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Is there a 'Mid-rank Trap' for Universities?

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Abstract: *The middle-income trap is an economic phenomenon to describe economies that have stagnated at the middle-income level and failed to progress into the high-income level. Inspired by this economic concept, this paper explores a hypothesis: is there a 'mid-rank trap' for universities in the exercise to rank universities globally? Using the rankings between 2004 and 2014 that were jointly and separately developed by Times Higher Education and Quacquarelli Symonds Company, this paper argues that there is indeed a phenomenon, which I term as 'mid-rank trap' whereby universities remain stagnant for a decade in a similar band of the rankings. Having established the hypothesis for universities, the paper examines policies and interventions that have been successfully carried out to elevate economies away from the middle-income trap, and importantly, to draw out the underlying principles of these economic policies and interventions that can be incorporated into policymaking and strategic planning for universities using the Malaysian higher education system as a case study.*

Keywords: *University rankings, middle-income trap, Malaysia, academic governance, academic leadership, academic development.*

Introduction

Economies are commonly categorised as high-income, middle-income and low-income according to their per capita income. The middle-income trap therefore is an economic phenomenon referring to rapidly growing economies that have stagnated at the middle-income level and have such failed to progress into the high-income bracket. Similarly, in higher education, with the announcement of the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) in 2003, a hierarchical comparison system of universities around the world was also created. These university rankings have shaped the global landscape of higher education by categorising universities into various categories such as Top 10, Top 50, Top 100, Top 200, Top 500, as well as those that were not or failed to be ranked across more than ten different global rankings of universities.

The middle-income trap has been recognised in the field of economics and public policy to be a phenomenon that requires different sets of economic policies to move beyond the trap and become a high-income economy. This paper therefore explores the possibility of a similar phenomenon in the context of higher education, which I term as a 'mid-rank trap'. Although the middle-income trap and 'mid-rank trap' have fundamental differences and are not directly comparable, there are also similarities that can help to enhance our understanding of policies and strategies in higher education where identifying and recognising the phenomenon of a 'mid-rank trap' in the global ranking exercises will have important implications for higher education systems and institutions, particularly, in helping institutions to chart their policies and strategies for future developments. This paper begins by understanding the middle income trap and the context of university rankings to contextualise the answer to the question "Is there a mid-rank trap?" Based on the argument that there is indeed a mid-rank trap for universities, the following section, based on recommended economic policies, discusses possible policies and institutional strategies in higher education to avoid the trap.

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The Middle Income Trap

The World Bank classifies economies according to their income per capita, more specifically the gross national income (GNI) per capita. For the fiscal year of 2015, economies with US $1,045 or less are defined as low-income; more than $1,045 but less than $12,746 are middle-income; and $12,746 or more as high-income (World Bank, 2015). Within the middle-income category, $4,125 is used to separate the lower-middle and upper-middle economies.

The middle income trap is a term coined to describe the situation where developing economies have stagnated at the middle-income level and are not able to develop further into the category of high-income economies (Aiyar et al., 2013). Using the income per capita of countries in 1960 and 2008, the World Bank (2013a) pointed out that most countries in the middle-income bracket in 1960 had remained in the same category in 2008, except a handful of economies which escaped the trap and moved into the high-income bracket (see Figure 1). However, there are also economists who argue that the trap implies a slowdown in the economic growth among middle-income countries in comparison to the economy of the United States which has been used as the benchmark for development (Handjiski, 2014). The argument of a slowdown mainly points to the period of 1980s and 1990s where the growth of many economies in the middle-income bracket was much slower than the USA, and hence, considered as being trapped in the middle-income bracket. Yet, since the turn of the millennium, many of these middle-income economies have experienced growth at a higher rate than the benchmark country USA, and therefore, slower growth may not have been a trap after all.

While some economists advocated the presence of a middle income trap, other economists argue that the growth slowdown of economies is a regression to the mean (Pritchett and Summers, 2014). This argument is centred on the fact that rapid growth is a strong predictor of future growth slowdowns while income level is a poor predictor, as it is highly unusual for an economy to experience continuous growth.

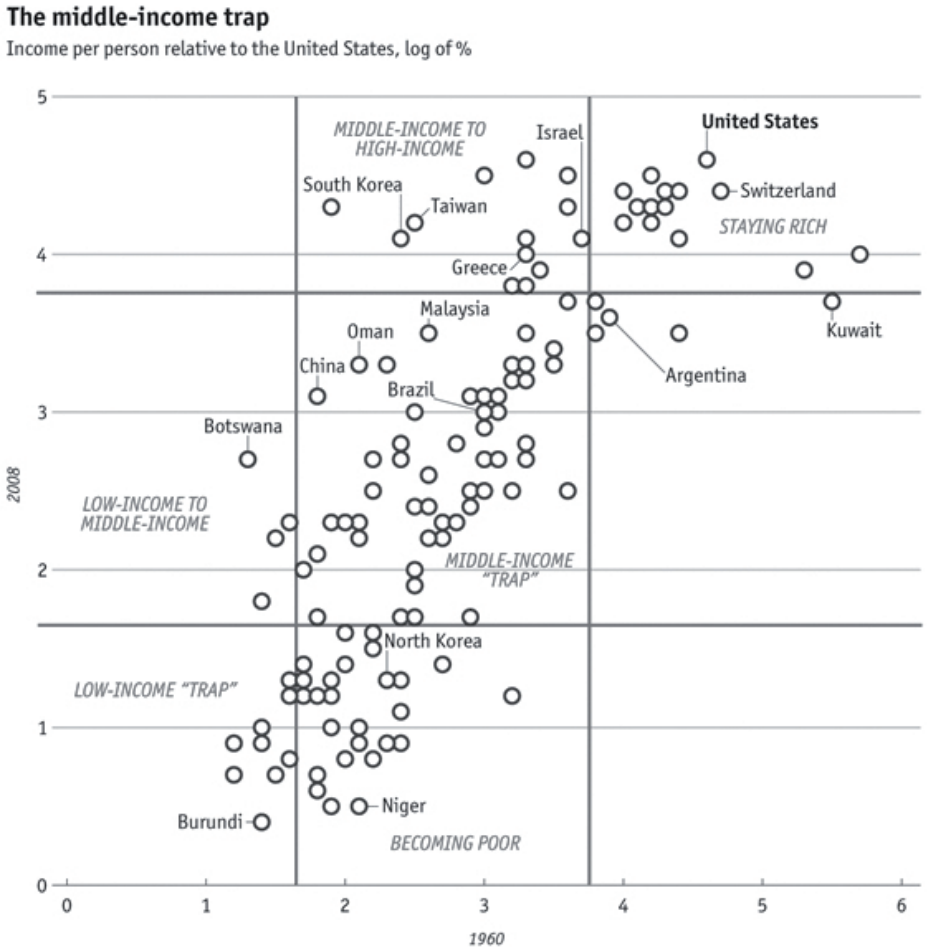
Besides the use of empirical evidence to illustrate growth slowdown or stagnation, the concept of middle income trap can also be understood as a situation where an economy has arrived at a point where it is caught in between the low-income and high-income economies and lost its comparative advantage to compete with either economies (Kharas and Kohli, 2011). On the one hand, an economy caught in this trap is unable to compete with low-income economies to manufacture exports due to the low-wages of the latter. On the other hand, the middle-income economies are unable to compete with high-income economies which tend to possess a workforce that is highly skilled and innovative. In other words, a middle income economy can be considered as falling into the trap when it fails to make a 'timely transition from resource-driven growth with low-cost labour and capital to productivity-driven growth' (Kharas and Kohli 2011, p. 282). By outlining the characteristics of economies that are considered caught in the middle income trap (as compared to determining the position of economies in the global ranking of income per capita), provides the platform for policymakers to understand the economic phenomenon and to begin thinking of ways to avoid falling into the trap through effective public policies.

University Rankings

University rankings, to some extent, share many similarities in the categorisation and ranking of economies according to their income per capita. Both rankings are a form of crude measurement to compare economies and universities respectively based on several quantifiable indicators. At the same time, both rankings ignore qualitative evidence and the context needed to understand the insights and complexity that shape the position of economies and universities in the respective rankings.

University rankings began with the publication of the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University in 2003 and followed by the widely-publicised World University Rankings by Times Higher Education Supplement in 2004. To date, there are more than

Figure 1: The Middle Income Trap



Source: The Economist (7 March 2012); World Bank (2013a)

ten rankings of universities published undertaken by universities, research institutes, governmental agencies and companies (Cheng and Liu, 2010).

Generally, university rankings have two main functions. The first is to provide information about universities. To be more precise, university rankings have a much greater emphasis on research and publication, as compared to the other academic functions of these institutions such as teaching and services (Hazelkorn, 2008; Altbach et al., 2009; Kehm and Stansaker, 2009; Marginson, 2010; Azman et al., 2014). Hence, rankings illustrate more information about the performance and quality related to research activities rather than the overall performance and quality of a university. The second function is to provide comparative data that aim to create global standards of world class universities. However, due to the basis of the standards used, such comparison only sought to encourage universities to conform into a homogeneous model and at the same time penalise divergence and difference across universities (Marginson, 2010). Furthermore, it is pointed out that indicators used in the construction of ranking has an arbitrary 'standard' and may not reflect an objective measure of how a university performs in terms of quality and outcome (Venkatraman, 2010). Moreover,

fluctuation in the positions of universities in these rankings does not indicate changes or problems within the institution or the quality, but instead mostly due to the subjectivity of indicators in the construction of these rankings (Marginson, 2007; Marginson, 2010).

Not only are university rankings becoming more popular, their impact on higher education policies and universities globally have also increased tremendously where university leaders, policymakers, students and employers have claimed to use these rankings in policy and decision-making (Salmi and Saroyan, 2007; Hazelkorn, 2008; Morshidi et al., in press). For instance, a significant percentage in the tabulation of the World University Ranking that was devoted to the reputation of a university, and the sample used to measure this indicator remained unclear. Likewise, the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) further reiterated the fact that even criterion such as impact factor, which is commonly used to reflect the quality of academic journals, can be flawed and manipulated and further suggested that the assessment and evaluation of quality in journal publication remains problematic (American Society for Cell Biology, n.d.). Despite the fact that no ranking is perfect, where there are many limitations and methodological problems (Altbach, 2006; Enserink, 2007; Hazelkorn, 2008; Marginson, 2010), these global comparisons have become an important feature in higher education and are likely here to stay.

However, in comparing university rankings and classification of economies, it is important to recognise that the former is a zero sum game whereas the latter is not. In other words, for a university to improve its position in the rankings, this is at the expense of another university. Yet, for a country to move from middle-income to high-income, the progression happens independently without affecting other countries. Hence, the zero sum game is an important difference between university rankings and classification of economies.

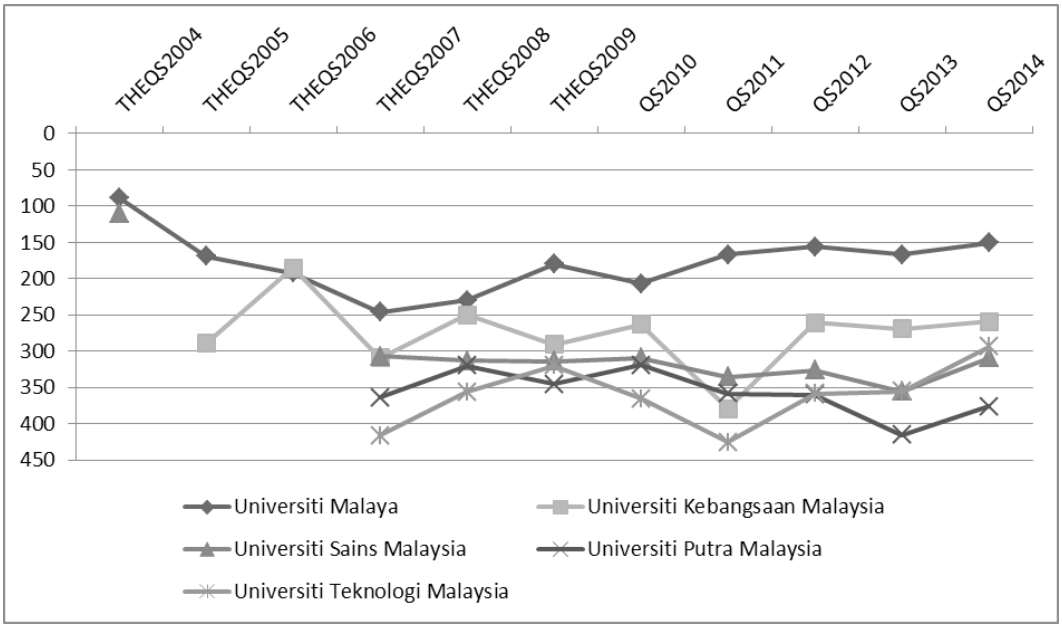
Is there a 'Mid-Rank Trap'?

Having established an understanding of the middle income trap and university rankings, I propose the following proposition: there is a 'mid-rank trap' for universities that have vast similarities to the middle income trap phenomenon. I shall use the universities in Malaysia as a case study to illustrate the proposed proposition, and verified with other universities in similar situation. Furthermore, to ensure more accurate comparability, the comparison will involve a similar university ranking over time and not across different university rankings.

Malaysian universities made their appearances in the global university rankings in 2004 where the two oldest universities - University of Malaya and Universiti Sains Malaysia – were ranked 89th and 111th by the inaugural Times' World University Rankings. However, the positions of these two universities were not accurate as there were miscalculations where Malaysian students and academics of Chinese and Indian descents were considered 'international' and contributed to these universities scoring almost a perfect score for the international indicators. The positions of Malaysian universities in the subsequent years can be considered a better reflection of the true picture. Figure 2 shows the positions of five Malaysian universities in the World University Ranking, first published by Times Higher Education (THE) (in 2004), co-published by THE and Quacquarelli Symonds Company (QS) (between 2005 and 2006), and subsequently by QS (between 2007 and 2014). The data of rankings for these universities is presented in Table 1.

These five universities are the highest ranked Malaysian universities in the World University Ranking and we can conclude that UM has remained around the Top 200, UKM the Top 300, USM the Top 350, and UPM and UTM the Top 400. All these five universities can be considered as mid- to lower-middle ranked universities in the ranking exercise. The World University Ranking can be considered the broadest ranking in terms of coverage which attempted to take into account reputation, research, teaching, employability and international outlook (Top Universities, 2014).

Figure 2: Times Higher Education & QS Rankings for Malaysian Universities, 2004-2014



Source: Top Universities (2014); UniversityRankings.ch (2015)

Table 1: Times Higher Education & QS Rankings for Malaysian Universities, 2004-2014

	University of Malaya (UM)	Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)	Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)
2004	89	111	nr	nr	nr
2005	169	nr	289	nr	nr
2006	192	nr	185	nr	nr
2007	=246	=307	=309	=364	=416
2008	=230	=313	250	=320	356
2009	180	=314	291	345	320
2010*	207	309	263	319	365
2011	167	335	279	358	401-450
2012	156	326	261	360	358
2013	167	=355	=269	411-420	=355
2014	=151	=309	=259	376	=294

Note: = indicates a tied position; * indicates a change of methodology used; nr indicates not ranked
Source: Top Universities (2014); UniversityRankings.ch (2015)

In the university rankings that focused predominantly on research, these five universities were also the main flag bearers for Malaysia. In the ARWU, University of Malaya was ranked in the Top 401-500 in 2011-2013 and improved its position into the Top 301-400 in 2014. Universiti Sains Malaysia was also ranked for the first time in ARWU in 2014 in the Top 401-500. Similarly in the Leiden Ranking that focused mainly on scientific research and publication, USM and UM were ranked 361th and 464th respectively among the top 500 universities in 2013. In 2014, USM, UKM, UPM

and UM were ranked 535th, 564th, 637th and 645th respectively out of the top 750 universities. Again, these Malaysian universities can be considered as mid- to lower-middle ranked universities in the rankings that are more focused on research.

Although these universities and the Malaysian government have outlined many initiatives to improve their positions in the global comparison exercise, their positions have remained relatively stagnant. The five universities have been granted the status of Research University which receives a substantial financial support from the State for these universities to intensify their research, development and innovation activities (Ministry of Education, 2014). The National Higher Education Strategic Plan launched in 2007 has also clearly outlined the aim to have two Malaysian universities ranked among the world's top 100 and one among the top 50 by 2010, and two universities among the top 50 by 2020 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). The aspiration of having Malaysian universities ranked favourably continues in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) launched in April 2015, where one Malaysian university is targeted to be ranked in the top 25 in Asia, two universities in the top 100 globally and four universities in the top 200 in the QS World University Rankings by 2025 (Ministry of Education, 2015).

In the Ministry of Higher Education[1], research universities are subjected to national rating systems that include the Malaysian Research Assessment (MyRA) and Rating System for Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (SETARA), which shared many common indicators used in the ranking exercises. MyRA is a research performance indicator which assesses the research output of all universities, while SETARA measures the quality of teaching and learning based on three generic domains of input, process and output. Within the universities, institutional policies and strategies have also been initiated to push for a higher position in these rankings, which mainly focused on enhancing the quantitative aspects related to research and publication. Policies and strategies that are common across the research universities include: requiring academics and postgraduate students to publish in ISI- and/or SCOPUS-indexed journals, requiring publication as an additional criterion on top of the thesis for PhD candidates, intensifying the recruitment of international students and academics, providing monetary incentive for publication in the more prestigious journals, and having a heavier weightage on research and publication for promotion exercises (Wan et al., 2014; Azman and Mydin Kutty, in press; Morshidi et al., in press).

