian royalty in many history books and chronicles (Thun, 2021). Those ancient monarchs who presided over Cambodia founded mighty civilizations, and they have also built, among the green Khmer forests, magnificent monumental pyramids of creativity that represent the values of morality, spirituality, and creativity. These monuments were built with precision and style and belong in the divine realm. They are testimony to the wondrous perfection of man as a spiritual being (Robinson, 2019). Table 1 provides a comprehensive chronological overview of significant periods in Cambodian history, from prehistory to the present.

This historical legacy provides a foundation for understanding the evolution of education in Cambodia. From the informal transmission of knowledge in prehistoric times to the formal system during the Angkor Empire and the dynamics of the Khmer Rouge era, education in Cambodia has un-

dergone a dynamic cycle. Understanding the history of education in Cambodia is essential for educators, policymakers, and academics seeking to understand how past systems and ideologies continue to shape contemporary educational practices. This article reviews the primary literature that traces the trajectory of Cambodian education from its early forms through colonial interventions, post-independence reforms, the Khmer Rouge era, and current reconstruction efforts. Through this historical review, the article highlights key milestones, challenges, and shifts in educational structures across historical eras. The paper examines how historical context has influenced Cambodia's educational framework by examining these transitions. It also reflects on how lessons from the past can inform the future of education in Cambodia. Ultimately, this literature review is an exploration for further research and discussion on the development of education in Cambodia within the broader Southeast Asian context.

HISTORY OF EDUCATION DURING THE PREHISTORY

During the prehistoric period in Cambodia, formal education as we understand it today was non-existent. Instead, education took on a predominantly informal nature, deeply embedded within the fabric of daily life, cultural traditions, and communal practices (Em, 2023b). Within prehistoric Cam-

Table 1. Periods of Cambodian prehistory and history

No.	Periods	Dates	Sources
1.	Cambodian Prehistory	600,000 B.C. to 100 B.C.	(Chin et al., 2023; Em et al., 2023)
2.	Nokor Phnom (Funan)	100 B.C. to 550 A.D.	(Chin et al., 2023; Em et al., 2023)
3.	Chenla (Kampuchea)	550 A.D. to 802 A.D.	(Chin et al., 2023; Em et al., 2023)
4.	Angkor (Khmer Empire)	802 A.D. to 1431	(Chan & Latif, 2013; Em et al., 2023; Rany et al., 2012)
5.	Chaktomuk	1432 A.D. to 1505 A.D.	(Fee-Most, 2023; UNESCO, n.d.)
6.	Longvek	16th-century	(Polkinghorne et al., 2019; Sassoon, 2018)
7.	Oudong (Ondong)	1618-1863	(UNESCO, n.d.)
8.	French Colony	1863-1953	(Em et al., 2023)
9.	Sangkum Reastr Niyum (King Sihanouk's Period)	1955-1970	(Keo, 2019)
10.	Khmer Republic (Lon Nol's Period)	1970-1975	(Benzaquen-Gautier, 2021; Em et al., 2023)
11.	Khmer Rouge (The Killing Fields)	1975-1979	(Ayres, 1999; De Walque, 2006)
12.	The People's Republic of Kampuchea	1979-1989	(Deth, 2009a, 2009b)
13.	State of Cambodia	1989-1993	(Collins, 2016; Keller, 2005)
14.	Kingdom of Cambodia	1993-Present	(Keller, 2005; Tep & Hap, 2022)

bodian communities, knowledge and skills were primarily transmitted through oral traditions and practical experiences (Chin et al., 2023). Children learned essential survival skills through observation, imitation, and active participation in the activities of their families and communities (Em et al., 2023).

During this period, the family unit served as the primary locus of education, with parents passing down knowledge and skills to their children (Chin et al., 2023). Traditional practices, cultural beliefs, and practical techniques were imparted through storytelling, folklore, and legends (Em et al., 2023). This method of education helped preserve historical and cultural knowledge while instilling practical wisdom in younger generations (Em et al., 2023; Em, 2023b).

Communal learning was also prevalent in prehistoric Cambodia, with elders and community members sharing their expertise and knowledge with younger individuals (Em, 2024). Informal education occurred during communal activities such as ceremonies, festivals, and gatherings, providing opportunities for individuals to learn from one another and participate in shared experiences (Em, 2024; Sophady et al., 2016). Spiritual and religious practices also significantly influenced prehistoric Cambodian education, contributing to a broader understanding of the world. Shamanic rituals, ceremonies, and spiritual beliefs provided insights into cosmology, spiritual beliefs, and the natural world. These practices fostered a deeper connection to the environment and the unseen forces believed to govern human existence (Em & Mao, 2024).

While formal education systems did not exist during prehistoric times in Cambodia, informal educational practices within communities and families were fundamental in transmitting knowledge, skills, and cultural values (Em, 2023b). These early educational foundations laid the groundwork for future developments in Cambodia's educational landscape, influencing the way knowledge was imparted and acquired in subsequent eras (Em et al., 2023).

EDUCATION DURING THE NOKOR PHNOM OR FUNAN PERIOD

During the Nokor Phnom or Funan period in Cambodia, which lasted from the 1st to the 6th century A.D., education played a significant role in the development of the society. This era marked the beginning of organized states in the region and witnessed the establishment of a sophisticated education system that laid the foundation for future edu-

cational advancements in Cambodia (Em, 2023c). Education in the Nokor Phnom period was primarily influenced by Indian Brahmanical traditions and Buddhism, which were introduced to the region through trade and cultural exchanges. As a result, the educational system integrated elements of both religious and secular teachings (Chin et al., 2023).

