The Cambodia-South Korea Relationship on Education Aid and Its Implications, 2010-2019

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Abstract

The decade after 2010 marked a turning point for South Korea as a prominent emerging Asian donor nation and member of the traditional donor group exemplifying Official Development Assistance (ODA). Korea was then becoming more important and increasing its rate of aid, while Cambodia was among the leading countries receiving Korean aid. This research analyzed conditions and implications of Korean educational aid to Cambodia in the 2010s. Mixed-methods research was done with statistical data gathered from the Cambodian ODA database, document analysis, and in-depth interviews with policy and practice stakeholders. Results were the following: 1) Korea was one of the top donors to Cambodia, ranking eighth out of 25 providers and fourth in bilateral cooperation; 2) Korea provided, after study of Cambodia's development plan and Cambodian requirements for universal education, teacher training, and response to emerging global challenges; 3) Korea initiated smart project management to ensure achieving efficiency and goals. As a former aid recipient, Korea was thought to understand Cambodia's strong reliance on foreign educational aid. While Cambodia benefited from Korean education aid, Korea potentially expanded its product market, tourism, and investment.

Keywords: Cambodia, South Korea, educational aid, implications, emerging Asian donor

Introduction

After examining its development situation in 2010 and 2014, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) discovered the country still relied heavily on foreign aid, shown by the fact that it was willing to accept extensive assistance by requiring cooperation through budget sponsorships. Conditions for these dictated that in exchange, donor countries were permitted to participate in prioritizing policies, inspect money disbursal, and improve governance in the recipient country (RGC, 2010; 2014). Cambodia's education budget was relatively low by Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) standards, or compared with international averages (Rany et al., 2012a; Channy et al., 2019). A report predicting the gap between the demand for educational resources (budget) and the available (limited) resources suggested that from 2014 to 2018, Cambodia faced an increasing annual education budget shortfall (RGC, 2014). As a result, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) (MoEYS, 2014) was obliged to seek increased funding from foreign partnerships and other participants to mitigate the situation. This made the

Cambodian government budget heavily reliant on foreign aid to improve national education. Efforts were made by soliciting aid from international organizations, allied countries, and NGOs.

South Korea is one of Asia's emerging donor countries, with an increasingly significant role. Emerging donors provide various forms of international aid, benefiting from their experience as developing nations in providing key lessons for recipient countries. These donors generally share relatively similar social contexts, compared to the developed North. The pattern of international aid provided by emerging donors has succeeded across Asia, and includes Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, China, and India (Chan and Chung, 2015). Sato et al. (2011) agreed that the role of emerging donors is rapidly expanding and their approaches to assistance differ from those of traditional donors. China, India, Korea, and Thailand all play a role in aiding impoverished Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar.

Korea has a unique status in this context, classified as an emerging donor and yet simultaneously as a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)-Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which serves as the model for ODA. Korea joined the OECD and has been a DAC member since 2010. As such, Korea's aid is a unique combination of approaches used by emerging and traditional donors (OECD, 2020). Korea is also a rare example of a nation which underwent a rapid, successful transition from aid recipient to donor (Kim, 2015). The 2017 Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA, 2018) annual report revealed that education was the top national priority for providing assistance, and was allotted the highest budget share. Cambodia was among the major recipient nations of Korean aid in the Asia-Pacific region, with the list consisting of Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines, in decreasing order of need. Among all types of aid, education ranked fourth among Korean regional priorities. This concurred with research by Reilly (2015), stating that Japan and Korea played vital roles as leading educational donors to Cambodia. Kim (2015) likewise reported that in the early 2010s, Korea provided the highest educational aid for Afghanistan, Vietnam, and Cambodia.

As mentioned, Korea has made remarkable progress in transitioning from a recipient to a donor country. So far, Korea has focused mainly on educational aid while targeting the provision of regional assistance to impoverished nations, especially Cambodia. This approach cohered with the Cambodian government's substantial need for foreign aid. In addition, Cambodia's Education Strategic Plan 2014-2018 reflected a considerable shortage of educational resources, prompting the MoEYS to seek foreign aid. Therefore, this research examines conditions for Korean educational aid to Cambodia during the years 2010-2019, focusing on analyzing characteristics and implications of this aid in diverse dimensions, including concepts and principles for developing education, types of education aid dependent on budget allocation, and characteristics of key activities. The goal is to provide in-depth, specific knowledge about issues and study topics for relevant subjects, leading to coherent, informed discussion and improved approaches to international education aid.

Theoretical Background and Research Context

International Education Aid

Since World War II, foreign aid has been used as an instrument for promoting economic growth and development to support postwar reconstruction. Most foreign aid is designed to achieve four major goals: 1) boost economic growth by building infrastructure and supporting manufacturing sectors; 2) strengthen educational, public health, environmental, and political systems; 3) support subsistence with food and

appliances, especially in aid operations and during humanitarian crises; and 4) help stabilize economies after severe disruption (Radelet, 2006). Foreign aid may have negative or positive effects. Thapa (2020) asserted that although intended primarily for humanitarian purposes, to maintain working relationships with governments to promote peace and stability, there are also disadvantages. These include a lack of motivation for rapid independent growth as well as serious gaps in living standards between rich and poor countries, worsening inflation, and interference with economic and political activities in recipient nations.