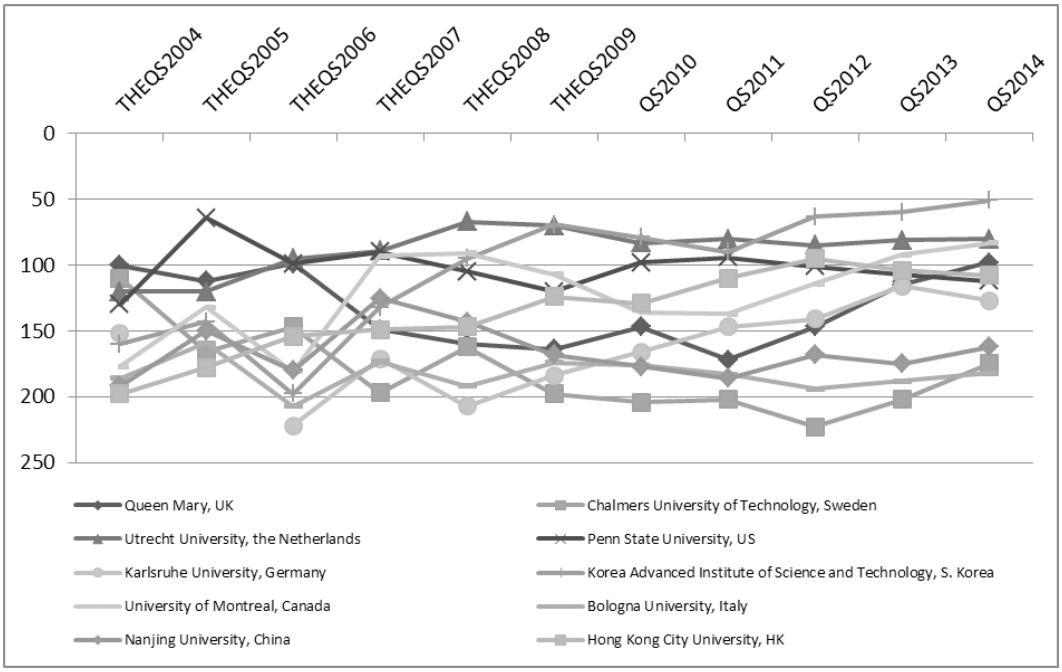
Thus, despite various policies and strategies taken with the view to improve the position in rankings, the relatively stagnant positions of these Malaysian universities in university rankings over a decade may reaffirm the proposition that there is indeed a mid-rank trap in the university rankings.

As a way to reaffirm the proposition, eleven universities were selected from the Times Higher Education Ranking of 2004. One university was selected for every tenth beginning with the number 100th, and only one university per country was represented in this list. The universities selected and their university rankings from 2004 to 2014 were presented in Figure 3. However, one university was eliminated due to missing data. Refer to Table 2 for the complete data.

The ten universities selected from the mid-rank of the inaugural World University Rankings 2004 are diverse in terms of institutions from developed and developing countries, as well as from Europe, Americas and Asian continents. Among the ten, there is also diversity in terms of old and new universities. However over the last decade, there has been fluctuation in terms of the rankings of these universities, but importantly, they have remained in the same category of 'mid rank' and none has managed to break into the top 50 category.

Therefore, not only Malaysian universities have remained very much in the same category of middle- or lower-ranked in university rankings over the last one decade, despite much initiatives and resources devoted for this endeavour, similarly many other universities globally are also experiencing some form of stagnation in terms of the position of their rankings. Hence the argument for a mid-rank trap for universities.

Figure 3: Times Higher Education & QS Rankings for 10 Selected Universities, 2004-2014



Source: Top Universities (2014); UniversityRankings.ch (2015)

Table 2: Times Higher Education & QS Rankings for Selected Universities, 2004-2014

	Queen Mary, UK	Chalmers University of Technology, Sweden	Utrecht University, the Netherlands	Penn State University, US	Karlsruhe University, Germany	Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, S. Korea	University of Montreal, Canada	Bologna University, Italy	Nanjing University, China	Hong Kong City University, HK	La Trobe University, Australia
2004	100	110	120	130	152	160	177	186	192	198	142
2005	112	166	120	64	nr	143	132	159	150	178	98
2006	99	147	95	99	222	198	181	207	180	154	nr
2007	149	197	89	90	171	132	93	173	125	149	nr
2008	160	162	67	105	207	95	91	192	143	147	nr
2009	164	198	70	120	184	69	107	174	168	124	nr
2010*	147	204	83	98	166	79	136	176	177	129	286
2011	172	202	80	94	147	90	137	183	186	110	317
2012	147	223	85	101	141	63	114	194	168	95	375
2013	115	202	81	107	116	60	92	188	175	104	390
2014	98	175	80	112	127	51	83	182	162	108	401-410

Note: * indicates a change of methodology used; nr indicates not ranked
Source: Top Universities (2014); UniversityRankings.ch (2015).

However, although there is a trap in income classification of economies and university rankings, it is important to point out that the causes underlying these traps differ considerably. For instance, the middle-income trap can be a result of an economy losing its comparative advantage concurrently to high-income and low-income economies in terms of technological advancement and low-cost labours respectively (Gill and Kharas, 2007; Kharas and Kohli, 2011). Yet, the cause of a mid-rank trap for universities can be attributed to more complicated reasons, which may or may not be the case in which a university losing its comparative advantage to other universities.

How can the Traps be Avoided?

While acknowledging that despite having similarities between income classification and middle income trap and university rankings and mid-rank trap, there are also fundamental differences in the nature of these rankings and the causes of the traps. Nonetheless, based on the argument that there is indeed a mid-rank trap for universities, it may therefore be worthwhile to consider how economies can avoid the middle-income trap and draw some lessons for universities in similar situation.

Economists and policymakers argue that to effectively address the problem of growth slowdown and avoid the middle-income trap, there are a number of policies and strategies that need to be adopted, which had proven successful for middle-income economies to transform themselves into high-income. Hence, this section of the paper attempts to examine the policies and strategies highlighted in the works of Gill and Kharas (2007), Kharas and Kohli (2011), Kohli and Mukherjee (2011), Eichengreen et al. (2013), and Pritchett and Summers (2014), and to unpick the principles behind them that may be applicable for the context of higher education. Although the policies and strategies have been successful in transforming economies from middle income to high income, importantly, the replication of similar policies and strategies or even their principles should not be considered as ways and recommendations to improve the rankings of universities. Instead, the principles underlying these economic policies and strategies can contribute towards the enhancement of quality in these universities, and the improvement of quality may or may not move these universities up the rankings.

The In-between Identity Crisis

Economies trapped in the middle income bracket suffer from an in-between crisis of neither being here nor there. Such economies have difficulties in competing with high-skill and technology-driven economies, as well as the low-wage and low-skill manufacturing exports (Gill and Kharas, 2007; Kharas and Kohli, 2011). In other words, economies in the middle income trap have lost their comparative advantage against both high-income and low-income economies and are caught in-between. As pointed out by Kharas and Kohli (2011), one of the significant differences between middle-income and low-income economies is for the former to focus more on the demand of the exports. Although middle-income economies are less competitive in terms of cost and wages, continuous growth can still be achieved by 'moving up the value chain' in introducing new processes and finding new markets.

Similarly, mid-rank universities have to juggle between the functions of research, teaching and service. While these institutions have difficulties in competing with the established research universities that are highly ranked in the global university rankings, the aspiration for higher position in the rankings have also resulted in institutions to neglect or give less priority to the teaching and service function. At least in the case of Malaysian universities, the focus on university rankings have created an emphasis on research, particularly on the quantitative indicators, and such an emphasis has led academics to allocate more time for research activities as well as to have unrealistic workload and expectations as a result of multi-tasking (Wan et al., 2014; Azman and Mydin Kutty, in press). In the long run, mid-rank universities will lose their comparative advantage because they will fail to compete with the top-rank universities in terms of research which are already much more advanced. At the same time, mid-rank universities will also fail to compete with universities that may be lower

in the ranking but have placed more emphasis and effort to improve their quality of teaching and create brand name or niche. Hence, an in-between identity crisis, similar to the middle-income economies, may become the problem for mid-rank universities.

Thus, applying the principles of 'moving up the value chain' suggest that mid-rank universities should find a niche or new market to become a world class institution rather than trying to gain this recognition from the position in the ranking exercises. The example of the Accelerated Programme for Excellence (APEX) programme has been an initiative encompassed in the Malaysian National Higher Education Strategic Plan to transform a Malaysian university into a world class one through a different mechanism. Universiti Sains Malaysia with its plan titled 'Transforming Higher Education for a Sustainable Tomorrow' was intended to transform the university to be world renowned for sustainability and to be a sustainability-led university, driven by the model of the Blue Ocean Strategy to explore the untapped market and opportunity for growth (Dzulkifli and Ramli, 2008; Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2008; Sarjit and Morshidi, 2010; Wan et al, 2015b). However, the success or failure of initiatives such as the APEX programme in Universiti Sains Malaysia may not be captured in the various university rankings unlike the categorisation of economies' income per capita, but that does not mean that universities cannot be world class in a different way and mould apart from being highly ranked. This initiative illustrates an example of 'moving up the value chain' and in the process of doing so, develops a niche and brand name for the university.

Invest in Human Capital

If 'moving up the value chain' enables middle-income economies to maintain the comparative advantage over low-income economies, investing in human capital has proven to be the most effective strategies and policies to sustain the growth of middle-income economies in moving towards the high-income economies bracket. High quality human capital plays an essential role in sustaining the growth and enabling the economy to move into high-value and high-skill innovations. It is also argued that education system in middle-income economies must be re-tuned and transformed to meet the needs of a knowledge- and innovation-driven economy. South Korea is recognised as the success story of moving its economy from middle-income to high-income due to the rapid expansion of secondary and tertiary education that provided a critical mass of skilled labours who are capable of generating ideas that shape and develop new technology to meet the needs of the modern economy (Eichengreen et al., 2013).

In the context of higher education, the essential human capital for growth in a university is the academics. Academics play the all-important role of conducting research, writing papers for publication, teaching and supervising students, as well as providing services and consultancies to industries and society. However, as pointed out by Venkatraman (2010), many universities in developing countries, which is where most mid-rank universities tend to be located, are handicapped by the inadequate financial resources and skilled human resources to back up the universities' efforts for development and growth.

In the case of Malaysia, although the State invested substantial amount to send its academics for doctoral training abroad particularly in public universities, it was found that academics in the hard disciplines with a foreign doctorate degree tend to be less productive than their peers who have a local doctorate degree (Shin et al., 2014). One of the explanations to this finding is due to the lack of facilities and technologies to support these foreign-trained researchers to continue the work they have started overseas and to re-adapt their research work to the needs of the local context. This therefore suggests that investment into human capital also needs to be accompanied by the adequate support in terms of facilities and suitable environment.

Furthermore, studies on academic profession in Malaysia also showed that Malaysian academics tend to prefer teaching over research (Azman et al., 2014) and that administration-related matters are one of the frustrations among academics in universities (Wan et al., 2014). There remained many unclear institutional policies such as promotions and rewards in universities and the additional

workload put upon academics who hold administrative positions, which have detrimental effects on the motivation and development of human capital in universities. Even for academics who gained satisfaction from research activities, there was also a sense of frustration with the unrealistic expectations that, for example, require academics to publish certain numbers of papers in top notch journals within a year (see Wan et al., 2014). The expectation become unrealistic as the process of conducting research and writing the paper as well as submission, review and revision typically take more than a year, and unrealistic expectations to some extent have contributed to academic malpractices of using short-cuts and unprincipled ways to meet these expectations.

Therefore, mid-rank universities that aspire to break through the trap and become a world class university, have to first recognise the importance of academics as its most valuable resource. Policies, strategies and efforts are needed to enhance the quality of academics and to provide the necessary facilities and a conducive environment for academic work to flourish. If expanding and improving the quality of education is the key to avoid the middle-income trap, expanding and improving the quality of academics and their work may be the key for mid-rank universities to transform in becoming a world class institution.

Focus First on the Institution

The race to become a high-income economy and to avoid the middle-income trap has the tendency to lure policymakers in having a wrong focus. Pritchett and Summers (2014) argue that policymakers may have got their emphasis wrong by looking only at how to move the economy from middle-income to high-income, but failed to address fundamental problems within the economy. For example, citing the case of India, although India, like many middle income economies, is focusing on economic growth to push the country towards becoming a high income economy, India still faces 19th century problems where sixty percent of Indians practise open defecation and problems of sanitation and inadequate urban water remained prevalent. Kharas and Kohli (2011) similarly argue that the transition from middle-income to high-income requires institutional development and changes. There is a need for the economy to have modern and agile institutions for property rights, vibrant capital markets, successful venture capital and regulated competition in the economy. All these institutions are pre-requisite for a sustainable high-income economy that should have been in place while the transition is still in progress. Thus, it is important for policymakers to get their priority and focus right by first addressing the fundamental problems and the institution within the economy, before setting their sights on the race to become a high-income economy.

Likewise with universities, it is important for aspiring mid-rank universities to focus first and foremost on their institution. This includes addressing fundamental problems within as well as revamping institutional structure that allowed the university to function more effectively, instead of focusing merely on the indicators in the university rankings to gain a higher position. As Azman and Mydin Kutty (in press) reported, academics believe that ranking can be 'gamed' or reverse-engineered. In other words, it is possible to achieve higher positions in the ranking by only focusing on the indicators used to tabulate the rankings without a genuine improvement on the quality and performance of the institution. Hence the improvement of position in the ranking is a short-term outcome.

While suggesting the need for institutional development to avoid middle-income trap, Kharas and Kohli (2011) also cautioned the fact that the benefits may not be immediately visible and accrue indirectly over a long period of time. In the case of the university rankings, it should be acknowledged that only 6 universities in the Top 100 of World University Rankings of 2014 are under 50 years old, and all universities in the Top 10 have existed for more than a century. This statistics showed that the quality and excellence of a world-class university is built up through a long process. Short term measures although can be 'gamed', but it is the long term indicators of quality and excellence that would need to take into account through the accumulation of 'cultural capital' among academics,

scholars and researchers as well as having the academic culture, facilities and environment to support quality and excellence, and all these developments would require time and space to materialise.

Dynamic Policies and Strategies

Many economies have successfully moved from low-income to middle-income supported by a set of policies and strategies, most commonly through social policies to eradicate or reduce poverty. However, one of the characteristics of economies trapped in the middle-income bracket is that these economies and their policymakers have maintained the same set of policies and strategies with the hope that continuous growth can be achieved. There is therefore a need for policymakers to realise that a more dynamic approach to policymaking and strategic planning is needed to address and avoid the middle-income trap.

In most middle-income economies, as society become more affluent the middle-class will also grow (Kohli and Mukherjee, 2011). As the population of middle-class increases, a different set of policies and strategies is required. For example, instead for social policies to focus on poverty eradication and reduction, middle-class will expect and require social policies to provide better public goods like safety, urban transportation and more green spaces in cities, as well as economic policies such as incentive for first-time home buyers in cities and more employment opportunities for graduates. Empirical findings suggest that for middle-income economies to be sustainable in the long run, the significant proportion of middle-class in the domestic economy is crucial to serve as a buffer against growth slowdown of falling exports (Kharas and Kohli, 2011).

Similarly, dynamic policies and strategies are also needed in the context of higher education. In the race to enhance reputation of a university for the sake of ranking, a lot of effort has been undertaken by universities to attract star professors and researchers. On the other hand, universities have also put in place policies and strategies to widen participation of students, and to some extent, academics with diverse background. However, as suggested in the concept of middle-income trap, the majority of the population is the middle-class, and in the university context, is the bulk of academics. While there are usually rewards for the best researchers or lecturers and penalties for the non-performing academics, there might be a need to address the needs and motivations of the majority group in between the two extremes. For instance in the five Malaysian universities that are ranked in the World University Rankings, the remuneration package for academics is determined by the level of qualification, years of service and seniority, which is guided by the civil service framework. Hence, the incentive system is rather 'flat' and without much flexibility for an individualised remuneration package of neither rewarding nor penalising the academics (Wan et al., 2015a). Thus, the suggestion to have different social and economic policies at different stage of development of an economy is also applicable for universities, where dynamic policies and strategies are needed at different stages of institutional development and a need to cater the needs and motivation of the majority 'middle-class' academics, which will play an important role in a university to push towards quality enhancement and pursue for excellence.

Specialisation and Decentralisation

For middle-income economies, it was recommended for policymakers to consider two strategies in policy-making. The first strategy is the need of specialisation as the key ingredient. According to Kharas and Kohli (2011), in the ongoing process of reallocating resources, there is a need for specialisation in middle-income economies to redeploy resources from low-productivity to high-productivity activities. The idea of specialisation is also in line with the idea to 'move up the value chain' and to develop a niche for the economy to have comparative advantage over the low-income and other middle-income economies.