One of the key learning centres during this period was the Royal Palace, where young princes and royal family members received their education. They were taught various subjects, including religious scriptures, literature, philosophy, astrology, and warfare strategies (Em et al., 2023). Education was considered essential for future leaders, and the princes were groomed to become wise and capable rulers (Em, 2023c). Besides the royal education, monastic schools were associated with Buddhist temples. These monastic schools served as learning centers for religious and secular subjects. The curriculum in these schools included religious texts, meditation, ethics, grammar, arithmetic, and other practical skills (Chin et al., 2023). Monastic education provided opportunities for individuals from different social backgrounds to receive an education and contribute to society (Em et al., 2023).

Apart from the royal and monastic schools, some private tutors provided education to children from wealthy families. These tutors imparted knowledge in various subjects and ensured that the children received a well-rounded education (Chin et al., 2023). It is important to note that during this period, education was primarily accessible to the elite and those closely associated with the royal family. The general population, consisting mainly of farmers and laborers, had limited access to formal education (Em et al., 2023). However, informal education and practical skills were often passed down through generations within families and communities (Em, 2023c).

The Nokor Phnom period's educational system contributed to Cambodia's intellectual and cultural development (Chin et al., 2023; Em et al., 2023; Em, 2023c). It fostered the spread of religious and philosophical ideas, the preservation of traditional literature, and the cultivation of intellectual pursuits (Chin et al., 2023). The knowledge acquired through education played a crucial role in shaping the society, promoting social cohesion, and contributing to the overall progress of the kingdom (Chhem, 2024).

EDUCATION DURING THE CHENLA PERIOD

During the Chenla period (550-802 A.D.), education in Cambodia experienced significant develop-

ment (Em et al., 2023). Chenla was one of the earliest recorded Southeast Asian kingdoms and was crucial in shaping the region's history and culture. Education was a vital aspect of Chenla society, facilitating the transmission of knowledge, skills, and cultural values (National Library of Australia, n.d.-b). In Chenla, education was primarily reserved for the ruling elites, including the royal family, nobility, and high-ranking officials. The education system was heavily influenced by Indian civilization, particularly the Brahmanical tradition (Em et al., 2022). Indian scholars and teachers played a crucial role in disseminating knowledge and imparting skills to the ruling class (Em et al., 2023).

The curriculum in Chenla encompassed a wide range of subjects. Religious studies, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, held great importance (Chin et al., 2023). Students learned about religious rituals, philosophy, and the scriptures. This religious education served to reinforce the legitimacy of the ruling elite and provided a moral framework for societal conduct (Tan, 2008). Literacy and language skills were also emphasized in Chenla's education system. Sanskrit, the language of Indian scholars, became the language of the elites and was primarily used for religious and administrative purposes. Education focused on mastering Sanskrit grammar, literature, and script. Additionally, the Khmer language, an early form of the Khmer script, was also taught. Mathematics and astronomy were other significant subjects in Chenla's education system (Em et al., 2023). Students were taught arithmetic, geometry, and algebra, essential for various fields such as land measurement, trade, and administration. Astronomy was particularly valuable for agricultural purposes, as it helped determine the timing of planting and harvesting (Dokras, 2022).

Education in Chenla was often conducted through a system of apprenticeship. Students would learn under the guidance of teachers, scholars, and priests. This method allowed for a personalized approach to education, with students receiving individual attention and mentorship. Knowledge was transmitted orally, and students were expected to memorize texts and teachings (Em et al., 2023). While education in Chenla was largely restricted to the elite class, evidence suggests that some educational opportunities were also available to commoners. Basic literacy and numeracy skills were likely taught to the general population, although the extent of such education remained uncertain (Chin et al., 2023).

EDUCATION DURING THE ANGKOR OR KHMER EMPIRE PERIOD

During the Angkor or Khmer Empire period, which extended from 802 A.D. to 1431 A.D., Cambodia flourished as a hub of cultural, religious, and intellectual activity (Em et al., 2023; National Library of Australia, n.d.-b). Education during this time was deeply rooted in religious institutions, with Hinduism and Buddhism shaping the curriculum and instructional methods (Rany et al., 2012). This period witnessed the construction of magnificent temples, including the iconic Angkor Wat, which served not only as places of worship but also as centers of learning and knowledge dissemination (Chan & Latif, 2013). The educational system of ancient Cambodia was hierarchical, with access to learning primarily reserved for the elite class, including royalty, nobles, and priesthood members. These privileged individuals received their education within the confines of temples and royal courts, where scholars and monks imparted knowledge through oral instruction and written texts (Rany et al., 2012).

Religious education formed the cornerstone of the curriculum, with students studying sacred texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas of Hinduism, as well as Buddhist scriptures like the Tripitaka and various commentaries. Sanskrit and Pali were the primary languages of instruction (Em et al., 2023). The role of Buddhist monasteries, or "wats," was paramount in the educational landscape of ancient Cambodia. Young boys from noble families were often sent to monasteries for instruction in religious doctrine, philosophy, meditation, and other subjects. Monks served as both teachers and mentors, guiding their students on the path to spiritual enlightenment while also imparting worldly knowledge (Chan & Latif, 2013).

