National Report Summary Education in Cambodia



Findings from Cambodia's experience in PISA for Development



BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES



This report was developed by Cambodia jointly with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which assisted in the design of the report and provided input, guidance and assistance in its development. The report is published under the responsibility of Cambodia and does not necessarily represent the official views of the OECD or its Member countries.

Please cite this publication as:

MoEYS (2018). Education in Cambodia: Findings from Cambodia's experience in PISA for Development. Phnom Penh: Author.

Cover photo: Education Prosperity Framework by Willms (2018) used for PISA-D Assessment and Analytical Framework

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Foreword

The Ministry of Education's purpose is to shape an education system for our country that delivers equitable and excellent outcomes for all of our children and young people. A strong focus on student learning and well-being underpins all our policy and the services we provide.

It is to help us achieve our Ministry's purpose that we joined the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment for Development, PISA-D. This programme aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by assessing the extent to which 15-year-old students, near the end of their basic education, have acquired key knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in modern societies. Cambodia's participation in PISA-D demonstrates the importance we place on the educational achievement of our children and young people.

In this report, a team of Ministry of Education officials has collated and analysed the information from our participation in PISA-D so that it can be used to benefit the education sector and, therefore, the children in our education system. This report contributes sound data, information and analysis for work undertaken to support the Government's existing education policies and our education policies, strategies and programmes in the future. The report also brings to bear on our education challenges the experiences of other countries of similar size and economic status, including some from our own region. This opportunity for international comparison and international learning is an extremely valuable aspect of our participation in PISA-D.

The PISA-D assessment focuses on the core school subjects of reading, mathematics and science, and does not just ascertain whether students can reproduce knowledge; it also examines how well students can extrapolate from what they have learned and can apply that knowledge in unfamiliar settings, both in and outside of school. This information about students' capacities in these three domains is combined with background data that enable us to look at the relationships between student achievement and contextual factors, such as students' health and well-being and their socio-economic backgrounds, students' attitudes to school and learning, the learning environment, quality of instruction, school resources, learning time, family and community support.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport intends to respond fully to the findings and messages contained in this report and to follow up the suggestions regarding effective interventions that are set out in the report. The effective interventions highlighted in this report include actions designed to:

- establish strong foundations for success and improving educational outcomes;
- improve the allocation of resources in education;
- improve the school environment;
- improve the quality of instruction; and
- strengthen family and community support for education.

Results from PISA-D for Cambodia will be disseminated widely to all stakeholders since success in education relies on many people and organisations across the community working together for the benefit of children and young people, especially to ensure Cambodia is ready for PISA 2021 and can achieve botter in the test and fully respond to a global education trend.

Phnom Penh, 23 December 2018 Amstry of Education, Youth and Sport Dr. HANG CHUON NARON

Introduction

Cambodia participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment for Development (PISA-D) in 2016 with other 8 members (Ecuador, Bhutan, Guatemala, Zambia, Senegal, Paraguay, Honduras and Panama). PISA-D was jointly initiated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and several development partners in order to encourage, provide capacity building to and enable the PISA-D members, which are low and middle income countries, to be ready for officially participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA¹) in 2021 or for implementing large-scale student assessments.

PISA-D is a one-off pilot project that aims to make the assessment more accessible and relevant to a wider range of countries. The project is also a contribution to the monitoring of international educational targets related to the Education SDG, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 as part of the Agenda for Sustainable Development.

PISA-D to a large extent follows the PISA's assessment format, which is a triennial international survey that aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing knowledge and skills of 15-year-old students, who are studying in 7th grade or above. PISA-D assesses the extent to which 15-year-old students, near the end of their basic education, have acquired key knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in modern societies. The assessment focuses on the core school subjects of science, reading and mathematics and does not just ascertain whether students can reproduce knowledge but also examines how well students can extrapolate from what they have learned and can apply that knowledge in unfamiliar settings, both in and outside of school.

PISA-D is a tool for measuring global competency of 15-year-old students in terms of knowledge and skills, and their capacity of applying those knowledge and skills in real-life situations. The tool is not based on any member country's curriculum. It is a competency-based assessment that assesses the cumulative competence of students at the end of their basic education. The modal grade for PISA-D students is grade 10, so the analysis in PISA-D will use grade 10 as a basis for the assessment to find out whether the students' educational attainment and achievement meet this age-based performance.

