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Article

A Review of the Local Life Skill Program and Role of Student Councils in Program Implementation

Lay Sovichea^{1*}, Souk Sophal², and Sin Navy³

¹²³Department of Policy, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport

*Corresponding author's email: sovichea_lay@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Knowing the importance of life skill education (LSE), a wide range of countries have mandated life skill education as a compulsory subject in their national curriculum. A local life skill program is adopted as one of the core subjects in the School Curriculum Framework 2016. The ministry of education, youth, and sport has paid great attention to the LSE in schools by developing a series of LSE policy frameworks and LSE implementation guidelines, aiming to educate students mainly from 4th to 12th grade. The goal of life skill learning is to improve of the well-being of children and adults, as well as teachers; therefore, they should be trained in the basic skills and soft skills that are necessary for effective living. The study used a mixed approach. The survey questionnaires and semi-structural interview questions were jointly developed by consulting with personnel from key departments such as the Department of Curriculum Development (DCD), the Vocational Orientation Department (VOD), the Provincial Office of Education (POE), and UNICEF development partners, ensuring that the collected data were insightfully reflective of the real context of the implementation program before data collection. Of the five provinces, including Takeo, Kompot, Siem Reap, Battambang, and Steng Treng, six lower secondary schools in each province, strongly supported by the UNICEF development partners in the LSE subject, were chosen for study. The result showed that the students were at a satisfactory level in local life skills; they thought that this subject was very beneficial for both their daily lives and their future. Amongst the topic selections for LSE learning in school, agriculture was still the most popular, followed by drug addiction, healthcare, environment, and climate change, respectively. The majority of teachers, accounting for 93%, believed that climate change was very important for integration into local life skill education. Regarding the teaching method for local life skills, a large number of students faced several major constraints particularly in the research step when the teacher applied a six-step process of learning. It was also identified that the student council has played a vital role in local life skill education. In addition, school peer support was of value and of

great benefit in strengthening the capacity of school leadership in local life skill education and in providing scalability.

Keywords: *Life skill, Basic skill, Soft skills, Career skill, Student council, 21st Century Skill*

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1. Introduction

Education can drive children to achieve their dreams and lead fulfilling lives. Having skills is a crucial thing in any young person's life and it is also a game-changer in the context of economics, education, and overall development in any developing country. Skills enhancement is a key resource for providing and securing jobs, especially for youth, and for adapting to technological change. In today's world, children need to develop both hard and soft skills, ensuring that they are more adaptable and resilient in living harmoniously in an ever-changing society; they also need to cope with many emerging issues, including climate change, pandemics, poverty, unemployment, and lack of job security as well as social, emotional, physical and psychological issues, due to industrialization, globalization, and the fast development of science and technology. Knowing the importance of life skill education (LSE), a wide range of countries have mandated life skill education as a compulsory element in their curriculum, and have various definitions according to their individual educational contexts (Prajapati, 2017). Sabonati (2015) defined life skills as a group of mental, social, and interpersonal skills that can help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop their coping and self-management skills all within a healthy and productive life. The goal of life skill learning is to improve the well-being of children and adults as well as teachers; therefore, they should be trained in the basic skills which are necessary for effective living. Four main areas of necessary competencies have been identified: 1) identity development or purpose in life, 2) problem-solving or decision-making, 3) interpersonal relationships, and 4) physical health (Zipora Shechtman et al., 2015). UNICEF (2003) categorizes life skills into three general categories with sub-categories which are presented as follows: 1) communication and interpersonal relationship skills including interpersonal relationships, negotiating skills, empathy, cooperation, group work, and advocating skills. 2) creative skills and critical thinking skills including problem-solving and decision-making. and 3) coping skills and personal management skills including the skills to manage emotions and stress management skills. In another categorization of life skills by UNICEF (2007), life skills are divided into 10 components: Self-awareness, Empathy skills, Effective communication skills, Interpersonal skills, Coping skills, Emotional management skills, Problem-Solving skills, Decision-making skills, Creative thinking skills, Critical thinking skills, and are incorporated into twelve components of soft skills in the local life skill (LLS) syllabus [Figure 1] (MoEYS, 2019). To realize the success of the LSE program, teachers must be competent, skillful, and personable (self-confidence) (Gazda et al., 2001). As suggested, teachers need at least two years of training before they can master LSE (Hord et al., 1987) because that training would help teachers be confident in influencing students' functioning and achievements.

Teachers who have high self-confidence are more motivated to help students who show learning or behavior difficulties and are more optimistic, democratic, and humanistic in classroom management than teachers with low self-confidence (Zipora Shechtman et al., 2015).

Taking into account the essential contribution of life skills to children's growth and development, life skill education (LSE) has been integrated into the national core curriculum in primary and secondary schools in 145 countries and it is a compulsory subject in 70 countries, including Cambodia (UNICEF, 2012). Currently, there are 185 schools (43 primary schools, 142 secondary schools) in five provinces of Cambodia with the support of UNICEF implementing a local life skill program with a new teaching method – problem-based learning ‘PBL’ (Jesse, 2021). Evidence has shown that life skills education (LSE) enhances critical thinking abilities which directly impact people’s daily lives, careers, and future planning (Albertyn, 2004), increases mental and physical health, pro-social behavior, and decreases behavioral and social problems and self-destructive behaviors (Ramesh and Farshad, 2004), improves interpersonal relationships and reduces aggression and behavioral problems (Smith, 2004), and prevents a wide range of issues and stress such as alcoholism, sexual abuse, smoking anti-social acts, substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, violence, and bullying, whilst, in turn, it promotes self-confidence and self-esteem among adolescents (Puspakumarage, 2013). Life skill education is regarded as critical for meeting the needs of children and young people growing up in the new era of globalization and increased interconnectedness. Young people increasingly require the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to navigate the world of work, be active in their local communities, and become global citizens. Hence, LSE education will help school-aged children live more fulfilling lives.

