Understanding and Practice of Teaching Reading in Content Areas in Upper Elementary Classes in Suburban Public Schools in Cambodia

by

Bopha Ong

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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2016

Abstract

In Cambodia, little research has been done on how teachers teach reading in their content-area classes. Teachers’ perspectives of and knowledge and skills in teaching reading are essential links as to how well they instruct their students and how well their students learn. This qualitative case study explores teachers’ instructional strategies in teaching reading in content areas in Cambodia, using a series of teacher interviews combined with lesson observations. Although teacher-training experiences impact teachers’ understandings of reading and their selection of instructional strategies, the findings of this study suggest that Cambodian teachers have neither become familiar with reading strategies nor learned specific methods for teaching reading in content areas. Even though student-centered approaches are utilized to teach reading in content areas, these teachers did not implement them consistently and effectively, preferring traditional teacher-centered approaches and rote memorization. Other factors that influence teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and choice of instructional strategies are also explored. More
importantly, key perspectives that explain the teachers’ perspectives on teaching reading, issues and challenges they encounter, and curricular roles they adopt or could develop are identified in each analysis in the findings chapter. Thus, this study has implications regarding the improvement of: teacher education programs, reading curricula, teaching reading in content areas, and pre/in-service teacher development.
Acknowledgements

Although this thesis has taken time and effort, it has been well worth it as it is one of the biggest achievements so far in my life. This thesis dissertation has represented a long and most arduous journey for me, where I have learned so much about life as a doctoral student, accepting the challenges and excitements in completing a dissertation and developing greater amounts of knowledge in the field. There are numerous excitements and challenges that come along when trying to complete this huge work. It has included a dark cloud that would have made me give up this work if there had not been continuous support and help from many important individuals who have come into my life during this process to help me succeed. I owe them a great deal and a big thanks. Without them, I would not have had the opportunity to complete this work.

Thanks to my supervisor, my committee members, and my professors

I owe my greatest gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Karyn Cooper. Without Dr. Cooper, I would not have had enough courage to complete this work. I offer a millions thanks to Dr. Cooper, who has always taken this path with me. She is very understanding and always helps me at all levels, including my thesis writing and other encounters that I have faced. She has always trusted that I can do this and has never given up on me. That is my biggest motivation from her part. Dr. Cooper has helped me expand my perspectives and knowledge towards a boarder spectrum in this field. I am forever grateful to her for all her patience and guidance.

I would also like to thank my committee member, Dr. Alister Cumming, who accepted me in the first place to be under his committee supervision. I enjoyed the opportunity to work with him and thank to him so much for his constructive and detailed feedback on my work. I am also thankful to Dr. Douglas McDougall for taking me in to work with him. It has been my great pleasure to work with him and thank him so much for having read and provided rigorous feedback on my work. All the feedback is very helpful to improve the quality of my work. My committee members’ guidance and comments are always useful and effective. I also thank Dr. Sarfaroz Niyozov for helping
me brainstorm my ideas/thoughts into this research topic at the beginning. His advice was
very helpful to combine my ideas into the proposal for this dissertation.

I am greatly indebted to the most helpful individual, Dr. Robert White, who
always trusted me at the very first place and has offered me courage and confidence when
I was lost during this whole process. He has helped me with numerous things during the
most difficult encounters, including editing work, writing and giving me a lot of ideas
and motivations on my work. Without him, I would definitely not have completed this
doctoral work.

Thanks and dedication to my beloved families

This thesis is dedicated to the most important people in my life, my family. All of
them have given me the opportunity to value education and to take courage to pursue this
highest level of education. They have supported me every single step of the way. It has
not been easy but, without them, it would have been impossible. First to my beloved
grandparents, Mr. Ong Bun Hor (អ៊ុង បុនហួ) and Mrs. Tan Kim Tien (តាន គឹមល
តេន), who had taught me to value and pursue my journey in education. They have
provided me with everlasting love that I will never forget. Even though they are not here
in this world with me, they are still in my heart forever and they remain the biggest
inspiration behind all I do. I wish they could hear and see my accomplishments and be
proud of me.

Very special thanks to my beloved parents, Mr. Ong Sivhor (អ៊ុង រ៊ុីវហួ) and
Mrs. Sak Reasmey (រក់ ររមី), who have also supported me and stayed by my side for
all the ups and downs. They are the greatest parents that one could ever ask for. They
have sacrificed so much for me and have provided me with countless love and care that
have supported me along the way towards where I am today. Without them, I could not
have such a great achievement, thus far. Both my grandparents and parents have taught
and inspired me to pursue my education to this level. One of their most inspirational
sayings is, “I do not have anything to give you except education and knowledge.” This
statement has taught me to be strong and never give up on education and learning. Third,
I would also like to thank my two dear brothers, Mr. Ong Sochheka (លោកអុងសុខ្កា) and Mr. Ong Keamesa (លោកអុងកាយមសា), who always helped me and stayed by my side every single moment and helped me with everything I needed, including my data collection in Cambodia. To all my beloved family members in Cambodia, we all had suffered because we missed each other so much. ‘Being away from home’ was uneasy and tough on its own already; plus, I had a mission to complete ahead of me. However, during this long waiting time for us to get together again, I always felt ‘we all were very close and supported one another.’ This has been our family spirit and strength that I have gotten from all of you to push me forwards to complete this work.

Last but not least, I save very special thanks for my beloved husband, Mr. Tiv Chhunly (លោកីវឈុនលី), who has sacrificed so much for my accomplishment on this Ph.D. journey. I owe him a great deal for so many things that I could not name them all. He is very supportive of everything I do, especially my work in education. He has provided me with everything for this achievement. I always honor and appreciate his insights and ideas on my work, which are very helpful for me to develop my writing. To be short, without him, I could not manage myself to get this work done. At last, my special thanks to the most significant person in my life, my beloved baby girl, Tiv Ong Cibo (កុមារីីវអុងហ្ស៊ីបូ), who came in during the middle of this journey. However, she is the one who gives me all the strength to complete this dissertation. She is my very special gift and, because of her, I have more courage to complete my writing during the toughest time, when trying to be a good mother and graduate student at the same time.

Thanks to my friends/colleagues and OISE’s staff

Many friends have helped me stay sane through these difficult years. Their support and care helped me to overcome setbacks and to stay focused on my graduate study. I greatly value their friendship and I deeply appreciate their belief in me. I owe a special thanks to my friend, Dr. Lydia Carol-Ann Burke, who always stayed by my side to support me and encouraged me that “I could complete this doctoral dissertation.” She has helped me with every matter during the up and down moments from the beginning until the end. I am also thankful to my friends, Dr. Merlin Charles and Dr. Anba Rathnam
who provided me with editing, ideas and insights on my work at the beginning. It has been really helpful for me to pursue this work.

The dedication of this work also goes to my former English School, COERR Language Skills Center, mainly to my late teacher and advisor at the Center, Sister Joseen Vogt, and the director/teacher, Mr. Srun Sotith, who provided me with the English language proficiency to pursue my dream in education. They also inspired me for the graduate study at the beginning of my Master studies. In the memory of Sister Joseen—You left fingerprints of grace on my life and work. You will never be forgotten. Regardless of her age, she always offered me assistance, guidance, and motivation. All of these are the main reasons that have led me to today’s accomplishment.

I am also grateful to the following former or current staff at OISE (Margaret Brennan, Michelle Pon, Terry Louisy, Cheryl Clark, and Danny Cavanagh) for their various forms of support during my graduate study.

Thanks to my participants and their school principals in Cambodia

I would like to also thank my participants and their school principals in Battambang province for making all the arrangements during the data collection. My special thanks also goes to the four teacher participants for allowing me a chance to conduct the interviews and classroom observations. This thesis work could not have been accomplished without their input.
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Chapter 1
Introduction/Statement of Purpose

This study aims to explore, examine, and improve teachers’ perspectives of reading and of teaching reading in content areas in upper elementary classes in Cambodia. By the term “perspective,” I mean teachers’ understanding, perceptions, values, beliefs, and practices of teaching (in this case it is about reading in content areas). Teaching reading in content areas means guiding students to comprehend and respond to ideas in texts within subject disciplines (Vacca, 2002). When exploring teachers’ perspectives on this type of teaching, I also investigated the instructional strategies and curricular resources that they use to teach reading in the content areas. I also looked at the methods and resources employed by the teachers, including the examination of the active and cooperative learning pedagogies and their effects on the teachers’ teaching practices.

I incorporate the question about these specific pedagogies because they have been mandated into practice in public schools in Cambodia, following the recommendation of powerful international donors such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Save the Children Norway, Kampuchean Action for Primary Education (KAPE), and World Vision. Furthermore, in addressing the main purpose of this study, I investigated the challenge that the teachers face when teaching reading in content areas, and identify their perspectives on how to improve this approach to teaching. I situate my study within comparative and international frameworks since I apply theories about teaching reading adopted in Western contexts as units of analysis, including an examination of the concepts of educational transfer—borrowing and lending educational ideas, policies, and practices. This study has implications regarding the improvement of teacher education programs, reading curricula, teaching reading in content areas, and in-service teacher development.

Definitions of Terms and the Scope of the Study

Within this section, I clarify some of the critical terms associated with this research topic. The term “upper elementary classes” refers to Grades 5 and 6 in elementary schools in Cambodia. “Active and cooperative learning pedagogies” are
learner-centered learning approaches in which teachers involve students in the learning process and view students as capable of learning (McCombs & Whisler, 1997). The terms active learning, cooperative learning and student-centered pedagogies are used interchangeably to mean students are the main focus within the classroom instruction and they take part in their own learning by working together in groups to maximize their learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1993). In addition, since this study focuses on each teacher participant’s pedagogies in teaching reading in content areas, it is significant to understand the term “pedagogy.” Pedagogy refers to the art of teaching (Hall, 1905) and each teacher’s instructional strategy for teaching a lesson. “Pedagogies are ideologies of learning mediating perceptions of how learning occurs and how teaching activities are to be organized to accommodate learning” (Needham, 2003, p. 28).

Throughout this research, another term “critical” will be encountered. Thus, it is also important to understand its meaning. The term “critical” here, refers to the ability of a person to think through, question, analyze, critique, and interpret what is being read by relating the text to her/his previous experience in order to understand it better and apply it later on in her/his everyday life encounters.

The term “content area reading/reading in content areas” means acquiring information in subject disciplines such as social studies, history, geography, science, math, and so forth, in order to develop personal meaning from that information (Macklin, 1978; Tarasoff, 1993). “Teaching reading in content areas” refers to the process of guiding and helping students make connections between new and prior knowledge and active teaching strategies that enable students to access background knowledge, understand text features, and practice meta-cognitive elements of learning (Billmeyer, 1996).

Reading in the early elementary grades is about learning to read and acquiring skills needed to decode words automatically and fluently, while reading in higher grades (including upper elementary grades) is about using those skills to comprehend what one has read, or reading to learn (Chall, 1983). Galotti (2011) concurred that, during the elementary education from kindergarten to Grade 6, children learn basic literacy skills including learning to read and to write; later, they are expected to master content in subject areas as well as in higher grades. Learning to read involves stages in which early
readers learn letters and sounds, and decoding skills in order to build confidence and fluency in reading both literacy and nonfictional text (Graves, 2006). After children have the skills and repeated experience it takes to learn how to read, they shift to learn another component of reading—reading to learn. Thus, ‘reading to learn’ refers to comprehending and interpreting what one has read so that, in some way, he/she can repeat and impart this newly acquired knowledge to obtain even more knowledge (Gunning, 1998). According to Salinger (2003), Grade 4 is the stage when students are supposed to shift from learning to read to reading to learn. Gunning (2000) identifies a slump at this point as students transition from learning to read to reading to learn.

The focus of this study is teaching reading in content areas or reading to learn (i.e., teaching reading skills and strategies to students who already know how to read, in order for them to learn from texts and to engage with texts in their content area classes). This study will not focus on how young children learn to read during the acquisition stage in oral and written language activities and narratives throughout the early grades (i.e., Grades 1-3). Thus, learning to read and teaching young children to read are not within the scope of this study. In the following section, I describe the rationale and background of the study.

The Rationale and Background of the Study

The Rationale of the Study

My previous experiences of teaching and learning reading in Cambodia have helped me to develop a great interest in conducting research in the field of teaching reading in Cambodia. In Grade 6, I remember studying several subjects that involved a great amount of reading, such as geography, Khmer studies, and history. The term “Khmer” means Cambodia and is the name of Cambodia’s national language. My teacher used teacher-centered approaches and rote-learning pedagogy to teach reading in those subjects. When learning reading in the history class, students were asked to read aloud two or three paragraphs from the textbook; this was then followed by the teacher’s explanations of difficult words and sentences. The teacher assessed students’ learning by giving dictation and tests. I remember spending a great deal of time memorizing texts, sentence by sentence, before the tests. I had to answer the test questions by quoting
almost verbatim what was written in the textbook and what the teacher explained in the class. This process of teaching and learning as described, serves to demonstrate that the teacher’s main pedagogical goals focused more on the technical process than critical engagement. Rather than using strategies and skills to teach reading comprehension to students, the teacher played a key role in transmitting knowledge to the students by using rote memorization and teacher-centered methods.

Rote memorization became the learning strategy that I had learned during my years of general education, as well as in the initial teacher education program in Cambodia. Therefore, as a teacher for four years, I still applied those traditional methods of teacher-centered pedagogies and rote memorization in my teaching practices because I believed they were the only ways to maintain good classroom management, and to get students to learn. I observed my colleagues teaching the same subject and realized that they also used the same teaching methods.

According to the Cambodia Education Sector Support Project’s (CESSP) recent report, Cambodian students (after Grade 3) tend to compare increasingly less favorably in reading comprehension than other countries in South East Asia (CESSP, 2008). This trend begins to emerge in Cambodian educational systems as Cambodian educators might neglect to address the importance of reading strategies and skills that should be taught in upper elementary classes and beyond. The results from the 6th grade national assessment in 2008 also showed that Grade 6 students, on average, were able to answer only about 10 to 15 percent of the Khmer reading items that required interpretation and advanced comprehension skills (CESSP, 2008). This result suggests that 6th graders are generally comfortable with the basics of reading comprehension and sentence structure but are weak in advanced comprehension skills such as inference, application and critical thinking (CESSP, 2008). I have reflected on this result and learned that 6th graders in Cambodia do not have sufficient ability to read material requiring interpretation, application, and critique, but rely on rote learning and memorizing facts.

After I left Cambodia for graduate studies in education in the U.S. and Canada, I started to re-examine my past general education and the contemporary general education in Cambodia by paying particular attention to how teachers teach reading in content areas. Have teachers in Cambodia improved their teaching practices? Has there been any
recent change since my time (1990s) in school? These questions are considered in the light of my theoretical orientation developed as a graduate student in international literacy and comparative education development.

My recent studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto have taught me that reading is very important because it is a way of encountering the world and making sense of it (Appleman, 2010). At the beginning of the 1900s, reading, and literacy in general, was starting to be thought of as a thinking process rather than simply memorization and oral expression, which had been the first goals of reading instruction (Sadoski, 2004). This attention to comprehension was emphasized in the sentence, story, and activity methods of reading instruction (Sadoski, 2004). Thus, reading is described as an ability to understand text and being able to use information effectively in order to function in today’s knowledge-based environment in textual societies (International Adult Literacy Survey, 1998). In order to succeed academically and professionally, people need to develop the ability to read material with clear comprehension, interpretation, application, and critique, rather than rote learning and memorizing facts. Thus, it is important for subject teachers to incorporate reading strategies/skills in their content area instruction in order to teach students to move beyond passively acquiring facts to actively comprehending and applying ideas to solve problems (Mikulecky & Jeffries, 2004).

The Background of the Study

Reading skills necessary at the upper elementary classes are different from those needed in lower elementary classes (Dieker & Little, 2005). Thus, upper elementary school teachers teaching academic subjects must be responsible for the instruction and practice of more advanced reading concepts, strategies, and skills. However, in Cambodia, the level of teacher knowledge and skills in implementing reading concepts and strategies, whether teachers possess a good understanding of teaching reading and whether they even have the inclination to do so, are under-researched (Kim & Rouse, 2011).

In implementing reforms in Cambodia, teachers have remained largely invisible in the policy reform process through lack of consultation and, if seen at all, have been considered only as technicians through which educational content is delivered
Policy makers and the top-level officials in Cambodia rarely take into account the teachers’ voices, what teachers are doing in the classrooms, what challenges teachers are facing, what teachers’ perspectives are regarding reform policies, and what teachers can do about the reforms (Kim & Rouse, 2011). Additionally, there is a lack of research into the teacher’s role in the educational reforms, including empirical studies of their knowledge, skills and attitudes, which constitute a significant gap in the literature (Kim & Rouse, 2011).

In any effort relating to educational reforms, teachers are key change agents; they are the crucial providers in the education system and they are the ones who make the policy work, implement innovations and enact improvement (Anderson, 1992; Fullan, 1993). This suggests that getting teachers involved in research and encouraging them to take a more active role in implementing reforms is a more viable alternative strategy than mandating change from above. Furthermore, teachers’ perspectives of, and knowledge/skills in reading and teaching reading are essential links to how well they instruct their students and how well their students learn (Blair, Rupley, & Nichols, 2007). Therefore, this study aims to discover how and what teachers do to teach reading in content areas, and what their perspectives are regarding the conceptual knowledge of reading and teaching reading in their content area classes.

In order to study how teachers teach reading in content areas, it is also essential to examine the instructional strategies they have implemented. However, there is very little research in the Cambodian context, which examines teaching reading in content areas and accompanying effective instructional strategies. What are well-known in the research literature and in the Ministry of Education documents are the active and cooperative learning pedagogies that were implemented in Cambodia under the recommendation of international organizations such as UNICEF and KAPE (Bunlay et al., 2010). These pedagogies are viewed as one of the most effective instructional approaches to teaching reading in content areas in Western contexts (Alvermann, 2002; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; McCombs & Whisler, 1997). Thus, as a comparative and international educator, I situate my study within international and comparative frameworks. Within these frameworks, I use Western theories about teaching reading implemented in non-Western contexts as tools of analysis by comparing those theories and concepts with
teachers’ perspectives of content area reading in the particular context of Cambodia. Specifically, this comparative and international study is undertaken to explore how Cambodian teachers react to active and cooperative learning pedagogies transferred from elsewhere and how teachers apply these approaches in their instructional strategies.

In the next section, I will lay out an overview of the Cambodian basic education system, recent educational reforms, and language/literacy learning and teaching in Cambodia. This overview will provide useful background information about the research context in order to better understand how reading is taught in Cambodia.

The Context of the Research

Cambodian Basic Education: An Overview

Basic education is a term used in the Cambodian government documents to describe schooling that consists of six years of primary school (Grades 1-6, where pupils must be enrolled at the age of six), and three years of lower secondary school (Grades 7-9) (UNESCO & IBE, 2011). According to the national curriculum, academic subjects that must be taught in upper elementary classes are Khmer studies, mathematics, science, social studies, and physical and health education (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport [MoEYS], 2004a). The government has stated its commitment to providing Education For All by ensuring that all Cambodian children and youth have equal opportunity to access education by 2015 (MoEYS & UNICEF, 2005). Thus, basic education is free to all citizens, and every child has rights to quality education at all levels (Dy, 2004). They have an equal opportunity to access K-12 education in Cambodia. However, teachers who teach in those basic grades are not highly paid. They are still facing a lot of challenges in their teaching profession.

In 2011, about a quarter of elementary teachers held an upper-secondary degree (Grade 12 completion), while about two thirds held a lower-secondary school degree (Grade 9 completion) (UNESCO & IIEP, 2011). Due to teacher shortages, the government certified teachers who were under-qualified to teach. Additionally, UNESCO and IIEP reported that teachers are underpaid, especially those who teach basic Grades (1-9). They earn, on average $80 USD per month depending on their qualifications, years of experience and number of shifts worked.
Recent Educational Reforms in Cambodia

The civil war in Cambodia during 1975-1979 almost completely destroyed the educational infrastructure and human resources in Cambodia (Chandler, 1998). Very few educators survived and were faced with a nearly impossible mission to reconstruct the education sector under circumstances of severe shortage of human and material resources. Since the general election in 1993, the government, having a strong partnership with international donors, has implemented many educational reform ideas in education in Cambodia (MoEYS, 2003). Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play important roles in providing financial, human, and physical resources to the Cambodian government (NEP, 2006). NGOs like USAID, Save the Children Norway and KAPE assist the Ministry at the central level, providing technical support and advice for pedagogical practices and teacher education in order to promote educational reforms in Cambodia (NEP, 2006).

Two important education reforms that focus on quality development are the Cluster School program (to mobilize the active participation of NGOs, communities, and parents), and Child Friendly Schools [CFS] (introduced in 2002) (Bunlay, Wright, Sophea, Bredenburg, & Singh, 2010). “Cluster Schools” refer to a parent school that covers a variety of activities, including co-operation between schools under its umbrella. This includes administration, the supply of teaching materials, pedagogy training, and other extracurricular activities. Most of the teaching resources and training are held at the cluster school in order to provide all teachers in the cluster school system with professional and pedagogical support (Giordano, 2008). The CFS framework focuses on teachers’ attitudes and skills to ensure that learning is an enjoyable experience for children (MoEYS, 2007a). In order to create a “pleasant classroom environment” (p. 16), the CFS reform methodology initiated by international donors mainly focuses on teaching and learning through active and cooperative strategies (MoEYS, 2007b).

Language/Literacy Teaching and Learning in Cambodia: An Historical Overview

The spoken language in Cambodia has influenced people’s attitudes towards written texts and how people interact with those texts. Stories are meant to be performed
and heard rather than read silently to oneself (Thierry, 1976). This practice indicates that the storyteller is more important than the audience and reflects the prevailing social order (Needham, 2003). Correct recitation, as well as correct reception, are elements that maintain tradition, authority, and orderliness. As asserted by Ledgerwood (1990), “the way that one receives the information, like the way it is told, carries the implication that this is being done in an orderly way, meaning essentially the way it has always been done” (p. 75). In addition, the term “reading” was defined by Samdech Chuon Nath (1966), the Master of Khmer language, as a way to look at words and say or speak out the words.

The idea of correct transmission of knowledge is historically rooted in Buddhist pedagogy (Needham, 2003). Originally transmitted verbally, the teachings of the Buddha had been written down by the time Buddhism reached Cambodia. The text was memorized and chanted aloud in replication of how the Buddha originally gave guidance to his disciples (Ishii, 1986). In the Buddhist temples, the teaching method is “Rien Sot,” meaning to study or to learn by heart, and it is informed by the way in which people interacted with the written text (Needham, 2003). This teaching method is suited to the original goal of instruction, which involved memorization of texts for later recitation. It is also in keeping with an ideology of learning in which a body of knowledge is meant to be transmitted, without question, exactly as it was received from the source (Needham, 2003). Teaching instruction in Cambodia is still influenced by the traditional ways of transmitting knowledge, which are rote memorization and recitation.

Western approaches to teaching reading will be described in the chapter following. Having described some important aspects of education in Cambodia that provide some background context for the study, the next section describes the research questions and the significance of the study.
Research Questions

This study is framed by a principal research question followed by sub-research questions. The principal research question is: How do teachers understand and teach reading in content areas in upper elementary classes in suburban public schools in Cambodia? Sub-research questions include:

1. What are the teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about reading and teaching reading in their content area classes? Why might this be so? How do these attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge influence their instructional strategies?