In addition to religious education, practical skills and vocational training were also emphasized. Young men were trained in martial arts, warfare, and administrative duties to serve the empire and its rulers (Em et al., 2023), effectively. Knowledge of agriculture, irrigation, and engineering was crucial for maintaining the empire's infrastructure, including its vast network of temples, reservoirs, and irrigation canals (Evans, 2016; Hays, 2020).

The royal court played a significant role in fostering learning and intellectual pursuits. The king and his courtiers served as patrons of the arts and sciences, supporting the construction of libraries, academies, and other educational institutions. The royal library at Angkor Wat housed a vast collection of manuscripts and texts on various sub-

Table 2. Names of kings, periods of reign, and capital cities during the Angkor period

Names of Khmer Kings	Periods of Reign	Locations of the Capital City
Jayavarman II	A.D. 802-869	Vyadharapura and Mount Kulen
Jayavarman III	869-877	Hariharalaya
Indravarman II	877-889	Mount Kulen
Yashovarman I	889-900,	Angkor
Harshavarman I	900-923,	Angkor
Isanavarman II	923-928	Angkor
Jayavarman IV	928-942	Angkor and Koh Ker
Harshavarman I	942-944	Koh Ker
Rajendravarman II	944-968	Koh Ker and Angkor
Jayavarman V	968-1000	Angkor
Udayadityavarman I	1001-1002	Angkor
Suryavarman I	1002-1049	Angkor
Udayadityavarman II	1050-1065	Angkor
Harshavarman III	1066-1080	Angkor
Jayavarman VI and Dharanindravarman I	1080-?	Angkor
Suryavarman II	1113-1150	Angkor
Dharanindravarman	1150-1160	Angkor
Yasovarman II	1160-~1166	Angkor
Jayavarman VII	1182-1218	Angkor
Indravarman II,	1218-1243	Angkor
Jayavarman VIII	1270-1295	Angkor
Indravarman III	1295-1308	Angkor
Jayavarman VII Paramesvara	1327-?	Angkor
Ang Jaya I or Trosak Ph'aem	-?	-?

Source: Adapted from Dokras (2022, pp. 4-5)

jects, contributing to the preservation and dissemination of knowledge within the empire (Edwards, 2006). While education in ancient Cambodia was primarily reserved for the elite, the empire's cultural and intellectual achievements impacted the region. The architectural marvels of Angkor, the literary works of Khmer scholars, and the spiritual teachings of Buddhist monks continued to inspire awe and admiration centuries later (Bhagentsang et al., 2021). Despite the eventual decline of the Khmer Empire, its legacy as a center of learning and civilization endures, leaving an indelible mark on the history of Southeast Asia (National Library of Australia, n.d.-a).

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS DURING THE ANGKOR

During the Angkor or Khmer Empire period, which lasted from 802 A.D. to 1431 A.D. (Em et al., 2023), Cambodia boasted a rich educational landscape that

included universities and higher education institutions. While formal universities in the modern sense may not have existed, the empire had centers of learning that served similar functions, fostering intellectual development and disseminating knowledge across various disciplines.

One of the most prominent centers of learning during this period was the famed temple complex of Angkor Wat (Carter et al., 2019). While primarily a religious monument dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu, Angkor Wat also served as a hub of intellectual activity. Within its vast precincts, scholars and monks congregated to study religious texts, philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, and other subjects (Pandya, 2022). The temple's intricate bas-reliefs and inscriptions are believed to contain symbolic and astronomical knowledge, indicating a deep understanding of celestial phenomena among the Khmer elite (Dolan, 2021).

The royal court of the Khmer Empire was an-

Table 3. Emerging educational institutions during the Angkor period

Levels of Education	Name and Location	Subjects Taught	Sources
Primary Education	Wat Schools (In Buddhist Pagodas)	Basic Reading and Writing Literacy skills	(Chan & Latif, 2013)
Secondary Education and Vocational Education	Wat Schools (In Buddhist Pagodas)	Develop Vocational Skills such as Carpentry, Develop Human Relations, A Sense of Responsibility, and Appropriateness	(Chan & Latif, 2013)
Tertiary Education	Wat Cheysrey University (In Preah Khan temple)	Literature, Arts, Philosophy, and Religion	(Em et al., 2023)
	Wat Raja Vihear University (In Taprom Temple)	Management and General Knowledge	(Em et al., 2023)
	Neak Poan University (In Neak Pean or Neak Poan Temple)	Medical Treatments	(Moeun, 2017)

other important locus of higher education. The king and his advisors, drawn from the nobility and the priesthood, were patrons of the arts and sciences. They supported the construction of libraries, observatories, and other educational institutions where scholars could pursue advanced studies. For example, the royal library at Angkor Wat housed a vast collection of books and texts on diverse subjects, including religious scriptures, literature, history, and astrology (Dolan, 2021).

Buddhist monasteries, or “wats,” also played a crucial role in supporting students to study in higher education during the Angkor period. Monks were not only religious practitioners but also scholars and educators (Chan & Latif, 2013). They taught young novices and aspiring scholars subjects ranging from Buddhist philosophy and ethics to grammar, rhetoric, and logic. Monastic education provided a pathway for upward mobility, allowing talented individuals from humble backgrounds to rise through the ranks of society based on their intellectual merit (Rany et al., 2012).