International education aid is the medium by which many countries deal with fundamental social and human development issues. It also brings benefits and educational advancement to recipient nations. The most tangible outcome may be increased enrollment in basic education (Riddell and Niño-Zarazúa, 2016). Yet international aid and cooperation have led to conflicts of interest between economic and political goals, as well as social and cultural values of donor and recipient countries (Morales-Gomez, 1991). Educational aid may focus on didactic essentials, such as classrooms, teachers and teaching materials, or factors affecting learning outcomes, such as curriculum choices, efficient teacher training, school facilities, counseling, supervision, leadership by principals and teachers, and local community involvement (Riddell and Niño-Zarazúa, 2016).

Education aid providers, such as the United States, see the education sector as a key part of foreign aid strategy. They recognize that education is essential for improving quality of life and economic stability in developing countries. The U.S. Congress has played a significant role in providing educational aid by approving educational projects and allocating annual budgets. Primary government agencies providing educational aid to developing countries have included the U.S. Peace Corps and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (which has recently been dismantled by the Trump administration), consisted of management reform and educational policy, teacher training, updating and distributing textbooks and learning materials, literacy development, participatory training, human resource development, and building schools (Morgenstern, 2016). In Japan, education aid is based on six fundamental principles: 1) emphasizing the mission of developing nation governments and promoting ownership; 2) recognizing cultural diversity and promoting mutual understanding; 3) enhancing international community cooperation; 4) promoting community participation and the use of local resources; 5) linking with development in other sectors; and 6) using experiences drawn from Japanese education. The main goal of Japanese educational development assistance is to ensure access to education, improve educational quality, and develop educational management as well as international student assistance. As can be seen, Japan's philosophy of aid places importance on improving the human capital of developing countries (Yamada and Yoshida, 2016).

Foreign aid has been positively correlated with the educational sector. Pakistani educational institutions thrived from foreign aid (Masood Anwar et al., 2017). Mentes and Talas (2021) described the more complex case of Afghanistan, where internal conflict, poverty, disasters, and resource shortages forced the nation to rely on international education aid. Foreign aid made structural and operational progress possible for the national education sector, with many schools constructed and repaired. Curricula were revised and teachers were hired, as books and class manuals were distributed widely, giving millions of indigent children the opportunity to attend school. Gender inequality was alleviated, and the illiteracy rate reduced. Still, reliance on foreign aid threatened societal independence and free will. In Africa, foreign aid positively impacted primary school attendance and lifelong learning. Asongu and Tchamyou (2015) studied the impact of foreign aid on education and lifelong learning in 53 countries

between 1996 and 2010. One example was Nigeria, where Mukaddas (2019) revealed that educational budget allocations were reduced due to resource shortages. As a result, Nigeria had to rely heavily on foreign aid to develop educational institutions. Foreign aid positively affected Nigerian educational infrastructure, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), human resources, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

Korean Development Aid

Starting in the 1960s, Korea developed rapidly and by 2000, had officially withdrawn from the DAC list of beneficiaries. In 2010, Korea joined DAC as the twenty-fourth donor country (Kim, 2016). Kim (2015) examined Korean experience in transitioning rapidly from aid recipient to emerging donor, while being eliminated from the list of recipient countries. From 2011 to 2015, Korea developed specific aid policies and strategies. In addition, the proportion of educational aid increased swiftly. From 2005 to 2012, it amounted to an average of 7-12 percent of the country's total educational budget, higher than other DAC countries. In this way, educational aid remained the fourth leading element of Korean budgetary priorities, after transportation, logistics, and agriculture.

Vietnam is an example of results from Korean education aid. Korea has been a major foreign aid partner since it joined the DAC, and currently provides Vietnam with aid in the form of soft loans and grants. Aid provision determinants include trade opportunities in the recipient country and good diplomatic relations between the two nations. Korea is aware of trade opportunities in Vietnam, resulting from development assistance levels in expanding export markets, job opportunities, and foreign direct investment. For its part, Vietnam has managed subsidies from Korea to reform its national economy, so that Korean development assistance policy to Vietnam may be seen as benefiting both countries (Jeong, 2018). In Myanmar, Korea increased national aid since the start of 2010. Three political factors motivating this increase include: 1) the North Korea factor, with the Seoul government providing development assistance for Myanmar to gain support in maintaining independence from North Korea; 2) geopolitical competition between Korea, China, and Japan in Myanmar; and 3) domestic political scandals. Research also indicates that interests in national security and political motivations, as well as determinations by developmental aid policymakers in the Korean presidential administration were key factors contributing to boosting Korean aid to Myanmar. Notably, Korea provides development aid to Myanmar to promote national security and its international image (Kim, 2018).

For Cambodia, Sotharith (2010) explored links between trade, investment, and ODA by comparing aid from China, Japan and Korea. As Cambodia's main trading partners, these nations were also important for foreign direct investment as well as ODA providers. In addition, many tourists from all three donor countries visited Cambodia. Despite progress in economic and national development, Cambodia has still retained a trade deficit with these nations. Similarly, Ky et al. (2012) compared Chinese, Japanese, and Korean ODA to Cambodia, concluding that foreign aid played a major role in Cambodian development. Each of the three countries helped Cambodia differently, from varying perspectives. ODA was provided to achieve national interest or attain Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Studies show that China appeared to distort ODA provision to Cambodia by providing concessional loans subject to conditions focusing solely on infrastructure. Japanese and Korean ODA goals were based on national-level policy and aid must be provided equitably to each nation. From the Cambodian perspective as a recipient country, Sato et al. (2011) noted that emerging donors were a new alternative for seeking national development aid, while benefiting from competition among emerging donors.