The Education Quality Assurance Department (EQAD) of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) is a body directly implementing the PISA-D for Cambodia. The assessment included 5162 students aged 15 (grades 7 to 12) and 4263 teachers from 170 schools in the 25 capital/provinces. The selection was scientifically conducted through a two-stage random sampling method to ensure that the student and school samples represent all students and schools across Cambodia. The students selected had to sit a 2-hour cognitive test, then they were required to complete a contextual questionnaire about their demographic characteristics, teaching and learning, well-being, attitude toward school and so on. School principals and teachers were also required to fill in their respective questionnaire related to the school and community environments.

¹ PISA is an international student assessment program conducted every three years. PISA was developed by OECD in 1997, currently consisting of 70 member countries. The low, middle and high-income countries use the results from this test to measures 15-year-old students in their countries, who are studying from grade 7 to 12 in the domains of reading, mathematics, science and other soft skills in line with the global education context. The 8th PISA will be conducted in 2021.

Objectives of the PISA-D

The main objectives of the PISA-D are as follows:

- 1. Assess the 15-year-old students' readiness for their adulthood;
- 2. Assess the students' competence in mathematics, reading and science;
- 3. Collect information related to the characteristics of students, families, teachers, schools and communities to reflect on each country's education system.

Why attends the PISA-D

The participation in PISA-D will be beneficial to Cambodia and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport in the following ways:

- 1. To show how the 15-year-old students are ready for their departure from schools;
- 2. To identify which areas of the schools should be improved by the national education system and the Royal Government in a timely manner;
- To compare the school environment and student learning with other PISA-D member countries;
- 4. To enable Cambodia to have an international student assessment system and appear in the universal education framework;
- 5. To show key measures for developing human resources in accordance with the 2030 and 2050 visions and the Rectangular Strategy Phase 4 of the Royal Government;
- 6. To improve the national student assessment system through the techniques and experiences from the PISA-D and be ready for the main PISA in 2021;
- 7. To improve the shortcomings of curriculum, teaching methods and student learning in Cambodia, particularly for students in secondary education;
- 8. To obtain experiences in successfully managing the schools to improve the student performance and to respond to the growing needs for knowledge and the regional and global market economy.

Analytical framework

PISA-D uses the Education Prosperity model (Willms, 2015) as an overarching analytical framework, while also taking into account the goals of PISA-D, lessons from past PISA cycles and other international studies, recommendations from research literature and the priorities of the participating countries.

Education prosperity is a life-course approach that identifies a key set of outcomes, called "Prosperity Outcomes", for six key stages of development, covering the period from conception to adolescence, and a set of family, institutional and community factors, called "Foundations for Success", which drive these outcomes. When applied to PISA-D, the relevant outcomes and foundations correspond to the fifth stage of the Educational Prosperity framework, late primary and lower secondary (ages 10 to 15). The four Prosperity Outcomes at this stage are educational attainment, academic performance, health and well-being, and attitudes towards school and learning. The model further identifies five Foundations for

Success: inclusive environments, quality instruction, learning time, material resources, and family and community support. These elements of the framework are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. PISA-D analytical framework

The PISA-D national report is organised according to the framework discussed above. It distinguishes four core outcomes of education at age 15: student attainment; achievement in key subjects; subjective health and well-being; and attitudes towards school and learning.

Through the measure of proficiency in the PISA-D test, this report provides a rigorous assessment of what students have learned. This measure is based on frameworks for assessing reading, mathematics, and science literacy in PISA, which were enhanced to provide more detail on foundational knowledge and skills in each subject. The link with the PISA scales enables the results to be comparable with international PISA results. In addition, the information collected for sampling operations in PISA provides comparative indicators about the attainment of 15-year-old youth in participating countries. Finally, self-report measures based on questionnaires can be used to indicate the level of health and well-being, as how engaged students are with school and with learning.

The underlying framework also identifies, based on international research, key aspects of the school, family, and community environment and important educational resources that are strongly associated with educational success. The factors are considered to be the foundations for success in any educational system. The presence of these resources and characteristics of the learning environment in the life of 15-year-olds is measured through questionnaires administered to participating students and children, but also through information collected from teachers, from school principals and from national sources of statistical information.