The second strategy is to decentralise the governance and policymaking. Based on the premise that modern economies tend to be complex, there is therefore a need for quick decision making that

is also based on large amount of information. Hence, to achieve that would require decentralisation of governing the economy, and a shift towards focusing on the results, outcomes and effectiveness of implementation. The decentralisation can also enable more pragmatic and grounded policies and strategies to be designed at the various levels.

Referring specifically to the case of Malaysian universities, specialisation and decentralisation are two important strategies for future development. On the one hand, the Malaysian higher education has been recognised as one of the most top-down system (World Bank, 2013b) with strong State intervention especially in public universities. By 2015, twelve public universities have been granted autonomous status by the Ministry of Education, which includes institutional, financial, human resources and academic autonomy; but for the autonomous status to have its full effect, a host of other initiatives are needed including reforms of the legislation governing higher education institutions, as well as regulations stipulated by the Treasury and Civil Service Department, to enable Malaysian universities to be fully decentralised and autonomous to chart their own direction for development (Fauziah and Ng, 2015; Wan and Abdul Razak, 2015).

On the other hand, apart from the APEX programme of Universiti Sains Malaysia that was based on the concept of sustainability, there are also existing elements of specialisation. The Ministry of Education categorised public universities into research, comprehensive and focused universities, while the private universities are allowed to develop their own niche and branding. The National Higher Education Strategic Plan also outlined the initiative to setup Higher Institution Centre of Excellence (HICoE) within universities, and to date, there are eight HICoEs in the areas of renewable energy, cancer biomarkers, diagnostics platforms, animal vaccines and therapeutic, behavioural research in addiction, Islamic finance criminology, sustainability of marine ecology, and biomedical image analysis. Although efforts and strategies have been designed to encourage specialisation within and across universities, more effort in this direction is needed for the entire higher education system of Malaysia that includes 20 public universities, 53 private universities and seven branch campus of foreign universities. Each of these universities should be encouraged to specialise, determine its niche and develop its own branding in becoming a world class university.

Leadership

In economy, political leadership plays an essential role to sustain the ambition for long-term and multi-generational growth. Although political change has no significant association to the probability of slowdown in economic growth, a change from autocracy toward democracy did have a tendency to influence a slowdown (Eichengreen et al., 2013). Such a political change in this particular direction tends to increase labour action and production costs, as opposed to strong authoritarian who have the opposite effect. In other words, strong individual leadership is identified as a crucial factor for pro-growth.

Likewise, leadership in universities have been established as an essential element for institutional development. World renowned universities spend vast amount of resources to search for the best leaders, not only within academia but beyond, to lead them forward. For instance, due to the structural constraints and lack of political will for reform, it has been argued that leadership has been a challenge to the growth and development of Malaysian universities and the process of identifying, developing and grooming future leaders is essential to ensure the future of these institutions (Morshidi et al., 2012). Hence, without strong individual leadership, it may be a challenge for university to chart the way forward and to see through in implementing the policies, strategies and initiatives proposed.

Conclusion

The mid-rank trap in university rankings has vast similarities to the middle-income trap. Both traps are essentially about how universities and economies have to adapt and change in the race to the top;

which in the case of universities to become world class and of quality, while in the case of economies to become high-income and high-skill. Yet, there are also fundamental differences between the two. Nonetheless, the parallel of these two phenomena has vast implications, whereby the principles underlying policies and strategies used in the economy to avoid and escape the middle-income trap can be applied into the context of higher education. Policymakers and university leaders can utilise these principles in thinking and designing policies and strategies for universities development towards improving the quality of these institutions. These principles include the needs to gain an understanding and recognition of the phenomenon, invest in human capital, focus on the institution, develop dynamic policies and strategies, adopt specialisation and decentralisation, and recognise the importance of leadership.

Although this paper has only used the case of Malaysian universities to illustrate the mid-rank trap and discuss the principles for development, nevertheless, the understanding gained from identifying and addressing the mid-rank trap has far wider implications beyond the context of Malaysia. Policymakers in various higher education systems and university leaders of universities that have an aspiration to compete in the game of university rankings and/or to become quality and world-class universities may draw on the lessons and principles from economic policies, and adapt and adopt appropriately into the context of higher education.

Notes

[1] Higher education was previously under the purview of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE)and it was absorbed into the Ministry of Education(MOE) following the General Election of 2013. A Cabinet reshuffle on July 28, 2015 has seen higher education taken out of MoE to re-establish MoHE.

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Skills Development: A Review With Reference To Southeast Asia

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Abstract: *In a context of rapid economic growth, skills development systems have become increasingly important to countries in Southeast Asia in response to skills gaps generated by changing labour-market conditions. Countries in the region have no alternative but to invest in the development and maintenance of these systems. This paper asserts that in doing so they should recognise the importance of adopting a definition of skills that encompasses cognitive and soft skills as well as technical skills, they should regard as being essential to the development of effective labour market information systems, and they should adopt and institutional frameworks that are adequate to the task of managing complex and effective national skills development systems.*

Keywords: *Skills development, Southeast Asia, skills gaps, labour markets, labour market policies, ASEAN.*

Introduction

Over recent years, skills development has emerged as a topic of increasing interest to academics, policy makers and economists alike. This growth of interest has been prompted by a global surge in youth unemployment rates following the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-09. It reflects also a commitment to the view that skills development will help alleviate the problem of high youth unemployment levels. Various international agencies, including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2012a, 2014a), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2012), the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2012, 2014a), McKinsey Global Institute (2012) and the World Bank (2013a), have reported on the matter.

This paper discusses the importance of skills development in the Southeast Asian region, defined as those nations belonging to ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations). The ASEAN region is experiencing both a high level of youth unemployment, projected to be 13.6% in 2015 (ILO 2015, Table 2.7), and significant skills shortages. For most ASEAN nations, the structural shift away from agricultural activities towards industry, services and knowledge activities is continuing and gives rise to a growing need for new or different skills in the workforce (ILO 2015, p.47). To meet this need, and to maintain economic growth, these nations have to attend more to the quality of their skills development systems. ASEAN as a region is becoming increasingly significant as a global economic entity (Naidu-Ghelani, 2015), but individual member states vary greatly in their level of economic development and rate of economic transition, and their capacity to respond to structural labour market changes and to supply the skills required has been mixed.

Skills, Skills Problems and Approaches to Skills Development

In describing skills and skills-related problems, some existing conceptual frameworks and definitions first need to be briefly outlined. Across the skills development literature, there is a tendency to focus

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mainly on technical skills as the most immediate solution for the resolution of skills shortages in an economy. In the context of economic development, however, a more holistic understanding of the nature of skills is warranted, including three categories of skills. These are: *cognitive skills*, that is, skills and capacities of a cognitive nature that are acquired primarily through participation in formal education; *technical skills*, known as skills and capacities of a manual or procedural nature that are acquired mainly through pre-employment vocational training programmes delivered by technical and vocational education (TVET) institutions and the like; and *soft skills*, described as skills and capacities concerning interpersonal communications, leadership, management ability and empathy that are acquired in part through participation in formal education but which may also inculcated in the home.

These skills categories need to be considered in relation to three common types of skills problems. As identified by Capelli (2015, p.252), these are: *skills gaps*, which occur when an education system does not adequately equip a nation's young people with the skills required by the labour market; *skills shortages*, which occur when there are shortfalls in particular skill categories within a nation's labour market; and *skills mismatches*, which occur when the skills of employees are not well aligned with the skills required by their jobs, resulting in either over-skilling or under-skilling in the labour market. Skills gaps and skills shortages tend to be the most commonly reported types of skills problems in the Southeast Asian region, while skills mismatches are less frequently reported in the literature from the region.

A range of conceptual perspectives exists in skills development discourse. In the standard neoclassical labour-market approach, skills development is a process that occurs naturally in response to price signals from the labour market: other things being equal, an increase in the wage rate in a particular skills area will attract more people to undertake the skills development required to access the jobs offering the higher wage rate. This perspective is helpful in isolating key drivers of skills development, but it rests on assumptions about perfect market information, the unrestricted mobility of labour and rational economic decision making that are rarely found in practice.

Another economic approach is one that sees skills development from the perspective of human capital theory. From this perspective, skills development is fundamental to economic growth and development because it provides a foundation of skills for the more efficient functioning of industry and for the more effective utilisation of productivity-enhancing technologies. This perspective appears to be well supported by evidence. From an extensive review of the relevant literature, Rodrik (2013, p.4) concluded that the accumulation of human capabilities in the form of human capital is significant in contributing to economic growth and development. As Rodrik notes, though, a more important influence on economic development is structural transformation in the form of a transition from a dependency on primary industry to a greater reliance on manufacturing and service industries.

More comprehensive in nature than either of the economic approaches is a model of skills development proposed by the World Bank and referred to as the Skills Toward Employment and Productivity (STEP) model (World Bank, 2010). This model identifies the following five stages for skills development: getting children off to the right start – where the focus is on health and the development of cognitive and soft skills; laying a strong foundation in basic education – where the focus is on the development of cognitive and soft skills; building job-relevant skills that employers demand – where the focus is on the development of technical skills; encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship – where the focus is on the effective deployment of skills in the economy; and matching skills demand and supply – where the focus is on the effective utilisation of available skills in the economy.

The World Bank proposed that its model should be utilised to undertake country-level studies of the formation of cognitive, technical and non-cognitive skills, as well as of the extent to which mismatches between skills availability and employer needs may be occurring. To date, however, only one such study has been conducted in the Southeast Asian region. It concerned Vietnam (World Bank, 2014a) and it identified a general need for Vietnam to invest more heavily in the promotion of early childhood development, the cultivation of foundational cognitive and behavioural skills, and the development of job-relevant technical skills. The study also found that better connections

were needed between firms, universities and technical colleges so that programmes of study could be better attuned to the needs of the labour market and so that students could be better informed about employment opportunities.

The World Bank approach, using the STEP model, is more holistic in nature than any of the economic models. It is also, however, a model that requires the collection of a significant volume of data if it is to be fully deployed for the purposes of examining the skills development environment in a particular economy. A drawback of the model in the context of Southeast Asia is that at least one-half of the countries in the region do not have a well-developed information base to support the deployment of the model. In order to implement such systems in Southeast Asia, these nations would require significant external investments from agencies such as the World Bank.

Beyond Technical Skills

Much of the literature on skills development in Southeast Asia, and more broadly in Asia (see for example, OECD, 2012b), focuses on the importance of developing vocational and technical skills. Indeed, in a review of skills development pathways in Asia, Martinez-Fernandez and Choi (2012, p.26) observe that expanding vocational education at the secondary education level is "one of the key elements in skills development strategies in Asian countries." This situation is not surprising, given the pace of structural transformation in most Asian economies and the associated need for more and better-trained technical personnel, but technical skills alone are an inadequate preparation for job readiness. Across many Southeast Asian nations, the cognitive skills of young people leaving school to enter the labour force or to undertake technical training are not particularly well developed. The problem is most acute in the region's poorer nations, such as Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, but is also evident among poor communities living in many of the better-developed nations, such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand. Laos provides an example of the problem. A survey of reading skills in Laos found that 30% of children in the second grade of school could not read a single word (World Bank 2014b, p.12). The reading skills of students completing secondary-level programmes were also found in the same survey to be equivalent to those of children completing primary school in Vietnam.

Cognitive skills provide an important foundation for national prosperity. Even a small national improvement in these skills can greatly improve employment prospects for young people and raise the value of gross national production (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2015). Establishing high threshold levels of cognitive skills is in the interests of all ASEAN countries, as it is in the case of China, where it has been estimated that: "Labour productivity would be 23% higher if junior high-school graduates had senior high-school education and would double if senior high-school graduates had college training" (Molnar and Koen 2015, p.9). As a recent World Bank report on Laos concluded, neglecting cognitive skills is costly for a nation: "Basic literacy (or lack thereof) has real implications for economic growth" (World Bank 2014b, p.51).

Opportunities to compare the performance of different Southeast Asian nations regarding the cognitive skills attainments of their young people are limited because of the absence of relevant comparative data. Only five Southeast Asian nations participated in the international Programme for International Assessment (PISA) survey conducted across 63 countries and regions in 2012. PISA tested levels of mathematical, scientific and reading literacy among 15-year-olds. Singapore and Vietnam achieved results that were significantly above the OECD average, while Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia achieved results that fell well below the OECD average. Indeed, young Indonesian participants scored so poorly, on average, that many were considered unlikely to be able to remain in school beyond the minimum leaving age (OECD 2014b, p.9). This situation greatly diminishes Indonesia's capacity to respond to skills gaps. It also places the young people concerned at an enormous disadvantage internationally in the competition for jobs. Low national average cognitive skill levels mean that many young people may be several school years behind children in the same age group attending school in other countries. It has been estimated that the gap, on average,

between children from Indonesia and children from any of Korea, Hong Kong or Singapore may be at least three school years (OECD and ADB 2015, p.19).

Technical skills are, without doubt, important as a foundation for employment, but their importance must be seen in the context of a broader definition of skills that also takes account of cognitive and soft skills. Marked variations across the ASEAN region are evident in terms of how effectively and successfully technical skills are developed, but firm comparative data in this regard are limited in terms of quality and availability. Singapore is, without much doubt, the leader in terms of technical skills development – as it appears also to be in terms of cognitive skills development. Its achievements in this regard are widely acknowledged (see for example, World Bank 2012a, p.16). Singapore enrols about 25% of the relevant age cohort each year in its national Institute of Technical Education (ITE), a network of colleges offering career-based vocational training that leads to technician-level employment in the fields of engineering, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), health sciences, business and business services. The ITE is successful for many reasons. It is well funded by the State; its programmes are popular and well delivered; there is a mix of classroom-based and experiential learning; pathways exist to enable graduates from its programmes to proceed to a polytechnic for higher-level training; industry partners play a significant role in identifying the skill needs to be addressed in the curriculum; and high employment rates are achieved by ITE graduates.

Other nations in the ASEAN region now face challenges with the development of technical skills that Singapore overcame during the 1990s when it began to reconstruct its TVET system. These challenges include: integrating enterprise-based training with training provided formally in classrooms; increasing the relevance of technical training programmes in terms of industry needs; improving the quality of teaching skills in TVET colleges; and raising the standard of leadership and management in TVET institutions (ADB 2014, pp. 61-62; see also Maclean, Jagannathan and Sarvi 2013, pp.9-19). On-the-job training, and participation in the non-formal education sector, also need to be properly integrated with formal programmes of technical skills development. These are important additional forms of technical skills development in Southeast Asia, but most countries in the region have not yet developed procedures for giving formal recognition for skills acquired by means of on-the-job training and non-formal education.

The extent of the need across Southeast Asia for more young people to acquire technical skills is not to be underestimated. Data on the matter are, however, difficult to locate. From Vietnam, though, it is reported that in 2011 only 15.2% of the 50.4 million people in the workforce had received any form of technical training, and only 3.7% of the total workforce had acquired any formal technical qualifications (World Bank 2012b, p.9).

Soft skills, including skills in communication, teamwork, problem solving, enterprise, planning and organising, self-management, lifelong learning and the use of technologies, are very important to employers. This is evident in literature from Southeast Asia (see for example, ADB, 2012a; World Bank, 2012b), as well as globally (see for example, World Economic Forum 2014, p.10). Measuring soft skills, and explaining why they are so important, are, however, matters that have not been easy to address systematically because of the wide range of soft skills typically referred to by employers, and because the reasons employers give for the importance of these skills are often extremely varied. To be effective, however, skills development systems must give attention to the importance of these skills.

Recent findings reported by the OECD are noteworthy here. Drawing particularly on research about the nature of 'character' by Heckman and colleagues (Heckman, Stixrud and Urzua, 2006; Heckman and Kautz, 2013), and with the development of a 'social and emotional skills' construct, OECD research is showing that soft skills, defined as a composite of elements that include conscientiousness, openness to new experience, self-efficacy, social communication, team-working skills, agreeableness and emotional stability, do impact both directly and indirectly on labour-market outcomes (OECD 2015, p.69). The OECD research suggests that the best way in which schools, colleges and universities can assist young people to develop 'social and emotional skills' is by including the

measurement of their successful acquisition in the normal student assessment processes. The kinds of assessment tasks that are more likely to indicate the attainment of these skills may be those that are 'authentic' in nature, requiring perhaps students to produce portfolios to demonstrate their learning. To date, however, it is evident that there are relatively few education systems that have explicitly built consideration of these skills into their student assessment frameworks (OECD 2015, pp.95-109).

In summary, it is important to consider cognitive, technical and soft skills in combination when establishing a skills development system. A national skills development system that focuses too narrowly on the development of technical skills is at risk of overlooking the labour-market importance of cognitive and soft skills.

Effective Information Systems

The literature on skills development widely acknowledges that effective skills development systems are those that respond efficiently and effectively to local needs. As Martinez-Fernandez and Weyman (2014, p.262) report, while international lessons on how to develop skills are useful, "targeted strategies need to match the conditions in each country, which are not uniform across Asian economies". According to UNESCO (2012, p.30), relevant skills should be generated by training that is "adapted to each local context, filling clear gaps in the skills base in the local area." To achieve such localised systems, there is a need for national information management systems capable of informing stakeholders about contextual factors, forecasting future labour-market needs, and enabling lessons to be learnt for past successes and failures.