In the context of Cambodian education, the local life skill program has been adopted as one of the core subjects in the School Curriculum Framework 2016. The ministry of education, youth, and sport has paid great attention to LSE in schools by developing a series of LSE policy frameworks and LSE implementation guidelines, aiming to educate students mainly from 4th to 12th grade (MoEYS, 2006, 2016, 2019). According to the initial LSE policies, the ministry aimed to educate all learners with quality and equity, knowledge, skills, behavior/attitude, expertise, and the ability to effectively respond to social needs. It is separated into two main categories: 1) Basic skills, which covered three domains: general knowledge (Khmer, Maths, Environment, Culture, Health, Civics, Community Knowledge, etc.), soft skills (21st skills), and personal value (behavior/attitude); 2) Career skills, which also covered three domains: basic skills, technical skills (Agriculture, Handicraft, Service Industry, etc.), and entrepreneurship (Marketing, Job Seeking, Career, etc.) [Figure 2]. Except for the general and technical high schools (GTHSs) which aim to provide hard skills in technical and vocational education, the LSE program is also integrated as a compulsory subject in almost all of upper secondary education from 10th to 12th grade. Currently, there are 20 general and technical high schools (GTHSs) in Cambodia, delivering technical education such as Mechanics, Electronics, Electricity, Agronomy, Animal Husbandry, Food Processing, Information Technology, Tourism and Hospitality, Landscape Design, Accounting, and Management. Seeing its indispensable role in improving human resources, Cambodia has set out a short-term vision to have at least one technical school for each province and a long-term vision to have at least one technical school for each district for youth upskilling and reskilling programs.

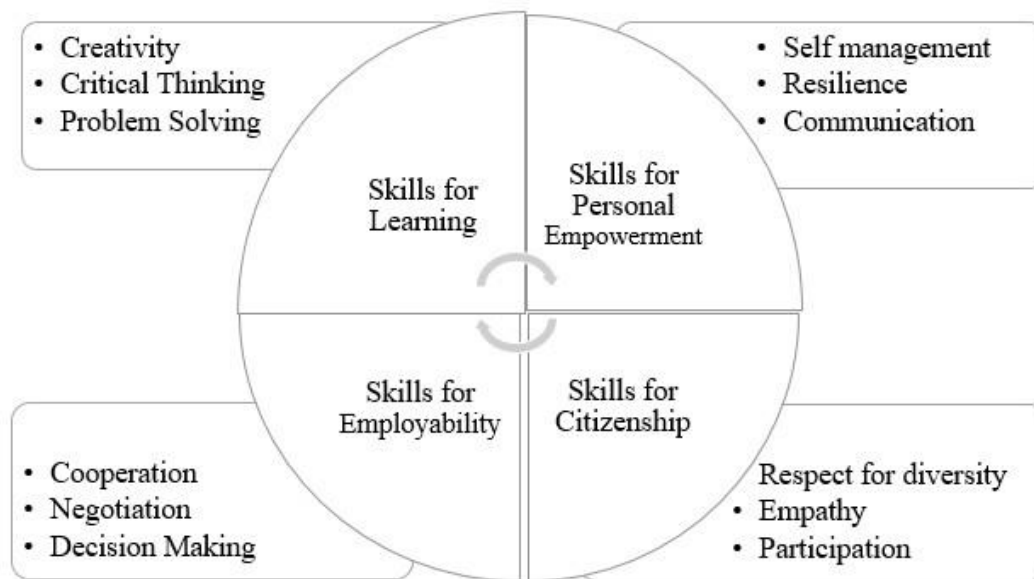


Figure 1: The illustration of twelve soft skills in the local life skill syllabus (Adapted from MoEYS, 2019)

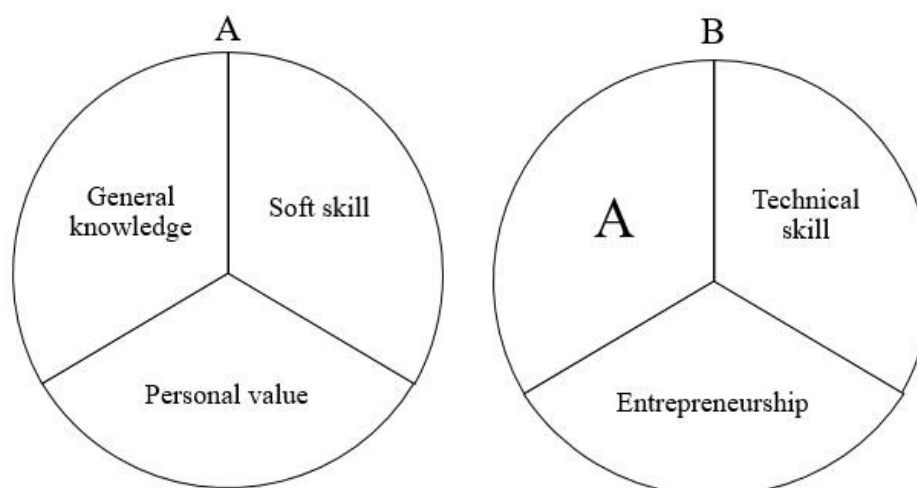


Figure 2: The schematic illustration of Life Skill Education: (A) is denoted “Basic Skill,” which is integrated into the national curriculum from 1st to 12th grade, whereas (B) is denoted “Career Skill,” which is taught from 4th to 12th Grade (Adapted from MoEYS, 2016).