The curriculum in these higher education institutions was diverse and eclectic, reflecting the cosmopolitan nature of Khmer society (Chan & Latif, 2013). Students studied classical Indian texts in languages such as Sanskrit and Pali, the lingua franca of intellectual discourse in Southeast Asia at the time. They also engaged with Indigenous Khmer literature, history, and cultural traditions, contributing to the preservation and propagation of Khmer identity amid the influences of Indian civilization (Em et al., 2023).

While access to higher education was largely limited to the elite class, there were avenues for talented individuals from less privileged backgrounds to pursue advanced studies. Scholarships and patronage from wealthy benefactors, including mem-

bers of the royal family and affluent merchants, could enable deserving students to receive specialized training and mentorship from renowned scholars (Em et al., 2023).

The legacy of higher education during the Angkor period continues to resonate in Cambodia’s cultural heritage and intellectual traditions (Chan & Latif, 2013; Rany et al., 2012). The achievements of Khmer scholars and intellectuals, as evidenced by the architectural marvels of Angkor and the literary treasures of its libraries, serve as enduring testaments to the empire’s commitment to learning and scholarship (Edwards, 2006). As Cambodia’s modern education system evolves, it draws inspiration from this rich legacy, seeking to nurture the next generation of thinkers and innovators who will carry forward the mantle of intellectual inquiry and cultural expression (Pak, 2003).

During the Angkor period, numerous academics, both Brahmin and Buddhist, served as priests and royal instructors, respectively. The royal family’s senior college was located at the Royal Palace, and King Jayavarman VII’s wife, Queen Indra Devi, held the position of Rector at Wat Chey Srey and Wat Raja Vihear Universities. 2,740 instructors and 18 individuals held PhDs for higher education instruction during the Angkor period. These people served as the cornerstones for the studies being conducted at the time (Em et al., 2023).

Among the 18 PhD holders, there were six very famous PhD holders, as noted by Em (2023a, pp. 20-22) as follows.

Dr. Shiva Som was fluent in the rules of literature and memorized various spells. He had compiled many stories and rules, including the Great War and the Grammar. He received favors from the Khmer kings of the time and was the personal teacher of King Indravarman I.

Dr. Yati Amorpheavak was a scholar during the reign of King Yasovarman I, who bestowed the royal title of presiding over all the scholars of the time, as well as the patriarch of Wat Indrasram, the center of Brahmanism.

Dr. Tava Kar was a unique poet of the reign of King Rajendravarmā II. He was proficient in the art of magic and could cast spells to destroy the enemy army. This man received keenness from the king and great pleasure by giving his daughter “Indralaksmey” to be the man’s wife.

Dr. Kavin Tra was an elegant writer during the reign of King Suryavarman I. He learned to read the scriptures and was the most intelligent man who could solve difficult problems quickly. That was why the king was pleased to appoint him as his advisor.

Dr. Phou Bantra was a scholar during the reign of Jayavarman VII. He presided over a panel of scholars who were advisors to the king, and he was a well-known judge for his broad legal sense.

Dr. Indra Devi was the second queen of King Jayavarman VII. She was crowned queen after the death of her sister. She then instructed the king to be pure in Buddhism and build a culture, such as establishing a high school for teaching Khmer children and a theater for performing Khmer arts.

There were many more scholars and intelligent individuals during the Angkor period. Their names and their work were scripted on the walls of ancient Cambodian temples across the country and beyond (Em, 2023a).

EDUCATION AFTER THE ANGKOR OR KHMER EMPIRE PERIOD

Following the decline of the Angkor or Khmer Empire around the 15th century, Cambodia entered a transition period marked by political instability and external pressures. The post-Angkor era saw significant changes in the region’s educational landscape (Stark et al., 2023). During this time, Cambodia experienced the rise and fall of various kingdoms and dynasties, including the Ayutthaya Kingdom, the Lan Xang Kingdom, and the Vietnamese Nguyen lords. These political changes profoundly impacted education, as the patronage of learning shifted along with the rise and fall of different ruling powers (Paglayan, 2021). Despite the disruptions caused by political upheavals, elements of traditional education persisted in Cambodia. Buddhist monasteries continued serving as learning centres, preserving religious teachings and cultural heritage. Monks played a crucial role in education, providing

instruction in Buddhist scriptures, philosophy, and language (Lee, 2020).

However, access to education remained limited, particularly for the common people who lacked the resources and social status to receive formal schooling. Education continued to be primarily reserved for the elite class, including royalty, nobles, and members of the clergy (Rethy et al., 2023). One notable development during the post-Angkor period was the increasing influence of Theravada Buddhism, which became the dominant form of Buddhism in Cambodia. Theravada Buddhist monks played a central role in education and spiritual guidance, contributing to the preservation and dissemination of religious texts and teachings (Harris et al., 2022).