Without an effective labour-market information system, a skills development system lacks the capacity to report quantifiable achievements, such as participation rates, unemployment rates, and graduation rates. Neither is it able to describe or address the underlying causes of skills gaps; nor quantify the impact that social factors such as poverty may be having in limiting access to skills development strategies. For prospective students, policy makers, industry stakeholders, employers and training providers, the absence of adequate information can result in skills development systems that fail to provide relevant skills and that are unable to alleviate skills gaps. In Vietnam, for example, young people were found to need better labour-market information, more information about graduate job placements, and more transparency regarding occupational competency standards and certification systems (World Bank 2014a, p.9). The World Bank has similarly reported that "Lao PDR's vocational education system does not seem to be as responsive as it needs to be and suffers from 'disconnects' among the schools, employers, and students… No formal mechanisms are available for firms to provide feedback to schools on their programmes or quality of teaching" (World Bank 2014b, p.60). In Myanmar, the ILO found that "the data is often limited, the definitions of TVET programmes are not fully clarified, the standards are constrained, and the [data collection and storage] equipment is obsolete" (ILO 2014b, p.5), and that a "major obstacle to understanding the [TVET] development challenges in Myanmar is the lack of accurate and consistent data" (ILO 2014b, p.6).

In emerging economies, the growth in importance of the informal labour market can further confound the collection of accurate labour market data, making sound interpretations about emerging needs extremely challenging. Though this sector of the labour market, which comprises highly adaptive enterprises, makes a vital contribution to skills demand in the countries concerned, it is a contribution that remains largely beyond the reach of existing labour-market data collection mechanisms and information systems. Detailed analyses of skills needs for the informal sectors in Africa have been undertaken (such as those discussed in UNESCO, 2011), but little evidence exists of these kinds of investigations having taken place in the Southeast Asian region. Without sufficient information on the informal sector and its skills needs, ASEAN nations may experience lags in responding appropriately to emerging skills gaps – and, as argued by Chen, Mourshed and Grant (2013) in the context of China, lags in responding to emerging skills gaps can be costly for a nation.

A recent development of note for its importance in directing attention to a comprehensive and consistent set of indicators for appraising national technical skills development systems is the World Bank's focus on workplace development processes within the framework of its Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) initiative, launched in 2014 (World Bank, 2014c). The SABER framework for workforce development examines the success of individual nations in terms of their strategic framework, system oversight and service delivery regarding technical skills development to meet labour-market needs. The indicators for which information must be obtained are: (a) articulating a strategic direction; (b) prioritising a demand-led approach; (c) strengthening critical coordination; (d) diversifying pathways for skills acquisition; (e) ensuring efficiency and equity in funding; (f) assuring relevant and reliable standards; (g) fostering relevance in training programmes; (h) incentivising excellence in training provision; and (i) enhancing accountability for results.

SABER country reports on workforce development have, to date, been produced for 25 countries, including three in Southeast Asia: Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam (World Bank, 2012a, 2012b and 2013b respectively). The three reports completed on Southeast Asian countries point to some marked differences between workforce development processes and policies. Singapore received the highest rating across all three workforce development categories, with its strategic framework, system oversight and service delivery all considered 'advanced. Malaysia scored a lower overall rating of 'established', while Vietnam received the overall rating of 'emerging'. Singapore was described as having "a clear and coherent [workforce development] system with a highly developed policy and institutional framework" (World Bank 2012a, p.13). Malaysia was said to have "demonstrated considerable strength in formulating a strategic vision for [workforce development] and policies and institutions to support that vision, but its capability is weaker at the oversight and implementation levels" (World Bank 2013b, p.13). Vietnam was said to be "on the right track with its policies and institutions for [workplace development]. However, critical gaps remain between the demand for and supply of skilled and qualified workforce" (World Bank 2012b, p.14). Importantly, Singapore has an advanced labour market information system that underpins the quality of its performance.

The potential value of the SABER approach is significant, but some limitations of the process do need to be acknowledged. First, it will be of limited value if not repeated regularly. Given the pace of economic growth in the Southeast Asian region, the value of a profile that is two or three years old will decline rapidly. Second, it is a highly interpretive process, requiring expert panel members to rate different aspects of national workforce development systems by drawing upon secondary documentation and personal knowledge of a system. Though implemented in a way that tries to reduce the risk of bias, an appraisal process of this nature is not immune from human error, nor is it completely free from the need to be politically sensitive. Third, participation in the SABER process is voluntary. Only three Southeast Asian nations elected to have their workplace development systems reviewed. The reasons why these nations did elect to have their systems reviewed, and why other Southeast Asian nations did not elect to have their workplace development systems reviewed, reflect inconsistent levels of government commitment to skills development and the establishment of accountable, transparent TVET oversight. The reasons for limited engagement with the SABER workforce development review in Southeast Asian nations warrant further investigation.

As is evident from the SABER reviews of workforce development processes in Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam, a capacity to collect, analyse and report labour-market data is critical in terms of the effective functioning of a national skills development system. For a number of ASEAN members, however, this capacity is weak. Vietnam's labour-market information system, for example, has been shown in several unrelated reports to have significant deficiencies (ADB, 2014; World Bank, 2014a). Though reports are not available on the labour-market information systems in Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, these countries are even less developed than Vietnam and are, therefore, even less able to be able to maintain effective labour-market information systems.

In summary, effective skills development systems, like labour-market needs, are dynamic. They are, therefore, inherently dependent upon the effectiveness of communications between

employers, industry and education providers regarding skills needs and emerging skills problems. This communication requires sophisticated national information systems for collecting and analysing information, as well as for disseminating key messages to stakeholders.

Effective Policy Settings

As this paper has discussed, skills systems are highly complex and locally specific. In order to effectively respond to the labour market and adapt to changing patterns of skills demand, they require sustained policy commitment, coordinated administration and adequate funding. As the World Bank has observed: "Accountability and governance arrangements are often the weak link of skills-building initiatives, with institutional failures often replacing market failures" (World Bank 2013a, p.176). Across ASEAN nations, however, the capacity of governments to manage these elements has been mixed.

For less developed nations, particularly those that have experienced rapid economic growth, the problem is most acute. A review of the TVET system in Vietnam reported, for example, that:

> …the existing fragmentation and complexity of institutional ownership and governance complicates policy implementation, including efforts to improve the effectiveness of skills acquisition… As a consequence of the organizational fragmentation, no one has an overview of all skills development . . . Fragmentation of state management of TVET is the main reason for poor coordination in TVET activities (ADB 2014, p.62).

A review of TVET in Myanmar similarly noted that:

> ...there is a lack of coordination among the ministries and their TVET providers, which results in either a lower quality of formal TVET delivery, or a lack of offers in some areas, causing confusion for young people trying to choose a career, or even for adults trying to get a (re) qualification (ILO 2014b, p.xii).

These examples contrast with Singapore, which is described as having an adaptive and highly effective system:

> The system's effectiveness in delivering demand-led skills has been enabled by the close tripartite partnership between government, union and stakeholders, and a coordinated approach within government… The results from the SABER-WfD Benchmarking process highlight that Singapore made continuous progress and significant improvements in its workforce development (WfD) system from 1970 to 2010. This has created a clear and coherent system with highly a developed policy and institutional framework. It continues to be subject to review and enhancements, where needed, to respond to shifting policy challenges and economic demands (World Bank 2012a, p.3, p.13).

Each of these examples demonstrates a strong correlation between clear policy commitment and administrative capacity and the success of skills development systems.

Linked to policy commitment is the tendency of vocational education streams to be regarded as being inferior to academic education streams. This tendency is reported in literature on skills development across many countries in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia (World Bank 2013b, p.12), Myanmar (ILO 2014b, p.49), Indonesia (OECD and ADB 2015, p.35) and Cambodia (ADB 2012a, p.100). The poor esteem of vocational training seems to be related to a tradition of inconsistent government support for the development of appropriately regulated, nationally coordinated skills development systems. As a result, there may be poor teacher quality (ADB 2014, p.30), inadequate quality assurance mechanisms for courses (ADB 2012b, p.2; ILO 2014b, p.xii), and a supply-driven approach to providing training opportunities in the TVET system (ILO 2014b, p.xi; World Bank

2014a, p.60). These circumstances further erode the reputation of TVET and its desirability for job-preparedness, public funding and prospective students, despite its potential to mitigate youth unemployment and skills shortages.

In response to the rapid growth of skills development and skills training, National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) have become an increasingly popular policy response to poor coordination and inadequate oversight in Southeast Asia. Over recent years, all of the ASEAN member states have adopted various types of NQFs. An ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework (AQRF) has also recently been established for the purposes of providing a common reference framework for ASEAN member states, as well as to provide a basis for comparing the qualifications of skilled labour across the ASEAN region (ASEAN, 2014).

UNESCO has strongly advocated the development of national qualifications frameworks as a way of bringing coherence and clarity to tertiary education systems. Qualifications frameworks also bring together qualifications issued by different bodies on the basis of different levels of learning outcomes, and they provide a common frame of reference across countries, thereby assisting labour mobility (UNESCO, 2013). The success of NQFs in the Asian region has, however, been mixed. To be effective, they require a high level of administrative capacity to ensure accountability, quality, and mutually beneficial industry partnerships. As the World Bank has concluded, "Over 100 countries have embarked on comprehensive National Qualification Frameworks, built around the definition of competencies, certification, and accreditation. But with exceptions, results and impact are sobering" (World Bank 2013a, p.177). National qualifications frameworks can provide quality assurance and accountability frameworks that substantially improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public investment in education, but their development and implementation needs to be well resourced, and there is also a need for an adequate infrastructure and management capacity.

The provision of appropriate funding is also critical to the success of skills development systems. Singapore is an example from within the ASEAN region of a nation that has been prepared to invest strongly in the establishment and maintenance of an effective skills development system. Singapore's government has also been highly effective in securing industry investment in the national skills development system. As reported in the SABER evaluation of Singapore's workforce development processes, public funding of education in Singapore is high, coming second only to spending on defence, and an employer levy to pay for lifelong access to opportunities for job-related skills upgrading and retraining has been successfully implemented (World Bank, 2012a).

In the case of less developed Southeast Asian nations, a considerable portion of financial support for skills development is derived from international development assistance and private industry. Examples of this support include an Alcoa-funded *Youth Development Program* in Brunei, an ADB-funded *Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training Project* in Cambodia, ILO-funded *Education and Skills Training for Youth* and *Job Opportunities for Youth* projects in Indonesia, an Australian-funded education and skills development programme in Laos, an ADB-funded *Technical Education and Skills Development Project* in the Philippines, and a GIZ-funded *Regional Leadership and Capacity Development in TVET* project in Indonesia, Laos and Vietnam. The breadth of external funding indicates that many of these nations do not yet have the internal financial or institutional capacity to sustainably support their skills development systems.

Many Southeast Asian nations also lack the financial management capacity to ensure that investment in skills development is adequate, efficient and effective. Poor budgetary and financial management are commonly reported, including the allocation of resources not linked to performance but to increases in enrolments, regardless of skills demand (ADB 2014, pp.63-64). Significant duplication of effort is also evident, with various ministries developing separate strategies and plans, and no central point of review or authority with access to national reporting from all TVET related government departments (ADB 2014, p.64; ILO 2014b, p.xi). Even where public funding for skills development is considerable, poor institutional capacity and coordination can undermine the efficacy of increased funding.

Further complicating the problems of poor coordination is the rapid proliferation of private providers, who can quickly become difficult for public systems to regulate. The topic of private provision of technical skills development programmes in Southeast Asia is not well addressed in the literature. From literature on South Asia, however, it is reported that the private sector is now responsible for up to 75% of TVET training, focussing on a "narrow band of occupations" (Panth 2014, p.174), the implication being that private providers may be responding primarily to market demand for particular skills, rather than working in collaboration with public providers towards the attainment of broader national skills outcomes. In general, private skills development providers in Southeast Asia are lightly regulated and audited, and it should be of concern that there seems to be little or no data available about their quality and performance. The risks of inadequately regulated private skills development providers are significant for students, national governments and employers.

Partnerships between private industry and government can, however, reap significant benefits if effectively managed. Hong Kong's strategy in developing its TVET sector was to partner with private industry to meet a shared skills development goal and to avoid duplication of investment. Hong Kong sought to ensure that public investment occurred in skills development areas of strategic importance to the economy that the private sector was less likely to support (Maclean, Jagannathan and Sarvi 2013, p.11). For programmes of study for which there was a high economic need but also a high capital investment cost, the State also subsidised tuition fees. In various parts of Southeast Asia, successful government partnerships with private industry are known to exist, as with Intel in Vietnam, but the details and impact of these partnerships are not well documented, limiting the likelihood that their success can be duplicated elsewhere.

Beyond funding, regulation and institutional capacity, skills development frameworks in Southeast Asian nations also need to respond to social and financial barriers limiting access to tertiary education. Social support mechanisms in Southeast Asian nations are generally weak, and vulnerable and disadvantaged populations are limited in their capacity to access skills programmes which may improve their earning capacity and ability to fill skills gaps. The ILO has observed that: "development should be viewed holistically as the productive transformation of the entire economy and labour market" (ILO 2014a, p.66).

Policy commitments and adequate funding, need therefore, to be accompanied by broader social measures and the attainment of social agency for marginalised and disadvantaged populations, including women, people with disabilities, marginalised populations, those living in poverty and in rural areas. Recent research also shows that effective social measures can "stimulate investment in skills formation" and these measures are reported as being increasingly included in the design and objectives of skills development programmes, providing an increased incentive for participation by marginalised and disadvantaged groups (ILO 2014a, p.132). Further arguments espouse that the most successful and lasting skills programmes act as holistic development solutions where "skills formation systems cannot only be designed to satisfy the needs of the economic systems, but also to satisfy wider basic needs of individuals and their communities" and to "develop the 'agency freedom' of individuals" (Valiente 2014, p.46).

Concluding Remarks

This paper has discussed the importance of developing cognitive and soft skills as well as technical skills, creating effective information systems, and establishing institutional and regulatory framework for the coordination of skills development systems. Southeast Asian economies are experiencing unprecedented economic growth following structural transition from reliance on agriculture towards becoming service-oriented and knowledge based economies. They are now also beginning to reap the benefits of investments in skills development systems, though there is wide variation in the effectiveness and yield of the systems that have been developed. Over time, however, and as has already happened in the case of Singapore, their skills development systems will become central to continuing growth and prosperity. It is timely that all of the ASEAN Member States address the

architecture for their skills development systems with a view to addressing current and future skills gaps.

Skills development systems in the region will be most effective where they are able to identify and track skills demand through effective data collection and analysis systems, and where they foster training programmes which build cognitive and soft skills as well as technical skills that best equip graduates to innovate and adapt to dynamic work environments. These systems must also have a capacity to be responsive to change, and to be informed by stakeholder needs and experiences. National governments will continue to have a vital role to play in coordinating and regulating national skills development systems to reduce duplication and maximise efficiency and effectiveness.

Across Southeast Asia, mechanisms to measure and improve the quality of skills development systems will be critical in ensuring that nations are able to respond to the skills needs of rapidly expanding and transitioning economies.

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Cambodia: From Dependency to Sovereignty – Emerging National Leadership[1]

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Abstract: *In the millennium leading up to its days of glory and regional leadership under the iconic Angkor empire, and even in the centuries of dependence since, Cambodia has often benefited significantly from the influence of its patrons, starting with traders from India who sailed up the Mekong at the beginning of a magnificent water transport system including an inland sea. Most recently such benefits have been from global and multilateral sources. Equally, due to its pivotal strategic location at the centre of the South-East corner of Asia, Cambodia has also suffered, at times enormously, from the competing influences of a plethora of well-intentioned but radically different influences: religious, cultural, linguistic, imperial, political, ideological and educational. This article will review the educational system of Cambodia and the issues that come with achieving political and now psychological freedom from dependence on foreign dominance and tutelage.*

Keywords: *Post-independence fragmentation, massification, privitisation, political resolution, fragilities.*

Rehabilitation – Dependence on International Support

After the expulsion of the Khmer Rouge (KR) in 1979 from Phnom Penh to the Thai border, Cambodia's Vietnamese saviours faced the task of assisting a demoralized and largely starving population to rebuild a functioning state and to commence the rehabilitation of an abandoned and shattered school system.

Despite the human and material resource limitations of the first post-KR decade, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) initially made considerable quantitative progress in rebuilding primary education enrolments from 947,319 in 1979 to 1,597,081 in 1982 (MoEYS, 2010–11). However, total primary enrolments had fallen off to 1,279,053 by the 1987–8 school year and did not again exceed the 1982–3 figure until 1993–4. This decline was no doubt due in large part to the effects of the poverty of the period (Mysliwiec, 1988). The quality of primary education was a major issue, with consequences persisting through to today (see below the section *Strengthening the quality of education*).

Following the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1991, Western bi- and multilateral aid commenced to flow into Cambodia, a further leap to hitherto unprecedented levels of external support. However, this high level of investment called for experienced educational planners to facilitate absorptive capacity and achievement of delivery deadlines.