According to the previous study on LSE, Home Economics, including cooking skills and embroidery skills, and simple clothes making, was found to be the most favorite subject (94%) in the five subject areas, followed by Agriculture (~81%), Art (~46%), Workshop (34.2%), and Computers (10.5%) in lower secondary education. In addition, the major constraint in LSE was the shortage of specialized teachers; for example, 84.6% of respondents claimed that they did not have LSE specialized teachers, hence, most LSE classes were instructed by different subject teachers such as science teachers (Maths, Biology, Chemistry), accounting for 70% and social teachers (Khmer, History, Geography, English), accounting for 65% (MoEYS, 2019). Paola et al. (2012) also found a similar result of LSE implementation regarding the challenges in LSE

service delivery in basic education in Cambodia, with insufficient specialized teachers, a shortage of technical and financial support, a lack of textbooks, poor community involvement and school leadership in LSE, as well as a lack of awareness of the policy framework and significance of LSE.

In addition, life skill education is a crucial part of promoting climate adaptation. It helps all learners understand and address the impacts of the climate crisis, empowering them with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes needed to act as agents of change. Climate change means a change in climate attributed directly or indirectly to human activity, which alters the composition of the global atmosphere and is observed over comparable time periods (UNFCCC, 1992). Climate change is likely to influence not only the environment itself but also other aspects of human livelihood including society, politics, and the economy. For example, climate change brings about higher temperatures; change precipitation; raise sea level; and also intensifies rainstorms, flood, droughts, and heat waves (IPCC, 2001; Jabareen, 2013). It was reported that natural disasters caused by climate change, such as droughts, floods, hurricanes, and lightning remain challenges in Cambodia and have seriously affected people's livelihoods across the country, especially people in remote rural areas, lowlands, and near to waterways. However, natural disasters such as storms with strong winds and lightning have caused 79 deaths and injuries while also killing 69 cattle and damaging 11 homes in the first six months of 2022, representing a significant decrease over the same period in 2021, which had 164 deaths and injuries (Khouth, 2022). While there is an emerging awareness of the current and potential impacts of climate change on education provision and learning, it is also clear that education (formal and non-formal), from primary to tertiary and adult education, has an important role to play in addressing this change. Education is recognized as an important first step in increasing resilience. One of the ways to help the education sector as well as other sectors from the negative impact of climate change is to transform life skill education from the conventional version to a new version that adapts to climate change and aims at supporting and enhancing resilience against climate change. Once the life skill curriculum has been reformed, a new generation of human capital (students) will be equipped with knowledge on why and how to cope with climate change.

In order to cope with the challenges, especially the severe shortage of teachers, the researchers aimed to investigate the role of the student council as an alternative source of exploitation in LSE program implementation in schools. It is reported that many student council leaders in Cambodia are already engaging in peer-to-peer learning, largely informally, but in some cases through formal study groups set up outside of class hours. The study also identified the status of LSE implementation and the impact of school-to-school and province-to-province partnerships in promoting local life skill education in lower secondary education to document good practices, lessons learned, and challenges for future possible scalability.

2. Material and Method

The study used a mixed approach. Questionnaires and semi-structural interview questions were jointly developed by consulting with personnel from key departments such as the Department of Curriculum Development (DCD), the Vocational Orientation Department (VOD), the Provincial Office of Education (POE), and UNICEF development partners, ensuring that the collected data reflected the real context of LSE implementation before data

collection. Of the five provinces, including Takeo, Kompot, Siem Reap, Battambang and Steng Treng, six lower secondary schools; ranked basic (2), moderate (2), and good (2) in LSE performance and strongly supported by the UNICEF development partner in LSE program, were chosen for the study. Within each province, the respondents of each school were the school principal, teacher, student council, local expert, and provincial and district education staff in a total of 68 samples. Only teachers who were in charge of LSE education in the school were selected as part of the sample. Moreover, the researchers also sought to interview key persons at the national level who were relevant to the implementation of the curriculum of life skills and climate change such as DCD, VOD, Department of Youth (DY), and Teacher Training Department (TTD) with a total of 4 samples. The previous research related to LSE was reviewed to develop a thorough understanding of the current status of the life skill curriculum, practice, and role of council involvement as well as the current status of climate change in the school curriculum.

During a field visit for data collection in May 2022, a few major challenges had been identified. Firstly, school just resumed in January 2022, after the COVID-19 closure, therefore, all SLE-supported facilities in school had yet to be well-restored and rebuilt. As noted, most of the school gardening areas for agricultural practice in school were under rainy water and weed cover. The facilities in the warehouse were dusty, reflecting that the school had not used them for so long due to the impact of the school closure. Secondly, some school principals and teachers were in a busy period during the 5th mandate district council election on June 5, 2022, causing a major constraint to make an appointment with them. Thus, to help solve the issue, the researchers used telephone or online interviews as an optional means to complement the field visit.