The introduction of Theravada Buddhism also led to the establishment of new monastic schools and educational institutions across Cambodia. These schools provided instruction in Buddhist philosophy, meditation, and moral precepts, shaping the spiritual and intellectual development of the population (Harding et al., 2020). Outside of religious education, there were limited opportunities for formal schooling in Cambodia during this period. The absence of centralized authority and the constant political turmoil hindered the development of a comprehensive education system. Instead, education remained decentralized, with learning taking place in local communities, temples, and households (Rethy et al., 2023). Despite the challenges, Cambodian society continued to value education as a means of personal and spiritual enrichment. Knowledge was passed down through oral tradition, storytelling, and apprenticeship, allowing skills and wisdom to be transmitted from one generation to the next (Sam, 2024).

EDUCATION DURING THE CHAKTOMUK PERIOD

The Chaktomuk was an age of traditional Khmer education. The religious curriculum comprised the recitations of religious scriptures and practices of Buddhist philosophy in the educational institutions established in the capital city and the provinces. The head of these educational institutions was a Buddhist monk (Coffill, 2022). The lay students were sons of affluent members of the royal family and the nobility. The secular curriculum was presumably established in the capital city and started from the third period outlined in this article for the royal elite, and their sons were sent to study at the higher educational institutions in the capital city only (Sam et al., 2024). The curriculum was a native

hodgepodge of language and literature, writing, Khmer history, geography, arithmetic, bookkeeping, principles of astrology, and government, along with strict rules of deportment. Several public educational institutions were established in the capital city and elsewhere for these descendants of the royalty, nobility, and other select students. The instructors were native Cambodians with a good educational background (Wright & Chan, 2021).

Two major types of educational systems were officially established during the Chaktomuk period. They were (1) a religious and (2) a secular educational system. The former had its higher educational institution for learning religious scriptures and practicing daily religious duties in the capital city (Eam et al., 2022). In the agricultural provinces and foreign countries, various religious centers were established to promote Buddhist discipline to the Cambodian people and foreign students. The secular educational system established its institutions mainly in the capital city of Phnom Penh and other principal towns in the agricultural provinces (Lee, 2020).

Throughout the Chaktomuk period, there were two systems of education. The first was the traditional abbey system, the second was the rudimentary elementary and secondary schools administered and operated by ordinary citizens who were not part of the monastic brotherhood (Biswas et al., 2021; Damrhung, 2010). Because Buddhism was the basis of the curriculum for these regular schools, the ground and foundation in Phnom Penh taught what was being taught at the local schools was the same as the traditional abbey system of religious, classical, and overall instructions. In essence, both types of education sources emphasized the teaching of the Dharma, the right comportment and behavior of individuals, love, respect, and responsibility toward parents and one's elders, and sincerity, attentiveness to duty, and an appreciation for a livelihood that was free of harm (Em et al., 2023).

Buddhist principles provided the basic philosophy for Cambodian education during the Chaktomuk period. Hence, the educational curriculum and training for students were not only guided by Buddhist principles but were also very similar for many centuries (Eam et al., 2022). The primary goal of education was for students to understand and completely embrace Buddhist philosophy and precepts. Underneath this grand goal, it is believed that the education system had another, more practical goal, which was to train students to sustain the Kingdom's religious values, cultural identity, customs, and traditions (Em et al., 2023).

EDUCATION DURING THE LONGVEK PERIOD

Education in Longvek was an institution of the state for the sons of the nobles. Noble families had two types of schools for ordinary children and highly skilled boys. The sons of the nobles studied finger weaving, and after wisdom and skills training, they practiced the moral values of the Buddha or led the congregation and other religious ministries (Hendrickson et al., 2023; Stark et al., 2023). The main study for children was the Brahmi script. This is because religion was composed of that script by the first wise men and taught students at a temple, even though they had no intention of being Buddhist monks. This was the topic of state management laws to make education evolve in compliance with each law by the education department. In the Longvek era, the subject of a system response was the availability of a printer who made manuscripts to meet the needs. This was because books were very expensive and took a long time to store (Ashley Faye, 2020; Dokras & Dokras, n.d.).

Besides the importance of maintaining the normal system, future trust in the correct form was important, regarded as existing through religious and social institutions. The kings had laid down a title in the official language of the laws, thus instigating students who studied them to be able to implement the laws, the law contained, and use them effectively (Polkinghorne & Sato, 2023). In particular, children who lived in the royal families and other sections of the nobility from a very young age studied, accompanied by a spirit of efficient state officers. This is peculiar in that the King's speech was set from educational contact and was, in theory, alveolar speech. Parenting, King's speech, etc., were based on the ideas of societal ruling and unequal social expectations of age from the time of the secrets (Ariès, 1978; Polkinghorne & Sato, 2023).

The education system during the Longvek period was influenced by Buddhist monastic schools that had existed since the early Funan period. Buddhist monks played a crucial role in teaching religious and secular subjects (Em et al., 2023). Education emphasized knowledge in language and literature, whereas scientific subjects, including logical thinking and accountability, were core to the conduct of people and were also included in the curriculum. Educational subjects focused on literacy in at least two languages: Sanskrit and Khmer. Elementary education focuses on teaching norms and ethical values, and not only that, it also aims to infuse love and kindness into the minds of individuals (Polkinghorne et al., 2024). The required learn-

ing capacity thus consisted of the intelligence to receive and compose verses, and the aptitude to distinguish black from white. Knowledge developed within an established ethical universe guided by ethical teachings in exemplary forms. Buddhist philosophical principles were deeply ingrained into intellectual thought and praxis, thus contributing to the formation of the Khmer moral community (Leng et al., 2022).