2. What instructional strategies do the teachers use and find most beneficial for their students when teaching reading in content areas? What is/are the most significant influence(s) on how they teach? Why?
   2.1 Where have they learned those strategies?
   2.2 What is/are the most significant influence(s) on how they teach?
   2.3 How do the teachers implement active and cooperative learning pedagogies?

3. What challenges do the teachers face when teaching reading in content areas?
   What do the teachers suggest for addressing those challenges and for improving the teaching of reading in content areas? Why?

4. How do teachers understand their role(s) in improving curriculum implementation in content area reading?

Significance of the Study

This study will provide a thorough scholarly investigation of teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, and practices in upper elementary schools in Cambodia. It also takes an in-depth look into teachers’ approaches to teaching reading in content area classes in those schools. Thus, the data gained from the sample of the population in this study offers useful information for improvement in three important areas: (1) teacher education programs and pre/in-service teacher development; (2) curriculum development; and (3) the conceptual and theoretical knowledge regarding teaching reading theories and comparative education.
The findings of this study will allow teachers and administrators in Cambodia to gain a deeper understanding of the issues associated with teaching reading in content areas in their own setting and the challenges they face when they teach reading in their content area classes. In addition, current practices (curriculum making and implementation) can be better analyzed and improved through the identification of the perspectives and practices of the teachers in upper elementary grades who teach content-subjects. Preparation for teacher development activities in Cambodia can be adjusted and improved in order to meet the areas that this study identifies as challenges for teachers. The findings of this study will also provide school administrators and educators at the Ministry level with some insights into the practices, the voices and the beliefs of their teachers, enabling the administration to focus on professional development and improving practices at the school level.

Furthermore, this study will also provide insights into the literature and theories on the teaching of reading in content areas in non-Western contexts, specifically in the Southeast Asian context. This study will engage theories and concepts of borrowing and lending of practices and ideas such as active and cooperative learning pedagogies and concepts around the methods of teaching reading in content areas from comparative and international education perspectives.

The following section will review the literature relevant to the study. Due to the research questions addressed above, the theoretical approaches used in this study will focus on a number of theories including (1) the conceptual knowledge of reading, including the values and types of reading, and the definitions of reading/content area reading; (2) teaching and learning reading in content areas; (3) challenges of teaching reading in content areas; (4) teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge; and (5) teacher agency in curriculum implementation.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

The Conceptual Knowledge of Reading

In comparison to teaching reading in Cambodia, described in the previous chapter, Western approaches to teaching reading differ significantly. Reading is important in education. Students need reading strategies and skills to comprehend, think, and reflect on what they read. Thus, reading is a complex process that involves not producing passive readers but active readers who will be engaged and engaging in life. The question of the importance of reading is addressed by considering the ways in which experience itself is read through the interaction of the self and the world (Freire, 1983). Through examining memories of childhood, it is possible to view objects and experience as texts, words, and letters and to see the growing awareness of the world as a kind of reading through which the self learns and changes. The actual act of reading literary texts is seen as part of a wider process of human development and growth based on understanding both one’s own experience and the social world. Learning to read must be seen as one aspect of the act of knowing and as a creative act. Reading the world thus precedes reading the word and writing a new text must be seen as one means of transforming the world (Freire, 1983, p. 1).

At school, students need to read texts in almost all subjects. When students read, they have to think, comprehend, and reflect on what they read, which is a goal of contemporary education. Alexander, Fox, Maggioni, and Dumas (2012) view the basic goal of reading as the way of learning from text (any form of text). Educators try to prepare students to become successfully educated members of society. Thus, reading is important in education. Good readers tend to be good learners and good learners tend to develop more academically and professionally. According to Madison Metropolitan School District High School Reading Task Force, “a student’s ability to read is key for success in all academic areas as in life itself” (as cited in Cahoon, 2007, p. 3).

Reading serves as the foundational basis for each subject at each level of learning starting from early childhood education to higher education in many societies. Cahoon (2007) argues that, even if students do not pursue an academic career or post secondary...
school, they must be able to read proficiently and critically in order to function in society. The ability to read successfully promotes student development in all areas, including intellectual, social, and psychological realms. Therefore, reading is an indirect form of learning and an aid to learning, which possesses unique characteristics. As asserted by Gray (1965), the significance of reading in the learning process is the fact that it utilizes printed or written words as symbols of meaning. The vast majority of children’s experiences are learned indirectly through looking at pictures, listening to oral presentations, or reading passages written by others (Gray, 1965). Thus, reading is a complex process that involves not producing passive readers but active readers who will be engaged and engaging in life.

**Definitions of Reading**

Different writers and researchers have defined reading in various ways. Reading was traditionally defined “as the process of recognizing printed or written symbols, involving such habits as accuracy in recognizing the words that make up a passage” (Gray, 1965, p. 47). However, Neilsen (1994) offers a different view of reading. He argues that reading is more than word recognition and the development of technical skill in the meaning of words and sentences, but is also self-connection and reflection. Bogdan and Straw (1990) describe this perspective of reading as, “the realization of personal and social goals for the readers rather than the perception or reception of some messages from author or text” (p. 6). According to Herber (1978), “reading is defined as a thinking process which includes decoding of symbols, interpreting the meanings of the symbols, and applying the ideas derived from those symbols” (p. 9).

Furthermore, Freire often describes the meaning of “reading” by linking it to a critical, dialogical mode of knowing and being. He adds, for example, “reading always involves critical perception and interpretation” (Freire, 1983, p. 11). According to Gunning (2013), reading used to be treated as a passive mean to get factual information without further reflection and critical thinking; however, readers should not be only the direct recipients of knowledge. The readers should create their own meanings out of the text and there should be two-ways involving a reader and a text. Reading is more than looking at letters and matching their sounds. It also consists of comprehension, understanding what is read, what is meant, and what is implied, which involves critical
thinking and comprehension abilities. Reading without comprehension is not reading. Rather, it is simply reciting words seen on paper. Hence, the definition of reading is not simply one that only involves the recognition and deciphering of letters, or the pronunciation of the words these letters form. According to Alexander et al. (2012), when reading any texts, the readers should take into account the intention of the author(s). Thus “defined, reading can be understood as a relation between the readers and the author via a text… we are referring to two reciprocal aspects of the meaning-making process” (p. 263). Reading is a complex cognitive activity that is imperative for adequate functioning in society (Alfassi, 2004). According to Smagorinsky (2001), reading is a mediating process that involves composition of meaning. Thus, students are required to understand the meaning of text, critically evaluate the message, understand the content, and apply the newly learned knowledge flexibly (Brown & Campione, 1990; Pressley, 2000).

Definitions of Content Area Reading

Helping students to learn factual information is only one role that text may play. The role of reading in order to get only facts in content areas has been criticized for not helping students move beyond the stating of basic facts (Hurd, 1998; Norris & Phillips, 2003; Wineburg, 2001). This argument means that students have to learn that a text is not the final answer in a discipline. Rather, students need to know how to analyze and evaluate information, as well as identify the biases in the texts that they read. They also need to learn how to communicate this information to others (Holliday, Yore, & Alvermann, 1994). Proper reading of resource materials requires that students interpret what they decode and effectively use the ideas they acquire.

Therefore, when associated with reading instruction in content areas, reading is not narrowly defined as a decoding skill or the development of the technical skill in learning the meaning of words and sentences (Benjamin, 2007; Herber, 1978). Harold Herber (1970) published the first textbook devoted primarily to content area reading and instruction. He introduced a method for teaching reading, not taught separately by reading experts in a remedial program, but as an integrated process that content area teachers could use in guiding students’ comprehension of their texts (Herber, 1970, 1978). According to Herber (1978),
Reading skills and subject content can be taught simultaneously. There need not be a dichotomy between the content of a subject and the skills for learning the content. Such a view of reading instruction requires one to change traditional views about how to teach reading. (p. 4)

Content area reading is defined as reading in academic disciplines such as math, social studies, history, geography, science, biology, and so forth (Tarasoff, 1993). McKenna and Robinson (1990) specifically define content area reading as “the ability to use reading and writing for the acquisition of new content in a given discipline; such ability includes three principle cognitive components: general literacy skills, content specific literacy skills (such as map reading in social studies), and prior knowledge of content” (p, 184). Hall (2005) adds that, when students read any materials in their academic disciplines, they process the information within the text by using meta-cognitive approaches, including comprehension, application, and connection to the text.

Content area reading requires reading skills necessary for students to gain meaning from the fiction and non-fiction texts that they encounter in their content area classes, including the ability to make inferences from the text, learn new vocabulary from content, link ideas across texts, and identify and summarize the most important ideas from content within a text (Torgesen et al., 2007). Content-reading programs are based on the notion that all students are required to learn from a variety of texts. To learn successfully from these texts, Bean and Readence (1989) urge that students must be exposed to a variety of reading and learning strategies that will help them meet the demands of coping with the new vocabulary, concepts, and text organization. Thus, in teaching reading in content area classes, teachers should consider themselves as facilitators of students’ textbook learning. It is their job to see that students interact with text at a high level of understanding through a wise use of reading and learning strategies (Bean & Readence, 1989).

**Types and Purposes of Reading**

The nature of the instruction provided in reading depends upon the types and purposes of reading in which children and adults engage (Gray, 1965). Gray suggests four major types and purposes of reading. The first type is reading with respect to the general form of reading, such as silent and oral reading. Second, reading level is
determined by the reader’s general attitude, such as “work-type” and “recreational.”

Third, reading is based on the specific purposes of the reader; for example, a child may read to find information relating to a problem or to follow detailed directions, and an adult may read to understand a situation better, or to determine validity of arguments relating to a social issue. Fourth, reading is based on the relation of the ideas involved, which is determined by facts and by relations inherent in the materials read. For instance, a child reads a geography text for the facts presented and interprets its content geographically.

However, Rosenblatt (1978, 1985, 1988) develops the view that readers experience texts through two reader’s stances (e.g. the reader’s perspective and orientation toward a given text). The reader’s stance serves to direct the reader’s focus of attention and purpose in reading (Rosenblatt, 1978). Those two stances are efferent reading and aesthetic reading. In efferent reading, the reader focuses on ideas and concepts to be taken away from the text (e.g. reading a newspaper article, a recipe, or a history book, etc.). In aesthetic reading, the reader becomes absorbed in a text world of imagination and feelings in which “attention is focused on what [the reader] is living through during the reading-event” (Rosenblatt, 1985). She acknowledges that sometimes the same text may be read either efferently or aesthetically.

In content area reading students are exposed to a variety of reading and learning strategies; thus, content area reading is subsumed under many types of reading, such as work-type reading (Dishner & Olson, 1989), silent reading (Flemming & Woodring, 1928; Young, 1927), reading based on the ideas involved (Gray, 1965), and efferent and aesthetic reading (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1985, 1988). In addition, the types and purposes of reading that are often used in upper elementary classes are oral and silent reading (Gray, 1965), recreational reading (Gray, 1965), aesthetic and efferent reading (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1985, 1988), and the fourth type of reading—reading based on the ideas involved, suggested by Gray (1965).

**Teaching and Learning Reading in Content Areas**

Traditionally, content areas have been taught in relation to three principles: (1) the student is a blank sheet to be written on or an empty container to be filled; (2) the teacher dispenses knowledge from the textbook, and (3) the instructional process consists of
students absorbing the information that the teacher or textbook presents (Pearson & Tierney, 1984). According to this view, it is usual that teachers who teach in content area classes assign reading in textbook chapters, conduct question and answer periods about the chapter, and then give tests. Pearson and Tierney (1984) add that, within this kind of instruction, some students do not learn the material at all. They may simply memorize isolated pieces of content materials in order to pass the end of the unit test.

However, learning the knowledge of an academic field requires more than passively receiving parts of knowledge from a book or a teacher. The goal is for students to develop meaningful conceptual understandings about the content, as opposed to engaging in rote learning and recitation of facts (Duffy & Roehler, 1989). In order to reach this goal, content area teachers have to move away from the passive view of learning, in which students remember factual information, and replace it by an active and cognitive view. Within this cognitive view of teaching, the content area instructional process involves two important elements: (1) the definition of the task (Doyle, 1983), and (2) the creation of opportunities for students to interact with the content so that, over a period of time, they construct the intended meaning (Duffy, Roehler, Meloth, & Vavrus, 1986).

Within these active and cognitive perspectives of teaching reading, ample research exists to support the efficacy of vocabulary instruction and strategic reading comprehension in teaching content area reading (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2000; Graves, 2000; National Reading Panel, 2006; Schumaker & Deshler, 1994). When teachers use these strategies in a systematic manner, student motivation and achievement in reading improves (Pressley, 2000; Richardson & Morgan, 2003; Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, & Hurwitz, 1999). Content area reading is a type of reading in academic disciplines that involves making inferences from text, learning new vocabulary from content, linking ideas across texts, and identifying and summarizing the most important ideas from content within a text. A number of researchers suggest vocabulary instruction and strategic reading comprehension in teaching content area reading.

Vocabulary development is a critical element in helping students learn from content area texts. In their report on reading comprehension, the RAND Reading Study Group (RRSG, 2002) contends that successful text comprehension requires students to
have various types of knowledge, including “vocabulary, domain and topic knowledge, linguistic and discourse knowledge, and knowledge of specific comprehension strategies” (p. 13). Therefore, it is important for instruction in content areas to provide stronger support for the development of academic vocabulary and content knowledge (Bulgren, 2004). According to Ruddell (2005), vocabulary instruction in content areas serves the dual purpose of removing barriers to text comprehension and promoting long-term acquisition and development of the language used in an academic discipline.

In order to meet these goals, teachers have to develop a conceptual understanding of how students acquire vocabulary, as well as a repertoire of instructional strategies that reflect that understanding. For example, teachers must understand the word-learning tasks (Graves, 2000) that students face in their vocabulary acquisition and develop efficient methods for selecting appropriate words. While students can benefit greatly from explicit vocabulary instruction in their content area classes, they also need opportunities to develop their vocabulary through extensive reading. The volume of a student’s independent reading contributes significantly to his vocabulary knowledge (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1991). Allowing time for independent reading across a wide range of texts also increases student fluency and motivation. For instance, enhanced literacy development in adolescents has been linked to providing students with a wide variety of reading materials (Rycik & Irvin, 2001), yet, according to Bean (2000), textbooks still prevail in most content area classes. The emphasis on traditional texts may inhibit students’ vocabulary acquisition, fluency, and motivation.

Another important element of teaching reading in content areas is teaching reading comprehension. When students learn to read and comprehend, they should be taught skills that show them how to read for specific purposes and how to be active readers. Herber (1978) states that reading comprehension is a three-tiered process: literal, interpretive, and application. He describes the process as follows: the student reads what the author says (literal), makes meaning (interpretive), and applies it to the knowledge already possessed (application). At the applied level, the student takes the intrinsic relations created at the interpretive level of comprehension and synthesizes them with self-possessed knowledge and experiences. From this synthesis, the student creates a new relation, an extrinsic relation that is larger than any meaning created from the context of
the reading (Herber, 1970). It is at the level of producing ideas that reach beyond the scope of reading passages in which the transference of knowledge from text to the student’s mind occurs. This level of comprehension starts with building characteristics of good comprehension (Pressley, Goodchild, Fleet, Zajchowski & Evans, 1989), developing self-regulation while reading (Paris & Paris, 2001), and applying knowledge in a problem-solving situation (Pressley et al., 1992). Barthes refers to this as “readerly” versus “writerly” texts.

To achieve these goals, a number of researchers suggest certain instructional strategies to develop comprehension skills. Researchers in reading comprehension have identified a number of different reading-thinking strategies used by proficient readers to comprehend text (Moss, 2005). Those cognitive strategies are: (1) engaging in cover-to-cover study of new texts; (2) activating and using prior knowledge; (3) drawing inferences; (4) making predictions; (5) determining importance; (6) summarizing, analyzing, and synthesizing; (7) evoking mental imagery; (8) generating questions; (9) using text structure and story grammar; (10) monitoring comprehension; (11) making connections between the text and other texts, oneself, and the world; (12) engaging in meta-cognition; and (13) thinking aloud (Moss, 2005). Similarly, other research studies have suggested that there are methods that teachers can use to help students comprehend content area texts (Guastello, Beasley, & Sinatra, 2000; Klingner, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1998; Lederer, 2000). These studies have found that students’ comprehension of expository texts can be improved when: (1) they are taught how to use graphic organizers, (2) when they are explicitly taught how to be meta-cognitive and apply specific comprehension strategies, and (3) when students are able to hear text read aloud as they follow along with it.

In the United States, according to the National Reading Panel Report (2001), comprehension skills may be taught through explicit instruction, cooperative learning, modeling, guided practices, and teacher monitoring. Marzano et al. (2001) conducted a meta-analysis to compile research on instructional strategies and determined the most effective strategies to teach reading comprehension in content areas. Those strategies include identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note-taking, reinforcement practices, non-linguistic representations, active/cooperative learning,
setting objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses, questioning, and scaffolding. Since active and cooperative learning strategies are selective methods to be investigated in this study, it is important to perceive how they are taught in content area classes.

In their definition and description of content area reading, Billmeyer and Barton (2002) propose three interactive elements of reading: the reader, the climate, and the text features that teachers must be aware of when teaching reading in content areas. With a focus on these three elements, teaching reading in content areas necessitates a shift away from passive, teacher-centered methods of teaching content to active and cooperative learning methods. Alvermann (2002) recommends literacy instruction for adolescents to build motivation by addressing students’ self-efficacy and engagement, and include participatory approaches that engage students and involve them in higher order thinking. She advocates that these student or learner-centered practices should replace passive, teacher-centered instruction (Alvermann, 2002).

McCombs and Whisler (1997) note that teachers, who apply active-learning methods, view each student as unique and capable of learning, and hold dear the principles that promote and accept the student’s points of view. In teaching reading in content areas, teachers should follow three steps in the process in order to promote active-learning methods (Billmeyer & Barton, 2002). First, teachers must enable students to access their prior knowledge of the subject and teach them to self-evaluate their mental disposition towards the reading. Second, teachers should create the environment in which students can learn best, feel a sense of safety, and actively engage in the whole learning process. Third, teachers must consider the features of a text, which include reader aids, vocabulary, and text structure, when they plan their lessons. When following these three elements of reading, teachers must be aware of the students as learners (Billmeyer & Barton, 2002).

**Active and Cooperative Learning Pedagogies (Student-Centered Approaches)**

Cooperative learning is a major strategy in student-centered approaches. Numbers of researchers have found that collaboration can increase students’ learning outcomes (Urquhart & Frazee, 2012; Langer, 2000). “Cooperative learning is a structured form of
small group learning. It is based on two keys assumptions, positive interdependence and individual accountability” (Cottell & Millis, 1994, as cited in USAID, 2009, p. 6).
Cooperative learning is an instructional strategy often used by teachers in which students are placed in small groups of two or more to complete tasks (Marzano et al., 2001).
“Students learn by interacting with others in the classroom, by generating and asking questions, and by discussing their ideas freely with the teacher or one another. Conversation not only sparks new ideas but also provides an opportunity for the speaker to deepen his or her understanding of an idea or topic.” (Urquhart & Frazee, 2012, p. 8).
There are different forms of cooperation among students, such as group discussions (large, small, or online groups) that can provide students with an opportunity to share/discuss/compare their thinking and allow teachers to help the groups with questions/comments by encouraging them to ask critical questions in order for them to deepen their thinking and analysis (Langer, 2000). According to Slavin (1990),

The lesson might begin with the teacher meeting with the whole class to provide an overall perspective, present new material, pose problems or questions for investigation, and clarify directions for the group activity. The class then divides into small groups, usually with four members each. Students work together cooperatively in each group, discussing the problem or question, making and testing conjectures, verifying that each student is satisfied that the group answer is reasonable. This communication of ideas with one another is especially valuable in the learning process…. The teacher moves from group to group, providing assistance by asking thought-provoking questions as needed. Cooperative learning represents a variety of approaches (jigsaw, student team, learning together, group investigation, etc.). (p. 10)

Cooperative learning strategies are believed to have positive effects on both students’ academic achievement and their social skills. Many research studies have shown that when students are placed as a central focus and students are actively and cooperatively engaged in their group work, their academic performance is improved (Ebrahim, 2010; Effandi & Zanaton, 2007). Many other researchers also provide the positive effects of cooperative learning on student behavioral and social skills. They argued that when students work together cooperatively in-group, they would better build their friendship, interpersonal skills, self-esteem, and motivations (Cohen, 1994; Ebrahim, 2010; Johnson & Johnson, 1990; Slavin, 1990).
Cooperative learning strategies are more difficult to effectively implement in the classroom (Ebrahim, 2010). Research studies have shown that, when applying cooperative learning approaches, teachers should be more flexible in their teaching methods depending on students’ learning abilities, needs, and interest. Johnson and Johnson (1993) stated “simply placing students in groups and telling them to work together does not mean that they know how to cooperate or that they will do so even if they do know” (p. 138). Not all groups are cooperative (Johnson & F. Johnson, 2009). There are several ways that group-work goes wrong and does not meet the purpose of cooperation (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Cooperative learning can go wrong when the group members are divided into different directions—slower learners leave the tasks for the others to complete and the more able group members might take advantage (leadership) at the expense of other less able members. According to Johnson and Johnson (1993),

Many teachers believe that they are implementing cooperative learning when in fact they are missing its essence. Putting students into groups to learn is not the same thing as structuring cooperation among students. Cooperation is not: (1) having students sit side-by-side at the same table and talk with each other as they do their individual assignments; (2) having students to do a task individually with instructions that the ones who finish first are to help the slower students; and (3) assigning a report to a group where one student does all the work and others put their names on it. (p. 139)

According to Johnson and Johnson (1999), in order for cooperative learning to be effective, the cooperative groups must function according to five defining elements: positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing—reflecting on how well the group interacts and how to improve it. In cooperative learning groups, “students come to rely less on the teacher and more on one another” (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2010, p. 72). They continue to state that, by engaging students in cooperative learning, teachers will accept more of the diversity that each student has and the contributions that each student makes (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2010).

There is also a manual about cooperative learning strategies developed by USAID for Cambodia. “Teaching practices that provide opportunities to students to learn together in small groups are known as Cooperative Learning. Cooperative Learning is children
learning together in groups, which are structured so that group members have to cooperate to succeed.” (USAID, 2009, p. 2). According to USAID (2009), there are four main purposes why cooperative learning is recommended. Those purposes are: (1) more children become more actively engaged in their own learning; (2) children learn to help one another; (3) child-to-child learning support; and (4) improved motivation through success. However, USAID (2009) also stated that:

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Today, many teachers in Cambodia are reconsidering traditional practices that emphasized competition over cooperation in the classroom. Teachers rethinking whether it makes sense to encourage students to work by themselves, often hiding what they know from others students in order to prevent cheating. (p. 1)

The Challenges of Teaching Reading in Content Areas

Some common challenges for many teachers relate to problems that have a direct bearing on teaching—problems which prevent teachers from realizing the full potential of their teaching skills. A major challenge for both teachers and students in upper elementary schools is the difficult nature of most content area textbooks (Mastropieri, Scruggs, & Graetz, 2003). Chall (1983) similarly states that students, after Grade 4, move from learning to read in familiar narratives into reading the informational texts in academic contents, which often makes it difficult for teachers to integrate reading and content instruction. Another challenge is resistance by the teachers themselves. According to Jackson and Cunningham (1994), the research on teacher-resistance to strategy instruction has been linked to factors in two main areas: content area teachers see themselves as experts in their content areas, not in reading strategies; and the constraints of the classroom (class size, pressure to cover a certain amount of content, and lack of planning time). Kiewra (2002) states that, now, school curriculum is often focused more on covering content than on students’ competence in using language and critical thinking skills. Subject matter is an essential mode for organizing and enacting the school curriculum. The predominant characteristics observed across studies of content area classrooms are: the use of textbooks, emphasis on factual information, and teacher-centered interactions with print (Richardson & Morgan, 2003; Alvermann & Moore, 1991). This traditional model of learning in content area classrooms is inconsistent with research on effective content area reading instruction, which makes it difficult for
teachers to implement change and new research-based strategies in predominantly traditional schools.