Methodology

Research Design and Data Collection

This study's mixed-method research employed a quantitative approach by analyzing statistical data, as well as qualitative analysis of relevant documents and in-depth interviews. Data collection took place from February 2021 to February 2022 from two sources. The first was statistical data obtained from the Cambodian ODA Database maintained by the Cambodian Development Cooperation Board (CDCB) of the Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC) (CDCB, 2021). The second was qualitative data derived from two sources: 1) documents acquired from related organizations such as KOICA annual reports, embassy news and press releases, research studies, peer reviewed articles, and other relevant gray literature; and 2) in-depth interviews with 12 key informants selected by purposive and snowball sampling, all relevant policy level stakeholders, practitioners, and academics. As suggested by Dunn (2004), the Delphi method suggests that sample size might range from 10 to 30, depending on the policy problem's complexity and the nature of the issue. Samples were selected from organizations listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Participant lists

Institution/Organization (anonymous)	Position/Role
1. International NGO based in Phnom Penh	Director
2. A university Cambodia-Korea Cooperation Center	In a leadership position
3. A Cambodian national think tank: Centre for Educational Research and Innovation	In a leadership position
4. Faculty staff	In a leadership position
5. Korean civil society organization (CSO) in Cambodia	In a leadership position
6. Local NGO based in Siem Reap	Managing director
7. A New Generation School, Phnom Penh	Former Korean volunteer teacher
8. A former student in Korean language at the Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL)	Interpreter for Korean volunteer teachers and private company employee
9. A local CSO (social enterprise) in Siem Reap	In a leadership position
10. Faculty staff (Undergraduate and graduate Korean scholarship program)	In a leadership position in implementing a Korean-funded program
11. Ministry staff of the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation	In a leadership position
12. Cambodia-based international organization	Global governance practice consultant

Notes: New Generation Schools are a reform inaugurated by the MoEYS in 2014 to create autonomous public schools with the mandate to innovate and improve educational quality. Access to high investment funds is contingent on high governance and professionalism standards. Interviews were conducted from June to November, 2021, via online due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Instruments

1) Structured interviews gathered perceptions of Korean education aid to Cambodia, education aid about provision concepts, problems, donor and recipient nation requirements, the nature of education aid projects in Cambodia, current and future trends, and suggestions for development.

2) A table tallying and summarizing comparative analyses was employed to collect and present comparative data. The analysis focused on outstanding characteristics and the proportion of educational

aid during the interval being studied, classified according to diverse perspectives, including project numbers, budget, and project nature or type.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis and content analysis were used, with descriptive analysis results consisting of comparative data discussion, table presentation, and charts. Quotations are also displayed pertaining to the main themes. The nine Cambodian interviewees are labelled C1-C9, and the three Korean interviewees, K1-K3.

Ethical Considerations

The research was approved by the Thammasat University Ethics Committee in Human Research-Social Science on 3 May 2021 by letter no. 036/2564 (effective from 27 April 2021 to 27 April 2022).

Results and Discussion

Education Aid in Cambodia and Korea's Positioning

Forty providers were listed in the Cambodia ODA Database, an increase from 2010 and 2019, when there were 25 education providers. The leading 10 budget aid providers are shown in Table 2. Korea is among providers devoting substantial budgeting for education aid in terms of total aid providers as well as bilateral cooperation.

Table 2 International aid budget for education in Cambodia from 2010 to 2019

All education aid provider				Bilateral education aid			
No.	**Organization**	**USD Thousand**	**Share (%)**	**No.**	**Country**	**USD Thousand**	**Share (%)**
1.	European Union (EU)	187,985.02	17.27	1.	Japan	127,099.90	25.06
2.	Asian Development Bank (ADB)	147,867.95	13.59	2.	Sweden	91,527.46	18.05
3.	World Bank	139,866.20	12.85	3.	Australia	80,673.40	15.91
4.	Japan	127,099.90	11.68	4.	Korea	75,351.09	14.86
5.	Sweden	91,527.46	9.06	5.	USA	54,684.55	10.78
6.	Australia	80,673.40	7.41	6.	New Zealand	24,759.91	4.88
7.	World Food Program (WFP)	80,577.19	7.40	7.	France	22,802.55	4.50
8.	Korea	75,351.09	6.92	8.	China	12,568.14	2.48
9.	USA	54,684.55	5.03	9.	Switzerland	7,926.82	1.56
10.	New Zealand	24,759.91	2.28	10.	Czech Republic	2,583.42	0.51
Total of 10 providers		1,010,392.67	92.85	Total of 10 countries		499,977.24	98.59
Total from remaining 15 providers		77,824.08	7.15	Total from remaining 6 countries		7,132.00	1.41
Total from all 25 providers		1,088,216.75	100	Total from all 16 countries		507,109.24	100