3. Results and Discussion

After the analysis of the data, a number of key areas of good practice and lessons learned from LSE program implementation in the selected lower secondary school were identified as follows:

3.1 The satisfaction of LSE learning

The vast majority of school principals, teachers, students, PoEs, DoEs, and other relevant parties agreed that they were strongly satisfied with the LSE program within their school. A school principal and teacher said, “The students were very keen and curious to learn the LSE because the teaching method of the subject is very different from other subjects. The topic selection and the process of learning were a result of the consultation of all relevant stakeholders, including the school principal, school management committee, teachers, students, the local community, and local experts. The students can learn both inside and outside the classroom. When they are inside the class, they learn the theory. When they are outside the class, they learn through real-life practice and research, which attracts their interest a lot. The teacher and student are very happy throughout the process of learning. After learning, the student has a positive change in attitude, new knowledge, creative ideas, collaboration, interpersonal skill, problem-solving, courage, opinion expression, critical thinking, curiosity, community involvement, and young leadership skill in particular.” In regards to the student’s viewpoint, a large number of them said that they could particularly use life skill education like

agriculture for their livelihood in the future, and understand issues such as daily living, community development, crop protection, the environment, waste management, and climate change. The student also attained various soft skills and knowledge in real life, such as courage when interacting with their communities, presentation, teamwork, leadership, creativity, and good morality. Seeing the benefit of LSE learning, numerous of them sincerely proposed that the school increase the teaching from one to two hours per week, the number of LSE teachers, and the amount of learning material.

Besides, the satisfaction with the life Skills Education program, the results of the interview indicated that PoE understands the advantages of the implementation program. PoE both understands the reason why the Ministry of Education put life skill programs in as extra-curriculum and is aware of the skills students will get from this program, as evidenced by the following comments:

“This program is very useful for the student to know a variety of learning methods, particularly in conducting research. Skills are very important for students before entering the job market because they help them know how to solve problems. Students will gain knowledge, skills, and confidence in their abilities. After studying life skills, students will be able to improve their learning skills (innovation, problem-solving), employability skills (cooperation, negotiation, decision-making), and personal empowerment skills (self-management, resilience, communication). PoE

Additionally, the findings from the Life skills expert officer at PoE and DoE revealed similar answers to those of the PoE. They focus on the important points of the program for developing student learning skills and some issues in implementation as follows:

“This program contributed to the critical thinking and soft skills of students. Students get more skills such as communication, encouragement, participation, analysis and reflection, and collaboration,” PoE

“Because the community, students, and teachers are not interested in and involved in the life skills program, the implementation of the program is very difficult. Some students think that it is not an important subject (there is no subject in the national exam, etc.). In schools that have implemented LSE, both teachers and students are more responsible, and students are braver and have more interaction with their teachers,” DoE

To respond and further explain the results from the qualitative research, the results from the consultative workshop of the representatives from 8 departments and 5 provinces, including PoE, the school leader, showed that the life skills program directly impacted the learning needs of students and the community. It brought up the challenge and the opportunities in the community to address and share these issues to create innovation in their community. This was because LSE provided an opportunity for collaboration between schools and communities to select LSE topics through school-community meetings. The representatives also agreed on the effectiveness of the implementation of LSE as follows:

- Students can develop knowledge, skills, a positive attitude, and values
- Expand career opportunities with technical skills through the exploration of information.

- Sharing the experiences with students and the community
- Give students the opportunities to learn research methods including collecting information, solving problems, documenting, sharing, and presenting information to the community
- Creating new jobs in the community is an important part of contributing to community development.

Furthermore, the representative from Stung Treng also emphasized that after the LSE program implementation, he observed that both schools and communities are willing to work together and participate in community work.

In all, LSE learning has value and benefits for upgrading the student's interest in learning and skills. The students are more confident in using LSE skills for their lives in the future; therefore, the school should create a better learning environment (school and community support, teacher's absence minimization, and discipline), maximize the LSE teaching hours, and increase student, teacher, and community involvement to support LSE learning.

3.2 The topic selection in local life skill education

As per the ministry's LSE implementation guideline, the school had to select two different topics annually for local life skill teaching. The first topic was taught in the first semester and the latter during the second. The topics were encouraged to be selected by participation from the various background of stakeholders such as school directors, teachers, students, and the community. However, according to the interviews, the topic selection process was found to be different from school to school. Some schools followed the guidelines, while others did not. In turn, they implemented the program based on their actual needs and local context. As noted, in any school that was described as having poor participation from the local community, the school director assigned the topics by consulting with the LSE teachers and students aligning with each grade. The school principal selected the topic through participation from the students, teachers, and community. Any topic that received the highest number of votes would be chosen. Normally, the topics had to be ready at the early beginning of the school year. According to the data [Figure 3], agriculture was still the most favorite topic among LSE learning in school, followed by drug addiction, healthcare, environment, and climate change, respectively., whereas home economics like cloth weaving and food and confectionery has a very low percentage, which was opposite to the previous study (MoEYS, DoPo, 2019). However, when it is combined with other topics in Figure 3, social topics are relatively more popular compared to livelihood topics (agriculture). From the interview with school principals and teachers whose schools taught agriculture, they said that agriculture is the most attractive topic as it is a fundamental life skill and is easy to link with the local community and daily life. Students were seen to be very interested and enthusiastic about engaging with the school garden because they could use this skill for their daily lives support as they would learn how to grow vegetables or look after animals. From the student's perspective, they also had high hopes of using agricultural skills in their lives when they finished their study. Interestingly, it was noted that some schools put agriculture instead of using LSE in the school timetable. Hence, DCD needs to work with the general secondary education department (GSED) to make sure that the school timetable is aligned with the school curriculum – the subject is no longer agriculture, it needs to be replaced by LSE.

Moreover, a large number of respondents replied that they support the integration of art and health within life skill education because they are all simple career skills.