In addition, depending on the context for learning, other socio-cultural factors may come into play, as well. Balfanz, Ruby, and MacIver (2002) found that teachers in high poverty schools feel that student behaviour is out of control, thereby making behaviour management a priority over quality instruction. Many other conflicting issues have kept content area teachers from successfully integrating literacy practices into their instruction. These pressures are: a lack of clarity about their responsibilities in this area; a lack of knowledge about how to teach reading strategies; the need to differentiate for a wide variety of student needs, learning styles, and interests; a lack of instructional materials to support these various student needs; and a lack of quality, ongoing professional learning on how to make literacy instruction an integral part of specific content areas (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007).

To address the above challenges, Herber (1978) and Conley (1986) suggest several promising solutions to improve teaching reading in content areas, such as teaching reading skills functionally, simplifying reading instruction, stimulating the reading process, sequencing for independence and sophistication, and higher levels of expectation and caring for students. In addition, quality professional development is a crucial factor in helping teachers to implement instructional approaches that effectively support students’ reading development. Professional development is important because some teachers may be resistant to new or different approaches to instruction, since they lack knowledge in reading development (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). Another important element that impacts teachers’ content area reading efforts at the school level is leadership. Biancarosa and Snow (2004) suggest that the combined leadership of principal, teachers, and other experts in the school has great potential for success. Thus, teacher leadership becomes increasingly critical when re-conceptualizing the field of content area literacy. As recommended by Heller and Greenleaf (2007), content area teachers should take a leading role in determining which literacy practices are most important to teaching in their field and in determining what responsibility teachers should embrace in terms of teaching these skills.
Teachers’ Perspectives (Attitudes, Beliefs, and Knowledge)

In order to understand how teachers approach and do their work, it is necessary to understand the beliefs, attitudes, and principles under which they operate. Niyozov (2001) asserts that it is crucial to take teachers’ beliefs, values and attitudes into account, and to understand their realities in and outside classrooms in order to improve their performance. Also, in a theoretical model of teacher thinking, Clark and Peterson (1986) stress that teacher beliefs relate to classroom instruction and to student performance. Past research has supported this claim and demonstrated that teachers’ personal theories and beliefs influence how they teach literacy and what they signify as important reading processes for their students (Allington, 1991; Lehman, Freeman, & Allen, 1994; Palardy, 1998; Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991). This view is supported by a study conducted by Cummins (1998) for the purpose of (1) identifying teachers’ beliefs regarding the teaching and learning of reading, (2) examining classroom reading practices, and (3) exploring the relationship between the beliefs and practice of teachers. Cummins found that a significant relationship exists between teacher beliefs and their activities. Thus, teacher beliefs about reading instruction play a crucial role in their classroom practices and instruction. Konopak, Readence, and Wilson (1994) also note that teachers, who come to believe that one of their roles is to help students become critical thinkers and readers in relation to content materials as a way to improve academic performance, will change their beliefs about teaching reading in content areas. Defining teachers’ belief systems or identifying what they believe about certain aspects of teaching is important in defining what they do in the classroom and how they do it. In addition, some research indicates that the effectiveness with which teachers are able to implement new practices in their classrooms can depend on whether the beliefs held by those teachers match the assumptions inherent in the new methods (Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, & Loyd, 1991). For instance, a content area teacher who maintains a traditional teacher-centered orientation towards teaching and learning would likely have less success implementing a strategy-based reading intervention than a teacher who maintains a more constructivist, student-centered theory of teaching and learning.

Researchers and practitioners also agree that attitudes and perceptions frame instruction. Researchers have found that what teachers believe to be true about literacy
education and students has a profound influence on their teaching practices that contributes to student performance and achievement (McCombs, Lauer, & Peralez, 1997). Teacher attitudes towards reading also affect teacher behavior and reading instruction (Morrison, Jacobs, & Swinyard, 1999). Morrison et al. (1999) studied the extent to which elementary teachers read, and their use of recommended reading instructional practices. The findings revealed that the majority of the teachers read often and enjoyed reading books, and that the teachers who expressed positive attitudes towards reading used more recommended instructional strategies than teachers with less positive attitudes. Darwin and Fleischman (2005) point out that “to meet the challenges of improving adolescents’ literacy skills as well as content area reading skills, educators must embrace a new attitude, and recognize that reading is not a static skill, but one that needs to grow along with the individual” (p. 85). Scates (2004) also suggests that “identifying the teachers’ attitudes that may help or hinder student achievement proves helpful as an indicator of reading instruction success.” (p. 53).

Teacher knowledge, planning, and interactive decision-making are also related to instructional practice (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Jackson (1968) and Lortie (1975) suggest that many teachers decide on their instruction by relying on impulse, intuition, and personal experience rather than on reflective thought and professional education. However, Clark and Peterson (1986), and Putman and Duffy (1984) show a contrary point of view by arguing that teacher practice does not only rely on impulse and personal experience, but that teachers do appear to possess a great deal of formal knowledge and knowledge of pedagogy. They add that the lack of empirical data makes it difficult to know whether this knowledge comes from the concepts of subject matter possessed by the teachers, professional education, personal experience, or a combination of all three.

The emphasis on teacher knowledge and skill is also important in teaching reading in content areas because reading lessons in the content areas are more complicated than those in the early grades, which influence teachers’ instructional strategies. A number of sources suggested three major types of knowledge that shape teacher teaching practices. Formal knowledge is primarily known and produced by researchers for teachers (Fenstermacher, 1994). Practical knowledge is defined as personal knowledge bounded by time and context that teachers themselves generate as a
result of their experiences (Clandinin, 1985; Elbaz, 1983; Fenstermacher, 1994).

Pedagogical content knowledge is “the intersection of content and pedagogy, in the transformation of content into forms that are pedagogically powerful and adaptable for variation in context” (Shulman, 1987, p. 15). Less of the current research in teacher knowledge in reading takes into consideration teachers’ practical knowledge. In addition, since teacher knowledge heavily relies on the context of experience (Munby, Russell, & Martin, 2001), this research will investigate teacher personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985). Personal practical knowledge is a combination of theory and practical knowledge born of lived experience, and is observed in practice and is revealed over time (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). In this research, because of my additional interest in exploring what teachers know about subject matter (herein, reading), formal teacher knowledge will also be examined. Formal knowledge helps shape personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

The Role of Teachers in Curriculum Implementation

In order to study how teachers teach reading, it is crucial to understand teachers’ roles in implementing the curriculum, because teachers are the main agents in the curriculum implementation. Marsh and Willis (2003) claimed that curriculum implementation is the translation of a written curriculum into curriculum practices. However, teachers are not empowered to select and implement the curriculum that is suitable for their needs and their students’ needs; for example, teachers in Cambodia have to implement the curriculum (teaching methods) selected by other people at the Ministry level. Even though curriculum is not the same as “teaching methods,” in the case of Cambodia, the Ministry of Education treats them as the same and they are mandated by the Ministry. This means that teachers have no choice about using alternative methods. As asserted by Paris (1993), outsiders, such as politicians, and Department of Education representatives, have made decisions about what needs to be taught, when and how it should be taught, and by whom it should be taught. In these cases, teachers’ engagement in matters of curriculum is restricted to only implementing the curricula that were selected for them and for their students by outsiders (Goodman, Shannon, Goodman, & Rapport, 2004).
Indeed, teachers have struggled to gain control over their own teaching and the curriculum used in their classrooms for years. The constraints of external curriculum providers are real but are not all-encompassing. As noted by Apple (1986), a few decades ago, curricula almost all over the world were determined by the growing belief that the requirements of society should dictate what is taught, rather than meeting the individual needs of the students and the teachers. This argument is also supported by other researchers. Teachers are not usually involved in the curriculum change process; instead, they are left behind by the policy makers and changes have been imposed on them (Hadley, 1999; Richards, 2003). Yildirim and Kasapoglu (2015) also stated that the reason behind the teachers’ lack of involvement in curriculum change/implementation is that the curriculum change is introduced through top-down channels and teachers remain silent without being asked to give ideas, opinions or inputs on the change.

Recently, in the curriculum development research, the focus of the research question is on how teachers could be involved more actively in the process of curriculum development (Tuul, Ugaste, & Mikser, 2011). A number of empirical studies, mostly qualitative have highlighted a problem of under-representation of teachers in the curriculum process and the consequences for teacher development and curriculum implementation (Craig, 2006; Shkedi, 2006, 2009; Shawer, 2010) (as cited in Tuul, Ugaste, & Mikser, 2011, p. 759). Teachers are typically trapped in the role of passive recipients rather than of active creators of their teaching (Ayers, 2001). By using and implementing curricula that are predetermined, and “teacher-proof” in nature, teachers’ engagement in curricular matters becomes inactive, limited, and stifled (Apple, 1986; Flinders, & Thornton, 2009; Paris, 1993; Silberman, 1970). The separation created between teachers and students makes it easier for politicians, international donors, and other unqualified or outside educators to control how and what is being taught in schools. This split also causes disengagement between teachers, their professionalism, and their work (Smith, 1986).

Teachers need to have the flexibility to make the kind of instructional decisions needed for their students (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). Ben-Peretz (1990) also discussed the importance of professional autonomy by describing how teachers cherished their curricular autonomy and needed the right to choose from various methods and materials
in teaching their students. According to the context in which they are teaching, teachers tend to rely on a variety of teaching methods and texts, not just on a particular text or method, in order to make these kinds of necessary professional decisions about their students (Ben-Peretz, 1990).

Fullan and Pomfret (1977) found that teachers needed to make adaptations to the curriculum as they used it in their classrooms. Thus, adaptation of curriculum refers to the ability of teachers to modify curricula as needed in their classrooms, and curriculum adaptation occurs as teachers make necessary changes. Curriculum adaptation represents the need to change curricula as they become enacted with students. Tyler (1949) believed that it was important for teachers to modify and adjust the curricula, as they found necessary in order to get the greatest possible results for the students they served. Fullan and Pomfret also found that, when the curricula were not highly specified or predetermined in nature, they were much more conducive to adaptation by the teachers as long as teachers were given this kind of professional autonomy.

**Teacher Agency in Curriculum Making**

According to Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, and Miller (2012), “in the wake of new forms of curricular policy in many parts of the world, teachers are increasingly required to act as agents of change.” (p. 191). Research has shown that the teaching work is getting more overloaded and intense, the school is more bureaucratic, and teachers are more disempowered and professionally marginalized (Ball, 2008). Within this context or situation, teachers should empower themselves as agents for their own profession and the students’ advantage. The term ‘agency’ can be described as the capacity of actors to “critically shape their responses to problematic situations” (Biesta & Tedder, 2006, p. 11). Pignatelli (1993) pointed out “teacher agency is often conceived as a slogan to support school-based reform, despite attempts by researchers to locate it in relation to wider theoretical discussion of agency” (as cited in Priestley, 2012, p. 193). Campbell (2012) also stated that:

Teachers are seen as alternatively agents of socialization as well as change agents, whose choices and actions variably reflect the implementation, interpretation, adaptation, alteration, substitution, subversion, and/or creation of the curriculum contexts in which they work.
Teachers are also believed or seen as moral agents within the school context. According to Buzzelli and Johnston (2002), “teaching is fundamentally a moral activity, that classrooms are sites of moral interaction, and that teachers are moral agents” (p. 118). In order to enact their agency positively and effectively, teachers need to highly consider their students’ agency so that they can select the most suitable and beneficial curriculum advantage for their students and their own profession (Campbell, 2012). Teachers can choose to be their own agents and achieve the agency. But, according to Priestley et al. (2012), “this capacity varies across contexts and is dependent on both environment conditions of possibility and constraint and the teacher’s ability to mobilize their beliefs, values and attributes in response to particular conditions, including externally developed policy” (as cited in Campbell, 2012). For instance, according to Peterson (2012), there is “dissonance between teachers’ theories of teaching writing and those underlying mandated writing curricula. Teachers may come to deeper understanding of tensions they experience as they attempt to implement curricula emphasizing particular discourses that teachers feel are less informant” (p. 280). “Such tensions are charged by the teacher’s own values, beliefs, and conviction, and agency is influenced by his or her capacity to engage in curriculum work that express these values” (Campbell, 2012, p. 188).

Research has shown that more and more teachers get frustrated and their agency is getting threatened by the imposed curriculum policy (Sanger, 2012). Sanger (2012) argued that the educational practice is constrained “in a narrow and instrumental language that does not support the meaningful discussion, let alone the effective pursuit of practitioners’ own basic educational values and identities” (p. 298). The practitioners (teachers) often thrive and develop their agency in a positive way to bring back their own professionalism. But the question is how could one teacher develop his or her agency? Sanger (2012) pointed out “teacher agency is inescapably connected to the teacher’s capacity to govern practice in ways that are consonant with personal and professional values and beliefs” (as cited in Campbell, 2012, p. 189). On top of the innovation to create change via positive agency, there is also negative agency that could take place in a different form. Osborn et al. (1997) suggests “this negative agency can take a number of
forms, including resistance, conspiratorial mediation and creative mediation” (as cited in Priestley, 2012, p. 193).

Teacher agency also characterizes the relationship between teachers and curriculum in that teachers have a personal initiative and a moral responsibility that involves action in critiquing and creating curriculum (Paris, 1993). In this sense, teachers as curriculum agents view curriculum as constantly evolving as learning occurs and individuals’ needs are met. What appears to be more natural for teacher agents is for them to respond to and adapt curricula that appear inadequate for the students they teach. Paris (1993) reported that, for many years, teachers have reorganized, embellished, refined, or rejected curricula that did not meet their students’ needs. Some current curricular practices limit these kinds of teacher agency interactions, leaving the teachers with few options to turn away from the curriculum given to them, regardless of the negative effects (Allington, 2002; Goodman et al., 2004; Meier, Kohn, Darling-Hammond, Sizer, & Wood, 2004).

Therefore, Silberman (1970, 1976) was concerned that there was too much mindlessness in schools and in implementation of curriculum. He got to the heart of teacher agency and wanted educators, politicians, policy-makers, and parents to ask critical questions like, “Why are we doing what we are doing in our classroom?” Paris (1993) also stated that teachers remain receivers and implementers of curriculum created or selected by others rather than being active agents in the creation and critique of curriculum. Teacher agency in reading instruction may prove crucial in meeting the needs of students and teachers in Cambodia who need quality teaching and learning.

In summary, the review of literature included theories about teaching reading, specifically content area reading, and teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, and skills and knowledge which help inform and answer the research question—*how do teachers understand and teach reading in content areas in upper elementary classes in suburban public schools in Cambodia?* Teachers face challenges when they teach content area reading, such as the difficulty of textbooks, lack of skills and knowledge in teaching reading in content areas, pressure to cover school curriculum, and other traditional models of teaching and learning embedded in the schools where they teach. In order to address those challenges, it is necessary to understand teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, and
their skills and knowledge about teaching reading in content areas, as well as their role in implementing reading curricula. Researchers and practitioners assert that these factors shape the teachers’ instructional strategies.

Cambodia is not an industrially developed country. The context of this country offers its own national and organizational culture. Thus, the above literature review forms the conceptual knowledge of this study, which is used as a foundation or lens for reflecting and understanding the teachers’ beliefs and theories about reading and teaching in Cambodia.
Chapter 3
Research Design and Methodology

This chapter presents the research design and methodology for this study and discusses the comparative and international frameworks, in which this study is situated. In addition, it outlines the rationale of the research methodology, the descriptions of qualitative research, particularly case study approaches, and the role of the researcher.

This study employed a qualitative case study approach (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1984, 2003) within comparative and international education frameworks, including an examination of the concepts of educational transfer—borrowing and lending educational ideas, policies, and practices.

Comparative and International Education Frameworks

Comparativists focus more and more on the internal variation that exists in nation-states, particularly in relation to education reforms (Schriewer, 2000). This new focus has increasingly led to new forms of comparison. Manzon (2007) states “comparison can move beyond geographical space to include units of analysis such as cultures, policies, curricula, and systems” (p. 85). The units of analysis of this study focus on the enactment of reading curricula—the perspectives and practices of Cambodian teachers in teaching content area reading compared to Western theories on reading and teaching reading in content areas.

Bray and Thomas (1995) listed three dimensions for comparative analysis. They are the geographical/locational, the non-locational, and aspects of education and of society. In the course of this study, the geographical dimension focuses on the school level (two suburban upper elementary schools) in Cambodia. The non-locational dimension of this research is the comparison between various concepts and practices in Cambodia and ideas/theories on the teaching of reading in content areas adopted in Western contexts. Additionally, the aspect of education under investigation is comprised of the educational transfer of active and cooperative learning pedagogies.
Educational Transfer—Borrowing and Lending Educational Ideas

Educational transfer is often understood as the transmission of educational methods from one nation to another (Steiner-Khamsi, 2003). Educational transfer can happen at many levels, ranging from basic classroom instructional changes to alterations in state education policy (Beech, 2006). Early studies of transfer were largely descriptive, and failed to acknowledge the local contexts that were affecting the education systems in each nation (Kubow & Fossum, 2007). Steiner-Khamsi (2003) argues that:

In more ways than one, educators and policy analysts in borrowing countries have been portrayed as passive receivers of educational goods—models, reforms, policies—which they then gradually implement in their own context. In response to that portrayal, I would like to make the point that their stories of resisting, modifying, and indigenizing imported educational goods have not been sufficiently told. (p. 156)

According to Elley (1992), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2004, 2006, 2011), and Postlethwaite and Ross (1992), “international, comparative surveys of literacy achievement have sought to shed light on factors that may influence literacy development across different countries, languages, and educational contexts” (as cited in Cumming & Geva, 2012, p. 10). In response to the idea of transferring policies and reading programs cross-nationally, Elley (1992), Hamilton and Barton (2000) maintain that not only can literacy practices not be imposed by one society on another, but even that what is known about literacy cannot necessarily be transferred across different contexts within the same society. Thus, this study will take a more critical stand and will employ the more current view in the field of comparative education: that educational transfer is not a simple process of exchange, but rather, the practitioners (teachers) in a local context play a key role in the adoption of, acceptance of, and resistance to any transference into their environment (Kubow & Fossum, 2007; Niyozov, 2008).

Steiner-Khamsi (2000) suggests that transfer is much more than the relationships within and between nations, but rather, it refers to how policies/methods are implemented within receiving countries. I intend to apply this concept of educational transfer in order to examine the transfer of active and cooperative learning pedagogies to individual schools and classrooms, and to explore how, and the degree to which, these pedagogies
are being implemented in the instructional strategies of teaching reading in content areas in everyday classroom practice in Cambodia.

The Research Approach: A Rationale

The study’s objective of understanding teachers’ perspectives of teaching and, in particular, how they teach reading is framed by the belief that realities in the world are socially constructed, complex, and constantly changing. The realities of the enactment of teaching reading in content areas in upper elementary schools in Cambodia do not exist outside the teacher, the students, and the social context of the classroom in that particular country. They are all part of the motion picture of realities in that context. Different contexts make different realities. Thus, the claim that certain perspectives are void because they are not consistent with ‘objective reality’ becomes problematic.

Within the framework of this study, realities are also viewed as “the results of prolonged and intricate process of construction and negotiation” (Bruner, 1990, p. 24). When a study takes place to understand an aspect of another society or another culture, it is necessary to take the contingent nature of realities into account. It is even more critical when the research is being done in a developing country, using theories and approaches that have originated and evolved within the academic communities of the developed world. In the educational field, theorists such as Mazrui (1975) and Weiler (1984) have warned researchers of the dangers of blindly using Western values and assumptions to judge the practices in, and to arrive at solutions for the developing world. Thus, this study is not trying to blindly apply theories or concepts developed in Western countries to solve any literacy issues in Cambodia. Instead, Western theories and concepts are merely used as a lens in order to examine and understand the perspectives and practices of Cambodian teachers in teaching reading in content areas.

The main purpose of this research is to listen to teachers’ voices, to examine what they are doing in the classrooms and what challenges they are facing, and to explore their perspectives regarding teaching reading in content areas. Therefore, this study is grounded in the qualitative research paradigm, which is suitable for the purpose of the study. Within this paradigm “‘meaning’ is of essential concern” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 7). Thus, what qualifies as valuable knowledge in this research is not numerical results but complexities, tensions, and perceptions surrounding the interest of this study, which
is situated in a particular context. “Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

The research methodology was selected based on the nature of the phenomenon to be studied (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). The study of teachers’ understanding and practices of teaching reading is complex and not easily characterized by a single category of ideas and of data. Some teachers might believe that they teach/incorporate reading strategies into their instruction by implementing their own ways of teaching, which may not be necessarily congruent with those of the research and theories, in general. Teachers’ understanding and perspectives are shaped by their beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge, which are, themselves, complicated concepts. Additionally, the ways teachers teach and the instructional strategies they use to teach reading in their content area classes are not carried out in a vacuum, but rather may be affected by the multi-layered context within which they teach. In this research, case study methods (Creswell, 2003; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1984, 2003) were selected in order to study and capture the complexity of teachers’ understanding and the strategies that they employ for teaching reading based on their beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge/skills. These research methods allow researchers to conduct research within the educational and natural settings of participants’ lived experiences. Throughout these methods, researchers are able to understand how participants make sense of their classrooms, their teaching, and their experiences (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Merriam, 1998).

Qualitative Case Study Approach

Qualitative researchers in the literacy field such as Hamilton and Barton (2000), and Street (1993, 2001) assert that literacy is meaningful only within its own context of social and cultural practice, and that different domains of social life, such as education, the workplace, and religion, entail different forms of literacy. Thus, qualitative research is more appropriate in order to gain a better understanding of local people’s everyday experiences of literacy and how literacy, particularly reading in content areas, is taught within multiple settings.

Qualitative research methods include, but are not limited to, ethnography, historical research, and case study research (Fairbrother, 2007). Because this study
focuses on the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes of the participants within two specific schools in Cambodia, I conducted this research as a qualitative case study (Merriam, 1998). The two cases (two upper elementary schools) that were chosen can be compared to get a thick description. The qualitative case study is suited for this research inquiry because it entails “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. 13). Quantitative research methods are not suitable for this study because they rely on “the collection of numerical data which are then subjected to analysis using statistical routines” (Picciano, 2004, p. 51). By contrast, I used qualitative methods in this research since they focus on “meanings, concepts, context, descriptions, and settings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 32). In addition, qualitative research methods are particularly suitable for this research because they seek to understand and provide insights into the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of selected participants who teach particular subjects (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003).

Case study research is also one of the methodologies used in qualitative approaches to inquiry. A case study is a “special kind of qualitative work that investigates a contextualized phenomenon” (Hatch, 2002, p. 30). Additionally, case study methodology is used for “in-depth and detailed exploration of single examples” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 104), and an example could consist of an event, a process, an organization, a group, or an individual (Merriam, 1998). According to Yin (1984), case study is preferred when answering questions of “how or why” and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life contexts. Thus, through a qualitative case study, I was able to investigate, to organize a wide range of information, and to evaluate teachers’ perspectives of reading and teaching reading in two particular schools in Cambodia in order to answer my research questions (Creswell, 2003). The type of case that is useful for this study is ‘instrumental and intrinsic’ in order to focus deeply on an issue or a case that this study aims to investigate (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).