Source: Compiled and calculated by authors from the Cambodia ODA Database

Korea is among the nations playing a vital role in providing international education aid to Cambodia. The findings from the present research agree with a study by Channy et al. (2019) indicating that between 2014 and 2018, the 10 largest donors to Cambodia were the EU, WFP, UNICEF, ADB, Sweden, the World Bank, Japan, Korea, New Zealand and the United States, in decreasing order of significance. Rany et al. (2012b) found that Cambodia received a significantly large amount of education aid, since the paucity of state budget for education would have been a major factor undermining the quality of education. Ngoy et al. (2019) observed that less than 10 percent of the education budget is currently allocated (from 4 percent in 2012 to 9 percent in 2016), lower than the global average of 15-20 percent. However, from 2019-2023, Cambodia planned to allocate around 18-19 percent of its education budget (MoEYS, 2019). The World Bank (2008) also reflected a key 21st century ODA phenomenon with the growth of emerging donors. Analyzing aid architecture, it proved that emerging donors were becoming increasingly significant as ODA providers, among them Korea. The present research concurs, insofar as Korea serves an important function among the ten leading providers of educational funding, while Sato et al. (2011) listed significant emerging donors to Cambodia as China, India, Korea, and Thailand. In addition, in 2011, the KOICA aimed to expand health, education, and rural development assistance programs. The 2019 KOICA annual report (KOICA, 2020) showed that education was the major assistance priority, often with a higher budget than other sectors. Cambodia was prominent on Asia-Pacific regional lists, following Vietnam and Myanmar.

This is consistent with interviews in which informants discussed how donors provide education aid to Cambodia, including the following: 1) EU provision of essential basic services and reform, from primary to higher education; 2) the World Bank as a major donor, due to investment loans to MoEYS for higher educational reform; 3) Japanese educational reform and improvements for elementary and higher education, with human resource development support since the end of the Cambodian-Vietnamese War; 4) Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) contributions to basic education, human capital development, curriculum reform and science investment; and 5) Korean assistance with widespread educational support through KOICA. Other related contributing agencies include Australian Aid furnishing scholarships, Thailand's H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Charity Fund, UNESCO bolstering teachers, UNICEF addressing school safety and life skills, and WHO collaborations with schools to support projects in underdeveloped areas. Among these many partners, charitable formats and approaches vary according to individual national emphases and priorities.

When comparing Korean education aid with other sectors, educational and training projects were the most numerous (45.06 percent), followed by agriculture, health and community development, and rural development and urban planning. Some involved cross-cutting issues, involving from three to five development fields, such as agriculture-education-rural development, or alternately, education-health-tourism. Korea's distinctive ongoing projects include exporting experts and volunteers, ICT, and promotion of gender equality in response to SDGs. This implies that Korea places an increasing emphasis on education as a top priority. In addition, interview data from both Korean and Cambodian interviewees reflected similar views, such as this:

> Korea tends to increase education aid to Cambodia to achieve a compatible mutual supply and demand relationship between donor country (Korea), providing education aid for impoverished ASEAN, and recipients (such as Cambodia) encountering problems in educational development (K2 [Pseudonym], 2021).

Korean Education Aid to Cambodia

According to the 2010-2019 Cambodia ODA Database, Korea provided grants for 63 education projects, divided into 11 types of assistance, as shown in Table 3. Korea focused mostly on primary education budgets consistent with the total Cambodian education budget, as shown in Figure 1, followed by teacher training projects and other educational activities concerning global development issues.

Table 3 Korean educational aid to Cambodia during 2010-2019

Type of educational aid	Number of projects	Amount (USD)
1. Early childhood education	-	-
2. Primary education	9	19,241,148
3. Secondary and technical education	2	4,000,000
4. Higher education	4	7,855,270
5. Non-formal education	1	1,549,000
6. Youth development	-	-
7. Physical education and sports	3	8,226,880
8. Policy sector	4	575,369
9. Technical and vocational education training	-	-
10. Teacher training	10	13,526,741
11. Others	30	19,129,115
Total	**63**	**74,103,523**

Source: Compiled and calculated by authors from the Cambodia ODA Database

Note: Two projects included cross-cutting issues in agriculture, policy management, business services, hospital services, and spatial planning. Four projects did not specify budgeting (three in others and one in policy sector).

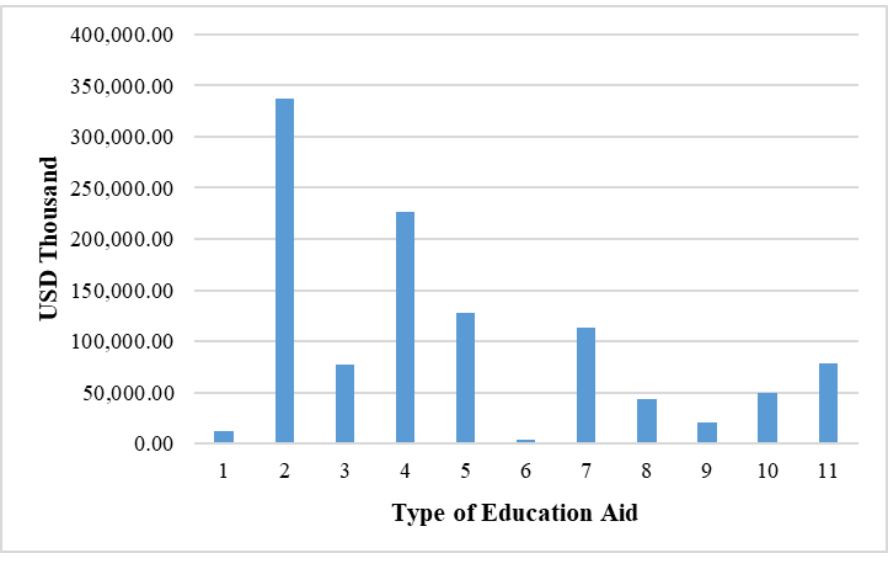


Figure 1 Educational aid budget in Cambodia from 2010 to 2019, classified by type

Notes: 1-11 labeled as shown in Table 3.