The Missing Generation of Trained and Experienced Educational Leaders

In 1992–3 it was common to see Education Ministry staff playing *boule* in the Ministry yard, gossiping at their desks and departing early for lack of any clear idea of what to do in the office. But following the election of the National Assembly in 1993, political leaders had welcomed the promise of large-scale foreign aid, concurrently urging Cambodians to be enterprising and to take the lead in national development.

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Unfortunately, few education personnel with the necessary experience were available. So from 1994, frustrated donors had to recruit large numbers of experienced, but necessarily foreign, advisors and consultants to fill the planning gap. However, the foreign consultants themselves were often constrained by the diverse sets of implementation regulations of their own particular agencies. Many were ill-informed on the Cambodian context and, visiting on short-term contracts, few stayed in country long enough to understand the unique challenges to be faced.

A further constraint on development planning and implementation was the intransigent behaviour of the Khmer Rouge (KR). Despite the overwhelming evidence of the 1993 election results, which clearly put the lie to the KR claim that they had the support of most of the nation, the KR remained a destabilizing force, continuing to receive covert foreign support, partly fuelled by the surviving dynamics of the Cold War. A remaining distraction was the contending political parties, only resolved in favour of establishing an orderly state towards the final years of the twentieth century. Following the resolution of these limitations, there were some significant achievements during the first decade of the new century.

The First Sector Wide Education Policy Framework

The final stage of dependency was still reliant on international consultants working directly to the Minister for Education, Youth and Sport and his secretaries of state. This stage saw the establishment, from the first plan in 2001, of the planning mechanisms of the annually updated ESP (Education Strategic Plan) and the ESSP (Education Sector Support Programme) (see, for example, MoEYS, 2006a, 2006b). This effective initiative in aid coordination, using a Sector Wide Approach (SWAp), was donor-led by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (Pok and Ratcliffe, 2006) and multi-donor supported. This advanced planning process was fully realized, progressing in published annual rollovers of the four-year forward plans throughout the first decade of this century (MoEYS, 2010).

The ES(S)Ps from 2003–6 through to 2006–10 were the last major plan documents written primarily by foreigners. For future plans, following considerable debate over who was to determine content, the choice of planning priorities shifted to national leaders in the Ministry (albeit often assisted by foreign consultants, but by now working at Ministry official rather than Minister level).

The Evolving Cambodianization of Education Development

Over the two decades from 1991, misperceptions on both sides of the aid transactions led to rising disillusionment with foreign-aid planners by both Cambodian political leaders and their educational administrators. As the new century proceeded, better educated and more experienced Ministry managers began to focus attention on significant professional issues in educational planning.

The annual updates of the ES(S)Ps through to 2006, initially written in English, then translated into Khmer, brought to light numerous priorities, and the absence of other priorities, to which national education leaders within the Ministry began to take exception. The conflict resolution and inter-language communication tasks, and the consequent planning process reforms required by the Ministry's national promoters of this changeover, led to a long gap of four years in plan production, so that the next plan, actually finalized at the end of 2010, incorporated Cambodian initiatives in the priorities to be funded under the ESP[2] 2009–13 (MoEYS, 2010).

By contrast with what had been observed in the 1990s, it was now possible to find, from the latter part of the first decade of the new century, many Cambodian staff acting in a professionally disciplined way. However, this capacity is still unevenly distributed across and within schools and higher education institutions, between regions, provinces and districts and across departments within the MoEYS.

Cambodian initiatives in education and in other fields were beginning to replace those of the donors in shaping the country's future. For example, revisions were made to methods of learning to read in order to take account of the unique characteristics of written Khmer (see below the section

Strengthening the quality of education). Another example from primary education is the reduction of the long enduring (1985 to 1997), but eventually resolved, massive 40 per cent repetition rate in the transition from Grade 1 to Grade 2, still 41 per cent in 1996–7 (MoEYS, 1997).

By this stage international organizations were beginning to recognize the need to work directly through adequately trained Cambodian professionals and administrators, rather than through transient foreign consultants. This message (Godfrey et al., 2000) took some years to be fully realized and applied.

The First Nationally Driven Education Strategic Plan – the ESP 2009–13

This was the first plan that Cambodian professional leaders could call their own. It has undoubtedly benefited from foreign consultant support to Ministry directors, but embodies many policy changes initiated by Cambodian professionals.

The current version of the ESP (MoEYS, 2010) justifies the long four years of its gestation by the superior quality of its systematic approach to identifying strategic priorities, then detailing programmes and budgets to address them. Programme 7.3, Enhancing Aid Effectiveness (MoEYS, 2010, p. 91), concludes the statements of the new initiatives in all programme budgets with the following declaration of ownership of the reform and development partner (DP) processes:

> Opportunities and Next Steps:
> MOEYS leadership and its ownership of the sector reform and development partnership processes will be further strengthened through the dialogue surrounding the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the new ESP 2009–2013 which has received support from all the DPs.

The new ESP's utility as a planning instrument has been considerably strengthened, particularly by reporting progress on target indicators, including the frank documentation of significant shortfalls where experienced. The format has been changed to incorporate the Education Sector Support Programme (ESSP), formerly a separate supporting document, into the ESP. All recurrent budget-funded development elements of the plan are now built around the programme-based budgets (PBB), now the planning, funding and reporting basis for reform implementation. The PBBs provide a clear statement of the prioritized strategies and how much is to be invested in each over the coming four years. The statistics presented mark a keen awareness of emerging needs. Serious disparities between city and country, between regions, between remote and central provinces and districts, and between poor and rich families, are tracked and addressed.

One outcome of the analysis of performance reports incorporated into successive ESSPs was a recognition that that the national level plan was not well understood and incorporated into planning at implementation levels below that of the Planning Department. Even the Ministry-level departments were patchy in their incorporation of ESP policies into their departmental plans, let alone planners at province, district, cluster and school levels. This shortcoming was particularly noticeable in many of the departmental presentations to the Annual Congress of provincial and central Ministry staff, attended also by the DPs. These shortfalls formed the basis for demands from the joint Ministry–DP Education Sector Working Group (ESWG 2007, p.33) for incorporation of all levels of plan implementation into the planning process.

One of the strengths of the current ESP is the high priority it gives to the development of Annual Operation Plans (AoPs) at technical department and field levels, aligned with programme budgets, and designed to address emerging implementation tasks. A typical implementation task, now identified and to be tracked in successive ESPs, is the preparation by each department of its plans to achieve in its own subsector the good governance goals of the Education Law (RGOC, 2007). It is envisaged that this priority in the mechanics of turning plans from wish lists into effective central and field level plans

will progressively be applied to the development of AoPs at province, district and cluster level, through to school development plans prepared by school management committees.

Sovereignty Confirmed

Following the elections of 1993, the regular Government–DP Cross Sectoral Coordination conference addressed issues of harmonizing conditional DP support with national development planning. For the DPs, a key element of this process was their joint advice to government on such general governance issues as transparency in the management of financial resources and respect for human rights. DPs regularly sought government commitments on targets to meet these conditions.

By 2011, China, never a participant in the Government–DP coordination meetings, was investing at a level rapidly approaching that of the largest donor. China does not demand commitments other than to achieve the goals of its aid projects and to repaying, admittedly at relatively high interest rates, the development funds advanced.

In mid-2011 government cancelled the scheduled annual coordination meeting with the other DPs. The cancellation of that meeting could be seen as the final step in the Government's emergence from dependency on DP direction as a condition of support to the assertion of unrestricted sovereignty.

Risks: Cambodia as a Fragile State

This article would be unbalanced if it did not draw attention to the worst case scenario. Ayres (2000) documents thoroughly the background to, and the KR processes in, the destruction of the education system, arising out of the chronic crisis in educational planning which characterized the third quarter of the last century (the years following independence from France). These failures contributed to the KR establishment of the paradoxically named 'Democratic Kampuchea'. Ayres' incisive analysis is then carried through to the two decades succeeding the expulsion of the KR from Phnom Penh.

For a description of the characteristics of the paternalistic mode of governance persisting to this day in Cambodia, the reader is referred to *Education and Fragility in Cambodia* (IIEP, 2011). This work cites numerous examples of current cases of the tension between traditional Cambodian and contemporary international values.

The continuing predominance of the tradition of patron–client relationships, symbolized at the peak by the king as the patron of his subjects, and now in the form of Prime Minister–citizen relationships, is seen as a constraint on change and development. While the French colonial period achieved much in the way of stability, economic development, population growth and quality of life, it is seen as essentially promoting education as an aspect of loyalty to the state, marked by the persistence of traditional rote learning rather than by developing the capacity to analyze, criticize and challenge. It is not surprising then that DP-supported efforts to develop the learner's capacity to be a 'self-starter' are often inhibited by the traditional culture of loyalty to the patron protector.

Contemporary international policies are written into the constitution and the laws, often at the instigation of DPs, but fail to be implemented. Cambodians' apparent tolerance of the loss of their human rights is surprising to many foreigners working in Cambodia. However, those who have never had a tradition of entitlement to human rights could hardly regard them as being lost. Post-KR Cambodia is seen by the writer as effectively a one-party state, in which respect for and, at worst, fear of authority undermine the capacity to challenge policies constructively.

An education example of collateral damage is the persistence, contrary to repeated policy direction, of 'informal' fees charged by schools (Bray and Bunly, 2005), often at classroom level on the initiative of the individual teacher. While the needs of underpaid teachers cannot be denied, the exclusion from teacher delivered benefits of pupils whose parents cannot afford the fee is a daily model to all pupils of the corruption of paper entitlements (the Constitution) and the impunity of agents of the state who fail to enforce policies (Tan, 2008, quoted in IIEP 2011, pp. 41, 47).

Some argue that KR survivors will put up with any neglect of human rights rather than risk another civil war. But what will happen when the younger generation, knowing little about the KR horrors, express their dissatisfaction with the lack of employment? This could be a future challenge to current paternalist practice.Government leaders seem genuinely bewildered by donor demands for the separation of the powers of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Such concepts have no validity in Cambodian history and traditional practice. It is, perhaps, not surprising that democratic protections, which evolved in the West out of centuries of learning how to regulate corrupt practice, have not yet developed some meaning in a short few decades of the history of modern Cambodia.

In short, Cambodia has made much progress since the expulsion of the KR, but the persisting cases of fragility do provide warnings of the risks which might be faced in future years unless these fragilities are effectively addressed. Counterbalancing these fears is the evidence of growing reform, albeit demanding time and patience.

Evolving Characteristics of the Cambodian Education System

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

The prioritizing of primary education has not included ECE until quite recently. The few pre-schools in operation at the beginning of this century included small numbers of Ministry and private pre-schools, mainly in Phnom Penh and the bigger towns. Pre-school enrolments in 1996–7 totalled 44,814 as against 678,863 in Grade 1 (MoEYS, 1997: Tables 1 and 7). By school year 2010–11, total enrolments in formal pre-schools had more than doubled to 99,130, still well short of Grade 1 enrolments of 454,346 (MoEYS, 2010–11: Tables 1 and 16).

Until the implementation of the Fast Track Initiative (FTI – World Bank, 2010), pre-school education was not a high priority investment target for government, so such pre-schooling as did exist was largely dependent on parent fees and DP support. A national pre-school teacher training centre based in Phnom Penh received considerable Japanese support and produced 100 teachers per year, allowing limited scope only for expansion.

Since the end of the last century there has been growing public and Ministry awareness of the critical importance of the foundation years in education. This perception has been reinforced by the global priority given to Education for All (EFA). By 2007, with the prospects of joint international donor funded support (World Bank, 2010) to achieve EFA through a Fast Track Initiative (FTI) grant of $57m., attention was focused on the enormous gap between current formal pre-school provision and the scale of the task of achieving universal pre-school education in Cambodia.

The result of the FTI agreement was a hybrid solution, comprising the addition of a third floor to the Pre-School Teacher Training College to double the annual outputs of fully trained formal pre-school teachers and the construction of new pre-school class facilities (but still far from enough), supplemented in most communes by the provision of support and training for non-formal community-based pre-school classes. Consistent with a number of other very ambitious targets, early childhood education is now defined as covering children aged three to five years, with a notional target population up to half that of the entire primary school system. There also remain serious questions about the awareness and capacity of the staff of the Early Childhood Education Department (ECED), created relatively recently as a separate department and using staff whose task had suffered decades of neglect.

Primary Education

Due to the 30-year post-KR period of priority for primary education, enrolment and retention rates in this subsector, including the participation of girls, have improved greatly, as has quality of teacher output, numbers of schools constructed and provision of equipment, learning materials and school

libraries. The ESP reports significant improvements from the 2005–6 school year in factors such as enrolment and progression rates, with significant effects on both efficiency and equity.

Table 1. Escalating Enrolment Rates

	2005–6	**2009–10**
Net admissions	82.6%	92.4%

Over that four-year period, disparities between the capital city and the rest of the country were reduced as the rate of admission in the provinces rose 3 per cent as against a rise of only 1 per cent in the already well served urban areas. However, mixed progress is seen in achieving the goal of increased efficiency of pupil throughout:

Table 2. Progression Rates-Mixed Progress

	ESP 2009–13	EMIS 09–10	
	2005–06	**2008–09**	**2009–10**
Repetition	11%	8.9%	9.8%
Dropout	11.6%	8.3%	8.7%
Survival from Grade 1–6	49.3%	61.7%	61.7%

The efficiency gains overall were visible in the shape of the bar graph representation of primary school enrolments by grade, which has been progressively moving from that of a broad-based, narrow-topped pyramid (most enrolees bunched in the lower grades) closer to that of a rectangle**.** As a result, total primary enrolments actually dropped, making investment in primary education more cost-effective per pupil.

The benefits of these impressive quantitative improvements may be slowing down, despite FTI and other investments since 2008. This is evidenced by the updating of the ESP figures (above), from the EMIS[3] indicators for 2009–10, of the data on repetition, dropout and survival. This slowdown may to some extent be related to concerns over the factors undermining the quality of education, such as, for example, teacher absenteeism in rural areas outside the main centres. Unfortunately this problem is widespread in rural areas (Benveniste et al., 2008, pp. 66-69).

Lower Secondary Education (LSE Grades 7–9)

By the beginning of this century, attention was turning to the woefully neglected levels above primary education. From the beginning of the new century, multilateral DPs, led by the ADB, have invested heavily in successive secondary education development plans, focused mainly on lower secondary education, a subsector which still has major shortfalls yet to be addressed (see relevant websites, ADB (Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP) I, ESDP II and Enhancing Education Quality Project (EEQP)), World Bank (FTI and Cambodia Education Sector Support Project **(**CESSP)).

Despite the DP support efforts, the number of LSE pupils actually decreased over the period, while the increase in the LSE Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) over the period barely got ahead of population growth. These figures make a strong EFA case for commencing the ADB-funded Third Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP III) to support secondary education development, proposed to target 2012–17, supplemented by further investments in improving primary school throughout.

Table 3. Stalled Progress in LSE Enrolments

	2005–6	2009–10
No. of LS Schools	911	1,172
Survival from Gd. 1–9	26.3%	37.2%
Pupil–Teacher Ratio	31.7	24.4
NER LSE	31.3%	31.9%
LSE Enrolments	588,333	585,115

The big issues facing LSE intake are incomplete primary schools and higher repetition rates in primary – the bottleneck at the transition from Grade 6 to 7. LSE needs to be made more relevant as two out of every three lower secondary school-aged adolescents are currently not enrolled and there is a very low parent tolerance for repetition in lower secondary schools (LSS), which results in high dropout rates (18+ per cent). There is a perceived need to develop a coordinated and comprehensive approach to employability skills in LSE, building upon successful initiatives thus far.

Upper Secondary Education (USE Grades 10–12)

Due to the demand for entry to university, upper secondary schools have tended to attract more donations from wealthy Cambodians, many of them university graduates (including those overseas) wishing to support access to higher education in their natal communities.

As statistically documented in the ESP (see below, *Polarization – the revival of social class based on wealth*), the poor are least likely to be among those who get through this gateway to higher education, where a surprising four out of five of those who pass Grade 12 go on to some sort of higher education institution (HEI).

The current ESP (MoEYS 2010, p. 29) therefore plans the following. Upper secondary scholarships for Grades 10 to 12 students will be mainly merit driven, but also poverty-indexed, based on Grade 9 examination scores. There will be scholarships for 3 per cent of the enrolment per year for upper secondary schools including 60 per cent for females.

The scholarship incentive for females is needed due to the time lag from nine years earlier when primary school entry enrolments were underweight in girls (now close to parity). In 2002–3, Grade 1 enrolments stood at 656,641, of whom 305,770 were girls (MoEYS, 2000–11: Volume 2002–3, 10, Table 10).

Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) and Non-Formal Education

The former MoEYS Department of Technical, Vocational Training and Higher Education was split following the 2002–3 school year by the migration to the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT) of the MoEYS Technical and Vocational Training functions and staff.

The TVE policies and plans described in the MoEYS ESP therefore refer only to recent endeavours to include vocational skills as a part of life skills training (LST) in the school level curriculum. The ESP (MoEYS 2010, pp. 36–38) outlines responsibilities to commence planning for TVE education in the upper secondary subsector and for LST at basic education levels.

For the non-formal sector, the current ESP (MoEYS 2010, pp.31–33) outlines the planning steps to be taken to invigorate this long neglected subsector. Plans are to be developed by the responsible department to expand re-entry and equivalency programmes for which a programme budget of over $3 million is to be provided over the five-year plan period.