The Role of the Researcher

One of the four characteristics of qualitative research suggested by Merriam (1998) is that the researcher is the primary lead for data collection and analysis. Rather than a position of detachment between researcher and subjects, “qualitative approaches
see researchers themselves as instruments of data collection, often with sustained and intimate contact and relationships with their subjects, further defying claims of a need for objectivity” (Fairbrother, 2007, p. 42). The qualitative researcher decides which questions to ask and in what order, what to observe, and what to write down. The researcher is an active agent in the research process beginning with the research question. The research question is rooted in an issue that the researcher wants to investigate (Janesick, 2003).

As asserted by Lincoln and Guba (1985), “even some of the giants of conventional inquiry have recognized that humans can provide data very nearly as reliable as that produced by more objective means” (p. 192). To produce reliable data the researcher responds to personal and environmental cues, collects information from multiple sources, and understands the situation and context beyond propositional knowledge. In addition, the researcher interprets and summarizes data by checking or asking the participants for clarification or correction (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Within the qualitative research paradigm, Cooper and White (2009) point out a representational crisis when it comes to writing. The problem of representation in writing refers to “questions about what to include, and how to include it.” Cooper and White (2009) further state that, “qualitative researchers cannot capture experience in a way that allows others to experience it firsthand…experience is created in the social text” (Cooper & White, 2009, p. 182). In order to avoid this representational crisis of writing, I, as a researcher, did not simply write about the participants and report what they say; instead, I interacted with them and interpreted what they say in light of my own understanding and experience. Guba and Lincoln (1994) also maintain the notion that findings are created through the interaction of inquirer and phenomenon (which, in the social sciences, is usually people) and that these findings are discovered through a more plausible description of the inquiry process than through objective observations and reports.

In the following section, I describe the methods that are used in this study, including research sites and participants, informed consent procedures, data collection methods, data analysis methods, and the validity and generalizability of the research.
Methods

This section provides a detailed description of the research methods used in this study, including research sites, participant recruitment, informed consent procedures, data collection methods, and data analysis methods. The methods selected were considered to be the most suitable methods for addressing the key research questions of the study.

The principal research question is: How do teachers understand and teach reading in content areas in upper elementary classes in suburban public schools in Cambodia? Sub-research questions include:

1. What are the teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about reading and teaching reading in their content area classes? Why might this be so? How do these attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge influence their instructional strategies?

2. What instructional strategies do the teachers use and find most beneficial for their students when teaching reading in content areas? What is/are the most significant influence(s) on how they teach? Why?
   2.1 Where have they learned those strategies?
   2.2 What is/are the most significant influence(s) on how they teach?
   2.3 How do the teachers implement active and cooperative learning pedagogies?

3. What challenges do the teachers face when teaching reading in content areas? What do the teachers suggest for addressing those challenges and for improving the teaching of reading in content areas? Why?

4. How do teachers understand their role(s) in improving curriculum implementation in content area reading?

Participant Recruitment

The methodological approach of this study is qualitative case study research, which is concerned with in-depth understanding of phenomena (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, as a researcher, I chose to work with small samples and to look at the process of the meanings individuals attribute to their given social situation rather than generalizing across large populations (Hesse-Biber Nagy & Leavy, 2005). I chose a small
sample of two teachers in each school who have characteristics that address the research topic. The two Grade 5 or 6 teachers from each school were purposefully selected to be research participants. The total number of teacher participants is four.

The selection of suitable participants (teachers) is crucial to this study. According to Stake (1995), researchers should choose the best places, persons, and occasions in order to help them understand the case. Before any selection criteria is imposed, it is important to understand that the participants need to volunteer for this study by understanding the purpose of this research.

In keeping with the purpose of the study, I previously aimed to choose participants according to the following specific criteria: they must teach in the upper elementary Grades 5 or 6 and should have at least five years of teaching experience. One participant should be a civil war survivor who has more than 20 years of teaching experience and has been trained prior to the civil war time. The second participant should be born after the civil war and had been recently trained as a teacher with at least five years of teaching experience. The same criteria would be applied to the other two participants in the second school.

However, when I was actually at the sites recruiting the participants, I was not able to recruit teacher participants who had been trained prior to the civil war. None of the teachers at the schools selected for this research met these criteria. The teachers who had the longest teaching experience in those two schools were trained after the civil war. All of the four teacher participants have more than ten years of teaching experience. Three of them are civil war survivors and have more than 20 years of teaching experience, with the exception of one teacher participant who was born after the civil war and has less than 20 years of teaching experience. Selecting participants with distinct past personal and professional experiences allows the researcher to gain different perspectives for the richness of the data.

The task of teacher participant selection was completed after having met with the principals and providing them with a statement about the purpose of the research and invitation (translated into Khmer), as well as the characteristics of participants needed for the research (See Appendix B). Then, I asked the principals to send or give the study information, invitation, and my contact information to potential participants and
requested that they contact me (the researcher) if they would be interested in participating in the study. After meeting with the principals, I went to the school sites the next day and I had two teachers from each school approach me in order to participate in this study. There is only one Grade 5 teacher and one Grade 6 teacher teaching at Mesa Primary School (pseudonym given to one school site for this study). Thus, I was quite fortunate to have recruited Channa (Grade 5 teacher) and Sophea (Grade 6 teacher) from Mesa Primary School who volunteered to participate in this study. In addition, two other teachers: Dara (Grade 5) and Sirath (Grade 6) from Cibo Primary School (pseudonym given to one school site for this study) also volunteered to be participants in this study. The real names of the teacher participants from Mesa and Cibo Primary Schools have been changed to pseudonyms.

Once I had the two volunteers from each school, I met with them and explained to them in detail about the research, through conversation, and offered an informed consent letter, written both in Khmer and English, for them to read and sign.

**Informed Consent Procedures**

After the task of teacher participant selection was completed and after having met with the principals and given them a statement about the purpose of the research and invitation (translated into Khmer), and the characteristics of participants needed for the research (Appendix B), I asked the principals to send or give the study information, invitation, and my contact information to potential participants and ask that they contact me if they would be interested in participating in the study. Then, I met with the teachers who volunteered/were interested in participating in this study in order to explain to them in detail about the research, as detailed above. Through the informed consent, participants have been made aware: (1) that participation is voluntary, (2) of any aspects of the research that may affect their well-being, and (3) that they may freely choose to stop their participation at any point in the study process (Diener & Crandall, 1978).

I also obtained documents, including materials used in class and teacher lesson plans, from the teacher participants. The consent for the use of these documents is contained in the consent form for teacher participants. I provided each teacher participant with the informed consent letter written in both Khmer and English. The consent form for teacher participants is displayed in Appendix C. And, I also provided parents/guardians
of the students whose activities/comments would be included in the data collected with an informed consent letter written in both Khmer and English. The informed consent letter is shown in Appendix D.

I am Cambodian and I was born and raised in Cambodia. I also did all my K-12 education and undergraduate studies in Cambodia. Thus, I am able to communicate very well in Khmer with the participants. Additionally, I translated the consent form(s) and other documents from Khmer to English and vice-versa. As most Cambodian teachers may not read/understand English, the letter written in Khmer helped them to fully understand all matters relating to their participation in this research. All participants were asked to read the document and to ask any questions or raise any concerns regarding their participation. All questions and concerns were addressed before each participant was asked to sign the consent form, and before I began any form of data collection.

Audio-recorded data was removed from the recording device on the day of recording and stored, in encrypted form (password protected), on my computer. Data will be destroyed after five years, if the participant so wishes. All data collected have been stored in a safe and confidential place that is not accessible to anyone other than the researcher, as the main and sole investigator. During the fieldwork in Cambodia, the research data were locked in a secure location at my home. While travelling from Cambodia to Canada, I carried the laptop with the encrypted data on the airplane and everywhere the researcher went. I kept the laptop, at all times, in a locked and secure suitcase. When in Canada, I stored the data (computer and external hard drive) in locked storage and in an encrypted form in my home.

Data Collection

Multiple data sources were collected to ensure the integrity of data analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). Data collection in case study research is typically large, drawing on multiple sources of data such as observations, interviews, curricular documents, and audiovisual materials (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). A major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence, which ensures data triangulation (Yin, 2009). The sources of data in this case study research included interviews, observations, field notes from the observations, and curriculum documents/artifacts in order to examine situations and
meanings made by participants (Patton, 2002). In this study, the primary source of data collection was through the use of five-cycle semi-structured in-depth interviews with the participants. Other supporting data was collected through four-cycle observations in each participant’s classroom, in which the researcher acted as a non-participant observer (Merriam, 1990; Punch, 1998). Through methods such as detailed participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews, participants were given a lot of breadth to share their own views, with the researcher inclining to surrender control to the researched in the process of inquiry (Fairbrother, 2007). I also studied the school curricular resources including textbooks, teacher guidebooks, and the teacher participants’ lesson plans in order to get a better insight into, and analysis of how reading is taught and enacted within content area classes.

**Interviews**

The interview is one of the most important sources of case study information (Yin, 2009). The purpose of an interview is to obtain exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory data (Hesse-Biber Nagy, & Leavy, 2005). Interviews allow the researcher access through words to an individual’s constructed reality and interpretation of his or her own experience (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995). In a case study interview, the actual interview questions are likely to be fluid rather than rigid (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Thus, through this kind of semi-structured interview question, participants were asked to propose their own insights into certain occurrences that enable the researcher to seek an understanding of their perspectives and of their experiences or situations through five face-to-face encounters (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). They were also asked about the working conditions as well as their opinions about events (Yin, 2009). In postmodern perspectives, interview should be a production site of knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) further state that there are seven categories of interview knowledge. First, knowledge is produced when it is socially constructed (e.g. the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee), and knowledge is further created through transcription and analysis. Second, knowledge is relational (e.g. inter/enter the views of the interviewer and the interviewee). Third, knowledge is created through a conversation (e.g. through conversations interviewer and interviewee can learn from one another). Fourth, knowledge is contextual (e.g. the
meanings of the interview relate to the interviewee’s context). Fifth, knowledge is linguistic (e.g. it is in the form of oral statements and transcribed texts). Sixth, knowledge is narrative (e.g. it tells stories). Seventh, knowledge is pragmatic (e.g. its usefulness and meaning).

Data was mainly collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview contained specific questions that focused on the topic areas/research questions that needed to be investigated during the course of the interview. The questions were open-ended questions in a conversational way, but I still followed a certain set of questions from the case study protocol questions (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990; Yin, 2009). Case study protocol questions are specific questions that researchers make up in collecting data (Yin, 2003). Creswell (2007) recommends using an interview protocol that helps a researcher to take notes during an interview. He adds that “it also helps a researcher organize thoughts on items such as headings, information about starting the interview, concluding ideas, information on ending the interview, and thanking the respondent” (Creswell, 2007, p. 135). Thus, I used a similar interview protocol during my interviews with participants in my study. The interview guiding questions for this study are displayed in Appendix A. The approach to creating the interview protocol also enabled me as a research to be flexible in responding to issues and questions raised by participants, to ask probing questions, and to allow participants to discuss issues important to them. However, the interview guide and questions still remain a focus in order to ensure that the research questions can be answered (Minichiello et al., 1995) and seek to ensure cross-case comparability (Brayman, 2001).

**The Interview Process**

In this study, interview data were gathered in five stages—five interviews per teacher participant according to the schedule shown in Table 3.1 displayed below. The purpose of the five interviews was to give participants the opportunity to express their beliefs, thoughts, and experiences related to teaching reading in content areas. The first cycle of interviews explored the perspectives of participants regarding their knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes towards reading and teaching reading in content areas, and on how such knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes influence their instructional strategies. This first interview was designed to seek responses for sub-research question 1: *What are the*
teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about reading and teaching reading in their content area classes? How do these attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge influence their instructional strategies? And Why? In order for me, as a researcher, to capture all the important comments by the interviewees and to reflect on them for further interviews, I created a transcript chart for all the interviews. A sample of the transcript chart of the first-cycle interview with the participants is displayed in Table 3.2 as shown below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Purpose/Focus</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Purpose/Focus</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First interviews with each participant</td>
<td>Sub-Q1</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td>First observation (subject 1)</td>
<td>Sub-Q2+Q3+Q4</td>
<td>45 minutes to one hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second interviews with each participant</td>
<td>Reflections on observation 1</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td>Second observation (subject 1)</td>
<td>Any changes? Progress?</td>
<td>45 minutes to one hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third interviews with each participant</td>
<td>Reflections on observation 2 + Sub-Q2</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td>Third observation (subject 1)</td>
<td>Any changes? Progress?</td>
<td>45 minutes to one hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth interviews with each participant</td>
<td>Reflections on observation 3 + Sub-Q3 + Sub-Q4</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td>Fourth observation (subject 2)</td>
<td>Any changes? Progress?</td>
<td>45 minutes to one hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth interviews with each participant</td>
<td>Reflections on all observations + interviews</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.2

A Sample of the First Cycle Interview Transcript Chart of the First Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Participant’s First-Cycle Interview</th>
<th>Interviewees’ Comments/Responses</th>
<th>My Reflections/Thoughts on Their Comments</th>
<th>Questions Emerged for the Next Interview(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question: Tell me about the purposes and types of reading</td>
<td>Response: The purpose of reading…reading is for understanding the meaning and the content of the text…</td>
<td>It is reading for comprehension</td>
<td>Why do you or your students read for understanding the meaning and content of the text?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Is it necessary for your students to understand the meaning any time they read and for any articles they read?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second cycle of interviews gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on what they did in the first observed classroom. The questions focused mainly on what happened in the class, and what/how the teachers thought about them and reflected on them. This second interview also explored each participant’s perspectives of situations observed by the researcher during the first classroom observation. This also allowed me, as a researcher, to probe the participants in order to get more of their thoughts and perspectives on what they said earlier and what/how they taught the class.

The third-cycle interviews were follow-up interviews after the second classroom observation. At the first stage of the interviews, I asked questions that emerged after the second observation in order to get more of the teachers’ thoughts and perspectives by asking them to reflect on their earlier statements. The last stage of the third interviews was planned to seek initial information on the teachers’ instructional strategies (including active and cooperative learning pedagogies) that they used to teach reading in their content area classes, and that they found most useful for their students. This interview
was designed to seek responses for sub-research question 2: *What instructional strategies do the teachers use and find most beneficial for their students when teaching reading in content areas? Why?*

The fourth-cycle interviews were follow-up interviews after the third classroom observation. At the beginning of the interviews, I asked questions that emerged after the third observation in order to get the teachers’ thoughts and reflections on the events that occurred in the classes and from their previous interviews. The other interview questions explored the perspectives that the participants have about the challenges they face in incorporating reading strategies in their classes, and how they hoped to improve their teaching of reading. In addition, the purpose of the fourth-cycle interview was to explore the teachers’ perspectives of their role in improving curriculum implementation in content area reading. This interview cycle was planned to seek responses to sub-research questions 3 and 4: (3) *What challenges do the teachers face when teaching reading in content areas? What do the teachers suggest for addressing those challenges and for improving the teaching of reading in content areas? (4) How do the teachers understand their role(s) in improving curriculum implementation in content area reading?*

The fifth-cycle interviews took place after the last classroom observation (I thought there were only four interviews per person). First, I asked each participant to reflect on what they did in the last class observed. I also asked them to give comments on specific events that happened in all of the four classes that I observed. At the end, this fifth interview enabled participants to revisit previous perspectives and reflect upon their experiences throughout the entire interview period. The five cycles of interviews seek to generate data in order to inform all of the study’s sub-research questions. All the interviews were approximately 30 minutes to 90 minutes in length and were conducted face-to-face at each participant’s school in the administrative office. The setting was also sufficiently quiet for them to be able to concentrate and feel comfortable. Permission to tape-record each interview was sought from each participant.

**Observations**

To obtain a better understanding of participants’ perspectives, to enable the comparison of findings (Mathison, 1998; Merriam, 1998) and, specifically, to be used as a means of guiding participants to reflect upon their perspectives, the researcher also
undertook four observations of each participant at their classrooms. The overall observation schedule is shown in Table 3.1 above. In this study, I was a non-participant observer in the classrooms of the participants. Within this role, I had a set-up location in the classroom of each participant. While observing, I sat quietly in that place and began taking notes about what the participants (teachers) did and said in their classrooms, as well as some of their students’ activities and comments that were important/relevant to this research study. The classes that involved a great amount of reading, such as social studies, Khmer studies, geography, and history were chosen to enable the researcher to observe each participant’s activities associated with their role in helping their students understand and engage with the text they were teaching.

The first observation occurred at the earliest date following the first interview. Its duration was one hour or more, depending on the time it took to teach one lesson in one day, at a convenient time for the participant. The one-hour observation was aimed at a lesson that the teacher taught in a particular subject (e.g. a geography lesson in social studies) during the day, because one lesson normally lasts for 45 minutes to one hour. Similarly, the second observation took place on a day after the second interview. It was also a one-hour observation that targeted one lesson that the teacher taught in the same subject (history lesson in social studies), as in the first class observed. The third observation was also a one-hour lesson of the same subject (geography lesson in social studies) that the teacher taught in the second-class observed, in order to see the progression of the same lessons and to become familiar with the teacher’s style and manner of teaching. The fourth observation took place following the fourth interview. The class observed was a one-hour lesson where the teacher taught a different subject (Khmer studies lesson in Khmer studies subject) from the previous classes observed in order to get a different perspective.

Field notes were also taken to record observations during classroom visits. To get all aspects of the incidents occurring during the visits, I also used electronic tape-recorders to reinforce my field notes. In order for me to capture all the important/relevant comments and activities of the participants and to reflect on them for further interviews and observations, I created an observation chart/field note that is displayed in Table 3.3.
Table 3.3
Sirath’s 2nd Observation’s Sample Chart/Field Note

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptions (Observation)</th>
<th>My Thoughts</th>
<th>Questions/Surprises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: asks students to summarize the lesson according to each historical event of each king.</td>
<td><strong>Rote learning:</strong> all 6 students memorize the whole lesson for about 90%—they use the same words from the text.</td>
<td>How do you think about this summary? Do you like it? Or do you want anything different?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students: 6 students stand up and summarize the lesson—by saying it aloud to the whole class…</td>
<td></td>
<td>If yes, how?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A systematic range of approaches to observation was adopted that include descriptive, focused, and selective observations (Spradley, 1980; Werner & Schoepfle, 1987). Field notes that documented descriptive observations of the general classroom setting included information such as classroom layout, class size, and classroom climate. The majority of observations undertaken during classroom observations were either focused or selective. Field notes of focused observations documented all the activities undertaken when each participant was acting primarily alone (when the teacher was taking a leading role without involving students), and what they said. Field notes of selective observations documented all the activities in which participant(s) were engaged in interaction with students, and what they and their students said. The field notes of the first classroom observation were specifically focused on how and what the teachers did in order to seek responses for sub-research questions 2, 3, and 4. The purpose of the remaining observations was to continue focusing on the events related to sub-research questions 2, 3, and 4, as well as to see the progression of the lessons and be familiar with each teacher’s teaching style and manner. When doing observations, the researcher respected the demands for privacy and confidentiality from participants and other school staff.

Researchers need observations to better understand the case through keeping a good record of what is happening in the classrooms during observation in order to
provide a relatively good description for future analysis and reporting (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) further states that, in qualitative approach, a good moment of the issue to be explored could be revealed by observations in order to find the unique complexity of the case. The observation and field notes can be compared with the interviews in order to verify the validity of the data, if what the teachers say reflects what they actually do in class, as well as to add more complexity to the meaning that the researcher is trying to make from the interview data.

**Collecting Documents and Artifacts**

Documents and artifacts add historical and contextual aspects to other data sources as they support, expand, and challenge the researchers’ perceptions (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 1998). Yin (2003) also asserts, “for case studies, the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (p. 87). Adding documents to the data sources is important for two reasons: verifying names and titles mentioned in the interviews, and giving detailed information for later references and inferences (Yin, 2003). “Document” refers to a wide range of ready-made sources of data in the form of written, visual and physical material (Merriam, 1998). “Artifact” refers to “a technological device, a tool or instrument, a work of art, or some other physical evidence” (Yin, 2003, p. 96). The documents and artifacts that were collected included: student textbooks, old teacher guidebooks, and teacher lessons useful for this study.

The documents and artifacts provided information about the contexts, the schools, and the educational history of the sites. Thus, it was important to collect suitable documents and artifacts for case studies because they are used to relate to the research questions; thus, they play a key role in any data collection (Yin, 2003). Merriam (1998) also states that, “since the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering data, he or she relies on skills and intuition to find and interpret data from documents” (p. 120).

**Methods of Data Analysis**

Data collection and data analysis should be a simultaneous process (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Merriam, 1998). Therefore, early analysis began with the start of data collection. This allowed for the possibility of ongoing data collection to fill in gaps, verify emerging categories and key ideas/issues, and allow for the formulation of “rival
hypotheses that question researchers’ assumptions and biases” (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data analysis is the act of making sense of the data. Merriam (1998) states that the sense we make of the data we gather is affected by the theoretical framework we form. It means “our analysis and interpretation of our study finding will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structure the study in the first place” (Merriam, 1998, p. 48). In case data analysis, the first step is to provide a description of each case or of data within the case, which is followed by a thematic analysis across the cases, called cross-case analysis, or an interpretation of the meaning of the case (Creswell, 2007).

**Case Analysis**

The analysis of the data from the three sources (interviews, observations, and documents/artifacts and observation field notes) followed the process of data reduction, data display and the drawing of conclusions outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994) in qualitative analysis. This process is shown diagrammatically in Figure 3.1.

*Figure 3.1. Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model from Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 23)*
**Interviews**

First I listened to the audio recordings and transcribed all the interviews in Khmer, and then I translated the transcribed text from Khmer to English. Translating the data from Khmer to English was not easy and it was time consuming, as I am not a professional translator. I was aware that translation was such a difficult task that I needed to keep reminding myself to try my best to contextualize every word and sentence as much as I could. Thus, in order to validate the meaning of the translated texts and to provide the best possible meaning, I followed the five translation methods suggested by Fawcett (2003). First, I used the *borrowing* method—keeping the original language (Khmer) without any translation, as the Khmer words are significantly specific to Cambodian context and culture, or they are the conceptual words in the Cambodian textbooks. And, the English translation might weaken their meaning. For example, those words are: Khmer word (ak-nouk-marn-roum), Khmer word (ak-nouk-marn-ngeak), and Khmer word (san-ta-rak-ka-tha), etc. Second, I used the *transposition* method—repositioning the translated words in a different order from the original words due to the syntactical differences. For example, the words “program supplementary” in Khmer reads as “supplementary program” in English. Third, I used the *modulation* method—making the adjustments by employing numerous English words to mean one Khmer word. Fourth, I used the *equivalence* method—using English words in one context in order to express a similar meaning to Khmer word(s). Fifth, I used the *literal translation* method—using a close English word that can be precisely translated from the Khmer word. Combined with these methods, while I was translating, I also consulted English-Khmer and Khmer-English dictionaries in order to identify the meanings of some words that were unclear to me.