Overall, almost all education projects were grants. During this period, budgets increased by 177 percent, and by the year 2017-2019, the aid budget rose significantly. In the 2011 KOICA annual report

(KOICA, 2012), Korean aid projects accounted for 22.42 percent of the total number of education projects. Interview data from Korean and local practitioners also revealed that Korea provides a wide range of education aid, emphasizing basic education, promoting learning opportunities, and developing learning materials for literacy. In the field of teacher development, Korea organized training programs to enhance primary and secondary school teacher potential. Significantly, Korea tends to focus on SDGs such as establishing learning centers, promoting gender equality, and vocational training for women. On the issue of well-being promotion, KOICA supports health education, training public health workers to disseminate knowledge to communities. Korea also focuses on science and technology assistance and develops business incubation centers in universities. Korea is aware of Cambodian government trends and priorities, which include attempts to develop a digital industry.

Korean ODA is unique in studying Cambodian national planning and carefully ascertaining Cambodian development priorities. Korea then initially promotes that aspect with diverse initiatives based on Korean emphases and Cambodian requirements. Examples of such aid are support for secondary education, establishment of the Cambodia-Korea Cooperation Center and learning centers for knowledge transfer, health education promotion, and teacher training. KOICA also connected and collaborated with other UN organizations to bolster Cambodian education. An interviewee commented on the differences between the two cooperation centers:

> To compare Japan's CJCC[1] and Korea's CKCC,[2] the CJCC supports long-term projects; by contrast, the CKCC concentrates on short-term projects promoting self-reliance. Meanwhile, KOICA is currently remodeling its assistance strategy to fit long-term perspectives (C1 [Pseudonym], 2021).

Thus, it can be said that Korea emphasizes aid in primary education, teacher training, and supporting projects with global impact. Korea focused mostly on primary educational aid budgets, according to international guidelines as stated in the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) 1990. Innovative advocates and educational leaders determined to fulfil a commitment in Cambodia included UNESCO, the World Bank, the EU, Japan and Sweden (UNESCO, 2000; Chansopheak, 2009; MoEYS, 2014). In 2010, Korea collaborated with partners to achieve educational goals providing accessibility to primary education and strengthening vocational training. The 2011 KOICA annual report (KOICA, 2012) supported the largest number of basic education projects with plans to build primary education infrastructure from 2011 to 2015. Korea continued to fund educational accessibility aid for disadvantaged pupils, including women, the disabled, and children not enrolled in formal schools, especially those in areas of disaster or conflict, as described in the 2019 KOICA annual report (KOICA, 2020). Since 2010, the Cambodian government actively cooperated with this approach, setting educational development goals. Education was accorded a key role in national development. Cambodians were guaranteed quality education and lifelong learning services responding to labor market needs, following national policy (MoEYS, 2010; 2014; 2019). Meanwhile, the third and fourth Rectangular Strategy pursued EFA goals by prioritizing human resource development for national competitiveness. The Cambodian educational budget increased continuously, with cooperation sought from the private sector, NGOs, and the global community to help educational standards meet international criteria and achieve national development goals (RGC, 2013; 2018). Another distinguishing Korean feature is the current promotion of preschool education as a challenging, significant project affecting long-term human resource development.

[1] The Cambodia-Japan Cooperation Center
[2] The Cambodia-Korea Cooperation Center

A Cambodian working at the international organization in Phnom Penh elaborated:

> Early childhood learning and nutrition aids are interconnected and have a profound impact on national development. Although there may be no direct impact, they will have long-term effects in the future, which is an important foundation of the country (C9 [Pseudonym], 2021).

Korea targeted assisting in teacher training, as per Education at a Glance 2012, which suggests that skillful training and support of teachers reduces educational quality gaps (OECD, 2012). Likewise, Cambodia actively planned to improve teaching professionalism and competency by managing learning quality in pre-service education and in-service teacher training (MoEYS, 2012). The Education Strategic Plan 2014-2018 cited teacher development as an area requiring reform, especially professional teacher training, through close cooperation with international partners. In 2013, a teacher policy was announced and instructors were sent to workshops in Korea. The plan credited Korea as among the 10 major sources of educational teacher quality, an imperative criterion for achieving EFA goals (Phin, 2014).

In addition, interview data reveal that Korea has contributed to university teacher development in social welfare programs in Phnom Penh. With tri-party cooperation, KOICA supported the budget, while a Korean university provided experts and worked closely with a Cambodian university. An interviewee who was responsible for the program explained:

> The first phase was for a master's degree (2016-2018), and the second phase for a doctoral degree in 2019. The master's program received full assistance for Batches 1 and 2. Since Batch 3, there were enough Cambodian experts to manage the program on their own. The year 2020 marked the seventh anniversary of the project. We have learned that Korea prioritized sustainable development and supported self-reliance of the project (C7 [Pseudonym], 2021).