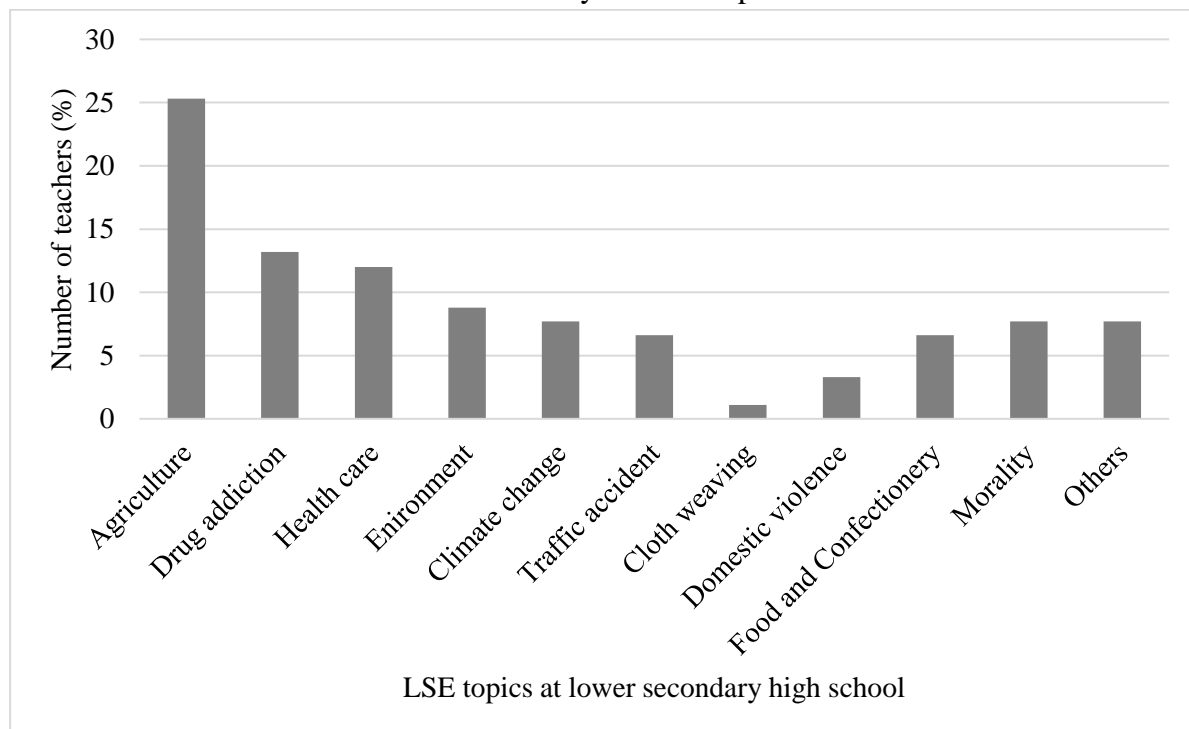


Figure 3: The popularly selected topics of local skill education in the academic year 2021-2022

3.3 Teaching method

Local life skill education was encouraged to use “Problem-based learning (PBL),” which has six key principles in teaching preparation: Understanding the topic (inquiry process), Collecting Information, Analyzing the information, Developing an outreach Plan, Implementation of the Plan, and Reflection and Evaluation (MoEYS, 2019). PBL is an inquiry learning technique that encourages students to explore, observe, explain, and learn how to solve real problems in their daily lives by using evidence-based research. Regarding the teacher’s interviews, they all stated, “The subject of local life skill education was taught both in theory and in practice. The students were excited to learn when they could put theory into practice inside and outside school. The students were inspired to integrate into the community to learn about real-life problems. For example, one teacher said his students visited the chicken farm once every month. They needed to interact with the local community, local experts, and all stakeholders in order to collect and analyze the data for presentation. He accepted that local life skill was not easy to teach when we follow the six-step process, but it was very useful for students to strengthen their knowledge, real-life experience, and soft skills.” As observed, the six-step process is difficult to apply for teachers. From the interview with students, a large number of them faced several major constraints particularly in the research step because they did not have enough material and time and it was difficult to meet local experts and community members due to a lack of coordination and involvement from teachers, who were unfamiliar with the learning environment. They acknowledged that LSE was important to their lives, but at the same time, they also made a complaint about teacher absence, learning support, and time.

According to the interviews of PoE, DoE, and expert officers, the opinions were as follows:

“Life skills education has many good points that allow students the opportunity to study, to research, and to learn from a method of learning by research (study linked to practice). We can integrate and apply this 6-step learning method to other subjects (real situations) and give students the ability to research any lessons that can be studied at any given time” Expert officer.

“We can integrate social studies. We can incorporate the 6 teaching steps such as identifying the topic, data collection, information analysis, planning, implementation, and reflection on the chemistry subject,” PoE

“Life skills are a part of education,” DoE

Hence, they requested the school, community, local experts, and all stakeholders to actively support and participate in the learning and teaching with new methods as instructed by the ministry, as well as increase teaching hours from one to two hours per week.

3.4 Student council

Student councils have played a vital role in mentoring, safeguarding, coordinating, and monitoring their fellow students to keep them on the same track. The purpose of establishing a student council is to follow the guidance of a national education policy and to improve school security management, school policy implementation and development, and school environment management with the common theme, “Be united to develop our school.” Their daily duties include monitoring school security, students’ learning performance, health, sanitation, environment, and so on. Their representative is always invited to make a public speech on a range of topics such as study performance, school discipline, and the environment after respecting the national anthem in the morning. Additionally, to highlight the importance of strengthening school security and safety before, during, and after their school day, the principal and his board committee have branched out another student security council to ensure safety, orderliness, and cleanliness in the school.