After getting all the translated data, the analysis included the reading and re-reading of the transcripts (Glaser, 1978). From there, I read each participant’s responses line-by-line and question-by-question, allowing for coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this stage of data reduction, the transcribed interview data was simplified and organized into more manageable elements by using initial and subsequent coding methods (Punch, 1998; Yin, 2009). I also clarified and defined the codes that connect to the original sub-research questions and literature review related to the questions (Yin, 2009). In the initial
coding level, small parts of the text were examined in order to identify the concepts/formulated meanings derived from what was spoken. Next, the data was reduced through the use of subsequent coding. This involved checking the initial and descriptive codes and clustering similarly coded units together into categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These categories were given a second-level conceptual label. To better understand the data, I also continued to simplify the data with a third-level of coding in which similar conceptual categories were grouped and given a more abstract third-level conceptual label.

The stage of data display involved the mapping of second-level categories and third-level categories into a simple and compact form on a chart within a table. The chart classified the data, based on concepts presented, and examples that corresponded to my major sub-research questions 1, 2, 3, and 4. Table 3.4 shows what an empty site-level display might look like.

Table 3.4
A Single Site-level Display for Interview Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Sub-Question 1</th>
<th>Sub-Question 2</th>
<th>Sub-Question 3</th>
<th>Sub-Question 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td>Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td>Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Channa)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td>Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Sophea)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table provides a visual representation of how categories relate to each other and it helps to identify the key perspectives emerging from each interview. Key concepts emerging from the analysis of each interview transcript were mapped onto a further chart (table) to enable comparison for a cross-case analysis. The key categories that emerged to answer the four major sub-research questions are displayed in Table 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8.
### Table 3.5

*Key Categories for Sub-Question 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Beliefs and Attitudes</th>
<th>Teacher Knowledge (sources)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional perspectives</strong></td>
<td><strong>Teacher Knowledge (sources)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Experiences as a student and a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching reading</td>
<td>Training/education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Traditional teaching practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New perspectives</strong></td>
<td><strong>Teacher Knowledge (sources)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching reading</td>
<td>Mandated curriculum guideline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others or Self-learning</td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3.6

*Key Categories for Sub-Question 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher-centered</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rote memorization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ personal methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Strategies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-centered and active learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective (reasons)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3.7

*Key Categories for Sub-Question 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>How to Overcome Challenges</th>
<th>How to Improve Teaching Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Textbook support</td>
<td>Old teacher guidebook</td>
<td>Traditional explanation methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ abilities</td>
<td>Culture of acceptance</td>
<td>Teaching basic reading skills to slow-learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ unresponsive behavior</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Seeing themselves as both reading teacher and content teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraint</td>
<td>Skipping some lessons</td>
<td>Questioning and vocabulary explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covering curriculum</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Group-work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant traditional teaching practices</td>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandated curriculum (teaching methods)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of professional development (teaching reading)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching material shortage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3.8

*Key Categories for Sub-Question 4*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum making (teacher agency)</th>
<th>Curriculum implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By the Ministry of Education with assistance from international donors</td>
<td>Following almost everything, skipping lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading strategies not included</td>
<td>Culture of acceptance, conformity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers do not understand their roles/agency</td>
<td>Power hierarchy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Documents/Artifacts and Field Notes from Observations*

The analysis of collected documents/artifacts and field notes from classroom observations also followed the process of data reduction, data display and the drawing of
conclusions outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). During the initial first-level coding phase of data reduction, descriptive codes and labels were assigned to phrases and segments of text from collected documents/artifacts and of observation field notes. During second-level coding, groups of similarly coded units were considered to be in categories and were assigned a more conceptual label.

Together with coded and categorized tasks, this stage of data reduction also included the amount of time spent on various tasks, from observation field notes. This information could then be compared with participants’ perspectives of issues discussed in interviews. This stage of data display involved the mapping of categories and time spent on each observation on a chart, in a more dense form. The map or chart classified the data based on concepts/perspectives presented, and examples that correspond to my major sub-research questions 2, 3 and 4. Table 3.9 shows what an empty site-level display might look like.

**Table 3.9**

*A Single-level Display for Observation and Document/Artifact data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Sub-Question 2</th>
<th>Sub-Question 3</th>
<th>Sub-Question 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chart provides a visual image of how categories relate to each other and helps to identify the key aspects of each participant’s teaching activities at the time of observation by the researcher. The key categories (from observations and document analysis) that emerged seek responses to sub-research questions 2, 3, and 4. When document evidence, observation field notes, and participants’ responses were contradictory, I noted unresolved differences in the interpretation of the findings.
Cross-case Analysis

A cross-case analysis/synthesis was used when doing studies of the four participants (Yin, 2003). The cross-case analysis of the collected data from each participant followed the process of unordered meta-matrix outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). After the data from each participant had been standardized in manageable formats, I assembled them coherently in one place in order to do a cross-case analysis. I created a chart that displayed the data from the individual cases according to a uniform framework (Yin, 2003). Table 3.10 shows what an empty cross site-level display might look like.

Table 3.10  
Unordered Meta-Matrix Displaying Data from Both Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Sub-Question 1</th>
<th>Sub-Question 2</th>
<th>Sub-Question 3</th>
<th>Sub-Question 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td>Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesa School</td>
<td>Channa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cibo School</td>
<td>Dara</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirath</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the phase of conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994), I noted key and similar concepts/issues emerging from the analysis of each interview transcript, classroom observation, and document displayed in the meta-matrix chart. Then, I studied the chart in order to look for similarities and differences emerging from a comparison across cases between the two schools (Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) further notes that this kind of data display can allow a researcher to make naturalistic generalizations and comparisons by analyzing the data from the cases, either for themselves or to apply to a population of cases.

This phase also sought to offer propositions about emerging and key issues. A constant comparative approach to the phases of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing was employed. Feedback from participants regarding emerging perspectives, tentative propositions and conclusions were sought along the way (after
each interview and observation) in order to clarify and honour their views. This aimed to strengthen the findings of the research (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Punch, 1998). In order to summarize how the research questions are connected to the methodology, data collection methods and the data analysis methods, I create a table for the data collection concept/chart as shown in Table 3.11 as displayed below.
**Table 3.11**

*Data Collection Concept/Chart*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theories</th>
<th>Sub-Research Questions</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Data Collection Methods</th>
<th>Data Analysis Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual knowledge of reading</td>
<td>1- What are the teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about reading and teaching reading in their content area classes? Why might this be so? How do these attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge influence their instructional strategies?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher beliefs, attitudes and knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and learning reading in content areas</td>
<td>2- What instructional strategies do the teachers use and find most beneficial for their students when teaching reading in content areas? Why?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1- Where have they learned those strategies?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2- What is/are the most significant influence(s) on how they teach?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3- How do the teachers implement active and cooperative learning pedagogies? Describe their effectiveness.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges of teaching reading in content areas and how to improve it</td>
<td>3-What challenges do the teachers face when teaching reading in content areas? What do the teachers suggest for addressing those challenges and for improving the teaching of reading in content areas? Why?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of teachers in curriculum implementation</td>
<td>4- How do the teachers understand their role(s) in improving curriculum implementation in content area reading?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Validity (Crystallization) and Generalizability

Creating trustworthiness of the study is important in order for the study to be meaningful, and to achieve its purpose. In addressing the validity of this research study, I was also particularly mindful of the following: how I treated the subjects; how I designed, conducted and reported this study; and how its findings can contribute to the improvement of education in Cambodia.

Triangulation was sought through the use of multiple sources of data (interviews, observations, field notes, and document analysis) and multiple sites (two schools). Researchers need to use multiple sources of data as a means to ensure greater data reliability (Merriam et al., 2002). Looking at teachers’ perspectives from interview data, observations, and documents/artifacts helped in establishing key perspectives/ideas for analysis. As Creswell (2003) notes, by triangulating different data sources of information through the examination of evidence from the sources, the researcher can build a “coherent justification for themes” (p. 196). For these reasons, I chose triangulation of data sources as one strategy for this study on upper elementary teachers’ perspectives and practices of teaching reading in content areas.

In addition to triangulation, in order to give deep, complex and thoughtful understanding of the topic, I also incorporated the crystallization framework (Ellingson, 2009; Richardson, 2000) into my data collection and analysis. During the whole data collection process, I always returned to each participant and gave them time and space to reflect on their previous statements/thoughts and activities. To get more of their insights and thoughts, I also thoroughly studied each participant’s comments and activities that they had described in order to come up with more questions for them in every upcoming interview. Rather than calling attention to the researcher’s knowledge, we should emphasize “how much we value the opportunity to learn about the participants’ world” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 78) and we should blur the dividing line between the knower and the known (Liu, 2011). Crystallization also involves respecting those who are studied, and it thereby provides room for their voices; in this respect, more complex findings are generated. Richardson (2000) defined crystallization as follows:

Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of “validity” (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves); and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex,
thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know. (p. 234)

The reliability of the instruments is also important for this study. Conducting interviews by using the interview guiding questions also provided researchers with reliable instruments (Merriam et al., 2002). Through each interview, I attempted to reconstruct the interviewee’s response and record these responses appropriately.

Within this case study research, my research findings were not generalized to be applicable in all other schools across Cambodia or to create any educational policies or rules for the Ministry of Education. I did not expect to find any solution(s) from this study to solve all the educational issues in Cambodia. Rather, I conducted this study within two schools in a suburban district to get a deeper insight and understanding of these particular cases. As Stake (1995) asserts, “the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization” (p. 8). Rather than generalize, this research was to provide educative messages that may “awaken and transform the participants… the policy makers, the donors, the change agents, and readers in general” (Niyozov, 2001, p. 83).
Chapter 4
Participant Autobiographical and Historical Contexts

Historical Context of Education in Cambodia

Cambodia has been through seven forms of government and its educational system has been tremendously affected. I would like to present the historical periods under French colonization from 1864 to 1953 (Chandler, 1994). The French brought their educational influence to many elite schools in Cambodia, which were only available to French people and Cambodian elites. However, most Cambodian people still practiced their own ways of education in local schools at Buddhist temples, following the Buddhist ways of education—correct recitation—which were available to them. The French did not adopt the policy of assimilation in Cambodia. The Buddhist-pagoda system of education was still the main source of schooling for most Cambodian children (Bray & Bunly, 2005).

The next period of change was the “Independence Period” of King Sihanouk, from 1953-1970. During that time, Sihanouk tried to expand education in Cambodia by modernizing the pagoda-schools into normal schools, but the system still consolidated the ideology of “Buddhist socialism” to educate Cambodian students and youth to adopt “loyalty to the monarchy and Marxist egalitarianism,” (Ayres, 2000, p. 449). Next, Cambodia was under the Khmer Republic regime from 1970 to 1975. During that time, Lon Nol ruled the government after the coup d’état to oust King Sihanouk. The country was not stable politically but the government still continued to expand formal education (Ayres, 2000). And, the traditional and Buddhist ways of teaching were still reinforced in school.

Next was the civil war period or Khmer Rouge regime from 1975 to 1979, which is known as “the genocide.” Masses of people, especially teachers and other educators, were killed during that time. The education system and infrastructure was destroyed. There was still some basic education provided to people in order to promote the government’s political ideology of an agrarian revolution (Ayres, 2000). According to Chandler (1993), the Khmer Rouge government did not appreciate quality education.
They used uneducated peasants as teachers to teach students during lunch breaks in a 14 hour workday.

The next regime was Cambodia under the occupation of Vietnam from 1979 to 1991. Because all the infrastructure and education system had been destroyed in Cambodia, the new government had to re-build the education system from the ground up. Their policy was, “people with low education teach the ones with no education” and “people with high education teach the ones with low education” (Sen, 2011). Traditional means of instructions were still implemented in newly formed classrooms.

Next was the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) and the coalition government from 1991 to 1997. There were not a lot of educational changes during that time. The latest period is the current government (Kingdom of Cambodia), established in 1997. The government still struggles to rebuild its infrastructure and human resources by implementing educational reforms and adopting new educational policies. During the earlier years after UNTAC there were many sponsorships and aid from international organizations to help rebuild the education system in Cambodia by providing financial aid and by bringing new teaching methodologies to re-build the system.

**Teacher Training in Cambodia**

In the early years after UNTAC, rote-learning was still adopted in classrooms. But the traditional methods were not good enough to promote literacies required in the twenty-first-century postmodern environment. Thus, the Ministry of Education was open to accepting new teaching methods from the West. Regardless of any educational reform efforts, the status of teaching still remains low and the level of pay is also so low that almost none of the teachers can survive on a teacher’s pay. This requires them to have a second job besides teaching.

In order to immediately restore the educational system, the Ministry of Education in the late 1990s recruited teachers from all over the country to be trained through a variety of courses (Nath, 1999). But, they still adopted the policy of “those who have more education teach those with less,” (Bunlay et al., 2010)—meaning those who completed Grade 3 could teach the first and second graders. Teachers who held junior
high school diploma could teach students in upper elementary school, and those who held high school diplomas could teach in lower secondary school (Grades 7-9) (Williams, Kitamura, & Zimmermann, 2012). Although, the current policy requires new pre-service teachers to at least hold a high school diploma, 75 percent of elementary school teachers in 2003 had completed only Grades 7-9. Some had less formal schooling (MoEYS, 2004b).

New teachers are selected to study at teacher training schools according to their total scores on the placement examination, which is given once a year (Benveniste, Marshall, & Aroujo, 2008). After they finish their training, they are placed to teach at a particular school, based on their total scores from the teaching practicum and the exit examination. To increase the number of quality teachers in the country, the Ministry of Education set up 18 Provincial Teacher Training Centers to train elementary school teachers and six Regional Teacher Training Centers to prepare lower secondary school teachers (Williams, Kitamura, & Zimmermann, 2012).

Within the Ministry, the Department of Teacher Training is responsible for providing professional development in the form of in-service training to teachers (Benveniste, Marshall, & Aroujo, 2008). There are two types of in-service training provided to teachers such as: (1) workshops to introduce new textbooks, (2) school-based training offered by specialized trainers, mostly to develop a vision for an effective school, grant development, and the introduction or implementation of student-centered pedagogies (Williams, Kitamura, & Zimmermann, 2012). The first type of training lasts about one week and is organized by the Provincial Department of Education and the headteachers from the attending school. The second training session is longer and is usually financed by NGOs and international donors (Benveniste, Marshall, & Aroujo, 2008).

However, the effectiveness and the quality of pre-service and in-service training still remains low for several reasons. The teaching profession is not popular among the top high school graduates. Most students who choose to be teachers or who are in the teacher-training program are those who get lower grades during the exams. As a result, the recruitment for quality candidates is a challenge and it eventually affects the trainee quality. One of the main reasons that teaching is not attractive is the low prestige and the
very low wages that cannot even offset the teachers’ everyday living expenses (Tandon & Tsuyoshi, 2015). Tandon and Tsuyoshi also state that:

Despite adequate facilities and positive perceptions of school environments, most of Cambodia’s teacher trainers have failed to provide sufficient content mastery and student-centered pedagogy… There is a major disconnect between the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports [MoEYS], teacher training goals, the stated curricular guidelines, and what is happening in TTC classroom. (p. 4)

Teacher trainers also work in an environment with little contact, support, or collaboration. Also, the old way of dictating lessons with little feedback or applied activities can mean the quality of training is still low. However, with encouragement from the Ministry of Education, the quantity of more qualified teacher trainees has increased recently. In 2013 more than 50 percent of primary school teachers held an Upper Secondary School degree or higher, compared to only one-quarter in 2007. At the present time, two thirds of teachers hold an Upper Secondary degree or higher (Tandon & Tsuyoshi, 2015).

Teaching in Cambodia

There are a lot of complex issues within the teaching profession in Cambodia, ranging from very low pay to teacher-shortage, lack of school infrastructure, and teacher absenteeism. Due to the lack of school buildings or classrooms, teachers, especially in primary schools, are required to teach two daily 4-hour shifts. More than 50 percent of primary schools require two shifts (Benveniste, Marshall, & Araujo, 2008). Teachers in primary schools teach 4 hours in the morning or in the afternoon from Monday to Saturday. But, in some schools, where the teacher shortages occur, one teacher takes responsibility for teaching two classes—one in the morning and another in the afternoon (Benveniste, Marshall, & Araujo, 2008).

Another issue associated with teachers in Cambodia is absenteeism. According to Kim (2009), “teachers are often absent because of additional jobs outside of teaching, such as driving a motorbike taxi, working as a tourist guide, and mostly farming.” (as cited in Kim & Rouse, 2011). According to the CESSP’s 2006 surveys, 150 lower secondary school teachers were absent on the day of data collection visits. The majority of teachers hold a second job because their salary from the teaching profession alone is
not enough (Benveniste, Marshall, & Araujo, 2008; Kim & Rouse, 2011). The basic salary for primary school teachers is $80 USD per month, and the amount will be increased based on years in the profession and the teachers’ qualifications (Tandon & Tsuyoshi, 2015). To earn more income, most teachers prefer to provide “private tutoring” after school hours (Dawson, 2011; Tandon & Tsuyoshi, 2015). Most students in Cambodia pay extra fees to their teachers in order to obtain more teaching service from them in the form of ‘private tutoring’, which often takes place before and after formal teaching hours (Brehm & Silova, 2014).

Another problem within the teaching profession is the lack of professional development (Kim & Rouse, 2011). In 2000, the Ministry of Education introduced CFS via cluster-school initiatives and promoted student-centered pedagogies in order to help promote the enrolment of students in Grade 1 and increase performance in later grades, as well as to improve retention in the rest of the grades in elementary school (Bunlay et al., 2010). In order to help implement the new approaches, the Ministry, with assistance from international donors revised primary and lower secondary textbooks and developed teacher manuals, as well as teaching handbooks that guide pre-service and in-service teachers to practice student-centered pedagogies (Bunlay et al., 2010). The Ministry of Education also suggested the “five-teaching pedagogy” in a 50-minute lesson (Dawson, 2011). Those five teaching steps are the standard teaching methods suggested by the Ministry to be implemented in everyday teaching. Almost all teachers in Cambodia know these steps since they have been modeled and taught by teacher trainers during the training programs. The five teaching steps are described as:

Step 1: it is usually very short, in which the teacher checks students’ absence and has a short chat with students about their uniform, hygiene, and food, etc. Step 2: reviewing previous lessons sometimes related or non-related to new lessons for about 5 minutes. Step 3: asking provoking questions in order for students to come up with new lessons’ themes or the title of the new lesson. Next is asking students to look at pictures, if there are any in the article or textbook, and ask them some questions related to the pictures in order to lead to what is written in the text or what the text is about. Students are asked to read the text silently in order for them to find difficult words and to pronounce the words correctly; then, students read again for another short time and answer the questions orally. After the questions, students are divided into groups and they work together to answer written questions provided by the teacher and, at this stage, the answers from the students become the lesson summary. Step 4: reviewing the new lesson that was just taught
by posing some questions to students with their books closed, while the teacher covers what is written on the board. Step 5: is the last teaching step and it is normally the recommendation for students to take home the homework assignment. (Teacher participant named Channa, 2013)

Many teachers find it hard or almost impossible to cover the steps in the given time frame (Dawson, 2011). Even though teachers have difficulty in practicing their teaching methods, teachers in Cambodia in general have a very limited amount of time to conduct research in order to find new methods in order to improve their teaching.

**Research Sites**

The research was carried out at two elementary schools—Mesa Primary School and Cibo Primary School—in a suburban district in Battambang, my hometown. The real names of the research locations have been changed to the pseudonyms—Mesa and Cibo Primary Schools. Those two schools have different characteristics, including number of teachers, number of classes, and student populations. The following are descriptions of the specific characteristics of each school.

**Mesa Primary School**

There are six classes at Mesa Primary School ranging from Grade 1 to Grade 6. Each grade level consists of only one class. There are 163 students in total, of which 84 are female. The total number of the staff is nine, including six teachers (all female), a school principal, a vice-principal, and one librarian. The six teachers teach in the morning shift only, from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. Each teacher is fully responsible for her own class.

Mesa Primary School has its own separate school ground (100 square kilometers), which is surrounded by a brick gate. All of the six classrooms in the building are made of brick. The whole school building has one small library and an administrative office for the principal and the vice-principal. Actually, the office and the library are classrooms. Because there are not enough rooms for other purposes, they converted classrooms into the office and the library. I saw the office was open, but the principal was not there. During all the days I visited the school, I have never seen the school principal. I have met a vice-principal once, when he came to school 2 hours later after the first class started at 7 a.m. Because there is not enough room, the principal’s office is also used as the teachers’
room. During break times, teachers often come to the principal’s office to chat with other teachers or to relax.

The office is equipped with principal’s and vice-principal’s desks and three other desks, as well as several chairs for teachers. The office and the library are the same size. They are pretty spacious and wide open with seven windows and a front door. The door and windows are decorated by short blue curtains on top. The library is next to the principal’s office. The teacher participants said the library is often closed during the school day. It is not opened unless the principal, vice-principal or the teachers need to go in. It seems that the library is not for students and the setting is not child-friendly and welcoming. Inside the library, I saw various old unused furniture and objects covered by dust. When entering the front door on the left hand side (I called it the front part), I saw a whiteboard and two blackboards hung on the front wall. On top of the black board, there was a Cambodian flag surrounded by a photo of the king and the previous king and queen. And, on top of the photos there was the national motto: Nation, Religion, and King. The whiteboard is close to the entrance door. On the board, there are some handwritten statements about the rules and regulations of the library, which read:

- The library is open daily during the class days from Monday to Saturday;
- Rule #1 please place your bags in the right place;
- Rule #2 please be quiet;
- Rule #3 you can borrow 2 books at a time for 18 days;
- Rule #4 the borrowers have to take a good care of the books, in case of being lost or broken you have to buy a new book or pay the cost of the book;
- Rule #5 the dictionaries and other important documents cannot be borrowed outside;
- Rule #6 the borrowers who do not return the books on time are not allowed to borrow a new book;
- Rule #7 you can renew the books by contacting the librarian;
- Rule #8 the readers have to follow the internal regulations of the library; and
- Rule #9 if you do not follow the rules and regulations, you are not permitted to enter the library.

The blackboard that is close to the white board features handwriting about the timetable of the library. This is the timetable that I copied from the board as shown in Table 4.1 below.
### Table 4.1

*Library Timetable*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Document search</td>
<td>Book repair</td>
<td>Material creation</td>
<td>Entering library</td>
<td>Material creation</td>
<td>Book repair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td>Narrating stories</td>
<td>Study games</td>
<td>Narrating stories</td>
<td>Week #1, class…</td>
<td>Narrating stories</td>
<td>Study games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Document search</td>
<td>Book repair</td>
<td>Material creation</td>
<td>Week #2, class…</td>
<td>Material creation</td>
<td>Book repair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td>Narrating stories</td>
<td>Study games</td>
<td>Study games</td>
<td>Week #3, class…</td>
<td>Narrating stories</td>
<td>Narrating stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Document search</td>
<td>Book repair</td>
<td>Material creation</td>
<td>Week #4, technical</td>
<td>Material creation</td>
<td>Book repair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>meeting,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On another blackboard next to the timetable board is posted information about the national holidays during the academic year. In front of the blackboard, I saw an old, unused bucket with empty plastic bottles, a sleeping mat, an old scale and a helmet. It seems to me that the place has not been used and probably no one has come to read the schedule on the blackboard. A bit further from the blackboard, there is a desk and a chair covered by dust. In the middle of the library room, I saw an old dusty bookshelf with a few old textbooks and storybooks and a big pile of documents; and next to the bookshelf, there are two student tables covered by dust. Also, at the rear part of the room, there exist two cabinets and a student desk full of old documents and books. On the wall, I saw several posters talking about domestic violence, a broken clock, and two slogans that read: “Time is money” and “If do not learn enough during the day, learn more at night.”