Notably, Korea also furnished aid for global challenges, especially fulfilling SDGs and national education practices endorsed in Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. The issues promoted included global citizenship education, gender equality in education, climate change training, ICT, and increased educational aid to developing countries (UNESCO et al., 2016). Correspondingly, Cambodia bolstered these developmental plans by integrating SDG4-Quality education into its Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023. Among issues implemented were gender equality in education, environmental education, educational decentralization, ICT for education, and lifelong learning. Cambodia also expanded cooperative partnerships with the private sector, entrepreneurs, international partners and NGOs (MoEYS, 2019). These initiatives indicate that the number of Korean educational aid projects increased steadily in response to key global issues to meet international aspirations and directly address Cambodian needs. In responding to global trends and SDGs, Korea expanded its framework even further by collaborating with NGOs, CSOs, and companies. As Park et al. (2015) pointed out, in 2011 alone, the development budget through NGOs accounted for 50 percent of the total Korean ODA budget. In the following year, Korea increased its ODA budget through NGOs and CSOs under the strategy of increasing partnerships with civil society and the private sector. According to the Cambodia ODA Database, in the 2010s, Korea funded NGOs to work on around 40 projects. The head of a Cambodian NGO based in Siem Reap province described his organization's mission:

> We do not cooperate directly with South Korea funding; Korean donors create partnerships with NGOs. In education projects, we collaborated to provide supplementary classes such as English,

> arts, living values for children who are from disadvantaged backgrounds and a library for children aged five to seven. We also focus on empowering marginalized women from poor households in the community by providing them with vocational training, such as doing business and selling products (handcrafts). Likewise, we have supported emergency food and essential workshops for poor families during the Covid-19 pandemic (C4 [Pseudonym], 2021).

Korean Aid Effectiveness and Cambodia Education Achievement

The Framework Act of advanced Korea's ODA was adopted (Kim, 2016) to avoid political intervention, and instead focuses on capacity building and developing in recipient countries (Kim and Jung, 2018). For educational aid to Cambodia, field-centered, result-based projects were implemented, empowering the overseas office to manage the projects and facilitate operations in the field. This act brought Korea closer to the community and local stakeholders, and other donors. Korea has also supported NGOs, CSOs, and the private sector to participate in Korean project management to enhance efficiency and achieve the expected results (Park et al., 2015; MoEYS, 2016). A Teacher Policy Action Plan also took full effect in 2018, partnering with UNESCO, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and KOICA to formulate policy guidelines (Teacher Training Development, 2015; Prigent et al., 2016). Korea was generally acknowledged for effective teacher training through motivational strategies, suitable compensation and benefits, career advancement, and learning management facilities (UNESCO, 2015). All of these policies and projects addressed the demands of Cambodia, which sought to improve. In project monitoring and evaluation, Korea developed a variety of tools and methods. In the early 2010s, comprehensive assessment and long-term evaluation were used. Project Design Matrix (PDM) was adopted to assess educational projects and outcomes in all dimensions in which stakeholders participated. Then, a feedback system and recipient satisfaction were added. In the mid- to late-2010s, Korea initiated "smart management" and included the four performance rating scales of the projects, from unsuccessful to very successful, to increase the reliability of project outcomes. A progressive assessment system was incorporated later to measure the socio-economic impacts resulting from the projects. For monitoring, projects would be considered as progress reports together with on-site inspection as Korea valued field work (KOICA, 2011; 2012; 2019). It is clear that Korea continuously developed project management tools, monitoring and evaluation systems, innovative methods, standards and practices as well as the criteria for project success throughout the 2010s. A local practitioner who worked in educational development projects pointed out:

> Korea adopted an approach of expanding cooperation with various agencies of Korea and other non-government agencies (C4 [Pseudonym], 2021).

However, the project implementation encountered problems, most of which were due to trust, language, and cultural differences. Feedback from a Cambodian scholar working with Korean officials expressed the experience of working with Koreans:

> There were cultural gaps and communication issues. Koreans were confident and overlooked the opinions of local experts. As a result, we felt uncomfortable, leading to a sense of unequal partnership. However, Korea had put a lot of effort into the project, never interfered with the administrative procedures of the Cambodian side and had a strong will to work towards the attainment of project goals (C7 [Pseudonym], 2021).

Meanwhile a Cambodian NGO practitioner noted the positive and negative aspects of working with Koreans in the following way,

> The Korean side has many requirements regarding monitoring and evaluation frameworks, audit reports, and financial statements, which make it more challenging for the operation, compared to other donors. On the positive side, it was an efficient project implementation, with transparency and responsiveness to the community in accordance with the project objectives (C4 [Pseudonym], 2021).

For educational achievement and learning outcomes over a span of 10 years, the MoEYS in collaboration with international partners and various stakeholders contributed to the Cambodian education system and reached key indicators. Table 4 shows the progress and trend of Korea's involvement in promoting through aid projects, concentrating on basic education and teacher development as well as challenging issues in SDGs. Figures 2 and 3 display equitable access in primary education and its progress, which reflect how Cambodia closely reached EFA, although it decreased in 2020/2021 because of Covid-19 pandemic. The completion rate has declined slightly over the last 10 years, which implies the student retention in primary school remains stagnant. The dropout rate gradually declined, but dramatically increased during three years of the pandemic. The repetition rate was no different; it shows slow progress in this decade and found that males showed poorer learning outcomes than females. As a Korean interviewee reflected another interesting situation:

> Impoverished Cambodians often have other priorities before education, since to earn a subsistence living, children must leave school early in remote areas where access to development partners is limited (K1 [Pseudonym], 2021).