In some schools, all students are members of the councils. Each class has five representatives who are sometimes elected but sometimes appointed. Students’ representatives express their enthusiasm for being on student councils although they say it is stressful at the beginning due to the difficulty in allocating time. Aside from student councils, there are other opportunities for students to be involved in volunteer and leadership roles; these include volunteering for my Community’s (VMC) clubs, children’s community groups, and scouts. According to answers from schools, students showed better behavior, better cooperation, and better leadership after being taught LLS knowledge. Students wish to have more written guidance on activities and they show a willingness to implement a greater diversity of activities if written guidance, training, and more support from adults were available.

According to an interview with a school headmaster, he said, “to make the team active and effective, the school has to write down a clear policy and strictly control its implementation, especially at the initial stage. After some years of implementation, the school has no longer any concerns about the failure of the security policy because the students have clearly allocated tasks.” He continued, “at present, the security council directly enforces the school regulations and rules and it has greatly contributed to developing the school as it helps maintain security and safety, orderliness, and cleanliness. They do not only engage in peer mediation, but they

also report to and get information from the school management committee.” Regarding the peer-to-peer learning mode of local life skill education, they were very active in school activities from the topic selection process to the presentation. They were leaders in the group and school. For example, they acted as a lead in guiding, interacting, and coordinating their team to take a site visit with the local community to collect the data. Once the student council was established, local life skill education was smoothly implemented. They could work independently, help their peers, and assist the teacher a lot. After learning the local life skills, they knew how to solve the daily problem, knew how to do research via the internet or library, and more importantly, they knew how to work and participate in a team by building a strong sense of love, solidarity, and courage, said the school principals.

Apart from this, the result of the consultative workshop also showed that the student council contributes to life skills education programs with discipline, environment, hygiene, social work, coordination, and monitoring of students in schools. For example, the school management has organized a clear structure, and assigned responsibilities. The student council performed its role very responsibly, said the Kampot representative. Importantly, the “growing mushrooms” topic was an example of one of the outdoor activities, in which students could learn to plant, create and provide compost, store compost, fertilize, detach spores, etc. Furthermore, the Takeo representative also emphasized that student councils can help invite the community to participate in the topic selection meeting. They also participated in the topic selection as well as communicating with local experts to teach, present, or collect data, and worked with all stakeholders to provide feedback (solve problems) through the events, forum, debate, etc. Along with these abilities, the student council can lead the development of life skills on their own and it will continue next year and for years after, with the support of the school through extracurricular and outdoor activities by organizing a project implementation club to address both issues with the support of a teacher.

3.5 School peer-support for scalability

School peer support is a good model for local life skill program scalability. According to the interview, the overwhelming number of PoE and DoE strongly advocated school peer support as an effective mechanism for assisting with low performance and unfamiliarity with local life skill education. A better LSE school could help by providing an example of best practice via online or offline training, school visiting, or orientation. According to the interview, one DoE official said, “If any school wanted to improve the quality of LSE learning performance, my team and I were very eager to help with support, including technique, strategy, and experience as much as we were able. So far, with the support from the vocational orientation department and UNICEF, our school located in Siem Reap has helped share best practices within schools in Battambang province.” At the school level, a large number of school principals supported the mechanism, while some were reluctant due to inadequately supported resources: specialist teachers, facilities, budget, time, and teacher training. However, they all believed this mechanism was a good means of assisting each other, and there were willing to share. For example, a school principal said, “Although our school currently does not have sufficient financial resources, we could manage to help our school community by sharing our best practices and teaching methods on local life skill education as well as learning from each other.” She continued by saying that local life skill education was very beneficial for the

student, school and community, hence, local life skill education should be carried out nationwide among schools.

The optimal way to promote local life skill education was to highlight the significance of local life skill topics and their benefits; otherwise, it would be difficult to motivate students, teachers, local experts, and the local community to be involved. Thus, schools are encouraged to produce videos on LSE good practices to share with other schools and provinces. Technically, the students tended to enjoy learning outside the class or in their local community; however, when there was a lack of guidance and coordination from the school, they would lose interest in their learning. Therefore, school peer support was of great value and benefit to strengthen the capacity of school leadership in local life skill education and to support scalability.

In addition to this finding, the result of a group discussion by the Battambang team showed that both school principals and life skills teachers had enough competency and technique in the implementation of life skills education programs. They mentioned the importance of hard skills (agricultural skills, construction work, etc.) and soft skills (sharing from teamwork, leadership,...) which are part of the life skills education program. In regards to practical skills, the student council at Samlot High School assisted teachers with various assignments, including monthly tests, beekeeping, agricultural activity, construction work, STEM Life Skills practice in Chemistry, and robotics. However, the Kampot team leader showed that at the school level, both the school principal and teachers had limited knowledge and technique to share[...] and that they needed more training for teachers, more resources, and a greater budget.

3.6 Climate change integration in local life skill subject

Raising awareness of the impact of climate change on livelihood and the environment is very important, especially for students so that they know how to protect society and the environment. Cambodia is one of the countries which heavily relies on the agricultural sector, sharing 25% of GDP (World Bank, 2021). Therefore, raising awareness of climate changes, including floods, drought, storm, sea level elevation, etc. to protect the environment and natural resources from disaster risks while protecting sustainable agriculture and people's livelihood is vitally important. According to the interview, every respondent agreed that climate change exists and impacted their lives and work. Therefore, there are a substantial number of topics in the life skill study program, about 1 in 6 of the total number, related to climate change. A positive sign of raising awareness of protection from natural disaster risks was mentioned by the school principal, "Students should know the root cause of environmental pollution and climate change from a global perspective. Then they would be able to know how to contribute to protecting the community and the earth." As observed from the interview, climate change was added as a new subject amongst the local life skill subjects this year with topics such as the impact of drought on crops, environmental pollution, tree plantation, and waste management.