Sector Wide Challenges

Given the long-term evidence, from planning trends since the mid-1990s, of Cambodian aspirations to participate fully in regional and global progress, challenges such as the following will need to be more effectively addressed.

Strengthening the Quality of Education and Teacher Capacity

Quality is one of the three strategic priorities incorporated in the MoEYS strategic plans since the mid-1990s and in the ESP since its early inception at the beginning of this century. The public examination measures adopted to improve the quality of entrants to higher education institutions have failed to achieve this goal, despite substantial investments in testing and certification technology and the management of the examinations.

In an attempt to get a more reliable indicator of the effectiveness of the education system, the MoEYS has in recent years introduced a system of performance testing at Grade 3, 6 and 9 levels, which avoids the distortions of gateway exams by small-scale sampling nationwide, with anonymous results – that is, a measure of the system rather than individual performance (Marshall et al., 2009). The results provide evidence of quality improvement needs on which Ministry professional leaders are now taking action.

For example, evidence of serious weaknesses in Khmer reading performance has drawn attention to pedagogical problems, remarkably similar to the worldwide debate, dating back to the 1950s, over the effectiveness of phonic versus *whole word* approaches to teaching reading (Adams, 1995). The current lack of the phonics approach, which was employed in Cambodia in the pre-KR days, is now seen by professional leaders in the Ministry as a serious lapse in enabling all pupils to read the complex Khmer script. This task is further complicated by the traditional practice in Khmer of running words together to make a whole sentence (i.e. a phonic *whole sentence* approach, which is very difficult). Perhaps a solution would be a compromise, in which the words in a written sentence are separated (as in written Thai) so simplifying the learners' reading task to the application of the needed phonic skills to the decoding of the relatively short string of sounds in each separate word, rather than to the relatively long string of written sounds running the full length of a sentence and not, as in Khmer speech, separated into individual written words which can easily be recognized when each is phonically pronounced.

*Teaching in Cambodia (*Benveniste et al., 2008) is a detailed up-to-date description of the problems at the heart of education quality in Cambodia, of reforms currently under way and of needed reforms yet to be addressed. The final section of the book, 'Teacher performance: delivering high quality education' (pp. 97–102), will give the reader a taste for perusing the full document.

Strengthening Decentralization

Those Cambodian policy and funding innovations at field level which do best do so in the context of the curious mixture of top-down control and largely unregulated decentralization, amounting in many cases to the de facto autonomy of provinces and institutions. Central intervention is largely limited to perceived threats to governing party authority. As a result, increasing attention is now being given to regulating processes of decentralization of management to province, district, cluster and school level.

The World Bank-funded Education Quality Improvement Project (EQIP) was an early policy initiative to trial the decentralization to school level of community-level school funding. It piloted in three provinces grants to school clusters to support school improvement initiatives at both cluster and school levels (Turner, 2002). The obvious cash and empowerment benefits of the project to the favoured three provinces were soon demanded by all other provinces.

From school year 2001–2, in the face of irresistible political pressure to share benefits equally across provinces, the government funded rapid extension of the grant methodology to all provinces, financed through the new Priority Action Programmes (PAP), with the grants going direct to each school. This process continues through today, now on a programme-budgeting basis (PBB funding of school operation budgets). Turner describes the effectiveness of this decentralization and also the remaining challenges to these pioneer initiatives in the decentralization of educational planning and management to each school.

The PAP process of spreading school grant decentralization nationwide was distinguished from the EQIP process in that it succeeded remarkably well in moving the process from the initiation of school grant funding using donor funds to its extension funded by a significant increase in the budget share of the Education Ministry. This again gave some hope of government movement towards ownership of both the problem and its solution.

Access and Other Disparities

Statistics on disparities monitored in the current ESP (MoEYS, 2010: Figures 1–3 and Tables 1–3) describe targets, progress and shortfalls in grade repetition, distribution of educational opportunity as between cities and rural areas and between central and remote provinces.

Much has been achieved in reducing gender disparities in basic education but this goal has yet to be fully achieved at post-basic education levels and has a long way to go in the staffing of the MoEYS itself, where the proportion of top level staff who were female had risen from 1 per cent in 2006 to only 7.7 per cent in 2009 (MoEYS, 2010: Table 3).

The most promising sign of future prospects for reduction in disparities is the ESP's careful reviewing of policy goals against the relevant indicators via PBB, and the naming in the relevant programme descriptions of the department in each case accountable, on the basis of annual management information reporting, for implementing the reforms designed to improve performance. For detail on current priorities and funding to reduce the many disparities relevant to the achievement of EFA targets, the reader is referred to the Fast Track Initiative agreement (World Bank, 2010).

Some of the more significant factors underlying quality shortfalls are general (i.e., not exclusive to education) characteristics of the evolving culture of contemporary Cambodia. These include weak governance and the consequent privatization arising out of multiple unregulated conflicts of interest in government funding. In large part the continuing and in some cases growing disparities are due to the low and declining level of government investment in education through share of the recurrent budget, resulting from weaknesses in tax and revenue collection, now being remedied, and in part from limits on MoEYS' capacity to absorb budgeted funds.

Underlying Problems

Public Resource Shortfalls and Proposed Remedies

Government budget items can be important indicators of serious policies and plans for changes in a nation's behaviour. Popular expressions worldwide express this truth in simpler terms, for example, 'Putting your money where your mouth is.'

In the early 1990s, Ministry of Education staff old enough to remember would express their yearning for the days of the 1960s when the education budget was 24 per cent of the total national budget.[4] With the education budget share (as distinct from expenditure) by 1993 of the order of 14 per cent a year (MoEYS 1994, p. 10), it was not too difficult to see why teachers on $20 a month had to find other sources of income – at the expense of the energy they could devote to their profession – and why supplies of school books, materials and equipment were so inadequate.

By the end of the century, government was commencing a process of progressively raising both teachers' salaries and expenditures on non-salary items. By 2007, policy-driven reforms such as the Priority Action Programme had lifted the education share of the national recurrent budget (often considerably above final expenditure share) to 19.2 per cent.

In 2010 the Budget Law had allocated an education recurrent budget of Cambodian Riel (R) 825 billion (MoEYS 2010, p.102). At 16.4 per cent of the total national recurrent budget (R5029 billion), this was 2.8 per cent lower than the peak share of 2007. However, there was worse to come.

For 2011, the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) (see Ministry of Economy and Finance (MoEF), 2010a) proposed a recurrent budget for the Education Sector of R939 billion, an increase of 13.8 per cent on the 2010 allocation. This would have lifted the education budget share to 17 per cent of the projected national recurrent budget of R5539 billion. But the Budget Law for 2011 provided a total for all government recurrent expenditures of R5518 billion, of which the education share was R916 billion, amounting to 16.6 per cent of the national recurrent budget.

For 2012 the ESP proposed an education share of 19.7 per cent of the recurrent budget for that year (MoEYS 2010, p.102). The revised MTEF had proposed 17.9 per cent (R1133 billion). The Budget Law passed in late November 2011 for the 2012 calendar year allocated R1008 billion (15.91 per cent), a loss of R125 billion (approximately $US31 million) to other ministries**.** A further reduction in education resources is revealed in the actual expenditure achieved as a percentage of the funds finally allocated by the Budget Law. As can be seen from MoEF records (e.g. MoEF, 2010a, 2010b), the MoEYS has had a chronic difficulty with expending each year all the funds budgeted. By 2010 the proportion actually expended had declined to 86 per cent, which can help to explain why the final allocations the following year had been reduced so much.

It is not clear what the causes of these shortfalls in expenditure are, but it would seem there is a strong case for a joint investigation by the two ministries responsible. One possible factor is the lack of synchronization between the school year (SY) and the budget year. The school year straddles the budget year, with growth notionally arising each September from new enrolments, requiring additional budget funds, which arrive at best from early January at the beginning of the budget calendar year. But the efficiency reforms of primary education throughputs have resulted in declining enrolments (due to much less repetition) over the past five years as against rapidly escalating post-secondary enrolments (MoEYS, 2010: Annex 1, Table 1). Conversely, the general education budget has proposed marked budget increases (only partly realized) – for example, an increase of 47 per cent for primary education from 2010 to 2011 – while the higher education increase for the same years is 13 per cent. There may be a problem of absorptive capacity in primary education management, given that the great bulk of primary school funding is expended mostly at province level on teacher salaries, which are carefully limited to the actual rather than the projected numbers of teachers being paid for being in front of classes.

Recurrent budget allocation records since 2006 also show declining shares for the Programme Based Budget (PBB), the policy-innovation-focused portion of the education recurrent budget. The ESP (MoEYS 2010, p. 84) proposed that up to 22 per cent of the recurrent budget should be committed to the PBB, with the remaining 78 per cent sustaining already established operations. While the PBB cash amount has been virtually fixed since 2007, and is projected to increase slightly through 2015, its share of the education recurrent budget has slid from 26 per cent in 2006 to 15 per cent in 2011. In purchasing power parity terms, inflation adjusted, its annual value has slipped by approximately 16 per cent since 2006.

In the light of the decline in actual recurrent budget allocations over the years 2008–12, the target education share of 22 per cent of the national recurrent budget seems unlikely to be achieved, particularly when account is taken of unanticipated costs such as the border conflict with Thailand and the flood damage in Cambodia, both experienced in 2011. The ministries of Defence and of the Interior seem much more likely to be the ones receiving large increases in their budgets. These shortfalls could be mitigated by the large-scale loans now being planned. The Budget Law for 2012 has authorized an

expenditure of $2.6 billion. Concurrently the government is discussing with donors, including China, the borrowing of an additional $1.1 billion (*Cambodia Daily*, 25 November 2011). Will Chinese loans include the funds needed to achieve the well planned ESP programmes for system improvement?

Resource Anomalies and Teacher Quality

At all levels of education the low level of government teacher salaries constrains the capacity of government to enforce regulations which could serve to assure some degree of equality of opportunity. The benefits prized by underpaid teachers are long holidays (both formal and informal) and short hours (four hours per day), so allowing the teacher time for other forms of income generation or food production, often at the expense of lesson preparation time (Benveniste et al. 2008, pp 56–59).

A 2005 nationwide survey of teachers by the Cambodia Independent Teachers Association (CITA) found that 40 per cent of teachers surveyed earned more from their second income or enterprise than from their pay as teachers (CITA 2011, p. 8). That proportion is probably higher now.

Polarization – the Revival of Social Class Based on Wealth

As is evident from the effective political pressures to 'spread the butter thin' in extending school support grant funding from three provinces to all, the majority of Cambodians have a strong preference for equality of opportunity. At the base of many disparities is the increasing polarization of the post KR communist society in terms of equality of opportunity. Starting in 1979 from a communist base of absolute equality, albeit equality in misery, Cambodia has achieved, within three decades, the following differences in access to education:

Table 4. Proportion of children in poorest quintile 2009–10 (MoEYS 2010, p.5) attending:

Primary schools	77.2%
Lower secondary schools	16.9%
Upper secondary schools	7.3%

The educational consequences are obvious, sourced in the now growing differences in wealth as among classes of parents. The effects of the rapid post KR polarization (see below) of Cambodian society are only too evident where those pupils in a class who can afford to pay their teacher for private tuition receive priority attention and higher test scores than their classmates, whose parents cannot afford the fees demanded by the teacher. Fees are forbidden in government primary and secondary schools but routinely collected wherever parents can afford such fees (Bray and Bunly, 2005; Brehm, 2011). In many cases they are collected and retained at the level of the poorly paid classroom teachers.

Many see one possible solution to the shortfall in government funding in the funding of schools either partly or fully from private sources. Private primary and secondary schools are popular with those parents who can afford them, particularly in the towns. Since the 1997 elections a broad range of private schools has appeared, catering for Cambodian and international parents and for a diverse range of religious affiliations. Enrolments in these schools are not included in education statistics. The private schools proudly announce on their websites authorization by the municipal or provincial Ministry of Education office but receive little supervision. The growth in Cambodian enrolments at private schools is seen by some as evidence that many parents lack confidence in the quality of government schools – and those who can afford it are voting with their feet. The issues are finally beginning to be addressed. The ESP (MoEYS, 2010) proposed implementation of

a sub-decree and directive on providing licences to private primary educational institutions, reviewed and strengthened in 2012.

Capacity Development

This article has traced the beginning of the process of learning to take control of their own affairs which has marked the gradual re-empowerment of Cambodian educational leaders in taking control of development planning.

It should not be overlooked that their foreign partners are also undergoing a learning process to enable them to engage more effectively with their Cambodian counterparts. Much of this re-education of the foreign staff of agencies providing support to Cambodians relates to the question of what constitutes effective capacity development.

Training Boom and Bust

The shortage of experienced Cambodian educational planners in the 1990s (see the earlier section, *The Missing Generation of Trained and Experienced Educational Leaders*) led to a DP prioritizing of what was described as capacity building, delivered via training courses, often cascaded. DP support for the MoEYS gave a high priority to teacher training, with in-service training of serving teachers seen as the quickest way to get results. Subsequent experience with mass training workshops over several years began to raise questions about their effectiveness.

The limitations of training workshops in Cambodia were first identified a decade ago, but it took a long time for the message to be widely recognized. Chhinh and Tabata (2002) describe an early evaluation of the effectiveness of in-service training of MoEYS teachers in a sample of Phnom Penh schools in the school year 2001–2002. The summary of the results is instructive:

> ... the study found no relationship between student achievement and the numbers of in-service training programs the teachers have attended since the introduction of the new curriculum in 1996. Investigation must be pursued to find out the mechanism underlining the issue. In-service training programs are thought to be one of the most outstanding achievements in educational reforms since the middle of 1990. However, the payoff at the classroom level seems to be minimal ... It is difficult to conclude whether the teachers learn what they are expected in the training programs or not as the programs are short, irrelevant, irregular and conducted in a cascade system (Chhinh and Tabata, 2002, p. 13).

Years later, Pearson (2011a) has now described in detail the learning experience of some NGO aid workers as they have grappled with the discovery of Chhinh's 'mechanisms'. What does and does not work in developing the capacity of Cambodian counterparts to deal with global change and its impact on Cambodia? Pearson demonstrates that the answer to this question depends on encouraging a constructive Cambodian dialogue between Cambodian demands for modernization and traditional Cambodian values. Drawing on her experience of training workshops in various Cambodian ministries over the past decade, Pearson has concluded that conventional training methods, which work well in cultures with a long tradition of universal literacy, do not work so well in Cambodia, nor in other countries with a strong reliance on oral rather than written communication.

Effective Capacity Building

Despite the achievements of senior MoEYS professional leaders in taking over from international consultants the direction of educational planning and management, effective leadership at provincial and school level is still heavily dependent on staff with limited professional training. Chhinh and Dy (2009, pp. 113–130) list some of the factors which limit success in implementing reforms.

They question the effectiveness of capacity building in the form of training and of study visits to other countries. Training can be very effective where it relates to manual skills such as those of a motorbike mechanic. However, it is hindered by a 'knowledge gap' where 'analytical, predictive and evaluative skills' are required to enable management, planning and leading. This was a problem for the then 5916 out of 7119 Cambodian school administrators, including school principals, whose education had not gone beyond the end of secondary school. Those who are capable are most likely to have the marketable skills to move to adequate remuneration by leaving government employment.

Pearson's view now, based on her long experience of the challenges of capacity development in Cambodia, is of a need to develop in learners the will and the capacity to reflect on experience, leading to critical thinking, confidence in questioning the status quo, and flexibility in adapting to change. Training may be appropriate for tangible 'hard' skills such as knowledge of regulations, procedures, and budgeting. But learning for understanding, analysis and application requires developing the capacity for flexibility in adaptation to change and in the use of new technologies in responding to the needs for global participation. Pearson (2011b) concludes that conventional training courses have a very low rate of success in development of the less tangible 'soft' skills of learning from reflection on experience, analysis, critical thinking, leadership initiatives, negotiation, political relationships, and ultimately changing organizational culture.

Developing the capacity of workplace managers requires long-term mentoring of their experience in applying the multi-dimensional complexities of innovations as affected by the concept and language limitations of the learner's cultural and political context. Constraints include those imposed by trainer funding conditions and by particular donor policies such as results-based management, in a local culture where the results cannot be predetermined but need to be shaped by evaluating the evolving process of managing the change.

Notes

[1] This paper was originally published as McNamara, V. (2013). Cambodia: From Dependency to Sovereignty – Emerging National Leadership. In L.P. Symaco (Ed.) *Education in South East Asia.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp.47-69. Revisions were made to suit the journal.

[2] This current plan, for the period 2009–13, will henceforth be referred to as the ESP (MoEYS, 2010). Earlier plans will be reference labelled with the dates of their coverage, ESP (calendar financial years covered, e.g. 2006–10, to finance enrolments for school years 2005–06 to 2009–10) reference (MoEYS, 2006a).

[3] Education Management Information System (EMIS), comprising statistics and indicators (MoEYS, 2000–11).

[4] http://www.tradingeconomics.com/cambodia/public-spending-on-education-total-percent-of-government-expenditure-wb-data.html (accessed 17 October 2012).