EDUCATION DURING THE OUDONG PERIOD

The educational system of Cambodians during the Oudong period was Buddhism, encompassing the royal family, the nobility, and the elite in society. It was important for the maintenance, evolution, and handing down of traditional and current knowledge, as well as the moral foundation and culture of the nation from one generation to the next (Em et al., 2023). There were two educational systems: one at the palace and the other at the pagoda. The activities and achievements of the educational institution at that time were part of human civilization because of the royal roles and responsibilities for nurturing humans that had been formulated in the situation and used all of its resources at every royal court, as the most important strategic imperative (Stark, 2023).

Educational supervision was under the domination of the Royal Institution associated with the Buddhist Sangha: Patriarchs, Buddhist monks, and their students were identified as the mediating function between the educated and the institution, royal authority, the ruling class, and society. The ranking of people who held the higher responsibility of education belonged to the Sangha first, followed by the Royal family; other Buddhists, teachers, students, technical workers, and actors in a multifaceted environment, in addition to the priests, teachers, etc., at each educational institution (Em et al., 2023). These human resources and knowledge of the Khmer people became the missionaries of this system, universally and practically, to build and develop the nation. The physics and energy of the ruling class, the Royal throne, and the institution reflected spatial and temporal autonomy in contesting the different humans and knowledge from the outside (Leng et al., 2022).

In the Oudong period, during the second half of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, the educational institutions were vital in preserving, transforming, and handing over Cambodians' traditional knowledge and religion to their descendants, mainly in two pagodas and in the Roy-

al Palace. According to Pin Thong, Mathematics, Divinity, Literature, Medicine, History, Geography, Architecture, and Astronomy were taught in the cathedral, while Divinity, Geography, Literature, ancient and modern history, and battles were included in the canon in these pagodas (Ashley Faye, 2020; Dokras & Dokras, n.d.; Hendrickson et al., 2023). Training students to have high ability, morality, and skills suitable to the actual needs of society. Furthermore, the production of competent Buddhist clergy played an important role in society. Educational systems during the Oudong period were the result of the development of traditions of human resources and knowledge of the Khmer people from previous periods, from the pre-Angkor period to Angkor and post-Angkor, and received a transfer from neighbors, especially from the Mon ethnic group of Hongsawadi (Em et al., 2023).

During this period, Buddhism infused education. The students were high-ranking officials and normal people working in the royal residences and the center of Oudong. They studied other subjects, but the curricula with religious knowledge focused on Buddhist texts and philosophy. Several high-ranking monks established and managed their institutions and accepted food offerings from wealthy families and people skilled in various crafts. They lived and devoted themselves to study (Heng et al., 2020; Piphall et al., 2023; Sprenger et al., 2021).

The high-ranking monks intensified the tradition of creating literary accomplishments by inciting and rewarding intelligent monks who became capable of composing religious poetry, fine literature, and oratory. Participants in public contests discussed roles in the construction of images, law in governance, town planning, as well as taxes (Takako, 2020; Thun, 2024).

According to the law and regulations, high-ranking monks acted as government-supporting agents, though they were not government officials. However, such support veiled spiritual needs. Indeed, the religious leader actively promoted education to enhance intellectual and spiritual knowledge. For this reason, religious leaders would send qualified young monks to study Buddhism in neighboring or remote countries (Piphall et al., 2023). They would return with religious texts and learning experiences to share with the students at the royal residences in Oudong, where religious congresses were held (Thun, 2024).

EDUCATION DURING THE FRENCH COLONIAL PERIOD

On the 11th of August 1863, King Norodom ceded

the right to the French in his own country under the form of a treaty (Thun & Keo, 2024). The French colonial rulers intervened immediately in Cambodian public education policy. Aware of the high standards of the old Cambodian traditional educational system, the French moved quickly to replace it with a system that allowed Cambodians to fill the administrative and clerical posts in the French colonial administration. They started to dismiss the Bonzes, Priests, and Laymen who were employed or involved in teaching at Wat Songs in Phnom Penh Prefecture (Benzaquen-Gautier, 2021).

The French language was adopted as the medium of education. The policy of replacing traditional religion should differentiate French educational institutions from the classical education methods in the Cambodian temples. It was a hard blow to the Buddhists who saw the teachings of Buddha interrupted (Chan & Latif, 2013; Rany et al., 2012). The French colonial education policy was to stamp out the last vestiges of Buddhism and the teaching of Hinduism in the system. This decision led to the collapse of formal education at the provincial level since the entire national ramifications of the pagoda-based education program had been built up meticulously over the years (Tan, 2020).

Therefore, the French colonial instruction pattern encouraged building a school system. In contrast, lower schools conducted lower school instruction in the traditional Western style to which the children were accustomed. In this manner, both education systems remained intact, yet laboring in extreme isolation since not one of the pagoda teachers was permitted to instruct in French or use the armed staffbook. Thus, the classical education system in the pagodas was gradually fading, unable to come to terms with the new century (Em et al., 2023).