Climate change is a global issue. Based on the respondents, the majority of teachers, accounting for 93%, believed that climate change needed to be integrated into local life skill education. However, the major constraint is that it will require a good teacher who comprehends the global knowledge related to environmental pollution and the industrialization of developed countries. In the interview, the school principals stated, "Their teachers did not come across

climate change training. This was one of the major constraints on teaching. Thus, they sincerely requested to provide a training course, and documents and to share experience on climate changes for life skill teachers.”

In addition to this, the results of the consultative workshop showed that the world’s current issues such as climate change and mental health caused by COVID-19 could be the subject of life skills with the following additions:

- Strengthen the implementation of existing lessons, especially in the subject of Earth Science, Environment, Geography, etc.
- Adding in science subjects at the elementary level,
- Create a topic separately based on existing resources (teachers, experts, and research through technology) and involve stakeholders
- Encourage students and the community to study those topics, for example, reducing the use of plastic /foam bags, saving electricity, greenhouse gas emissions, and deforestation
- Study the effects of climate change such as floods, storms, and droughts...
- Maintain awareness of the importance of health to the community
- Find an expert to help teach and provide additional support.

3.7 Implementation of Life Skill program

The result of the implementation program was crucial to building an effective program through learning skills, integrating the teaching method in curriculum studies, and improving the shortage of LSE program resources such as teachers, LSE trainers, facilities, and documents. The interview results with PoE, DoE, and expert officers revealed that they disseminated the results from project research on the life skills learning program. They not only played a very vital role during the practice program but also sought support from other sources, as mentioned in the following paragraph:

- *Annually, I disseminate information on the life skills programs or the implementation results including social issues and career issues. I played a role as a facilitator in the training course for teachers and fundraising for the implementation life skills program, said PoE.*
- *I took part, it was very helpful for the students in their personal growth and adaptation to the community. I participated in the selection of school topics and strengthened the implementation of life skills program through meetings [.....] with various schools and asked teachers to share their experiences at various stages, said DoE.*
- *I disseminated the information on the life skills programs during the workshop, monitored the implementation program, and shared the teaching methods in further groups. I organized capacity-building courses, and workshops, shared experience, and disseminated the implementation to local authorities and stakeholders, said an Expert officer.*

During the implementation life skill program, the school faced a shortage of teachers that were able to teach this extra subject. Therefore, the school had no choice but to request other teachers to teach life skills.

- *There were not enough teachers to teach life skills programs and it required students to learn and research on their own. Because of a lack of experts and teachers, schools decided to use other subjected teachers to teach life skills, said PoE*
- *Today we got support from another school in the implementation of the life skills program, said DoE*
- *Some local experts lacked the skills and methods to share information, said Expert Officer*

According to feedback from respondents about improving the life skills program, one of them thought that it was doing well because teachers were able to conduct their teaching. In addition, a local expert officer mentioned that the students studied the basic life skill education program by researching the topic they chose. These real-world issues should also be included in life skills education programs because everyone is concerned about both the current situation and the future. However, DoE had no concerns about the revised program and stated that climate change, mental health, and plastic use should be included in the life skills program.

Meanwhile, the PoE and DoE participants in the implementation program believed that both school principals and local life skills teachers had the technical ability and confidence to implement of life skills programs that could meet the needs of students and the community on their own. Moreover, they think that teachers can share good practices and learning techniques with other schools, as stated in the following statement:

- *I feel confident that we cooperated well between schools. We sent our staff to help other schools. The school needed technical support and experience to improve. I wanted students to study life skills education because it was important and responded to the Rectangular Strategy. Which states that by 2030 Cambodia needs to upgrade to an upper middle-income country; therefore, students needed strong skills to reach the goal, said PoE.*
- *So far, organized by the Department of Vocational Orientation and UNICEF, Siem Reap has helped Battambang participate in supporting and expanding LLS implementation, Expert officer.*
- *We exchanged visits between Samlot High School and Aranya Rainsy Secondary School in Siem Reap Province. We also exchange visits between Samlot High School and Sa Kaeo High School, Thailand, said the Battambang team.*

Besides, from this individual interview about the implementation of the life skills education program, the results of the group discussion showed that the majority of teachers and school principals attended training sessions on life skills programs and disseminated to other teachers, students, and the community the importance of life skills education at the local level. Based on the response of the Kampot team, school principals and life skills teachers have the knowledge, technical skills, and confidence to implement life skills education programs that meet the needs of students and the community themselves because they are highly committed, prepare a clear action plan via a meeting between the community, teachers, and student representatives to choose the topic. In particular, teachers had prepared a clear teaching plan for student involvement at each stage.

3.8 Challenges

Local life skill education was one of the core subjects in the national curriculum. Within this subject, the teacher is encouraged to use an inquiry-based learning approach in order to attain the 12 soft skills. Along with the local life skill learning process, there are several challenges as follows:

3.9 Lack of participation, coordination, and guidance in local life skill learning

The main aim of local life skill education is to encourage student to learn outside of class or participate in the local community to improve their soft skills. They need to study or research independently under the coordination of the school in their local community. The student would be able to interact with the local people to get information or data for analysis. Finally, they are asked to share their findings with their class. Any school which had good coordination from their teacher or school principal was found to be more successful in LLS learning. The students were more active and well-integrated into the local community. It was found that a number of schools did not have good coordination in LLS learning, which was a key reason the students lost the chance to interact with their local community. Most students earnestly requested that the school principal and teachers strengthen their coordination with the local community and local experts to create a favorable environment for students to learn in their local community. Moreover, regarding the interview, some teachers did not know the concept of “problem-based learning,” so they did not how to coordinate or guide the student’s participation in their learning; for example, some teachers stated that they had never guided the students with learning in the local community. These teachers thought that local life skills mainly focused on agriculture, hence they asked the student to grow vegetables in the school garden as the learning practices for this subject. Similarly, one PoE and DoE admitted that it is difficult to engage the relevant stakeholders in the implementation and dissemination of the life skills program. Therefore, it is believed that when there was stronger coordination, there would be more interactivity between the students and the community in building up the LLS learning environment.