Key Results

This report summary shows Cambodia's key results from the participation in PISA-D. Based on the PISA-D analytical framework as presented above, results are divided into 5 major sections as follows:

Education attainment

PISA-D results showed that Cambodian 15-year-old students studying from grade 7 to 12 constitute 28.1% of the total population of 15-year-olds. This result suggests that approximately 72% of the Cambodian youth have dropped out of school or delayed their schooling (they are studying at grade below 7). The Cambodia's education context is comparable to those of Senegal and Zambia, in which most of the youth are out of school. Among the PISA-D countries, Ecuador has the highest rate of 15-year-old students studying at grade 7 to 12 (61%) followed by Paraguay (56%), Guatemala (47%) and Honduras (41%).



Figure 2: Percentage of students aged 15 at grade 7 or above

Source: PISA-D databases

Note: "The total population of 15-year-olds in Paraguay reported in this table may be significantly overestimated and subject to future revision (see section "Special cases" in the forthcoming PISA for Development Technical Report). As a result, the percentage of 15-year-olds covered by the PISA sample (Coverage index 3) may be significantly under-estimated."

The data also suggests that roughly 40% of Cambodian 15-year-old students, particularly among boys, were one or more years behind track, meaning that at age 15 they are still in grade 7, 8 or 9, suggesting that these students are more likely to be grade repeaters or slow learners. Their failure to study at the expected grade is a major issue in the education system, adversely impacting the quality and equity in education.

Cambodian 15-year-old students studying from grade 7 to 12 constitute 28.1% of the total population of 15-year-olds, meaning that the remaining Cambodian youth have dropped out of school or delayed their schooling (they are studying at grade below 7). In Cambodia, about 29.1% of students reported that they had repeated a grade at least once in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary school. This grade repetition rate is not far different from that of PISA-D countries on average, but it is higher than OECD countries (12%) and ASEAN countries (13%), particularly higher than Indonesia (16%), Thailand (6%), and Summary

Vietnam (7%), while the countries with high PISA scores such as Singapore, South Korea, and Finland have the grade repetition rate of less than 5%. Voluminous studies suggest that grade repetition does not bring about positive results to students. In contrast, grade repetition will result in a higher cost of education since these students are slow learners, class size will increase, and students are more likely to drop out of school. Also, it delays students' entry into the labor market. Other reports, including this PISA-D report, suggest that the grade repeaters are more likely to get lower learning outcomes than the non-grade repeaters.

Academic performance

PISA-D results showed that in Cambodia 15-yearold students outperformed those in Senegal and Zambia in all subjects and obtained a comparable academic performance in mathematics to those in other PISA-D countries (Cambodia got 325 scores, while PISA-D average was 324 scores). However, Cambodian 15-year-old students had significantly lower performances in reading and science than those in PISA-D member countries and ASEAN countries (Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, and

Only 8% of the 15-year-old students in Cambodia achieved a minimum proficiency level (level 2) or higher in reading, and roughly 10% achieved a minimum proficiency level or higher in mathematics. These students have met the goal of SDG 4.

Singapore). Their performance was in particular lower than those in OECD member countries. Cambodian students obtained 321 scores in reading and 330 in science out of the roughly 700 total scores. On average, students in the PISA-D member countries obtained 346 scores in reading and 349 in science. Meanwhile, 15-year-old students in ASEAN countries obtained 430 in reading and 447 in science; while on average students in OECD member countries obtained solution about 490 scores in all subjects, equivalent to level 3 of the 6 PISA proficiency levels.

The score at 410 or above suggests that the students have a minimum proficiency level (level 2) in line with the competency level that is the goal of the Education SDG 4. *Level 2 is the baseline competency level of the 6 levels of PISA-D or PISA.* At this level, students are able to discover key information in reading articles or statistic tables, easily understand key ideas of articles despite little ideas of the article (they are able to make a conclusion), make a comparison and reflect on the article contents in the real world. In the domain of mathematics, students are able to apply general theories or mathematical formulas, resolve problems or calculate numbers in the work or real-life situation context, such as exchange rates, speed or distance, and explain or interpret the results found. In the domain of science, students are able to apply the contents and procedural knowledge, explain or interpret the data and phenomena in nature or real-life situations, such as friction, gravity, and the benefits of muscle or blood vessel exercise.