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Issues In European Educational Change Over The Last 30 Years

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Abstract: *Pan-European integration, based on theories of neo-functionalism and inter-governmentalism dates back to the Treaty of Paris of 1951, and has been an important force in the development of education and social policy across Europe since that time. This paper concentrates on the social, political and educational changes that have come about in many of the 28 sovereign states that now claim membership and are therefore subject to the EU treaties that cover educational policy and training issues. Choosing a selection of education developments, social policy and historical changes within European member states, the author seeks to illustrate how and where change has occurred and the implications that follow. It argues that, whilst European integration has been an important force of social and educational change, there are counteracting forces of national and regional interests, linguistic and cultural factors and historical trends that severely limit inter-governmental action and intention.*

Key words: *Europe, integration, policy, trans-nationalism, diversity .*

Introduction

The first part of this paper offers an analysis of the national developments of education in western European countries which became members of the European Union (EU) prior to the the Nice Agreement in 2003; the second section will cover the member states of the EU which joined after 2003 and is predominantly about those countries from the central and eastern parts of the subcontinent, many of whom have been previously been under the educational and political influence of the Soviet Union and are moving through a transitional phase towards more western models. The relatively small, yet complex, educational systems of the Mediterranean countries, Cyprus and Malta, are also featured.

This review aims to provide a concise analytical overview of some major educational traditions and their recent evolution across Europe. At the same time it offers insights into the mosaic of schools and colleges, languages and social characteristics that each country exhibits through the education it provides for its citizens. Much of this review is based on the two books *Education in the European Union* (Corner, 2014/5) which contain chapters contributed by educational researchers from the current 28 countries of the EU with insights and experiential knowledge of the educational forces that have formed the European population as a whole in the current time. Together they shed some light on the countervailing forces for integration towards a European identity and the enduring wish to retain regional national and autonomy and locally-based school administrations.

Seeking Identity and Unity in Europe

Europe is the smallest continent; it is not even a continent but an appendage of Asia. It is smaller than Brazil and about half the size of China and the United States. It has, however, a high intensity of internal differences and contrasts across the approximately 46 countries of which it is composed. There are many small territories and islands that also claim some degree of social, political and thus educational separateness, whilst what draws the eastern 'border' of Europe would be a long term subject of debate. All of these countries have their unique yet overlapping histories, politics,

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languages and cultures - and educational systems. Their histories have been intensively analyzed and studied, though perhaps the role of education in the formation of the countries of Europe, and its contribution to the consciousness of what Europe was has been given less attention.

If the current view of Europe's destiny is one of gentle pessimism, it is at least a little more optimistic than in the late 1940s. The constituent states of Europe could no longer aspire, after 1945, to international or imperial status of pre- World War II times. The continent had not been able to liberate itself from Fascism by its own efforts nor, unassisted, to keep Communism at bay (and still may not be able to do today). Later decades of the twentieth century saw increasing disbelief in the great nineteenth-century theories of history with their assumptions of progress and change, revolution and transformation. The current theory that supports the idea of a "European model" results in a mixture of Social and Christian Democratic legislation which regulates social intercourse and inter-state relations. Embracing everything from child-care to inter-state legal norms, this European approach has stood for more than just the bureaucratic practices of the European Union and its member states; by the beginning of the 21st century it had become a beacon and example for aspirant EU members and a global challenge to the United States.

The presence of Americans in Europe is an inheritance from the major wars and continues to the present day; anyone travelling across Europe over this period of time could, and still can, see the presence of the multitude of American military bases scattered across western Europe, their attendance on university and college campuses and through the lifestyle exemplified through social, digital and visual media. Conversely, it is also the case that Europeans travelling in the USA can re-asses their self-image as Europeans, and perhaps only fully realise their European identity when immersed in an 'American' culture.

The concept of 'European identity' varies considerably and can refer to overcoming the German past, French republicanism and enlightenment, British nationalism and exceptionalism or the many other characteristics that come under the general theme of national identities. Although the EU has not succeeded in luring individuals away from these national identities, it has been assumed that European identification can only come about by becoming European through acquiring EU membership. Schilde (2014, p.652) quotes Jacques Delors when speaking in the USA in 1999:

> We are doubtless rather too blase today to believe in the European dream as we did in the aftermath of the war. Nevertheless, Europe needs its dreams and without it, renaissance an reunification would be illusory.

Besides the many variables that contribute to any individual's sense of identity (national or European), expectation of personal or country benefits, ethnic, linguistic and minority status, it is education that is seen to play a vital role in developing the cognitive skills that can be assessed and the level of educational attainment that contributes to 'cognitive mobilisation' or the overall human capital in society.

This first section gives some insight into the commonalities and differences that educational developments have shown be it through local, regional, national or EU legislative means and to varying degrees takes in the perspective of those 70 years that have elapsed since the catastrophic collapse of Europe, east and west. A further analysis of those eastern European states that saw the phenomenon of European identity as positively identified in the Euro-15 as an aspiration for the fourteen countries that have joined the EU since 2013 (Corner, 2014). A similar analysis of educational change since 1989 for these eastern European countries is to be found in a sister volume to this (Corner, 2015).

Themes that are reviewed here include the regional and national contemporary educational structures and policies, research innovation and national trends in the light of their historical precedence, plus selected issues and problems such as historical and political trends and their effect of educational reform, systemic changes within the school and university systems, minority languages, regional change, and inter-cultural changes for indigenous and new immigrant populations.

Recent Evolution of National Education Systems in Western European Countries

One of the most persistent attempts to measure the efficiency of national education systems over the years has been the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) studies which has now had 6 major surveys up to 2014. One aspect of its work has been to relate efficiency indicators academic results variables with resource variables used in the production of educational services via schools and other social institutions. Some general conclusions from this work are that European countries are characterised by weak management, whilst American schools (mainly Latin American) by a weak endowment of resources, and the Asians by a high level of heterogeneity. Thieme et. al. (2012) argue that standardised tests such as PISA are a good indicator of educational achievement, but do not capture so easily the aspects quality of performance of educational system managers. That is, whilst PISA results give a reasonable picture of academic achievement at a particular time, they do not indicate:

a. how these results were achieved through educational provision before the age of 15 years when the tests are administered - in the primary schools, for example.
b. the link with achievement with upper secondary and higher educational achievement (as PISA surveys progress however,this is becoming more possible).
c. the environmental factors surrounding the school systems that can and do affect achievement but cannot be easily measured or changed.
d. the numbers of students tested was about 400,000 across the 57 countries which have approximately 20 million of 15 year-old students in total; the sampling ratio is thus about 1 in 50.

The table below ranks the pre-2003 EU countries (with the exception of France and the inclusion of the UK), along with the highest and lowest performers of the 54 countries surveyed across the world by the Organisation for Economic and Co-operation Development (OECD).

Table 1. Resource, result and environmental variables based on PISA data (2006)

Country	Desirable outputs		Inputs		Environmental
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Finland	546.9	555.8	0.513	0.641	0.256
Netherlands	506.7	527.8	0.310	-0.149	0.252
Ireland	517.3	504.9	0.035	0.299	-0.015
Belgium	500.9	515.4	0.022	0.799	0.173
Germany	494.9	509.7	0.448	-0.762	0.293
Austria	490.2	508.2	0.828	1.015	0.197
Sweden	507.3	502.8	0.593	0.574	0.237
United Kingdom	495.1	505.1	2.089	-0.677	0.191
Denmark	494.5	504.5	1.215	-0.040	0.309
Luxemburg	479.4	488.2	0.988	-0.043	0.088
Spain	460.8	484.2	0.234	0.954	-0.311
Portugal	472.3	468.5	-0.662	2.256	-0.617
Italy	468.5	468.5	0.275	1.170	-0.070
Greece	459.7	466.3	-0.296	1.769	-0.153
Korea	556.0	534.8	1.295	-0.211	-0.007
Kyrgystan	284.7	316.3	-2.556	-1.737	-0.659

1- Reading achievement
2- Average achievement in Maths and Sciences
3/4- Educational and Human Resources
5- Surrounding Environmental Factors

Source: https://pisa2006.acer.edu.au/

The overall conclusions from this analysis have been that Finland (along with South Korea) had optimal systems with high achievement and strong input of material and human resources. Most of the other western European countries suffered managerial problems to a large extent, whilst Portugal and Greece (along with many of the eastern European countries) required a greater input of resources as well. The lowest country by achievement (Kyrgystan) was judged to be able to make the greatest improvement by substantially increasing human, and thus teaching, resources. Korea and the east Asian countries have consistently demonstrated high achievement scores.

The genesis of the PISA surveys and the approach of OECD to the collection of information and data went through a number of stages, initially favouring individual country studies, and guided by the 'Education at a Glance' studies that OECD continues to issue. Trohler (2013) has argued that it was the intervention of political and education influences from the USA which favoured the collection of information based on comparable data and measurable dimensions of inputs and outputs such as financial resources and educational achievement - indicators providing empirical and objective data.

If custom and law define what is educationally allowable within a nation, the educational systems beyond one's national boundaries suggest what is educationally possible and the study of comparative education exists to examine these possibilities. Thus much has been made of the global reach of the PISA (the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)) testing programmes and the potential for comparisons in achievement in different systems around the world. It is equally possible, particularly for large educational systems such as the USA or Russia to do cross-regional comparisons which give indicators of variable success within a political doctrine. The situation for Europe is somewhere between the two - national systems which guard their educational provision with some care, and an organisation such as the EU which seeks to augment its reach through social policy and educational programmes.

This point can be illustrated with a comparison of the TIMSS and PISA results for Finland and the Flanders of Belgium which represent the two most successful systems from the perspective of their mathematics achievement of their students. Both are economically strong, have similar populations and have been subjected considerable foreign influences in their development. Nonetheless, a closer examination of the scores achieved over a period of 20 years show considerable variability, though almost always outcomes above the media scores.

The Finnish success is well-known and has led to a plethora of books and articles examining possible reasons (Neimi et.al., 2012). In acknowledging the perceived success of Finnish education that date back the position of education within Finnish society and the prior organization of school and teacher education from the 1970s, Rautiainen and Kostiainen (2014) point out that the challenges for the future throughout the educational system are huge and emanate from the rapidly changing society, disputes over the aims of education and the impact of Information, Communications and Technology (ICT) to the need for continuing critical evaluation of the system and the essential requirement of maintaining a vision within the educational process.

In Belgium, the French, German and Dutch speaking communities are autonomous in their educational policies, though required to follow overarching federal state structures. In a discussion of the situation for Flanders in the regionalised systems, Standeart (2014) argues that further inclusiveness is required to cater for all needs of young people in Flanders, and there is greater uncertainty and less reliability developing in the assessment of achievement in the schools. The role of PISA studies continues to influence the international ratings of educational systems generally and to fuel the debate on how effective and instructive the national ratings of achievement are in judging the relative qualities of educational systems of EU neighbours.

The structure and basic laws of the Greek education system are influenced by EU policy which inspires national developments on the education and training processes. Economic austerity, which is manifested in increased rates of youth unemployment and high levels of skills shortages and mismatch with the labour market, have generated new policy considerations and challenges for the Greek education system. In Ireland too, where the downturn of the economy in the mid-

2000s caused reforms to be eroded and even reversed. There are concerns around the teaching of mathematics, science and literacy which are under-performing from an international perspective plus the philosophical debates which underpin the educational system, including the place of religion in a pluralistic society.

Educational provision in Luxembourg shows that simple relationships between educational costs and performance are hard to find. A contemporary look at Luxembourg's educational system commonly addresses three issues which are used as corner-stones for discussing current changes and potential developments within this core European country: firstly, the internationally acclaimed trilingual education system; secondly, the poor outcomes of Luxembourg's schooling population in international standardized testing schemes; thirdly, the cost of Luxembourg's public education which ranks as the highest in Europe.

Vocational and Higher Education

Europe's influence on the vocational and higher systems from the 1970's to today's impact of the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes has especially been projected as a force for integration. Germany has traditionally provided a large proportion of its workforce with qualifications obtained in the dual vocational training system, a sector which has been institutionally divided from general academic schooling and higher education. However, due to the growing demand for abstract and codified knowledge but also given recent European reforms demanding greater educational mobility and lifelong learning, it has been a goal of the German policy makers to increase permeability between the different sectors of the educational system. The implementation of European educational guidelines has been significantly influenced by the specific mode of coordination in the German educational system and the national model of capitalism more generally.

Recent Educational Change in Southern and Eastern European Countries

For much of this second section the focus will be on those countries which joined the EU after 2003. These are predominantly those countries in the central and eastern parts of the subcontinent - Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Many of these countries had previously been under the educational and political influence of the Soviet Union and are now moving, hesitantly in some cases, through a series of transitional phases towards more western models. The relatively small, yet complex, educational systems of the Mediterranean islands, Cyprus and Malta, also formally joined the EU in 2004 and illustrate some of the potential educational opportunities and problems that arise when joining the European integration process. The many small islands scattered across the Mediterranean sea have long served as transitional links for populations of Eurasia and north African countries with a commitment to respond to the needs of the educational needs of migrants and refugees.

Taking the long view from the early 20th century, Ringer has made the point that the role of social and political conflict cannot be ignored in the history of educational development (Ringer, 1979). The demand for increased opportunities, for 'democratization', has been an important factor in the enlargement of European education systems since 1918 and in the growth of enrolments progressively through systems more generally. A reform consensus emerged during the inter-war years, the importance of which stemmed from the wide support it had from the centre and left of the political spectrum. Segmentation in education was generally disapproved of as tending to preserve privilege, whilst greater inclusiveness was seen as an aid to the economy and as a democratic measure. If the breakdown of class barriers, increase of educational opportunities for lower-class students, and merit rather than family background determined access to education, then inclusiveness and progressiveness ensued.

During the period of the Cold War, a social and economic revolution transformed the Balkans. The all-important shift to an urban, industrial - and now post-industrialised - society brought

fundamental changes to the nature of daily life and new challenges to domestic political elites. The ending of the Cold War has allowed the Eastern European states to participate in a different Europe, whose values are inscribed in its dominant cross-national institutions - the EU, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Council of Europe. It has also transformed them geo-politically since they now find themselves at the centre of a greatly expanded market which takes in the Black Sea, the former Soviet Union and Central Asia, offering possibilities for business across a vaster area than at any time since the Ottoman Empire. As well therefore as inheriting the educational patterns of the past they have to take on dilemmas familiar to most of the European countries: how to reconcile older patterns of educational provision, absorb the competitive pressures of global capitalism and mould the output of educational systems to build prosperous economies and allow social democracy to flourish (Mazower, 2000).

Education and Life Chances

The eastern European countries tend to illustrate an inheritance of Soviet models and philosophies of education and the countervailing forces for integration towards a European identity, as well as an enduring wish for regional autonomy and locally-based school administrations. The role of education as a determinant of individual life chances and as a predictor of young peoples' chances in the labour market and society are subjects of continual discussion for teachers and educationalists. It is a central part of the professional educationalists' existence to make the case for the importance of education 'from cradle to grave' and act as both a protagonist and critic.

The power of a national state, and the extent to which each interacts with others, are expressions of the historic, political and economic strands which infuse and inform an education system. The western European social democratic view has been to argue that, by relieving the individual of the hazards of poverty, by providing more opportunity, not least by means of education, for self-development and by limiting the arbitrary use of power by the holders of money and status, the margin of individual options has been widened. The liberal consensus is that perhaps the over-riding purpose of the educational system should be to help the individual to realise his and her potentialities, abilities, and interests as they develop from interaction amongst the agents of educational influences (Husen, 1979).

Writing in 1979, Grant interpreted the purpose of education in the U.S.S.R. as primarily a political tool for the construction of a communist society and quotes the Basic Law on Education (1974): 'The goal of public education in the U.S.S.R. is the preparation of a highly educated, well-rounded, physically healthy and active builders of communist society' (Grant 1979, p.25). Was it the case that in gaining membership of the European Community in 2003/4, the governments of Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia (and, coming from a different perspective, Cyprus and Malta) were taking on acceptance of western European values of social solidarity which finds political and legal expression in the welfare state and a programmatic commitment to free education from kindergarten through to university irrespective of political ideology? The question perhaps, especially at the present time, is whether this rhetoric of social solidarity can be translated into constitutional guarantees which can allow the European Constitution to gain traction of identity and identification for the peoples of the eastern European countries (Weiler, 2003).

The major trends being examined here are therefore the evolution of the school systems, the main factors that have shaped these systems in the past 30 years, the political changes during the late 1980's and the expansion of the European Union in May 2004 when it formally accepted a further 10 member states (eight of the then central and eastern Europe (CEE) countries with Bulgaria and Romania joining in January 2007. The view of the European Commission in Brussels was that this rapid enlargement enhanced the prospects of embracing the cultural heritage of a 'greater Europe'; at the same time, of course there was also an increase in cultural heterogeneity, social disparities and economic imbalances and their ensuing influences.

Diversity, States and Regions

Whilst on his trans-Europe walks following the Maritza river near Plovdiv in Bulgaria, Patrick Leigh Fermor relates some of the colours and complexities of cultures to be found in that region during the 1930s:

> There was a pinnacle mosque and suddenly Turks - sashed in red like the Bulgars, but they wore baggy black trousers and slippers and scarlet fezzes. I might also have seen some Kutzovlachs, or semi-nomadic Aruman shepherds speaking a low Latin Dialect laced with Slav and akin to Rumanian. The Pomaks are said to be Bulgarians converted to Islam after the Turkish conquest. On either side of the border live tiny pockets of Kizilbashi, red-headed and Shi'ite Muslims. A turn in the lane and all the shops would become Greek and the air would ring with this language (Fermor 2013, pp.28-29).