3.10 Lack of knowledge of LSE implementation guidelines

The LSE implementation guidelines were comprehensively produced to fulfill the need for LSE teachers to improve their teaching and learning in their schools. From our observation, some LSE teachers have never known or read these guidelines, and they did not have an interest because it was not relevant to their specialized skills. The teachers who taught local life skill education came from various subjects such as English, Khmer, Physics, Math, Geography, etc. The current context, the way to recruit LLS teachers, is either voluntary or by appointment from the school principal to take a role regardless of their specialty and background. After the interview, it was revealed that because of unavailable teachers, the school principal and office staff took charge of local life skill teaching. As observed, life skill education in school was considered an elective subject due to a lack of knowledge of the LSE implementation guidelines, learning support, funds, community participation, and a shortage of teachers.

3.11 LLS teacher's capacity building

Although it was stated that 82% of the LLS teachers had been trained in a short course on life skill education, this was not sufficient to address the needs of teachers. From the interviews, some teachers said, “We were invited twice to take part in the LLS short course. We agreed that the short course was very important and helpful in upgrading our knowledge and way of thinking. Hence, we requested more training both online and offline means to improve our teaching capacity in local life skills. Previously, we did not understand a lot about the concept of local life skill education. After training and exchanging experiences with local school teachers, we realized that local life skill teachers needed to guide the students to learn with a local community to improve their soft skills. The students learned how to define and solve the real problems in their local community themselves.”

4. Conclusion

As identified from the study, the students were satisfied with learning local life skills; they thought that this subject was very beneficial to their daily lives and their future. Moreover, it was found that agriculture was still the favorite topic amongst LSE learning in school, followed by drug addiction, healthcare, environment, and climate change, respectively, where home economics like cloth weaving and food and confectionery were low. The majority of teachers, accounting for 93%, believed that climate change must be integrated into local life skill education. Regarding the teaching method of local life skills, a large number of students faced several major constraints particularly in the research step because they did not have enough material and time to support when they went to collect the data for analysis and it was difficult to meet local experts and community members due to a lack of coordination and involvement from teachers. They also made a complaint about teacher absence, learning support, and time. It was also identified that the student council has played a vital role in local life skill education. They were the most active components in topic selection and the process of learning. In addition, school peer support was of great value and benefit to strengthen the capacity of school leadership in local life skill education and to support scalability. However, there were some challenges identified, including a lack of coordination and guidance in local life skill learning, a lack of knowledge of the LSE implementation guidelines, and a need to improve LLS teaching capacity.

5. Key recommendation

- Local life skill education really needed strong coordination and guidance with the local community in order to facilitate the students learning. The improvement of coordination and guidance by the school with the local community is the most needed mechanism for a positive learning environment for students. Therefore, school principals, teachers, school management committees, local authorities, and other stakeholders should work closely and support each other to address this challenge.
- The student council played a vital role in the LLS learning process. They participated actively in the learning activities. The student council needs to be used to implement LLS, especially with respect to the environment, tourism, and agricultural sectors. They could work independently, help their peers, and greatly assist the teacher. Hence, the school needs to strengthen student councils or clubs to create a favorable learning environment. Peer-to-peer learning, whether through student councils or voluntarily, has been shown to have great benefits for both the learner and the teacher. Students not only improved their understanding of the course content, but also developed communication skills, teamwork, leadership, confidence, and respect for peers, which made the process more professional.
- The integration of climate change into the LLS is strongly supported by the teachers, principals, PoE, and DoE. However, the knowledge of teachers relevant to climate change is a challenge. Therefore, to make climate change a prioritized topic, more training should be provided. Alternatively, it is necessary to work with universities to give university students credit for a semester of teaching. Being a good teacher is important for success in almost every aspect of life. Cambodian university students, who have already clearly shown an interest, could be employed as climate change LLS teachers for a month, three months, or a semester of university credit. This might be appropriate to promote both science (ecology, forestry, environment, and biology) students as well as social science students of education. MoEYS could work with universities to build this program into the coursework for students.
- A school peer-support mechanism is overwhelmingly desired to scale up the local life skill programs in other schools. To better implement this, the core school should be provided more support in term of resources such as learning equipment, online and offline documents, short video clips, technical training, and funds.

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ក្រសួងអប់រំ យុវជន និងកីឡា (២០០៦) គោលនយោបាយអប់រំបំណិនជីវិត

ក្រសួងអប់រំ យុវជន និងកីឡា (២០១៦) ក្របខណ្ឌកម្មវិធីសិក្សា អប់រំបំណិនជីវិត នាយកដ្ឋានតម្រង់ទិសវិជ្ជាជីវៈ

ក្រសួងអប់រំ យុវជន និងកីឡា (២០១៩) បំណិនជីវិតតាមមូលដ្ឋាន ឯកសារណែនាំអនុវត្តសម្រាប់គ្រូបង្រៀន និងគណៈគ្រប់គ្រងសាលា