Table 4 Progress and key performance during the 2010s

Core breakthrough indicators	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
Percentage of five-year-old children enrolled in any form of early childhood education programs (%)	52.7	59.9	61.4	64.1	66.4	68.5	68		↑
Number of districts with primary education repetition rate less than or equal 10 percent		184	184	171	173	173	182		→
Number of provinces with lower secondary education completion rate at least 40 percent		7	9	8	11	13	10		↑
Adult literacy rate (15 - above)			78.1		78.1	82.5	84.7	85.8	↑
Percentage of primary teachers with upper secondary certificate ++ (%)				57	69.6	72.1	59		↑
Percentage of primary teachers qualified according to national standards						73.0	74.0	75.0	↑
Percentage of teacher educators (Provincial/ Regional Teacher Training College: RTTC, and National Institute of Education) with master's degree				10	20.2	18.2	18		↑
Number of school principals trained in school-based management (SBM), primary and secondary					948	752	670	700	↑

Source: Summarized by authors from MoEYS (2014; 2019; 2024)

*↑ = Achieved, → = Likely to achieve, ↓ = Unlikely to achieve

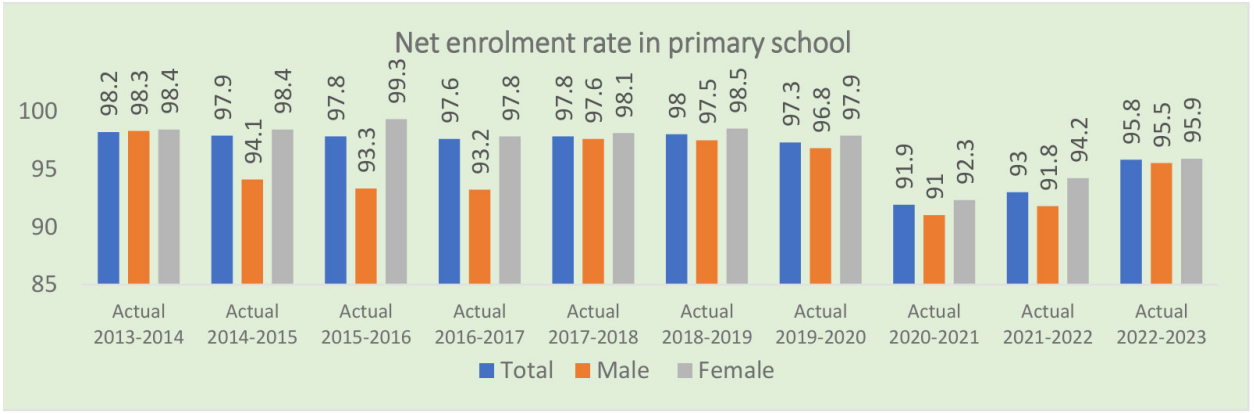


Figure 2 Net enrollment rate in primary school reported by MoEYS (2024)

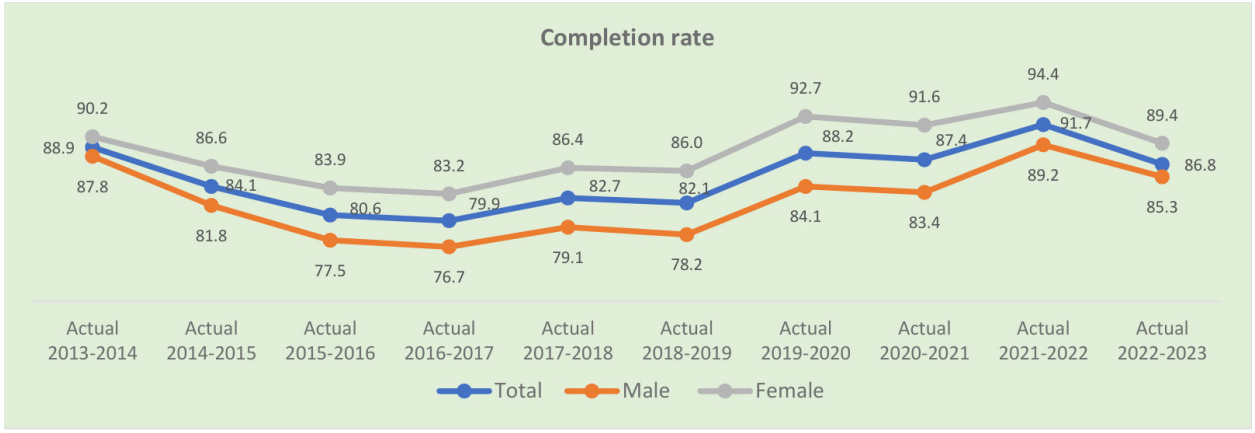


Figure 3 Completion rate in primary education reported by MoEYS (2024)

Implications of Korean Educational Aid to Cambodia

Korea successfully strategized to formulate guidelines for developing impoverished countries (Chan and Chung, 2015), achieving a rapidly increasing role in aiding Cambodia as it entered the 2010s (Sato et al., 2011; Kim, 2015). As revealed in the 2017 KOICA annual report (KOICA, 2018), education was Korea's top priority, with Cambodia among the first countries to received subventions from Korea and Japan as outstanding education providers (Reilly, 2015). Interviews with Korean and Cambodian samples rated education as a highly important mechanism for national development. Koreans cited national ordeals after the Korean War as motivation for rapid development through education to become a leading Asian nation, proving that education and human capital development benefit and expedite future growth in recipient countries. Therefore, education remains the heart and spirit of Korean society. Most Korean vice presidents previously served in the Ministry of Education. Thus, Korea is convinced that it can liberate Cambodia from hardships, as Korea itself did. Korean and Cambodian samples suggested that the two nations had comparable, war-traumatized legacies, another possible reason for Korea to empathetically help improve Cambodian education. Insofar as during the Cambodian genocide, the Khmer Rouge destroyed the national educational system, its recovery must speed along simultaneously with other aspects of country-wide development. Since Cambodia desperately needed educational assistance, Korean aid fulfilled the objective. However, interviews, as the one that follows, revealed that other types of assistance are needed:

> Although Cambodians saw education as crucial for national development, their country still faces other challenges, including budget shortages, lack of technical support and universal education, quality improvement, and limited participation in education (C9 [Pseudonym], 2021).