There are six classrooms in Mesa school. Each classroom is the same size with similar decorations for a typical classroom. I now offer an example of the general image of the classrooms of Mesa School by describing the classroom of teacher, Sophea. Other classrooms, including Channa’s classroom, has similar decoration and features. Sophea’s classroom is equipped with 12 student desks. All the student desks are placed in three
rows. Each row has 4 desks. The student desk is an attachment of a table and a chair together. One desk can seat two students (they share desk). An example of a typical seating arrangement is shown in Figure 4.1 and 4.2 below. Because the desk is made up of two tables and two chairs attached together, made of wood, it is not easy to move around when placing students to work in groups. The design of the desk is still the traditional design of the desk 20 to 30 years ago. When I was a student, the desk that I sat in is the same as this desk, except during my time one desk could sit four students. Similarly, students sit in a row. Students sit in a row—two students sitting in one desk together. The shorter persons usually sit in the front. The classroom is pretty spacious with a lot of posters and pictures, flowers, and slogans on the wall. On the front wall, there is a large blackboard with a box of chalk and an eraser.

*Figure 4.1. Sample of a Typical Study-desk (2 seats) in a Classroom in Cambodia*

Next to the blackboard there is a teacher’s desk and a bucket of water for the teacher to clean his/her hands. On another side of the board, I saw a number of score charts that post the ranks and scores of students each month. On the sidewalls, there are some pictures, student artwork, flowers, a Cambodian map, and slogans. Also, on the rear walls, there is student artwork, a Cambodian map, a poster of numbers from 1 to 100, flowers, and some pictures of classrooms. This is a description of a typical classroom in Cambodia.
In front of the school building, there is one pole that displays a Cambodian national flag, surrounded by trees and a small garden. At the right side of the building, there is a playground and a couple of food stalls. Since there are no classes in the afternoon, the school is closed all afternoon.

Mesa Primary School is located in a suburban district close to the Battambang town center. Most of the students are from lower-income families. Eighty percent of the families are farmers, 19.5 percent are vendors in the local market, and 0.5 percent are government officials.

Cibo Primary School

There are 20 classes at Cibo Primary School, ranging from kindergarten to grade 6. These 20 classes include two kindergarten classes, two Grade 1 classes, two Grade 2 classes, three Grade 3 classes, four Grade 4 classes, four Grade 5 classes, and three Grade 6 classes. There are 612 students in total, of which 279 are female. The total number of staff is 23, including 20 teachers (18 are females), one librarian, and two administrators (one principal and one administrative assistant). Among the 20 teachers, 14 teach the morning-shift classes from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. and the other 6 teachers teach the afternoon-shift classes from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Cibo Primary School does not have its own separate school campus. It is a part of the entire Cibo School, which is divided into three different grade levels: Cibo Upper Secondary School (Grades 10-12), Cibo Lower-Secondary School (Grades 7-9), and Cibo Primary School (Grades Kindergarten to 6). The primary school building is 500 meters away from the secondary school buildings. There are 16 rooms in the entire primary school building. Eight classrooms are made of wood, and they are very old and in a run-down condition. Sometimes, the teachers who teach in those wooden classrooms have to spend their own money and materials on repairing the broken parts of classroom walls. However, the other eight classrooms are made of brick and are in better condition, as they have been renovated.

The school has one library and an administrative office for the principal and the administrative assistant, which are situated in the newly renovated building. Because of the limited number of rooms, they use the principal’s office as a teachers’ room. During the breaks, teachers hang out in the office along with the principal. During my school
visits, I often saw the principal. The principal came in every morning during school days and, occasionally, she came in the afternoon, as the school is open for two shifts (morning and afternoon). The principal’s office is often closed in the afternoon, as there are not many classes in the afternoon.

The room next to the principal’s office is the library. This library room has been converted from a classroom into a library. The library is open only in the afternoon since the librarian only works during the afternoon shift. The library is equipped with a wide variety of books, including storybooks, history books, comic books, picture books, Khmer dictionaries, English dictionaries, and textbooks. Different from the library in Mesa School, this library provides a friendly reading environment and welcoming atmosphere with many little reading tables for students. The library room is spacious with eight windows with colorful curtains. The walls and the ceiling are decorated with colored objects, pictures, reading picture posters, and some slogans. Most of the slogans are related to reading, such as “Now you are a reader, in the future you are a leader,” “Read more, learn more, know more, and be smarter,” “Library is a stock of knowledge,” “Learning less from the teacher, do not forget to come to the library,” and “Read for leisure, read for understanding, read for memorizing, and read for knowing.” The surrounding walls of the library are reader friendly. They are decorated with student artwork, colored shapes, colored animal artwork, Cambodian alphabets, Cambodia maps, pictures of Khmer traditional instruments, and so on.

There are 16 bookshelves that are equipped with storybooks, picture books, and novels and textbooks from different grades from Grade 1 to 12 because the library serves both elementary and secondary schools located on the same school campus. I saw a number of students from different age groups and grades coming to read the books. Most of them read picture books or picture storybooks. Inside the library, there is a library desk at the entrance and two big cabinets to store documents and dictionaries, including Khmer English and French dictionaries. This is one of the best libraries that I have seen in Cambodian schools during my years of education and teaching in Cambodia. It is impressive that, on the wall of the library, there is an imposing posting about the founder of the library. An international company from the Netherlands, named Philipse & Co Amsterdam SIPAR, funded it.
The design and the features of the classrooms are all similar to those in Mesa School. The difference is that Cibo School still has a very old wooden school building, in which are housed eight classrooms. Dara’s classroom is located in the old building. The size of the classroom is no different from those in the new building. However, the walls are a combination of wooden panels with holes in between. During the rainy season the classrooms are often flooded. The roofs of the classroom are made of zinc panels, which cause a really loud noise when it is raining. The classroom is not as spacious as that in the new building. It has six windows with blue curtains. The classroom has richer and nicer decorations, compared to Sophea’s classroom. On the front wall, there is a blackboard and, on top of the board, there is a Cambodian flag and pictures of the king and previous king and queen. On top of the photos, there is the national motto, which also includes “Kingdom of Cambodia, Nation, Religion, and King.” On the sides of the national anthem, there are flowers and some charts. The teacher’s desk is next to the blackboard and, behind the desk, there are several charts of student scores with their ranking each month.

On the side walls, I saw various decorations with flowers, pictures, student artwork, slogans, and different posters about key lessons of each subject such as mathematics, science, Khmer studies, and geography. The desks are placed in only two rows instead of four rows. The desks are exactly the same as the desks from my generation when I was in elementary school. Each desk is made of wood and can sit four students in a row. Each long desk is the combination of four small desks together, which make them hard to move and re-arrange for group work. The picture of the desk is shown in Figure 4.2 below. There are six desks in each row and four students sit in a one-desk row. Male and female students sit together. There is no gender separation in terms of sitting. Taller students are mostly placed in the rear desks and the shorter students sit in the front. In addition, Sirath’s classroom has similar features and design as Dara’s classroom. The only difference is that it is located in the brick building. And the walls are made of brick, which is better for noise reduction. Also, the desks are placed in four rows instead of two. And there are seven desks that seat two students in one row. These are examples of typical classrooms in Cibo School.
In front of the school building, there is one pole on which the Cambodian national flag is hung; and the pole is surrounded by trees, a small garden, and benches. At the right side of the building, there is playground for the students to play during the breaks. The food stalls are located behind the old classroom building. The school is open in the morning and the afternoon.

In addition, Cibo Primary School is located in the suburban district of Battambang City and is quite far from downtown Battambang. Most students are from low-average income families. Seventy percent of the families are farmers, 29 percent are vendors in the local market, and 1 percent are government officers.

Mesa and Cibo Schools were purposefully selected because, according to Patton (2002), “the logic and power of purposeful sampling leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (p. 46). Both schools were chosen because they are within the Cluster School system and are located within the targeted area (suburban district) of my research study. Additionally, I could gain access to these research sites because I know the school principals. They were very approachable and allowed me to conduct research in their schools. Table 4.2 below outlines the summary of the two schools.
Table 4.2
Summary of the Research Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Mesa Primary School</th>
<th>Cibo Primary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Participants</td>
<td>Channa and Sophea</td>
<td>Dara and Sirath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Administrators</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Classes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ families</td>
<td>80% farmers, 19.5% vendors, 0.5% officers</td>
<td>70% farmers, 29% vendors, 1% officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Teaching Shifts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the following section, I am going to describe each teacher participant’s personal and professional qualities, including their educational/teaching background, personal history, and learning and teaching philosophy.

Channa

Teaching, Educational Background, and Training

Channa teaches Grade 5 in Mesa Primary School. She has 28 students (18 females) in her 2012–2013 class. She teaches five subjects: Khmer studies, mathematics, social studies, science, and physical and health education from Monday to Saturday in the morning shift from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. There are two break-times within the entire teaching hours: the first break is at 8:45 a.m. and another one is at 9:45 a.m. The teaching time for one lesson is approximately 45 minutes.

Channa is 32 years old and has been a teacher for 11 years. After she finished high school and earned a high school diploma in 1999, she passed the entrance exam to study at the Teacher Training Center in Battambang Province for two years (1999 to 2001). She began teaching Grade 5 at Mesa Primary School and she continued working there until the time of this research.

Channa’s study at Teacher Training Center in 1999 was not interrupted by the political unrest in the country. She mentioned that Cambodia was at peace after the coup d’état in 1997. When she studied at Teacher Training Center, she was taught only the
general techniques of teaching—“five steps” and the other lessons about general subjects such as mathematics, science, and social studies. However, Channa never learned any specific methods for teaching reading. She also did not learn how to write lesson plans until she began her practicum at schools. When she became a teacher, she wrote lesson plans for each lesson only in the first year of her teaching. After the completion of her practicum, she has been following the guidelines outlined in the teacher guidebooks.

Apart from the training provided by her school principal once a year, Channa has rarely had any additional training since becoming an in-service teacher at Mesa Primary School. Her school principal joined training sessions at the cluster school (Savanna Primary School) about student-center teaching techniques provided by the cluster school’s principal and other senior teachers, and she returned to teach all the teachers in Mesa School. Savanna Primary School is the pseudonym used to replace the real name of the cluster school. Mesa Primary School is one of schools within the cluster school system of Savanna School.

Personal history

Channa was born after the civil war. She started Grade 1 in 1986 and graduated from high school in 1999. She has the reputation of being a good student in high school. Channa is from an average-income family, so the family’s financial issues did not affect her study. She could spend the majority of her time studying and reading the lessons in textbooks as well as doing homework, which allowed her to remain a good student in class.

Channa still continues to be in an average-income family after her marriage. She has been married to a civil servant for six years and has a daughter who is in Grade 3. Channa lives in a different village from the village where Mesa School is located, and she has to travel to the school by motorbike for about 10 minutes. Because she teaches in the morning shift only, she has the whole afternoon to run a small business as a lottery retailer at home. Besides teaching, she has to work in another business in her spare time to supplement her income, since her teaching salary is not enough.
Learning and Teaching Philosophy

It is challenging for Channa to effectively teach her students and get them to learn many lessons according to the curriculum assigned by the Ministry of Education. When she speeds up her teaching to cover everything in the prescribed school curriculum, her students do not acquire all the necessary skills, which leaves many students academically behind. Those students need more learning time than the curriculum prescribes. Thus, Channa spends some time with those students with poor academic skills during breaks to help them with reading and basic mathematic calculations. Channa argues that students should have a greater amount of time learning and mastering one lesson, rather than learning many lessons in such a short time in order to cover the Ministry’s school curriculum.

Part of Channa’s teaching philosophy is accepting and incorporating all the ideas given by her students. She believes that there are different ways to correctly answer the questions. Thus, her students do not necessarily memorize the answers from the textbook. Channa also works hard to motivate her students to question her and other classmates if they have any doubts about the subjects being taught.

Sophea

Teaching, Educational Background, and Training

Sophea teaches Grade 6 at Mesa Primary School. She teaches five subjects: Khmer studies, mathematics, social studies, science, and physical and health education, from Monday to Saturday in the morning shift from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. She has 25 students (14 females) in her class in the 2013 academic year. The whole teaching period is divided by two breaks: the first break at 8:45 a.m. and the second break at 9:45 a.m.

Sophea’s ability and time to study at Teacher Training Center was disturbed by the political unrest in the country a few years prior to the national elections in 1993. After finishing Grade 9 in 1989, Sophea took an exam to enter Teacher Training Center in 1990 and studied there for two years until her graduation in 1992. During that time, the whole country suffered from political unrest. There was gun fighting over almost all of the country. She felt that she did not learn enough, due to the fear of war/coup d'état and escape from the gunfire. She could not stay focused on her studies during that time.
Sophea reported that, oftentimes, she had to hide in a Buddhist temple for a while during her study time in order to escape from the shooting. It was an overwhelming time for her at Teacher Training Center and it has been many years already since she started learning there; thus, Sophea could hardly remember what she learned during the pre-service training. However, she could recall parts of what she studied at Teacher Training Center, which included teacher-centered teaching methods, how to do lesson plans, and other general subjects such as mathematics and Khmer studies.

After finishing pre-service teacher training, Sophea earned enough credentials to become a teacher in primary school, although she had not yet acquired a high school diploma. After being in the teaching profession for many years, Sophea never gave up her chance to get the high school diploma. She went back to take the Grade 12 examination and earned the diploma in 2012.

Sophea started teaching in Mesa Primary School in 1992 and has been teaching there until the time of this research. She is 45 years old and has been a teacher for 21 years. Since she became a teacher, she has never been called/selected for any additional training or degrees except for the preparation for her high school diploma examination. She has only attended one-week workshops about teaching techniques twice a year at the cluster school. She learned teaching methods from her school principal at her current school and from the cluster school’s principal at the cluster school’s training sessions. The principal delivered what she learned from the Ministry of Education officers to the teachers. Sophea stressed that, apart from the training provided by the Ministry of Education and NGOs, Sophea is not able to afford to go back to school for any additional training on her own.

**Personal History**

Sophea was still a child during the civil war. Her primary school was interrupted by the war. All schools were shut down and Khmer Rouge soldiers forced all children into labour instead of going to school. Thus, from ages 8 to 11, Sophea received no education; instead, she spent most of her time working in the rice fields. Fortunately, the civil war finally ended in 1980, and Sophea could resume her primary school studies in 1981 from Grade 3.
Sophea grew up and lives in a below-average income family. She lives in the same village where Mesa School is located. Thus, it requires 2 to 3 minutes for her to commute to school by motorbike. Sophea is still single and lives with her older sister’s family. Her house is close to the rice field and her family has had a farming background since she was a child, prior to the civil war. As a child, having grown up in a farming family, Sophea had a tough childhood. In Cambodia, farmers live below the average income line and most of them have difficulty making ends meet. In the farming business, her family faced a lot of financial hardships, which required Sophea to go out and sell spices to make extra income. Having committed to helping her family with this small business, she could not afford much time for her studies, such as doing homework and self-study at home. However, she still tried to get up very early each morning to review all the lessons before going to school, in order to keep up with other classmates.

Although Sophea is now working as a teacher, she still faces financial difficulty, which requires her to have a second job. Besides teaching in the morning, she has a part-time job in the afternoon as a woodcraft woman in order to earn additional income to supplement her teaching salary. Her teaching salary is not enough to support everyday living or even to make ends meet.

**Learning and Teaching Philosophy**

Sophea believes that reading is the most important skill, compared to other subjects, including mathematics. She feels that, if students are not able to read, they cannot learn and understand other subjects. Thus, she tries to help students with reading difficulties during break time and urges the better performing students to help the lower performing students. Additionally, what Sophea is most concerned about is her students’ learning. She believes that she has to teach her students one little thing/one lesson in one day rather than teaching them nothing. That is one of the most important motivations for her to remain in the profession and to come to teach every day, although she earns insufficient salary from this job. Her ultimate goal is help her students to learn. This is why Sophea often includes inspirational messages in her lessons to encourage her students to pay more attention to their academic work and to study harder, as well as not to quit school in order to seek employment in neighboring countries.
Sophea prefers the traditional teaching approaches (teacher-centered) to the new ones (student-centered or active learning pedagogies). She believes that students need to be directly guided and forced to learn; otherwise, they are too lazy to learn by themselves. If they are not punished when they do not study hard enough and are not well disciplined, they will not learn. Sophea believes that punishment and the teacher’s power to control the class is needed in order to make students learn. Thus, she prefers teacher-centered approaches to student-centered approaches because teachers have more control in terms of classroom management. Additionally, another main reason why students do not learn well is not only the teachers’ teaching methods but because parents or guardians do not care enough about their children’s learning. They do not spend extra time teaching their children at home. Thus, she argues that the main obstacle in her teaching is students’ low engagement and lack of external support in learning.

**Dara**

**Teaching, Educational Background, and Training**

Dara is a Grade 5 teacher at Cibo Primary School and has been a teacher for 24 years. She started teaching Grade 2 at Cibo Primary School at its main location for one year. She then taught at another branch of the school in a different location. After teaching Grade 2 for two years, she was promoted to teach Grades 5 and 6 for seven years at the branch location. Since then, Dara has been teaching Grade 5 at Cibo Primary School (main location). The subjects that she teaches in Grade 5 are mathematics, Khmer studies, social studies, science, and physical and health education. Khmer studies also includes reading strategies and other skills, such as listening, writing exercises, and conversation. Dara teaches only in the morning shift from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. In her class, in the 2013 academic year, there were 36 students in total; 13 are females.

After finishing Grade 9 in 1982, Dara passed an entrance examination to study at the provincial Teacher Training Center in Battambang in order to become a primary school teacher. Because Dara is a Grade 9 graduate, she was placed in a supplementary program for only six months to complete certain required courses. Those courses included teaching methods (teacher-centered approaches), mathematics, Khmer studies, geography, history, and so on. Dara graduated from Teacher Training Center and became
a primary school teacher in late 1982. Although she became a public school teacher, she had not earned a high school diploma. After being in the profession for many years, Dara recognizes that it is important for her to get the diploma. It has become more competitive with other colleagues who have obtained a Grade 12 diploma; and this diploma is also required in order to get a pay raise. Dara rigorously prepared for the exam and earned the diploma in 2010.

In 1990, besides teaching at the public school, the Ministry of Education assigned Dara to teach students with learning difficulties in Battambang province during the long school break time (July to September). She taught these students reading skills and learning techniques, as well as basic mathematics calculation. This experience allowed her to learn that reading is really important. She also began to learn her own way of teaching reading. This experience is part of her self-sustained professional development.

Dara has attended other training programs, including the Overseas Teacher Program for one week in 2011. This training was sponsored by an Australian non-governmental organization, and the trainers were foreign volunteers from Australia. They taught the teacher-participants some story reading methods/strategies and how to narrate stories. Dara also attended another two-week training section sponsored by World Vision in 2010. World Vision sponsored the fund for this training to happen in order for the teachers and the heads of the teaching-technique committee from the cluster school to meet and learn from each other. During the training, Dara worked with other teachers from other schools within the same cluster school system to design relevant teaching materials and to create lesson outlines for each lesson, following the teaching guidebook from the Ministry of Education. The head of the cluster school’s teaching-technique group supervised the training section. In early 2011, Dara also attended another training program called the Girls’ Consultancy Program in which local trainers taught her different types of games (most of them are from the Western context) to apply in her own teaching activities.

Beside those training sessions, Dara also participates in local teaching-technique committee meetings with other Grade 5 teachers once every three months. There are three Grade 5 teachers in Cibo Primary School, and each takes turns becoming a committee leader every two years. It was not Dara’s turn to be a leader during the time of this
research (2013), although she used to be a leader during 2010-2012. The committee meeting is held once every three months, and is mostly about exchanging teaching experience and creating teaching materials such as pictures and lesson outlining/timing for teaching during the year.

**Personal History**

Dara had a miserable childhood during the civil war. When she was 11 years old, Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia and the civil war began. Her formal schooling in Grade 6 was interrupted. Dara stated that, during the civil war years (1975-1979), all schools were closed and all children were forced to work in the rice fields, instead of going to school. Dara was separated from her parents and, a year later, they were killed by the Khmer Rouge soldiers in 1976. After the end of civil war in 1979, Dara started school again in Grade 7 and continued until Grade 9.

Dara is 49 years old and is married to a man who is also a teacher at Cibo Lower Secondary School (at the same location). Dara is also a mother of three children. The older son is doing his Bachelor’s degree in mathematics in the capital city (Phnom Penh) in order to become a higher-secondary school math teacher. This is a part of higher educational system in Cambodia—after completing bachelor studies in mathematics, the graduates need to spend one year at a pedagogy school in order to become a higher-secondary school teacher. The second daughter is doing an associate’s degree in nursing. Dara’s youngest daughter is in Grade 12.

Apart from teaching, Dara’s family also does farming. Dara and her husband grow vegetables and sell them to local vendors. They spend their afternoons doing all the farm work in order to generate revenue in addition to their teaching income. Dara claims that her teaching salary alone is not enough for her and her husband to support the entire family. Dara’s house is located in a different village from Cibo School’s. Thus, Dara and her husband travel together to work every day on their own motorbikes.

**Learning and Teaching Philosophy**

Dara notices that her students’ learning abilities are getting worse from one academic year to the next. She believes that the lack of parent involvement in student learning is a key issue in their children’s education. She believes that, if parents pay
enough attention and get engaged in their children learning, their children would be more successful learners. Another issue is that students’ memorizing capacities are getting lower. Her students keep forgetting lessons learned, very quickly. Dara believes that another fundamental reason why her students do not remember the lessons well is their age. When they are too young to learn the level of lessons they are currently learning, they do not enjoy learning. Instead, they really enjoy playing and keep forgetting what they learn. However, if her students learn with tangible aids, such as computers and other materials/tools associated with the lessons, Dara believes that they would enjoy and learn much better than learning with only textbooks.

Dara applies both approaches (teacher-centered and student-centered) to her teaching. She likes the newly mandated approaches (student-centered) in terms of group work and questioning/answering methods. However, she believes that these approaches work perfectly in developed countries where teachers and students have greater access to various teaching materials, including computers. These would not effectively work in Cambodia where there are not enough teaching materials or learning aids.

Dara strongly believes that working in groups and that collaboration between the stronger and weaker students promote students’ learning. Thus, she often arranges those students together for them to help each other. And, most of the time, Dara helps monitor and coordinate the group work in order to make it more dynamic and productive. Dara is open to any answers from her students when using question and answer methods. She does not only accept the answers offered in the textbooks. Dara is a very inspirational teacher and often includes an educational message in each of her daily lessons to inspire her students to help educate each other. She believes that the good/rich should help the poor. She learned this inspirational way of teaching, “friends educate friends,” from the “Girls’ Consultancy Program” workshop and from her own beliefs.

Sirath

Teaching, Educational Background, and Training

Sirath is a Grade 6 teacher at Cibo Primary School and has been a teacher for 19 years. He is also a leader of the Grade 6 teaching technique committee at Cibo Primary School. There are only two Grade 6 teachers in the school, and both of them take turns
being the group leader every two years. The meeting is held once every three months. It is mostly about exchanging teaching experience and creating teaching materials, such as pictures and lesson outlining/timing for teaching during the year.