In Cambodia, 8% of the 15-year-old students achieved a minimum proficiency level (level 2) or higher in reading, and roughly 10% achieved a minimum proficiency level or higher in

mathematics. However, in science, only 5% achieved this level. These students had the universal competency level that meets the Education Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4). However, Cambodian education needs to invest more efforts given that about 90% of the 15-year-old students still had a below basic competency level (below level 2) compared to those in PISA-D countries (72%), ASEAN (43%) and OECD (21%). Effective and long-term reforms will enable Cambodian 15-year-old students to rapidly obtain better results because around 35% of Cambodian students were in the competency level 1A (the highest of level 1) in reading and roughly 42% of them were in the competency level 1A (the highest of level 1) in science.



Figure 3: Percentages of students aged 15 reaching the minimum proficiency level

The low academic performance among 15-year-old students in Cambodia on the PISA-D assessment suggests that much has to be done in lower grades to ensure they have a minimum knowledge and skills to be ready to perform better in secondary education given that the PISA-D assessment is a competency-based assessment model that measures cumulative knowledge and skills students are supposed to gain across grades. In this regard, Cambodia needs to put more efforts on student learning from primary to secondary levels; the emphasis is to be on the application of knowledge and skills real-life situations, in particular reading skills and mathematic problem-solving skills rather than only on the contents of textbooks. The teaching requires that students understand the contents and are able to practically apply them, particularly to link them with real-life situations and work contexts; for instance, the students should be able to read information or statistics tables and discover key information or ideas in the texts by themselves.

Source: PISA 2015 and PISA-D databases

Students of private schools significantly outperformed students of public schools in reading and mathematics, the equivalent of about two years of schooling. On the equality side, girls obtained higher scores than boys in reading by 17 score-points and by 4 score-points in science. Conversely, boys and girls obtained comparable scores in mathematics. Students in urban schools achieved better scores than those in rural schools in reading by 42 score-points and by

51 score-points in mathematics. Considering the PISA-D context, this gap is higher than the expected scores students gain per school year. This means that grade 10 students in rural schools have a competence comparable to that of grade 9 students in urban schools.

The analysis also suggests that student achievement was more likely associated with their socio-economic status. Socio-economically advantaged students were about four times more likely than socio-economically disadvantaged students to obtain higher scores or a minimum proficiency level (level 2) in mathematics. These results reflect the inequity in Cambodia's education, particularly between the advantaged and disadvantaged students, which is normally related to educational services provided at public and private schools. The data shows that students of private schools significantly outperformed students of public schools in reading and mathematics, the equivalent of about two years of schooling. This substantial gap reflects that students in public schools lag behind their peers in private schools in terms of knowledge and skills about two years of schooling, meaning that grade 10 students in the former school system can have comparable knowledge and skills to grade 8 students in the latter one.



Figure 4: Public and private school comparison

Source: PISA-D databases

Health, well-being and attitude toward school and learning

About 64% of the 15-year-old students in Cambodia reported that they were satisfied with their life and had good or fair health. The data from the student questionnaire suggests that a high rate of Cambodian students were satisfied with their life and had a positive attitude

toward their schools and learning compared to students in the PISA-D countries and those in the OECD and ASEAN member countries. However, Cambodian 15-year-old students seemed to have several issues that the schools should pay attention to, such as health issues.

Girls were more likely than boys to report feeling sad or depressed at least once a week.

About 34% of students reported that they were hungry because they had inadequate food at least once a month. Girls were also more likely than boys to report feeling sad or depressed at least once a week (46% of girls so reported, compared to only 37% of boys).

Foundation for success: Resources invested in education

The comparative results across countries suggest that the expenditure in Cambodian education sector was relatively low. The national data shows that Cambodia spent around 2.7% of its GDP on education, representing 18.3% of the total public expenditure. In the global education context, the expense at this rate is a challenge for sustainable development. The OECD's research has found that to achieve the Education SDG 4, all developing countries

Cambodia spent around 2.7% of its GDP on education, representing 18.3% of the total public expenditure. In the global education context, the expense at this rate is a challenge for sustainable development. should increase their education expenditure to at least 6% of their GDP. Vietnam and Thailand spend between 6% and 7% of their GDP. The increased expenses on education were found to link to the increase in the scores of PISA 2012 and PISA 2015 in all subjects. In Cambodia, the total expenditure per student aged between 6 and 15 is roughly 3087 dollars,

which is very far lower than that of PISA-D member countries, particularly Ecuador and Paraguay where the expenditure per student is about 4 to 5 times higher than that of Cambodia, while Senegal and Guatemala spend about 2 times more than Cambodia does.