Yet Kim and Oh (2012) observed factors determining ODA allocation, that Korea increased aid to higher-income developing countries, implying that ODA primarily serves Korean economic interests. Still, Korean cooperative development policy is bifurcated in the following way: 1) self-preservation of its own interests as a higher-income developing country; and 2) humanitarian approaches to lower-income countries. Kim (2016) perceived that Korean economic and political strategies determined the aid given to recipient countries, rather than the needs of the latter. According to a study of leading recipient nations of Korean aid, economic opportunities and market access were key factors considered before increasing support to Vietnam and Bangladesh. By contrast, Iraq received additional aid from Korea for political motivations. After the United States occupied Iraq to combat terrorism, Korea sent troops there, along with diverse aid in solidarity with American forces. Kim and Oh (2012) established that Korean ODA policy remained unchanged over the years, despite regime changes, agreeing with Sohn and Yoo (2015), who asserted that Korean ODA policy was not affected by political differences in successive governments. Progressive and conservative governments differed little in allocating aid. National interests influenced ODA allocation more than ideological inclinations, including economic and geopolitical interests, such as the military conflict between North and South Korea. Kim (2018) remarked that for Myanmar, Korea's main goal is to furnish aid to promote national security and its international image. In other words, in addition to improving education in Cambodia, geopolitically speaking, Korea seeks to increase its role to counterbalance the influence of China and Japan, the two nations that play an important role in ODA to Cambodia (Kim, 2016; Kim and Jung, 2018). Korea's desire to enhance relations with Cambodia while strengthening future partnerships and mutual support did not go unnoticed by a Cambodian interviewee, who noted,

> Korean education aid provisions to Cambodia may have other motives besides improving Cambodia's education system (C8 [Pseudonym], 2021).

In terms of business and economics, Korea expanded product markets, tourism, and investment through Cambodian connections, with the latter country's relatively low wages and cheap raw materials. Yet aid to Cambodia is also part of sustainable development. Jeong (2018) stated that, similar to aid for Vietnam, determinant factors for Korean funding were trade opportunities and good diplomatic relations shared by the two nations. Korea benefited from expanding its export markets, employment, and investment, while Vietnam spent the financial aid provided by Korea to facilitate its economic restructuring. Lee et al. (2017) also recognized that the Korean government boosted subvention volumes to support Korean construction businesses abroad, along with reciprocal support for ASEAN community members. Kim (2016) added that foreign aid was essential for developing countries as a significant source of funding. Radelet (2006) stated that most foreign aid is designed to stimulate economic growth and stabilize the economy after disruption, which is in line with Masood Anwar et al. (2017), who wrote that foreign aid was a vital contribution to the economic growth of developing nations.

Therefore, there are some concerns as international aid and cooperation have created conflicts of interest between the economic and political agendas, as well as the social and cultural values of the donor

country and the recipient country (Morales-Gomez, 1991). As a case study from Mentes and Talas (2021) found, although foreign aid in Afghanistan has made progress for the nation's education sector, both structurally and operationally, the reliance on foreign aid threatens the independence and free will of society. Similarly, Asongu and Tchamyou (2015) found that foreign aid had both positive and negative impacts on the education sector in the African region.

Conclusion

During the period 2010-2019, Korea played an important role in providing educational aid to Cambodia. As shown in the Cambodia ODA Database, Korea is the eighth-largest donor of 25, while ranking fourth in bilateral aid. This reflects a new image of Korea as an emerging donor participating in providing educational aid to Cambodia. One of its key characteristics derives from its experience as a former recipient country and new donor. This enables Korea to realize the importance of development and motivation to inspire a recipient country to achieve an economy comparable to that of a developed nation. One essential success factor, according to Korea, is national education development, leading to prioritizing education in aiding developing countries. As it happened, Cambodia urgently required educational aid and Korean aid filled that need, distributed after careful preliminary study of Cambodian national development planning and demands. All assistance was in the form of aid grants delivered under the auspices of KOICA.

Apart from concurring views on the importance of education for national development, Korea and Cambodia were both impacted by war and experienced post-conflict reconstruction and development. This may be another essential reason why Korea provided educational aid to Cambodia, especially in developing basic education and teacher development. The Korean ICT system, globally recognized for its expertise, will help modern educational development be achieved. However, results and impacts of Korean education projects in Cambodia are correlated with Cambodian attitudes about Korea, as seen with Cambodian eagerness for Korea to participate in formulating development plans at different levels. Meanwhile, Korea gained other benefits, such as a market share in Cambodia, product market expansion, and tourism and investment. Since Cambodia is known for its relatively low wage scale and abundant natural resources, it may serve as a significant future production base for Korea, which may in turn participate in the regional power balance by reducing the influence of other donors to Cambodia, especially China.

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