



Leveraging teacher development to overcome structural challenges and technological disparities in education

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Abstract: Addressing the systemic exploitation of teachers in the Philippines and Cambodia is essential for realising the full potential of educational technology. Only by dismantling the oppressive structures that overburden and underpay educators can we ensure equitable and effective education for all students.

The integration of technologies in education has been heralded as a [transformative](#) force capable of enhancing learning experiences worldwide. However, the effectiveness of such technologies is deeply intertwined with the **quality of teacher training** and the broader educational infrastructure. Much has been said about the [impact of rest](#) on student's learning capabilities, but we often neglect the fact that **overburdened teachers** are unable to teach effectively. Insights from the Philippines and Cambodia shed light on the gaps and

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challenges surrounding teacher development. In both the Philippines and Cambodia, educators face daunting challenges that limit their ability to leverage technology effectively.

A World Bank [study](#) found that Filipino teachers rank low in effective pedagogy compared to their Southeast Asian counterparts. This deficiency is linked to a lack of mastery in the subjects they teach and significant [teacher absenteeism](#). The educational structure in the Philippines places a [heavy burden](#) on teachers that requires them to be proficient in multiple core subjects, such as Science, Mathematics, English, Filipino and numerous non-teaching assignments including administrative work. This multitasking demand on teachers results in a scenario that I can compare to 'jack-of-all-trades, master-of-none'. Even as a student back in the Philippines, I remember how my teachers are forced to divide their focus and energy across several disciplines. On top of this, they are [severely underpaid](#), overworked by at least [400 unpaid hours](#) annually, and lack financial and developmental [support](#) for classroom expenses. All these factors make their already challenging job even more difficult. In turn, what students receive is lacklustre learning experience. Nonetheless, it is important not to place blame on the teachers for these issues. The teachers are exhausted, juggling multiple responsibilities with insufficient institutional support.

The case of Cambodia draws some parallels to the Philippines. According to the [study](#) of Pich, one of the critical factors impeding the efficacy of educational reforms is the existing gap in teacher [quality and training](#). The teacher preparation programs are profoundly [inadequate](#), lacking the depth and rigour necessary to properly equip teachers with essential skills to effectuate positive student outcomes. And the main problem here is that Cambodia is also lacking qualified trainers to upskill the teachers. Thus, it creates a loop that never ends where poorly trained teachers become trainers themselves. While there are teacher training programs in place, these are significantly undermined by a [lack](#) of proper accreditation and systemic support, especially from the the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS).

In Cambodia, much like in the Philippines, the lack of adequate incentives, combined with low pay for teachers, fails to attract high-quality candidates and results in low retention rates. This is even more pronounced in remote regions where there is a massive shortage of teachers. According to [UNESCO](#), about 34.5 percent of teachers in remote areas and 6.5 percent of teachers in rural areas have not studied beyond the primary level. And those who do would often opt to teach in urban centres, leaving rural schools at significant disadvantage. The persistent shortage of primary school teachers in rural and remote areas forces the available teachers to take on double shifts, teaching both morning and afternoon sessions. Calling the teachers burnout would be an understatement at this point. This situation is compounded by the limited availability of ICT tools and internet

access, with only [23 percent](#) of students having access to such resources, hindering the adoption of digital education solutions.

To effectively tackle the complex challenges in education, it is crucial for countries like the Philippines and Cambodia to implement well-rounded policies that enhance teacher capabilities. You cannot have quality education without qualified teachers. Teachers are the cornerstone of educational quality, and their ability to thrive in their roles directly influences the calibre of education that students receive. It is imperative for both countries to increase investment in teacher training and development and also enact new laws and policies that provide robust support to educators. These efforts should be guided by international human rights standards, such as those set forth in [Article 26](#) of Universal Declaration of Human Rights ([UDHR](#)), [Articles 28 and 29](#) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC](#)), as well as [Articles 13 and 14](#) of International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ([ICESCR](#)), which emphasise the importance of quality education for all.

Fulfilling the rights of teachers to teach and to learn is not merely an act of policy compliance. It is a critical long-term investment that holds profound implications for societal progress. In states like Cambodia and the Philippines, where educational disparities and systemic inefficiencies persist, enhancing the professional development and working conditions of teachers is essential for safeguarding the right to education of present and future generations. By aligning national education policies with the human rights obligations from international provisions, both countries can make substantive progress toward ensuring that every child, regardless of location or background, receives quality education facilitated by qualified, supported, and well-resourced teachers. A necessary policy change must ensure continuous professional development, including access to EdTech for teachers, [secure fair compensation](#), and provide ample resources, thereby acknowledging the pivotal role teachers play in society.

In particular, the revised Magna Carta in the Philippines should enhance existing provisions and focus on urgent issues while investing on teachers in the long term. These developments will focus on giving Filipino teachers to stay in their home country to teach. Migration must never be a necessity but should just be an option. The increasing rate of [brain drain](#) in the Philippines where there is a massive exodus of professionals leaving the country for a better life overseas is a symptom of systemic failure. Enhancements should focus on creating a more attractive teaching environment that competes favourably with opportunities abroad.

For Cambodia, the creation of a similar legal framework is crucial. While the [Teacher Policy of 2013](#) has laid down strategies to create a qualified and competent teacher workforce, it could have a more explicit focus on teacher well-being, including [mental health support](#), stress management, and work-life balance. The current national policy

could also place greater emphasis on promoting student-centred teaching approaches that encourage critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills among students, instead of pure memorisation. While current policy outlines mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation, it fails to mention the processes for collecting and responding to feedback from teachers and other stakeholders, which is crucial if Cambodia wants to take into account the perspectives of teachers. As part of the [Digital Tech Roadmap](#), Cambodia will benefit tremendously by detailing the processes it will take to modernise teacher's training.

The measures proposed here —and further addressed in a [policy brief](#)— will not only create a more supportive environment for teachers but also create an environment for students that is conducive to learning. This environment will elevate the educational standards across these countries and ensure that technology integration is just one part of the approach to the needed educational reform. By focusing on these foundational aspects, the Philippines and Cambodia can build education systems that are not only technologically adept but also inclusive, equitable, and sustainable.