As mentioned earlier, Cambodians had a rich cultural and educational heritage long before contact with the French. Thus, the French policy of overseas expansion saw the introduction of French colonial schools, and the French language became the medium of instruction in all educational institutions. Indeed, French colonial education was to set Cambodian education on a new course (Peycam, 2020). The French could exert great influence on schools and education in Cambodia because the French discouraged traditional religion, law, and culture. Thus, there was tension in Cambodian society during the French colonial period between the contradictions in education: the old traditional Khmer education system and the newly introduced

French colonial schools. The responsibility of schools was the question of what should have been done to help children learn this new education (IM, 2020).

EDUCATION DURING THE KING NORODOM SIHANOUK PERIOD

During King Norodom Sihanouk's period, also known as Sangkum Reastr Niyum, education was greatly improved and modernized (Em et al., 2023; Rany et al., 2012). King Norodom Sihanouk was able to reorient the education system in ways more in line with what many believed would support a newly independent country. Some reforms were highly interventionist, such as centralizing control to be more effective in imposing a modern left-leaning ideology (Sam et al., 2024). He reinstituted the Concours as the Brevet d'Etudes Secondaires. During his reign, Cambodian history and culture received significant attention, as did the funding of restoration projects at traditional temples. Several French writers attributed the first linguistic studies of modern Khmer, indicating an area where modern knowledge was just beginning to take shape. Political leaders had long wanted to promote a simpler and more comprehensible form of the Khmer language, particularly by removing archaic writing systems that were not in common use, often in conjunction with attempts to create new linguistic forms (Miller, 2021).

People saw education as an indispensable process that underpinned society and the state. In Cambodia during King Norodom Sihanouk's period, a sense of transitional society related to influences across borders resulted in a variety of administrative changes (Sokunrith & Norimune, 2020). Simultaneously, in the realm of society, a shift occurred in the teaching and learning process. During the King Norodom Sihanouk's period, a range of internal and external agents and roles shaped the curriculum, subjects, and education, fostering a fresh understanding of the significance of citizen education and a connection between society and education (Goscha, 2020; Sokunrith & Norimune, 2020).

Policies on education, including the introduction of free primary education, girls' education, and teacher training in line with the country's needs, combined with an emphasis on reducing illiteracy, led to the human capital formation and leveling-up of the general Cambodian population, including ruling elites, beyond urban and rural disparities (Heng & Sol, 2022). Education policies also inadvertently affected aspects of social life in Cambodia,

such as marriage, economics, and outmigration from rural areas to urban centers. Education was one of the major themes brought into the new socio-economic development strategy (Un & Sok, 2022).

Consequently, King Sihanouk's period saw important educational initiatives. From a socio-economic point of view, it is essential to undertake an evaluation to discern the real and in-depth impact of the education policy of King Norodom Sihanouk's period, which Cambodia received as a legacy (Peycam, 2020). Comprehensive planning for future development requires an evaluation of the impact of the systems and policies inherited from the past. King Norodom Sihanouk's reign was characterized by profound social change, from feudalism to a mixed economy with an emphasis on modern sectors (Deth, 2020; Norén-Nilsson, 2024).

EDUCATION DURING THE LON NOL PERIOD

The Khmer Republic period, known as the Lon Nol period, lasted from 1970 to 1975 (Benzaquen-Gautier, 2021; Em et al., 2023). In the early Lon Nol's period, around 1970-1973, the government assumed responsibility for demobilizing rural civilians (Kiernan & Hughes, 2020). Term one of the Second Congress guided the mainly educational rural rebuilding programs (Bredenberg, 2022). The programs included vocational training, the reopening of targeted high schools, and the reopening of several higher institutions and professional schools (Kheang, 2024). Also facilitated was the opening of monitored French and English high schools in the city, at that time a most serious necessity from the economic, political, and military perspectives because language instruction in the city, in contrast with other subject areas, remained non-socialistic (Un & Sok, 2022).

Education seemed good at the beginning; however, chronic wars had negative impacts, consequently (Em et al., 2023). One of the impacts of the political instability in Cambodia after 1970 was seen in education. It was ironic that the entrance into a state of greater political chaos, marked by the period of restoration of Sihanouk, was marked by a period of greater stability for the educational institutions in the nation (Peycam, 2020; Sokunrith & Norimune, 2020).

The French system of education had been maintained even after the achievement of full independence in 1953, and the ruling government maintained Francophile tendencies in its general policies in this field (Em et al., 2023). Teachers were well-qualified and, with few exceptions, politically

neutral in their educational activities among the nation's children. Only in a small number of areas were there the kinds of disagreements between teachers and parents seen as a problem in other nations (Harris, 2021). Fewer than nine out of ten children were, at least, able to enter and leave the early years of schooling, able to post decorative printed banners, to sing revolutionary, nationalistic, and religious-cultural songs of local (Cambodian) origin, and to read (Sokunrith & Norimune, 2020) and write Khmer [Khmer was the language of instruction in the lower grades; French was reintroduced in the later stages of the elementary school curriculum] (Keo et al., 2022).

There were long-range plans for the improvement of educational facilities, particularly preparing teachers to take over the instruction of the last five years of high school (Sok et al., 2023). In addition to the public schools, parochial schools operated by non-Catholic religious missions (including, among others, the Buddhists) provided instruction in areas without public schools, and the Ministry of Education provided financial support to the missions to enable them to improve in-service training (Bun et al., 2023). The system was being modified quietly by introducing a special series of training programs to prepare a small group of intellectually and morally fit students to work in the most important areas of administrative leadership in some future age. Still, the nation was particularly at risk because what should have been an educational environment designed to prepare the young who were to be the men of tomorrow and a greater growth soon lost the confidence of all the people who had access to the schools (Jones & Nagel, 2022).