Figure 4: Spending per student and math performance

Average spending per student from the age of 6 to 15 (in thousands USD, PPP, 2013)

Source: PISA 2015 and PISA-D databases

In Cambodia the average number of students per class was 45, which is higher than ASEAN countries (38) and the OECD countries (26), particularly higher than PISA-D member countries (36). The result also suggests that the student-teacher ratio at the secondary school level in Cambodia was relatively high (about 35). In the OECD member countries, the student-teacher ratio at the secondary school level was 13 on average while that in ASEAN countries was 19. This results suggests that the deployment of teachers in Cambodia still faces challenges, particularly in rural schools where the student-teacher ratio is higher than that in urban schools. The analysis also suggests that the rural teachers had less experience than urban teachers did. This result reflects the situation of teacher deployment in Cambodia, whereby new teachers are mostly sent to rural schools which are poor or under-resourced. Most teachers in Cambodia also had low qualifications (no bachelor's degree) compared to those in PISA-D member countries.

Foundation for success: School and community environments

PISA-D results for Cambodia suggest that about 94% of students felt positive toward school and learning; 96% of them reported that they did not have any concerns about their safety at school despite their statements

In Cambodia, a large majority of students (94%) feel that they belong at school.

that their schools had some delinquents and that they had concerns about their safety while travelling to schools. Cambodian students were well-disciplined in class; they listened to their teachers, did classwork, or did not make noise, the situation of which was better than that in PISA-D or OECD member countries.

Moreover, about 90% students reported a positive perception toward teachers, stating that their teachers paid attention to student's health and gave students chances to share their opinions in the class. This result reveals that Cambodian students have positive feelings toward their learning and the schools do not act very discriminatorily. The implementation of "one commune, one junior high school policy" seems to have fruitful results given the fact that most students reported that they did not have problems with school distance.

However, the analysis reveals that while Cambodian students are satisfied with their schooling, teaching quality is still a problem. The PISA-D data suggests that the loss of learning

50% of students report that they arrive late for school at least once in the two weeks before the PISA-D assessment...61% of students are in schools where more than one in five students reported that a teacher did not come for class during the two weeks prior to the PISA test. time due to the teachers and students coming late to schools is the main problem across schools in Cambodia. 50% of students report that they arrive late for school at least once in the two weeks before the PISA-D assessment. The analysis also suggests that about 72% of 15-year-old students in Cambodia are studying at schools where the teachers come late to school; 61% of students are in schools where more than one in five students reported that a teacher did not come for class

during the two weeks prior to the PISA test. This result reflects school management problems in Cambodia, a factor causing students to come to school late and affecting teaching quality and student learning.

The total instructional time in Cambodia (from primary to lower secondary school) is comparable to that in some top-performing countries in PISA, such as South Korea, Macau, Japan and Singapore. This information further suggests that learning time is not a factor that explains the low academic performance among Cambodian students. In contrast, the loss of learning time and teaching quality are the major factors.

The PISA-D data also suggests that the participation of parents and community in education remains low, particularly in regard to the meeting between teachers and parents and their monitoring of student learning. Only 43% of students report that they regularly

Only 43% of students report that they regularly discuss with their parents how well they are doing at school.

discuss with their parents how well they are doing at school. This result suggests that schools are completely in charge of education in Cambodia, putting schools at a further distance from the community.