Today, cultural and linguistic diversity persists in many of the CEE countries (and may well increase in the light of the current migrations from Eurasia and northern Africa) but the major changes in educational provision have grown step-by-step with radical political and economic transformations; new patterns of education, new types of schools and new institutional structures have emerged. Whilst some changes have reached back to a pre-communist era, others have adopted Western European trends. For example, the structure of post-secondary education has been diversified, both through the introduction of secondary vocational programmes and the appearance of private institutions. Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia and Poland, having been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, inherited influences from the Austrian and German education and training systems, whilst Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia also introduced early selection in prestigiously academic gymnasia, along with a dual system of vocational training (Graf, 2015). The three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have been influenced by both German and Russian education traditions and have significant Russian minority populations. Continuing links with the Scandinavian countries from the 1990s have encouraged secondary-based vocational education and enhanced social welfare initiatives. Significant increases in the tertiary and private sectors are also common to these countries. As in the case of Finland, there have been attempts to explain the relatively high educational performance of a number of these smaller states, especially Estonia. The rapid application of new information technologies during the mid-1990s through free public internet access, paperless government, internet voting and introduction of computer laboratories, upgraded equipment and internet access in most schools enabled a leap-frog development in educational achievement. At the same time, the practice of using a teacher dedicated to the management and coordination of all of any one class's teachers has enabled the close monitoring of each child's progress in considerable detail (Stevick, 2015).

By the end of the Ceaucescu period less than 8% of secondary students were enrolled in theoretical (academic) education so that Romania too has had a relatively late education expansion with continuing Soviet influences remaining into the early years of the present century (Mocanu et. al., 2008). Bulgaria inherited a centralised economy and standardised education system from the Soviet era and found difficulties in the transition to a market-based economy, especially during the 1960s. Whilst open to European integration it had some reservation in fully exposing changes in general educational attainment to international gaze as illustrated by its tentative adoption of international achievement tests such as TIMSS and has lagged some other eastern countries with vocational education at lower-secondary level remaining low and ethnic groups achieving significantly lower educational levels (Kogan et.al., 2008). The Bulgarian system has nonetheless continued to react to democratic changes and the main educational law of 1991 established a new educational structure whilst the curriculum law of 1999 established general basic standards and grades in line with the social and cultural changes that have taken place of the past two decades (Bankov, 2015).

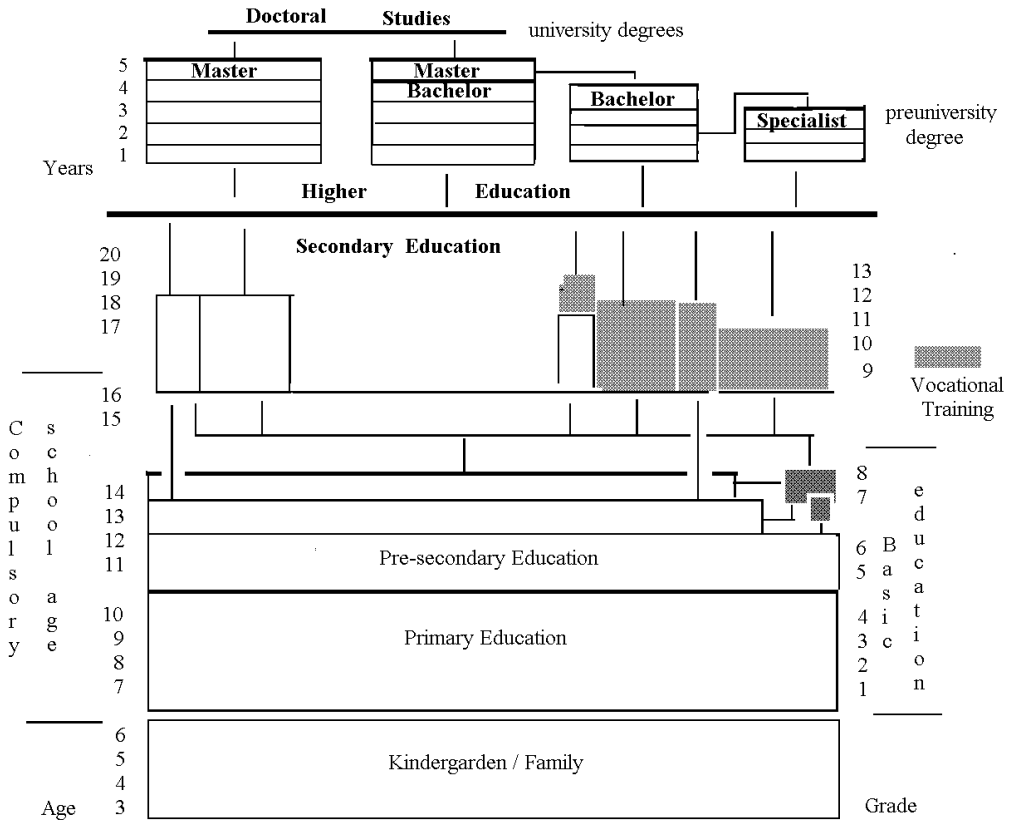

Figure 1: Structure of the educational system of Bulgaria (Ministry of Education, 2006)

Malta and Cyprus both officially joined the European Union in May 2004 as a part of a new enlargement. The smallest member of the community by size and population, Malta continues to debate the benefits and drawbacks of membership though educationalists see some benefits in the access to education in other European states, whilst others conclude that Malta is becoming a staging post for refugees seeking access to the European continent which membership has inadvertently encouraged. Borg and Mayo (2015) have particularly examined the role that international influences have had on education, how achievement is seen as both a passport and cogent element of life, and the growth of adult and higher education have been emphasised as fundamental elements for a competent workforce.

The accession or the Republic of Cyprus was again part of the 2004 enlargement, and had been anticipated as a potential force for the unification of the island (much in the same way as the potential for the alleviation of Belgian regionalism would be hopefully realised via the 1957 Treaty of Rome). In practice the negotiations between the Cypriot communities have been complicated by this accession and whilst, legally at least, EU regulations cover the whole of the island, they are enforceable only in the southern part. Whilst recent educational developments on the island are shaped by local, post-colonial anxieties, ideologies and histories as well as by Greek national culture and identity, the recent internationalisation of Cyprus with regards to membership of the EU, UNESCO and OECD have become the dominant factors in the last 20 years (Klerides and Philippou, 2015).

Enlargement and Integration or Dissipation and Confrontation?

Writing in 2007, Symecki has pointed to political economic and educational factors that drove the eastern and southern European countries to anticipate EU membership with enthusiasm.

> This enlargement must not be the last. It is difficult to define the limits to 'Europe'. And perhaps it is useless to discuss where Europe ends, while the new Member States are likely to become diligent and disciplined neophytes. If the old EU-15 becomes more active in fostering integration, the diligent converts will follow suit, If the path to be chosen by the EU is bold and far-reaching, then the marriage (of enlargement) could be perhaps be stormy and adventurous, but not boring (Symecki 2007, p. 410).

The current view is that there is a great deal of equivocation on the direction of educational change, and the role and functions of European integration for the countries concerned. To a certain extent enthusiasm for integration has waned and the sought-for economic drivers for monetary union remain elusive. Whilst the Lisbon-Copenhagen-Maastricht and Bologna processes have pushed educational integration a step further, particularly in Vocational Education and Higher Education, the sought after marriage of the EU15 to the EU13 is turning out to be stormy and adventurous, but the overall direction of travel is not easy to discern.

There are currently just over 500 million people in the EU countries; which compares with 325 million for the USA, frequently cited as a similar world region and friendly competitor. There will soon be over one billion teenagers on the planet and, as James Martin has pointed out, this 'Transition Generation' is likely to benefit from much 'free' education via internet forums, as well as within formal schooling; this is an area of educational change where the EU countries have yet to make an impact. On the grand scale much of future educational development could come from the deliberate transfer of knowledge of how to cure diseases, grow food and create employment; this process of educational transfer between the major regions of the world would enable populations to grow at a slower rate and reduce poverty (Martin, 2006).

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Book Review

Regulating Private Tutoring for Public Good: Policy Options for Supplementary Education in Asia By Mark Bray and Ora Kwo (2014), 93pp. ISBN: 978-988-17852-9-9, Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre.

In this monograph, Bray and Kwo provide a list of supplementary tutoring in 32 countries in Asia which indicates the scale and spread of this type of education in this region. Private tuition has been in existence in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan for some time, whereas in parts of Central and Northern Asia, it is now gaining momentum after being muted during the Soviet ear prior to 1991.

The monograph by Bray and Kwo also focus on regulating private tutoring for public good. The authors offer various policy options for governments and suggestions for implementation. Having shown that private tutoring is becoming a global phenomenon and a huge industry, they also discuss private tutoring participation by subjects and the mode of tutoring such as one-to-one either in the tutor's or the student's home, which is usually more expensive than other modes (i.e. small-group tutoring, large-classes in classrooms or lecture theatres and internet and broadcast tutoring).

The book starts with an introduction mapping out the conceptual framework and moves on to elaborate on what and who should be regulated. In chapter two, they discuss the scale and spread of private tuition, which has moved beyond Asia to become a global phenomenon. They then discuss the subjects and modes of providing tuition. The diversity of providers range from university students, mainstream school teachers, professional tutors to online tutoring. They also provide country examples, in terms of the magnitude of private tutoring.

In chapter three, the authors provide cogent reasons as to why private tutoring should be regulated. They begin with social inequalities brought about by socio-economic, racial/ ethnic, rural/ urban and gender differences. They also consider the backwash effect on regular schooling. They introduce the metaphor of corruption in situations where mainstream school teachers deliberately reduce the coverage of regular lessons to increase the demand for private tuition. Chapter four deals with the various requirements needed for companies providing private tutoring, regular teachers providing tutoring, students and other self-employed persons providing tutoring and Internet tutoring. The chapter cites the requirements needed for serving teachers in twenty-one countries.

In the succeeding chapter the authors state that for the implementation of private tutoring to be effective, the following factors have to be considered: (i) Deploying the necessary personnel, (ii) Educating the consumers for informed choices, (iii) Encouraging self-regulation and (iv) Building partnerships – with schools, teachers' unions, other branches of governments, community bodies and with media

The authors recommend that authorities should involve all the stakeholders for the pursuit of public good and conclude that a government's responsibility is not only to pay attention to the quality and impact of education of the public sector, but also to include the private sector to promote sound social and economic development. In the six chapters of the monograph, they trace the growth and expansion of the private tuition industry in the Asian region and discuss both its positive and negative effects on the regular school system. The authors make a strong case as to who and why the industry should be regulated. Country-specific examples in the region are provided and their experiences are discussed in depth. Also, Bray and Kwo provide suggestions as to how rules and regulations can be effectively implemented.

This monograph is a must for educational policy makers, academics, graduate research students, parents and members of the public who are interested in the subject of private tuition. The references are impressive. Readers are advised to source Bray's other publications on shadow education for further reference.

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Book Review

Literacy and Language in East Asia: Shifting Meanings, Values and Approaches. By Marilyn Kell and Peter Kell (Eds.) (2014), 165pp. ISBN: 978-981-4451-29-1, Singapore and New York: Springer.

'Literacy and Language in East Asia' is volume 24 of the Springer series 'Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects.' The volume emerged from an international research project on literacy indices, which both the authors were part of. Chapter 1 of the book sets out the 'central problem'; also the focus of the book: East Asian countries such as Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore, are ostensibly on top of global indices of literacy such as the Programme for International Students' Achievement (PISA) or the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), yet the governments and various stakeholders in these countries are anxious about the skills, capabilities and employability of their school graduands. Yet again, the East Asian region is one of tremendous variation in literacy, between countries such as Laos, Cambodia on one end of the spectrum to others like Hong Kong or South Korea on the other. Literacy inequalities persist within the region as well as for specific sub-populations comprising girls, minorities or other historically marginalised groups.

Chapters 2 to 4 frame the book's main arguments. Chapter 2 highlights conceptual problems in defining literacy as a multidimensional, socially and culturally-situated construct. It examines differing assumptions that international organisations like UNESCO or the OECD make about literacy in declarations like the UN General Assembly Declaration on the Literacy Decade (2002) or the UNESCO Literacy for All declaration (1990), and argues that the way literacy is defined invariably tends to privilege certain dominant forms of literacy in certain languages. Chapter 3 and 4 draw on these points, apply them to international high stakes tests like PISA, PIRLS or the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and problematise them. The authors argue that in much of Asia these standardised tests are valorised by the public within the context of strong "test-taking cultures". The uncritical influence of the ensemble of international literacy tests can thus potentially have 'toxic effects' on pedagogy, curriculum, local school reform movements and resource allocation, when high test scores are seen as a proxy for quality of education. Thus the politics of ranking schools and nations through league tables, within a larger discourse of accountability, has in many instances privileged the centralisation of curriculum control.

Chapters 5 and 6, taken together, examine the impact of global testing regimes in the East Asian region and beyond. Through a close analysis of league tables for three widely used tests, PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS, the book examines interestingly the effect that high scoring East Asian countries have had on the US, Europe and Australia. The discourses of high stakes testing regimes have been constructed as 'a race' against these Asian nations, what the authors call the 'Sputnik effect,' echoing the 'crisis' in the US in the late 1950s after the launch of the Soviet space rocket, the Sputnik. The book seeks to unlock the 'success' of some East Asian systems seeing them also rooted socio-culturally in the persistence of test-taking practices which manifest themselves in various forms, such as the *gaokao* or the college entrance examination in China, for instance, or in 'shadow education' an alternative schooling system of 'test-centric' cram schools which co-exists alongside mainstream schooling in Korea and in many other countries.

Chapter 7 contrasts the East Asian educational landscape with the Anglo-American one, especially in terms of "the positioning of the state with regard to education and the economy". East Asian countries on the whole are driven by strong statist policies in nation-building, modernisation and socio- economic development. By contrast, the post-1980s in the "Anglo-American world

saw a reduction in the influence of the state and a shift to a more deregulated economy (p.79)." These contrasts argue against simplistic comparisons between countries which are grounded in fundamentally different educational ethos and testing regimes. The chapter goes on to argue that even within East Asia there is considerable variation in each country's journey through processes of decolonisation, identity formation, national reconstruction, modernisation and development. This is illustrated in insightful case studies of education and schooling in Hong Kong, Macau, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Indonesia, all of which have been undergoing rapid and dynamic change particularly in the recent past, since the Second World War.

Chapter 8 then addresses the inequalities in economic development and in schooling within the East Asian region. Economically the region is home to the world's high income economies (including Japan, South Korea or Singapore) as well as some poor or low income economies (such as East Timor), with the majority in the middle income range. These inter-country comparisons are also discussed in light of the Human Development Index in East Asia. The chapter points to the disguised growing inequalities between these countries, as well as more crucially, within these countries; a fact often glossed over in popular media characterisations of the region in terms of the so-called 'East Asian miracle.' An important section of this chapter (pp.113-123) discusses inequalities in terms of the quality of life of young people in a region where the population pyramid comprises a large proportion of youth and young adults.

Chapter 9 builds on these arguments by problematising the connection between examination-driven systems and preparation for work. This is a crucial argument, but a curious feature of this chapter is that the authors rely largely (see pp.125-134) on generic employability skills seen in terms of the literature on graduate attributes of Australian universities. Australia is obviously not part of the East Asian region, and certainly has not been treated as such in the rest of the book. The authors claim on p.125 that "many of the arguments that were expressed in Australia have resonance with those that are emergent in East Asia" but cite no evidence for this claim. There are on-going efforts by many Higher Education Quality Assurance organisations in the East Asian region – Thailand and Malaysia being cases in point – that have data on graduate student attributes of their universities, and this could have been drawn on to buttress the important arguments in this chapter.

The final chapter argues that literacy within the East Asian region as a whole needs to be seen in terms of the processes of globalisation, the socio-political and socio-cultural changes in Asia, and that governments and various stakeholders in the region need to take these into account in policy formulation. Certainly, this is a useful counterpoint to the view to literacy that the book has largely dealt with, defined in terms of global tests of literacy which tends to predominate the economic and development literature emanating from policy reports of the OECD, for instance. The impact of the social media, new technologies as well as its influence on literacy in alternative public and private social spaces is evident in the new workplaces and civil society – not just formal education, and thus need to be taken into account in a broader socially relevant policy formulation and deliberations on literacy development in a dynamic East Asia. Here the authors argue that cognizance must be taken of notions of critical literacy and multiliteracies rather than functional literacy with a vocational focus. This is where the book's subtitle 'shifting meaning, values and approaches' plays out. A final point to note is that with the main title of the book being, 'Literacy and Language in East Asia: in multi- and plurilingual East Asia', one would have expected to find a discussion on the impact of the regions' many languages – global, regional, national and local – on literacy in the region. Still, the book as a whole offers powerful insights on literacy in a dynamic region and makes a valuable contribution to fields such as comparative education, literacy studies and sociolinguistics.

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