EDUCATION DURING THE KHMER ROUGE REGIME

The Khmer Rouge Regime, also known as the Pol Pot Regime, lasted from 1975 to 1979 (Ayres, 1999; De Walque, 2006). The great task after 1975 was to transform all individuals from their former status as victims of the old order into the fullest agents of the new, free from attachments, open to all that was new, and a perfect construction of revolutionary zeal. The great makers of the new society were to be molded to portray one side of their humanity to rival the other (Galway, 2021). For people of such complexity, the simple directions provided by the first leader of the revolution could not suffice (Peycam, 2020). Some viewed taking precautions as obliging the leadership to guard its secret intentions more jealously and to differentiate between those who had not yet completely rid themselves of the

errors of the past and those who were so addicted that reversion to crime against the state was inevitable. The struggle opened at once. The leadership saw treachery everywhere (Brehm, 2021; Sirik, 2020).

Teachers, in particular, were singled out as symbols of the old order. Foreigners had trained them and were privileged members of society, respected by all others, and they were taught knowledge that was not only not required for the new society but that was subversive (Ogisu, 2022; Sirik, 2020). They were part of the Buddhist establishment and were enemies of the state (Neau, 2003). Official policy documents named several categories of teachers, including the former educated elites, as those who could not contribute and as hopeless cases who had tried for too long to cultivate bad tendencies and patterns of behavior. Their attitude, which was manifested in their way of dealing with students, was based on private interest and was the worst kind of opportunism and servility toward those in power (Sirik, 2020). The problem with most teachers was that they had been educated in foreign-trained classes in foreign-inspired schools and were products of a counter-revolutionary education. Members of this category owed their privilege to the former society, were exploiters not to be trusted, in no way to be re-educated, and certainly not worthy of being agents in the unfolding of the new society. Any exercise of leniency on the part of the people's justice was viewed as a mistake (Duncankudos, 2024).

EDUCATION FOLLOWING THE 1979s

After the Khmer Rouge regime was overthrown in 1979, the education system in Cambodia was destroyed. The regime dissolved training institutions, burned textbooks, and killed almost all teachers. The educated Khmer-Franco people's dwellings, temples, and schools were burned or damaged (Em et al., 2023). The regime abolished organized learning and implemented mandatory hard labor in agricultural centers. This negatively impacted the education system and resulted in the deaths of many teachers and students (Neau, 2003). After overthrowing the regime, the government worked to rebuild the education system but faced challenges such as a lack of educators and resources. The post-Khmer Rouge era presented both challenges and opportunities for the education system in Cambodia (Jeong, 2014). Even through the challenges, the Cambodian Government, other stakeholders, and the Education Ministry have tried to improve education in the country to what it is today (Em et al.,

Table 4. A Brief Table of Education History in Cambodia

No.	Periods	Education Processing
1.	Prehistoric period	Rather than training (watched and followed)
2.	Nokor Phnom or Funan period	Disāpāmokkha schools
3.	Chenla period	Disāpāmokkha schools
4.	Khmer Empire period	Formal education
5.	After the Khmer Empire period	Less formal education
6.	After Angkor was abandoned	Wat schools
7.	Prior to 1863	Wat schools
8.	Between 1863 and 1953	French model (6 + 4 + 2 + 1)
9.	Between 1953 and 1970	French model (6 + 4 + 2 + 1)
10.	Between 1970 and 1975	French model (6 + 4 + 2 + 1)
11.	Between 1975 and 1979	The Killing Fields
12.	Between 1979 and 1986	10-year-education formula (4 + 3 + 3)
13.	Between 1986 and 1996	11-year-education formula (5 + 3 + 3)
14.	Between 1996 and the present	12-year-education formula (6 + 3 + 3)

Source: Em et al. (2023, p. 148)

2023). Table 4 below provides a summary of Cambodian education history from the early times to what it is today.

CONCLUSION

From the past to the present, education has always been an essential part of Cambodian society. Education in Cambodia dates back to the prehistoric era. Education has played a significant role in various aspects of Cambodia's past. Education shaped people's lives across different periods in Cambodian prehistory and history. Education in Cambodia peaked during the Angkor Empire, also known as the Khmer Empire. During that period, hundreds of educational institutions across the country, including higher education institutions in Angkor's capital city. Thousands of instructors were highly qualified to teach Khmer people and foreign students. However, the collapse of the Angkor Empire led to a gradual decline in education in Cambodia, culminating in its ultimate devastation under the Khmer Rouge Regime, which prioritized the killing and destruction of the majority of teachers. Since

the Khmer Rouge ended, the Cambodian government and concerned education stakeholders have been working hard to restore education in Cambodia.

By knowing the history of education in Cambodia, concerned education stakeholders can take action to reform education in Cambodia. They should prioritize opportunities for educated people to work in offices, not dismiss them. The Pol Pot Regime deliberately targeted and destroyed qualified individuals. As a result, the country reached a state of near collapse. However, the Angkor or Khmer Empire united qualified and educated individuals to serve as the country's pillars. Consequently, the country's development and power reached unprecedented heights. Thus, the government and other concerned education bodies must consider these things.

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