Key recommendations

Per the results above, we can see that Cambodian 15-year-old students still have limited competency. These results are consistent with those of the national assessments in Cambodia. However, the analysis shows that Cambodian students have high life satisfaction and positive attitudes toward schools when they have a chance to attend schools. Students also show high respect to their teachers and are more disciplined than those from the PISA-D countries. These factors reveal that the students are eager to learn but the schools have not provided quality education services and met the global competence requirements such as the application of knowledge and skills in real-life situations and at the workplace. However, Cambodia is able to improve the education system because about 35% to 42% of students have the proficiency level at level 1A in reading and science which is the highest of PISA-D's level 1. This result suggests that Cambodia is able to achieve the proficiency level 2 of PISA, which is the basic competency level and goal of the Education SDG 4 through the implementation of the following policies or intervention tactics:

- Reduce grade repetition, particularly among boys through the establishment of support programs for slow or poor learners, a peer support program or a study club and through the encouragement of teachers to pay more attention to poor students by giving them more exercises or practices. The school principals and homeroom teachers should identify and observe slow or poor learners on a monthly basis. The Reduction of grade repetition is a major factor in reducing school dropout. It is now a good time for Cambodia to develop its economy because about two thirds of its population are aged under 30. These young people will become a driving force in economic and social development. Should they have problems in their study in a low grade, such as grade repetition, they will become slow learners or possibly drop out of school. In such a situation, Cambodia will face a human resource shortage and has to wait for young people for at least one more generation to develop its economy and society.
- Ensure quality Learning time (no loss of learning time and students are actually learning) through strengthening school discipline and school management because

the PISA-D results reveals that Cambodia has lost a lot of learning time due to the fact that both teachers and students frequently come late to school and are absent. Moreover, teachers should encourage their students to practice competency-based exercises more (particularly focusing on different cognitive levels/bloom taxonomy), and additional research-based exercises or homework. Students have to know how self-study and do not cheat in a monthly or semester exam. Schools and teachers should engage the community and in particular parents in the monitoring of their children's learning on a regular basis through the promotion of monthly, quarterly or semi-annual meetings between the teachers and parents.

- Strengthen "school standards" to ensure effective school management. Proper implementation of school standards is a key factor for monitoring the performance of schools that are facing challenges or are in a disadvantaged condition to ensure an easy allocation of resources, such as deployment of teachers and allocation of budget, and help schools to be able to conduct self-assessment and learn from each other, in particular within their school clusters. Most of successful countries in PISA often focus attention on disadvantaged schools (in poor or needy or rural areas) in the allocation of resources to meet their actual needs.
- Improve the quality of instruction by improving teacher education and strengthening the concept- and competency-based curriculum in teacher education and teaching methods (inductive teaching) to enable students to learn independently and to have high critical thinking. Teacher quality is a key factor for promoting student competency, including knowledge, skills and attitudes that meet the national, regional and international labor markets.
- Additional investment in the kindergarten and basic education to improve students' universal basic skills because they are required to have basic competency in reading and mathematics, such as proficient reading with critical thinking, the competency in explaining the mathematical or scientific theories and solving mathematical problems by linking it to their daily life in order to become an effective driving force in the society and prepare themselves for PISA 2021. To achieve the goals above, the ministry should develop or additionally work on concept- and competency-based textbooks and align it with teacher education, teaching methods and classroom-based assessment. Doing so will support the implementation of the new curriculum and enable Cambodian students to have the universal competency in line with the global education context and the PISA.

Education in Cambodia Findings from Cambodia's experience in PISA for Development

Cambodia's participation in the Programme for International Student Assessment for Development (PISA-D) is one of remarkable growth and achievement in its education system. Over the past ten years, efforts to develop a comprehensive student assessment system have enabled the country to gauge student learning and to formulate policies for education improvement in terms of both quality and equity. Nonetheless, student assessment in an international perspective plays a key role in monitoring student learning progress and achievement in the midst of globalization and the pressing need of 21st century skills.

This report is a result of collaborative work between Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the OECD, aiming to identify and address education issues at policy and school levels in Cambodia. It examines multifaceted factors that affect students' educational attainment, academic performance, health and well-being, and attitudes towards school and learning and suggests specific policy options that directly foster student learning. The report also provides an in-depth analysis of the experience of other high-performing countries, ASEAN countries and the PISA-D countries.

Contents

Chapter 1. Cambodia in PISA-D

- Chapter 2. Achievement and attainment outcomes at age 15 in Cambodia
- Chapter 3. Health, well-being, and attitudes toward school and learning at age 15 in Cambodia
- Chapter 4. Foundations for success in Cambodia: Resources invested in education
- Chapter 5. Foundations for success in Cambodia: The school and community environment
- Chapter 6. Looking forward: Policy options for Cambodia