When Sirath first started teaching in 1994, the highest grade in the primary school system during those years was Grade 5. Thus, Sirath was assigned to teach Grade 5. After teaching Grade 5 for two years, the Ministry of Education included Grade 6 in the primary school system, and he was re-assigned to teach Grade 6 and has been doing so until the time of this research. In his Grade 6 class, Sirath teaches five subjects, namely mathematics, Khmer studies, social studies, science, and physical and health education. Sirath teaches only in the afternoon shift from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., and has 23 students (7 females) in his class (2013 academic year).

After passing the high school examination in 1992, Sirath’s original goal was to become an upper secondary school teacher (teaching Grades 10, 11, and 12). However, he could not afford to travel to the capital city for the exam, and it was unsafe on the road from Battambang (his province) to the city, due to the incidence of political unrest during the 1990s. Due to all of these obstacles, he changed his intention in order to take an exam for lower-secondary school teachers; however, the Ministry of Education did not make the examination available at that time. Sirath decided to undergo the training to become a primary school teacher. Sirath studied at the Teacher Training Center for two years. There, he studied many subjects including general subjects (mathematics, science, history, geography, etc.) and how to write lesson plans by following teacher-centered pedagogies. However, he was not taught any specific reading strategies during the training. Sirath also learned other teacher-centered methods from the senior teachers with whom he did the practicum.

Since Sirath started teaching at Cibo Primary School, he has been rarely called for any professional training outside of the school, except for the local training provided by the principal of the cluster school and Cibo School’s principal. Most of the training by the school principal focused on how to embrace new concepts, such as human rights and environmental issues, into the lessons. Sirath also attended another training session about teaching methods that was sponsored by the World Vision organization in 2010. In the past few years, he has also participated in other sessions about student-centered
approaches at Siha Cluster School once every six months. Siha Cluster School is the pseudonym that has been used to replace the real name. Cibo Primary School is one of the schools within Siha Cluster School. Since late 2011, he has never been to any other training. Regarding the selection of the participant teachers for the training, Sirath added that the ones who are mostly selected for the training are those who have a close relationship with the principal.

**Personal History**

Sirath was 4 years old during the civil war. At that age, he had not yet started school and, besides, there was no formal schooling during that time. Sirath and his peers were grouped together for all kinds of labor work, including farming and cooking. The war interrupted his education at a very young age, and he could not start school at age 6. After the war ended, Sirath started Grade 1 at age 9 and continued until he finished high school. He earned his high school diploma in 1992 before he entered the Teacher Training Center.

Sirath is married to a local merchant woman and has two daughters. The oldest is in Grade 5 and the youngest is in Grade 3. They both study at Cibo Primary School. Due to his family’s financial constraints, Sirath could not dedicate all of his time and effort to teaching. If he cared only about teaching, he could not earn income to support his family. Thus, besides teaching, Sirath has to help his wife with the family business (selling groceries) at home. Sirath acknowledged that teaching requires a lot of research; however, he rarely conducts any reading or research on teaching methods and other general knowledge on the subjects he is teaching. The rest of the time after the afternoon teaching period is spent with family and helping with their business. The reason why he needs to do all of these to support the family is that his teaching salary is too low and is not enough for his family to make ends meet.

**Learning and Teaching Philosophy**

Sirath’s teaching philosophy is to focus upon students’ thinking and memorization. Students need to memorize the lessons in order to learn. Regarding students’ memorization of the lessons, Sirath believes that the Ministry’s mandated student-centered approaches do not work in Cambodia, although those approaches claim
to promote student thinking. By applying these methods, students are placed in groups to work and only a few students think or attempt to complete the exercises. On one hand, most of the other students are too playful; on the other hand they are inactive. As such, they do not participate and do not memorize the lessons. Also, students are not attracted to the lessons when the teachers do not have tangible teaching materials to present to them while teaching.

In class, Sirath often asks his students to write on the blackboard and to do the work/exercises individually, since he has a belief that students can learn more by doing and by participating in the activities relevant to their learning. Thus, he prefers the old methods (teacher-centered) to the new mandated approaches. With the old approaches, teachers describe and explain lessons to students directly and the students can remember the lessons. He argues that teacher-center approaches can promote students’ memorization of the lessons. However, he still applies student-centered approaches in his teaching, since they are mandated and he would get in trouble if he never practiced them. With these new approaches, he still believes that the questioning method can promote student thinking and learning. Sirath argues that he does not care much about what approaches he needs to apply; but what does matter is how to teach his students to get meaning from the lessons he is teaching.

Another way to help with students’ memorization and thinking is through homework, and it is the only way to encourage them to study at home. Thus, Sirath often assigns homework at the end of each lesson and encourages his students to complete the homework and read/review the lesson before each class. With regards to reading, Sirath believes that understanding difficult words and having more time to read one article will give students more room to think and remember what they are reading and learning. When teaching reading, he spends a lot of time teaching difficult vocabulary to his students.

In the following chapter, I describe the findings and the discussions emerged based on my data analysis. In each section of the findings, I identified key perspectives that explain the teachers’ perspectives on teaching reading in content areas, issues and challenges they encounter, and the curricular roles they adopt or could develop. Those key ideas will be presented in the following chapter.
Chapter 5
Findings (Responses to Sub-Research Question 1)

What Are the Teachers’ Attitudes, Beliefs, and Knowledge about Reading and Teaching Reading in Their Content Area Classes? Why Might This Be So? How Do These Attitudes, Beliefs, and Knowledge Influence Their Instructional Strategies?

Most teachers in Cambodia have been through several changes in terms of the country’s regimes and different educational systems. For example, when they were at school, they were taught in the traditional ways of teaching—teacher-centered approaches, rote learning and memorization when they read/learned a text in the school curriculum; however, the ways they were trained to become teachers were somehow similar and, yet, different from the methods that their former K-12 teachers had used to teach them. And, once they became teachers, they were told to teach in different ways, using newly introduced approaches (student-centered approaches). Also, their personal history and other factors, including teacher training, imposed curriculum and their senior colleagues, influenced their attitudes and understanding of reading and the teaching of reading.

Thus, within this research topic, due to the radical changes in the Cambodian teachers’ educational and professional realms, it is important to learn about these teachers’ attitudes and beliefs towards reading to see how their own attitudes and beliefs about reading affect how they select methods for teaching reading in content areas—if they still hold their traditional beliefs on reading and if their knowledge about reading remains unchanged; and how have their knowledge and understanding about reading/teaching reading have evolved over time after they became teachers? Therefore, the first sub-research question is to understand the teachers’ past and current attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about reading and teaching reading in content areas; and why they hold those attitudes, beliefs and knowledge, and what the consequences are. The answers to these questions will reveal the understanding and beliefs of those teachers about reading, as well as teaching reading, and how their knowledge and beliefs affect how they teach reading in content areas and how they select their instructional strategies.
findings/responses to the above questions have been organized into four recurrent key perspectives.

**Traditional/Technical Knowledge on Reading**

*Channa*

Not all of the teacher participants distinguish the generic definition of reading from the definition of reading in content areas. They have only one definition for all types of reading. Three teachers have defined reading similarly, except for one teacher participant. And the most appropriate definition of reading was defined by one of the teacher participants, named Channa. She has defined reading as “looking at words and following those words in a text in order to get the meanings.” And, this definition, for her, has remained unchanged over time. Channa also has a basic understanding about the importance of reading. She believes that, if people do not read, they do not learn or know any words. By mentioning this, she stressed that reading plays a significant role in daily life; for example, if a person cannot read, he/she is not able to understand and interpret any informative signs or labels in public places. People living in one textual society need reading, since they have to know the messages other people want to convey in their writing. For her, reading is a crucial skill that people need for living. Channa views reading, as well as the act of reading, as a survival skill in order to be socialized into a society.

Moreover, Channa believes that the main goal for students to do reading in class is to answer teacher’ questions and to summarize a lesson/text at the end. In relation to this purpose, she also stressed that, in order for students to understand the meanings of a text that they are reading, they have to answer the provocative questions given by the teacher(s), and, lastly, they should be able to do a lesson summary in order sum up what they have read and to verify their understanding of that text. When students are capable of completing these two exercises, she concludes that her students understand the lesson and comprehend what is written in the article.

In addition, based on her knowledge of reading, she divides reading into three types: individual reading, silent reading, and reading aloud. The first stage is individual reading—meaning students scan the text by reading to themselves individually for
understanding and getting the general meaning of the text. Then, students go to the second stage of reading, which is silent reading—meaning students still read individually to themselves but, at this stage, they read and pay attention to and look at the questions given by the teacher or in the textbook in order to answer those questions. The last stage of reading is reading aloud—meaning, at this stage, they read aloud to the whole class or they take turns reading each paragraph in a group. At this stage, the teacher assigns two or three students in the group to read each paragraph consecutively to the end of the text. Channa believes that students benefit from all the three types of reading. They need to read silently to themselves first and, next, share the experience with other students.

**Sophea**

Similarly, Sophea has defined reading as “counting the letters of words in order to correctly follow each of the letters accordingly… it is similar to counting the letters to correctly match with the consonants.” According to her general understanding, reading refers to the act of readers who are able to say words correctly, according to each letter in the word. She added that reading also means saying out the words to create sounds, and then to understand the meanings and to learn what the texts are all about. This is the definition of reading that she has understood since she was a student, up until she became a teacher. After Sophea had been in the teaching profession for many years and had taught innumerable reading lessons to her students, she has come to realize that reading is also about getting meaning—main ideas from the text(s), rather than merely pronouncing words and learning vocabulary.

Moreover, Sophea also believes that reading is important because, after reading, readers could gain information, such as knowing the history of a country, and could be able to understand what are textually presented in their daily lives; for example, readers (students) are able to read and understand concepts about weight, distance, street signs, and other messages posted in public places. She has a very fundamental understanding and knowledge about the importance of reading, which is basically a survival skill and this is about becoming textually aware of any written language. Sophea treats reading as the most important skill/subject, compared to other subjects, including mathematics and science. She expressed that, if students cannot read, they would not be able to understand mathematics and other subjects. For her, she also argued that the primary purpose of
reading is to learn about the information given in the text that is being read, and learning new information in order to generate more knowledge for the readers.

Similar to Channa’s point of view about types of reading, Sophea divides reading into three categories, namely silent reading, reading aloud, and whispering reading. Silent reading means students read to themselves quietly and then concentrate on the reading in order to briefly know about the text. Second is reading aloud, which means students read to themselves by making sounds so that they can hear what they are reading and learn about the words in the text as well as their meaning. The third is whispering reading, meaning reading to themselves in a low voice so that they can concentrate on the text while their eyes are moving from word to word and, listening to their low voices, they learn to hear how the words are pronounced.

**Dara**

Dara has a lot of experience in teaching reading, including teaching students with reading difficulties. Her knowledge about reading was mostly influenced by her past experience and the training she received from international organizations. Dara understands that, in reading for the first time, the readers can understand or take only 15 percent from the text. Other ways to make readers understand the text is through questioning. She stated that:

> Students can read fluently, but when we ask for meanings and their understanding of the text(s), they do not know yet. So, we have to set up questions to link before going to reading. We have to use the questions first. We have to get students to read the questions first before getting them to read the text(s) so that they can understand. If they just read (general reading) without questions, the memory is too little to catch up the meanings.

Generally, Dara believes that reading is about remembering, understanding the meaning, and finding main ideas within the article(s). Thus, the readers need to have questions to connect their thoughts to the texts and then answer those questions. For students, teachers have to use additional questions for them to answer before and after the reading. Dara pays more attention to reading because she has additional experience teaching reading (basic skills of reading) to illiterate students/people in a village after the civil war, as well as teaching low-performing students during the summer of 2011.
Dara has received the most professional training among all of the participants. Much of this training has influenced her thoughts and understanding about reading, as well as the ways she teaches reading in content areas. The non-governmental organization (NGO) that sponsored her first training regarding teaching reading and writing is World Vision USA. They embraced the method of student-centered approaches and group work for teaching reading and writing so that students were able to work in collaboration with each other. Another NGO that provided training to her, several years ago in 2009 and 2010, was through the Overseas Teacher Training Program. She found this to be an effective training program that taught her how to narrate short stories. The ways the trainers teach also relate to reading—this is where she discovered that readers can only take 15 percent of meaning out of an article they are reading for the first time.

How Dara understands reading from her teaching experience and training make her believe that reading is imperative for both students and teachers. For students, Dara suggested that reading promotes students’ thinking, understanding, and intelligence, as well as helping them gain more information. According to Dara,

When students are reading, they are trying to understanding. So, reading is important for them to enhance their thinking and intelligence. For example, when they are reading historical texts, they learn about the history from generation to generation. When they are reading science texts, they learn about how to take care of their health.

Dara also acknowledged that reading is even more important for teachers. They need reading to gain new information and knowledge to share with their students. According to Dara,

The reading for teachers is reading lessons in order to explain to their students. The textbooks just give us only key points. So, it requires us to do more reading and research. We need to consult with the old textbooks and teacher guidebooks, especially the old teacher guidebooks from the earlier generation such as the one in Rath Kampuchea Regime (the State of Cambodia Regime from 1989 to 1993).

In addition, for students, she believes that the purpose for them to read is primarily to learn vocabulary. Vocabulary is very important for them to understand reading and to proceed with it. She claimed that, when students read, they always encounter new and difficult words, which interrupts their reading flow. And, in order to fulfill this purpose of reading for students, teachers have to help them find those difficult
words first and then teach them to make sure that they are able to read and pronounce those words correctly. By doing this, students can proceed to read the whole article and understand it better. According to Dara, teachers play a key role in vocabulary instruction; and learning vocabulary is the main purpose of reading.

Moreover, Dara classifies reading into two types: silent reading and reading aloud. Silent reading means that the readers do individual reading and think at the same time. This type of reading can promote their concentration. After that, the readers read aloud. It means they read with voice so that they can hear themselves reading. This type of reading promotes their ability to pronounce the words correctly.

**Sirath**

Sirath has defined reading in content areas in a slightly different way from Channa and Sophea, even before the former became teachers. Sirath understands reading as learning about facts that are presented in text(s) and the memorization of the facts given in the texts. He acknowledged that he had never thought about how reading was defined when he was a student. In addition to memorization, Sirath also believed that reading is about understanding the meanings of the texts; and, in order to understand a text, the readers need to associate themselves with the text(s) by questions—meaning, there should be initial questions for readers to think about when they read, and then answer those questions for their own understanding.

How Sirath understood reading texts when he was a student affected the way he understood reading when he became a teacher. He believes that reading for students is about memorizing the information in texts for gaining more knowledge and ideas, as well as understanding what is written in the texts. Sirath has a basic understanding about the importance of reading. He believes that reading basically makes the reader(s) know more about things around them and increases their overall knowledge, as well as helping readers obtain new knowledge. Reading is even more important for teachers and students, as they need to read and do research constantly to gain more new knowledge.

However, he argued that reading is less important for other people since they are too busy with their daily life work and this makes them do less reading. For Sirath, the overall purposes of all kinds of reading, for both students and teachers, are getting
meaning out of the text—what the text is about in order for them to learn new information, new facts, and new vocabulary. He divides reading into two categories: silent reading and reading aloud. He expressed that readers choose which types of reading they prefer, depending on the location in which they are doing readings and the effectiveness in getting meaning from the texts. If they are reading in public places, silent reading is preferred. The effectiveness of reading also depends on each person. Some people can learn more and read better when they read aloud to themselves; however, other people can concentrate better when they read silently in a quiet place. So, according to Sirath, the reader is the one who chooses how they should conduct their reading and selects a suitable place for it.

In conclusion, due to their past experiences in practicing reading, as well as the restricted experience in being trained with the advanced or specialized strategies to teach reading/reading in content areas, the teacher participants possess limited knowledge of reading. They associate reading with the ability to understand the written language in order to survive in a textual society, as well as the ability to communicate with other people. The other two teacher participants who have had a richer experience in conducting reading, as well as teaching reading, understand that reading is about memorization in order to improve the readers’ knowledge and to share with other people. Generally, all four teachers relate reading with the ability to pronounce words and understand the meanings of words, as well as the whole text.

**The Beliefs and Attitudes towards Reading and Teaching Reading in Content Areas**

All four teacher participants believe that reading is important for their students, as well as for the general populace. However, they still have a basic understanding about the importance of reading. All of them believe that reading is significant for their students to be able to understanding the meanings of texts they are reading, either in public places for them to cope with their daily living, as well as for their future working environment.

**Channa**

For Channa, when teaching any lessons except mathematics, she mainly focuses on reading by trying to explain to her students, in order for them to get the
meaning/understanding of words and the meaning of the whole text in the lessons. She understands that students in higher grades, i.e., Grades 5 and 6, read differently from those in lower grades. She believes that her students who are in Grade 5 are old enough to think more deeply about the main ideas and overall meaning of the text they are reading.

Although Channa expressed her beliefs about reading—when students read, they gain the ability to think and get meaning from the text—the ways she taught her students reading (through questioning) did not accommodate or enhance the students’ thinking ability. When teaching reading in content areas, the ways that her students responded to her questions after they read a text were still the traditional and technical ways—the students copied the answers from the textbook, which inhibited their own thinking ability. Channa, as a teacher, accepted students’ answers and did not challenge her students to think critically and give alternate responses from a critical lens.

**Sophea**

Another teacher, Sophea, argued that reading for memorization (memorizing words and contents) still plays a significant role in reading in content areas. She often encourages her students to read for memorization; otherwise, she noticed that her students do not know/learn what they read. Besides reading for memorization, Sophea learned that the basic skills of reading only include identifying words, the ability to associate the letters with the sounds and figuring out the words, spelling out the patterns of words, and sounding those words out. She believes those skills need to be taught and mastered by the students first, before teaching them reading for comprehension. Sophea claims that she cares more about reading, and she believes that reading is the most important skill compared to other subjects. If students are not able to read, they cannot learn other subjects.

**Dara**

Dara has a lot more experience in teaching reading, both to regular students and to students with poor reading performance. And, her past experience affects how she treats reading. Dara believes that reading is important for everybody, especially students; and they can learn how to read as well as to master reading skills more easily, compared to other people. Also, learning new vocabulary is one of most significant reading skills for
her students to learn. Dara believes that teachers should teach vocabulary instruction first to the students so that they are able to read and understand what they read before advancing to other skills.

Regarding teaching reading, Dara also argued that every student can learn to read and they are able to read any text. However, the only issue is that they have difficulty finding the main ideas within the text(s). She added that she noticed only 50 percent of her students are able to identify main ideas within the text. The reason behind this is the familiarity of the exercise. Dara argues that most of her students are not accustomed to reading for main ideas—they have not been trained to do so since the early grades. Instead, they are taught to read and respond to technical questions given by the teachers; and the answers are obviously presented in the text, if the students are able to locate them. In addition to that, even Dara herself thinks that reading is not for finding main ideas, thinking, and interpreting; rather, it is about memorizing facts and choosing the right answers when assessing the students’ reading comprehension. If her students can respond to her questions correctly after reading, it means her students have good reading comprehension skills.

She also believes that reading is connected to the readers’ motivation and intention to read. It will not be effective when someone is forced to read. Thus, she often encourages students to read more at home by giving them extrinsic motivation (giving gifts) in order for her students to do practice reading more at home.

**Sirath**

Similarly, Sirath treats reading as an important skill for himself, as well as for his students. He believes that reading is a necessary skill for students, as well as for other people in general. In his opinion, everyone needs reading for increasing his or her specific and general knowledge. And, once they get the knowledge from the reading, it is even more beneficial to share it with others. In order for his students to understand the meaning of the text, he believes that questions play a crucial role in reading comprehension. Reading is related to questioning. And questions are given, depending on the level of the students. Sirath argues that he offers both critical and simple questions to his Grade 6 students since he believes that those students have already developed the ability to think, rather than merely memorizing facts.
In addition, he accepts that reading is so important for his students that he often motivates his students to read at home (read the lessons) in advance, prior to the actual reading lesson in class. He believes that it is more beneficial to motivate his students to read and pass on the message/information from the reading to others. His experience in reading makes him believe that reading, or the process of reading, should be completed, depending on the purpose of the readers; for example, if the reading is for pleasure, it should be a quick and fast reading without taking any notes; however, if the reading is for retrieving factual information, note taking is really necessary to save all the information in order to share with others. He stated that these methods of reading are very important for teachers like him because he needs more factual information to share with his students.

Sirath was not able to offer an opinion as to whether he believes reading is for memorization or for thinking/critical thinking. He was unsure by expressing his bias/thought that reading is for memorization, comprehension, and critical thinking. Although he claimed that reading is for critical thinking, he still practices and encourages his students to read for memorization because his past learning and teaching experience affects his attitudes and beliefs in choosing instructional strategies to teach reading.

**Past Experience Influences Their Understanding about Reading**

Their personal background and professional training influence the teachers’ views of literacy and of reading, in particular. Because all four teachers have different amounts of teaching experience, as well as different life histories, they possess unique experiences in reading. Thus, the ways they were taught reading at school influence their general understanding of reading and teaching reading in content areas.

**Channa**

Channa believes that reading is about memorizing facts presented in the text being read and then thinking about the meaning of the text afterward. When she was a student, her own reading experience was unique, compared to other teachers. At school, she had navigated her own ways of how to read and understand a text. She started by paying particular attention to each paragraph and, then, tried to get one important sentence out of the whole paragraph. She claimed that the sentences from each paragraph could help her
understand the meaning of the whole text. Channa expressed that she often read and analyzed the paragraph(s) first and then tried to understand/think about the meaning of the whole text, as well as to memorize some important facts in the articles, later. Channa has applied these reading methods in her own reading up to the present.

She learned these reading methods from one of her teachers in elementary school and she finds they are useful for her own reading practice, as well as to teach her students reading. However, her experience in learning reading always ended up with memorization of factual information in order to be able to complete the tests. During her school years, each student’s reading comprehension was assessed by his/her ability to complete tests given by the teachers. If students could respond to the questions in the test(s) correctly, with the exact same answers from the textbooks, they would get the highest scores and were much more appreciated by their teachers. Channa added that her teachers would praise the students for remembering the reading lessons well. This practice and appreciation had a great influence on Channa’s understanding of reading. Since her student years, her reading experience is for understanding the meaning of the text and, especially, for memorizing key phrases and sentences within the text.

Not only does her own education affect the way she teaches and understands reading, her experience during teacher training has had an impact on her understanding of reading. Channa has learned from the teacher education programs that reading is not only done individually but also, according to the new approaches (student-centered), good reading should be conducted in pairs and in groups. In conclusion, her experience as a student, and as a pre-service and in-service teacher, has taught her an enormous lesson about reading, which basically influence her own ways of teaching her students reading in content areas. She often places her students in reading groups and individually; although rote-learning, as well as reading for memorization, still plays a big role in her teaching of reading in content areas.

Sophea

Sophea’s past reading experience is quite similar. When she was a student, she was taught reading for memorization. She was taught to memorize what she was reading, specifically for answering the teachers’ questions and for completing monthly tests. At school, the general purpose of reading any article was to memorize the facts in the
articles in order to respond to the teachers’ questions during and after lessons. Sophea described her reading experience at school as follows:

During each lesson, students were usually asked to read aloud in order to learn the pronunciation of certain difficult words and learn new vocabulary. Next, the teachers explained the text(s) to the students and told them the key ideas within the text(s) in order to make sure that the students understood it. The teachers in my generation always trust their explanation that it would help students with comprehension of the lesson. Then, students were encouraged to read for memorization at home as a follow-up in order to reassure that the students understand the reading. If they did, they could be able to complete the questions (tests) in class.

Her own schooling experience makes Sophea believe that reading is for both memorization and comprehension; and reading aloud reinforces the memorization of the important facts or sentences in the articles being read. Also, from her own experience, she has learned that reading requires time and reading should be done two to three times for better comprehension. In addition, other experiences during her professional training and teacher education programs have taught Sophea that reading in subject areas is about memorizing and comprehending what is being read in order to be able to write an article or text later on. Her personal background in learning about reading and how reading was taught has had a great influence on her teaching practices. Her main philosophy of teaching reading is that, after reading, her students should be able to answer her questions. In order to reach this goal, she often encourages her students to read and learn by memorizing what is written in a text so that they could answer the test questions and summarize the lessons.

**Dara**

Dara has much more experience, compared to Channa and Sophea, in teaching reading to various students, including poor-performing students and villagers who have had little education. Also, her rich experience in teaching reading affects her understanding of reading, as well as the definition of reading itself. From her previous experience in teaching low-performing learners, Dara has understood that, in order to be able to learn reading, readers should break down the text into paragraphs, paragraphs into sentences, and sentences into each small words. That way, readers can read and learn each word first, followed by sentences and paragraphs, and then by learning to read the
whole text. This experience has helped her enormously when she teaches reading to her current students, especially to slow learners. By using the above methods, Dara can successfully teach her students who truly have difficulty with reading to move forward and to be able to catch up with their peers.

In addition, Dara’s past and personal reading experience greatly impacts her knowledge and understanding of reading. When Dara reads any article, she often associates it with listening. From her own reading experience, when she was preparing for her high school examination, after finishing the first reading of an article, she would get someone to read the articles again, aloud, so that she could remember the critical phrases of the article(s) for her exam. This experience makes her believe that, when reading alone, the reader(s) get only 15 to 20 percent of the meaning from the text. She argues that the readers rarely think when they read to themselves, especially when they read aloud. Thus, the readers need to hear someone else reading in order to better concentrate and associate sound with words for better comprehension.

She believes reading is also about memorizing key sentences and phrases in the articles and learning new vocabulary. From her past experience when she was a student, she read and took notes on the important sentences and difficult words. For the difficult vocabulary, she often looked these up and learned by heart in order to remember the definitions of the words and to learn their meanings. Dara wrote those words down many times so that she could remember the spelling of the words and their definitions.

Therefore, all of her various experiences in learning reading and teaching reading obviously impact her understanding of reading and the definition she gives about reading. Dara believes that a good result after reading any text is the ability to do memorization and understand, as well as to learn new vocabulary. Also, she perceives that, the first time, reading is very limited for readers to understand the meanings of the texts. The readers would get only 15 to 20 percent of the meaning of the texts. Thus, she states that, in order to learn reading and to comprehend the meaning of the texts, the readers should take notes, answer the questions related to the articles, and listen to other people reading the texts aloud.
Sirath

Sirath’s experience in learning reading when he was a student, as well as his teaching experience, affects his ways of thinking of and understanding reading. His reading style is dependent on his purposes for reading. When he is reading for pleasure, such as reading fiction, he never takes notes. However, once he is reading to acquire information to share with others, especially with his students, Sirath often takes notes and he finds that taking notes is a good way for him to remember what he has read.

Thus, for Sirath, memorization is still a key purpose of reading. When Sirath was a student, he acknowledged that he often practiced reading a couple of times at home in order to remember what he read in order to answer the teachers’ questions and to complete monthly tests. He tried to remember key ideas and phrases in the articles. Thus, Sirath mainly believes that rote learning is an important practice for reading for memorization. Due to limited access to textbooks, Sirath and other students in his generation were unable to practice a wide variety of reading at home or at school. He had only the written lessons or texts written on a big blackboard, and he had to remember those lessons by heart in order to answer the teachers’ questions. Thus, this limitation reinforced the students’ experience, including his own experience in reading, for rote learning and memorization. Sirath mentioned that:

When I was at school, my teachers wrote everything on the board and asked us to copy everything from the board. There was no book to read at that time. There was only teacher book. Students did not have textbooks in my generation. That was why we had to copy and read what the teachers wrote on the black board and we had to memorize most of the lessons we copied from the teachers for answering teachers’ questions or completing the tests.

Therefore, his educational experience in learning reading in the past has strongly influenced his knowledge and understanding about reading. He believes that the main purpose of reading is memorizing what is written in the text in order to be able to answer the questions and assess the readers’ comprehension. As a result, he argues that the understanding of the text(s) would come after answering the comprehensive questions.

All teacher participants have experienced different educational backgrounds in different schools with different teachers; however, their experience in reading is quite similar. But, how they read a text is somehow quite different. Channa and Dara have
similar experiences in conducting reading for their own understanding. When they read, they take sentences from paragraphs and words from sentences. They learn to read the individual words first before they learn to read and understand the whole sentences and paragraphs. In summary, all the participants understand that reading is about memorizing sentences and words in the text they are reading in order to answer the teachers’ questions and for completing the tests in class. All of the knowledge about reading that the four teachers possess is greatly influenced by their earlier experiences from school—how their teachers taught them reading, including their teachers’ intention to get them to read and memorize the lessons/texts or to learn by heart. Their teachers at that time appreciated and gave the highest scores to the students who were able to complete the tests or answer their questions verbatim. Their teachers’ practices and attitudes encourage them to believe that memorization is more important than comprehension in reading.

**Present Experience of Teaching Reading in Content Areas to Their Students**

Teachers in Cambodia have a teacher guidebook to help them with their teaching methods. Thus, all four of the teacher participants agreed that they have followed the steps within the teacher guidebook when teaching reading in content areas. The guidebook that they are currently following is an older version, compared to current student textbooks, and does not correspond with the newer version of the students’ textbooks. Although the teacher guidebook is not up-to-date (2001), the teachers admitted that the methods of teaching provided in the book are still useful and practical for them to follow. What the teachers have learned from the teacher guidebook and from their teacher training experience is that questioning is a good strategy/method for teaching reading in content areas. They frequently practice it and believe that questions actively provoke their students’ thinking in order to gain meaning from the articles they are reading. Every time they teach their students reading (any article in their content area classes), the four participants always provide questions, both verbally and non-verbally, for their students. Also, they all believe their students’ ability to answer those question can measure whether or not their students understand the articles they are reading.
**Channa**

When teaching any reading lessons, Channa mostly follows the teaching steps presented in the teacher guidebook and other pedagogical approaches that she has learned from her teacher training. Almost every time she teaches reading, or any lessons that involve reading, she gets her students to read the text(s) two or three times individually and in groups. These activities are often followed by provoking questions. Most of the questions are extracted from the student textbook.

In teaching reading, Channa often asks her students to read silently, first, after introducing the title of the article being read; this silent reading is followed by group reading. In practicing group reading, she calls one group to read one paragraph and another group to continue with the next paragraph. Or, another way is to ask one group to read the first half of the paragraph and another group to read the second half.

The teacher divides students into groups. Generally, the same students work in the same groups because the setting of their tables and chairs makes it difficult to move around easily for newly formed groups. Also, group reading means everyone in the group reads a text together simultaneously.

Channa rarely practices group reading, as she finds that it is not a very effective means to assess each student’s ability to read a text. She argues that, as a teacher, it is hard for her to know who is able to read and who is not, as well as who learns and who does not learn from the text. Channa’s experience in teaching reading in content areas has been built throughout her pedagogical training at the Teacher Training Center and through supplementary training as an in-service teacher. However, Channa acknowledged that she has forgotten most of the differences in methods that she learned from teacher training, as she still remembers that the methods she has learned are similar to those provided in the teacher guidebook. Thus, Channa primarily follows the teaching guidelines in the teacher guidebook.

**Sophea**

Sophea has claimed that she has practiced methods in student-centered approaches in teaching reading in content areas. Similar to Channa’s methods, Sophea’s methods in teaching reading in content areas are basically from the teacher guidebook,
and the questioning method is highly implemented in her teaching instructions. This questioning method plays a key role in teaching reading and getting the students to understand what they are reading as well as to assess their comprehension levels.

Sophea argues that, when teaching any lessons involving reading, she gets her students to read silently and individually first and, then, practice pair reading and group reading. After students’ reading, she often asks her students questions. Most of the questions are direct questions. Based on her teaching experience, she noticed that almost all of her students face a lot of difficulty in answering critical questions. Thus, Sophea often asks her students straightforward questions, the answers to which the students can easily locate in the text.

Sophea states that, personally, she wants her students to read and think critically and to be able to answer challenging questions. It does not provoke their thinking when they only answer and replicate what is presented in the textbook. She thinks that asking direct questions and getting direct answers from students is not helpful for them to comprehend the meaning of the text because it is most likely that the teacher has already given them the answers.

Although Sophea has claimed that she has applied student-centered approaches in her teaching of reading, I noticed that, during my classroom observation, her teaching practice is rather different. Sophea took control of the class and performed most of activities where she was practicing teacher-centered approaches. From my observations, her practice is quite different from what she has previously commented on in terms of her appreciation of critical thinking and comprehension. Most of the questions she asked her students, during classes I observed, were straightforward and direct questions. Her teaching objective is to get students to be able to answer questions as quickly as possible in order to save her teaching time and to finish the lessons.

**Dara**

Dara’s broad experience in teaching reading to poorly performing students, as well as to illiterate villagers right after the time of Pol Pot, makes her well equipped with various teaching methods, especially in teaching reading. Dara argued that, in addition to following the teaching guidelines in teacher guidebook, she has extended the teaching
methods by adding other teaching techniques that she has learned throughout her teaching profession.

Dara has employed various methods and techniques, including questioning and using visual aids (pictures). She argues that the main pedagogical approaches that she has practiced in teaching reading in content areas to her students are both student-centered approaches and teacher-centered approaches. Dara’s instructional strategies in teaching reading also include vocabulary instruction, prediction, and conversation (questioning and answering) to get main ideas from the text. She claims that the methods that she has implemented in her reading instruction have followed certain procedures, including showing pictures, asking questions, and assigning reading exercises to students to read individually and in groups, as well as silently and aloud. There are also certain detailed steps that Dara has followed throughout her reading lessons. She has described those steps as follows:

At the beginning, I introduced a reading article by showing the existing pictures in the textbook of that lesson (if there is any), and then I asked students some provoking questions for them to predict the title of the article to be read. Next is asking students to practice silent reading for a few minutes; and then we practice group reading.

Vocabulary teaching is also important in her reading instruction. After students practice silent reading, she begins to teach vocabulary by asking students to find difficult words while they are reading silently. Next, students look up the definitions in the glossary at the back of their textbook and write the definitions they find on the board. After that, Dara often explains the meaning of difficult words to students and asks them to read the questions they would need to answer afterward. After answering the questions, she helps her students compare the answers that they find with their previous predictions before reading the text.

In addition, Dara claims that she often pays attention to and helps students who struggle with reading. After matching the answers and correcting students’ responses, Dara often helps poorly performing students to read several lines in the articles and to make sure they pronounce the difficult words correctly. If not, she helps them with pronunciation. She admits that she pays more attention to low-performing students by giving them more time to practice near the end of the class. What Dara has done to help
her low-performing students to move forwards and catch up with the rest of the class is the most significant and equitable strategy for her teaching that makes her become one of the most respectful and recognized teachers in the school. Dara’s practice is viewed as being a critical and socially just way of encouraging struggling students to stay at school and move on to the next grade. It significantly helps reduce the dropout rate, which is also one of the biggest educational issues in Cambodia.

Sirath

Another teacher, Sirath is reluctant in responding about methods he has been using to teach reading. The main methods that Sirath claims to utilize in teaching reading are: pre-reading, vocabulary instruction, finding the meaning(s) of the article, and homework assignments. He expressed that he did not use rote-learning and memorization methods in his class because they are considered obsolete. However, there were inconsistencies between his comments and his practices. Regardless of his comments, during my observations, I noticed that he occasionally used rote learning and memorization methods in his class. When the students were asked to do a lesson summary, almost all of them, instead of summarizing the lessons, say the entire lesson/articles, using exactly the same written words in the textbook. They might have been taught to memorize all the words when doing lesson summaries in the lower grades or in Sirath’s class without knowing how to properly summarize the lessons.

Sirath has accepted how his students summarize the lessons. Although he has claimed that he does not apply rote learning and memorization in his instruction, the way he validates how the students summarize the lessons as well as verbatim answers to his questions does promote the traditional rote learning methods. Even though Sirath did not think or acknowledge that he practices rote learning and memorization in his class, he might have implemented them unconsciously because he has had a lot of experience with these methods ever since he was a student. Or, other teachers of his students in lower grades might have preferred their students to answer questions and summarize the lessons following exactly what is written in the text. That is the reason why his students have used and been exposed to learning by heart and memorization methods.

Sirath argues that he still follows the teaching methods or activities provided in the teacher guidebook and his own methods—who has he learned from his teachers
when he was at secondary school and at the Teacher Training Center. Sirath still believes that each teacher has his or her own unique methods added to the main student-centered teaching strategies recommended by the Ministry of Education; however he was not able to express what that unique method was. This is because he has not been specifically trained with any methods for teaching reading and he basically follows the methods that his teachers had taught him.

Similarly to other teachers, he started his reading lesson by giving a 5-minute time limit to his students to pre-read the article. He believes that, when students have time to read, they can memorize what they read. In addition to that, he also believes that, when students first read the article, they are able to identify the key ideas or key points in the text. After pre-reading, with their books closed, Sirath asked the students questions. Most of the questions are from the student textbook and teacher guidebook. He rarely creates his own questions for the class.

In addition to questioning methods, Sirath has other unique methods—for example, reading motivation, which is finding a story to read for homework. He believes it is the best way to motivate his students to read at home. He expressed that, when he assigned more homework for the students to find their favorite reading, students would create in themselves a love for reading. This reading assignment usually takes place twice a month. Sometimes, Sirath assigns the reading tasks to be completed in class by having students go to the library to find their favorite reading. Sirath stated that the common reading that his students pick is from old Khmer stories in children’s storybooks. As well, other favorite stories that Sirath often assigns for his students to read at home are popular Khmer novels from the 1960s, such as Kolab Pailin (Pailin Rose), Tom Teav, Pkar Sror Poun (Dead Rose), etc. Then, when the students come to class, they have to narrate the story for the teacher, as well as for other students in the class. Sirath believes that this practice is a good method to encourage his students to read at home.

Another method that Sirath frequently uses when teaching reading is vocabulary instruction. Vocabulary instruction is his main method in teaching reading. He believes that students cannot read and understand the text until they know every word in the text. Thus, the teachers have to teach their students difficult words by explaining the meaning of those words, first. He uses teacher-centered approaches in teaching vocabulary. When
teaching vocabulary, Sirath often plays a key role in giving the definitions and explaining the meanings of those words. Sirath strongly believes that reading needs vocabulary comprehension before understanding the meaning of the text.
Chapter 6
Findings (Responses to Sub-Research Question 2)

What Instructional Strategies Do the Teachers Use and Find Most Beneficial for Their Students When Teaching Reading in Content Areas? What Is/Are the Most Significant Influence(s) on How They Teach? Why?

This section of the finding aims to provide a vivid description of the methods of instruction for teaching reading that the teacher participants believe they have applied in their daily teaching activities. In the past, the traditional teacher-centered approaches fundamentally influenced all the instructional practices in almost all of the classrooms in Cambodia from K-12 to universities. All of the teacher participants had also been exposed to these old ways of teaching for many years, until the introduction of new student-centered approaches in late 1998. Within the traditional approaches, the power dynamic in the classroom is focused on the teachers. However, with the new approaches, the main focus in the classrooms has been switched from teachers to students.

Thus, this section will reveal the reality in the contemporary upper elementary classrooms in Cambodia—whether or not the teachers choose to practice the required new approaches or whether they close their classroom doors and secretly employ teacher-centered approaches within their comfort zone. Regardless of the approaches they are using, this section will describe the particular methods of teaching reading that each teacher participant implements, along with the descriptions of the sources of their knowledge of those methods and the effectiveness of their instructional strategies. The findings/responses to the above inquiries have been organized into three recurrent key issues, as follows:

**Teacher-Centered Approaches versus Student-Centered Approaches**

When referring to the official instructional strategies in teaching reading in content areas, all of the teacher participants pointed to two main instructional approaches (student-centered and teacher-centered) that they have learned from the Ministry’s suggested strategies and from their own experience. Since the late 1998, the Ministry of Education in Cambodia has promoted new teaching approaches—student-centered
approaches or cooperative learning pedagogies. Although it has still been a struggle for most of the teachers in the entire nation to implement these new teaching strategies, teachers are encouraged to practice them in their classrooms with the technical and methodological supports from the Ministry of Education and from education-related NGOs.

Upon the introduction of the new student-centered approaches, most of the teachers had not been fully trained to be practically and critically aware of the approaches. Thus, they superficially understand these new instructional approaches. What they know best about student-centered approaches are: group work and getting the answers from students when teachers ask questions. In addition, the frequency with which the teachers use these new methods is still minimal, due to lack of resources and teacher motivation in using them. The teachers are encouraged to use the methods in teaching every lesson in all subjects, including reading. However, teachers in Cambodia are used to the old methods in which they have been trained and which they have been exposed to for many years during their teacher education and in their own general education from K to 12. Thus, the teachers’ perceptions and understanding about teaching instruction are strongly embedded within traditional approaches. The teacher participants argue that they basically practice new student-centered approaches in their teaching of reading, according to the guidance from the Ministry of Education. Although the teachers claimed that they have implemented the new approaches, there are still inconsistencies within their practices. They have used traditional teacher-led approaches, but they think that they are learner-centered approaches.

**Channa**

Channa argued that, in teaching reading in content areas, she employs student-centered approaches every day in every lesson. She understands that, in the teaching of reading, she has involved students in class activities by getting them to read in groups and in pairs, as well as by asking students questions and getting the answers/ideas from them for making a lesson summary. She has learned that those activities are implemented within student-centered approaches. Asking students questions is also one of the important instructional strategies offered in the teacher guidebook and is associated with what Channa has learned during her teacher training.
What Channa has learned from teacher training and other training that she has completed was the five teaching steps. These five steps are also suggested in the teacher guidebook. The activities recommended in the five teaching steps consist of: asking students questions and receiving students’ answers, students working in pairs and in groups, and students writing on the board, etc. These represent the main teaching methods within student-centered approaches. Once Channa has followed the five teaching steps, she believes that she has applied student-centered/active-learning pedagogies in her teaching.

Channa believes that she has used student-centered methods in most of the lessons, including reading lessons. She understands that, within traditional teacher-centered approaches, students have less interaction with the teacher and the only person who speaks is the teacher, which is not an effective way of teaching. Although Channa has some negative attitudes towards teacher-centered teaching, she was unable to demonstrate her own preference between the two approaches because she has still implemented both strategies in her teaching. Generally, Channa seems to be reluctant in describing how she would apply either one of the approaches in practice. Channa stated that:

I feel quite strange because I get used to teacher-centered approach when I was a student. Within the old method, I get used to study alone. But now when I am a teacher, I have to use student-centered approaches, in which students and teachers or students and students have to face one another and to give ideas or discuss.

Although Channa claims to have used active learning pedagogies in most of her lessons, there is an inconsistency between the use of the two approaches—student-centered and teacher-centered. During the classroom observations, Channa presented one reading lesson that she believed to be a good standard teaching instruction within a student-centered approach. However, within that particular class, she still controlled the classroom in order to remain within her comfort zone. The teacher still played an active role in leading the lessons; although she asked the students questions, the answers provided still followed the guidance of the teacher and were copied from the textbook. Within this specific lesson, Channa argued that she had perfectly followed the general five teaching steps suggested by the Ministry of Education.
Channa conveys the impression that she did not pay much attention to the methods or teaching approaches she should use or is obliged to use. She mainly remembers her daily teaching routine that she has followed for many years. She has basically applied the same methods she remembers in most of her classes, including reading. The main teaching method Channa incorporates into her daily teaching instruction is “questioning.” Channa has also admitted that she even remembers the questions that she should ask her students so well that she does not need to create a lesson plan.

This is her daily teaching practice, and it makes Channa confident in her teaching profession as she continues to practice what she has done, so far, within her comfort zone and forgets about other methods. She still believes that active learning strategies are easier to put into practice, compared to the old traditional approaches. In the old approaches, teachers are the ones who do all the work, which makes them more tired. Channa also expressed that, in the present time, the methods are different—both students and teachers talk and exchange ideas. Another unproductive side of the student-centered approaches implemented in Cambodia is that, although students are given opportunities to answer questions or give ideas, they still copy the answers from the textbook and imitate previous words used by their teachers. I noticed that students, including the highly performing students, rarely express their own ideas/thoughts.

Thus, even though Channa expressed that she supports student-centered approaches and she practices them in most of her lessons, her interventions and activities still genuinely promote teacher-centered teaching. Another challenge that inhibits student-centered teaching is the students’ placement to work in groups. Since this is a challenge, Channa rarely divides students into separate groups; instead, she lets them stay in a big group (the whole class) and gets only two or three students to read or answer questions. This kind of instructional strategy does not promote cooperative learning pedagogies; instead it limits students’ engagement and espouses traditional teaching approaches.

**Sophea**

Although Sophea has been in the teaching profession longer and has been trained in earlier years compared to Channa, she still struggles to understand the methods she has
used to teach reading in content areas; she seems to be hesitant and inconsistent with the methods or approaches that she has implemented in the teaching of reading. Like Channa, Sophea does not have a specific method for teaching reading. Instead, she offered the two general approaches (student-centered and teacher-centered) that she has known and has been using for many years. Since Sophea has been in the teaching profession for over ten years, she remembers almost every single step in her teaching activities. Her teaching steps are basically taken from the suggested activities (teachers and students’ activities) in the Ministry’s teacher guidebook from earlier years.

Sophea argued that she has used student-centered approaches in her teaching of reading in content areas such as history and social studies subjects etc. Similar to Channa, Sophea has followed the five teaching steps in student-centered approaches, suggested by the Ministry of Education. During the classroom observations, I also noticed that she tried her best to complete the five teaching steps. According to other Cambodian teachers, as well as Sophea, following the five teaching steps and embracing the activities suggested in the teacher guidebook is considered a “best teaching practice” that has been promoted by the Ministry of Education. Sophea argued that she did not practice all the five steps in every lesson because she needs to cover the entire curriculum and did not have enough time for that. Sophea, as well as many other teachers, often selects only step 3 to practice. Except, when there is an inspector from the Ministry or a visitor observing their class, they incorporate the five teaching steps and other activities that they consider to be within student-centered approaches, such as placing students to work in pairs/groups and asking them questions.

In addition to the five teaching steps, Sophea claimed that she has used her own methods, including a “simple method.” Sophea believes that this method helps her students understand better and more easily. She has applied it within her method of explanation by using simple/daily connotations and examples to explain the meaning of a text to her students. Sophea noted that she employs mixed methods in teaching all of her lessons, including reading. She stated that:

I used some of their [the Ministry of Education’s] methods and some of our methods. When I teach, I still used and I embraced some of their methods. I learned to ask questions following their methods in student-centered approaches.
Besides the Ministry’s methods and her “simple method,” Sophea does not have other special methods for the teaching of reading in content areas. She mentioned that the Ministry of Education, through training and the teacher guidebook, has already provided her with more than enough teaching guidelines to follow. Thus, she does not need to dig into or do more research for other methods for teaching.

She expressed that student-centered and teacher-centered approaches are both working. However, the selection of better approaches is dependent on the grade level of the classes that the teachers are teaching. For example, in lower grades, from 1 to 4, students still need more guidance; thus, teacher-centered approaches work better at those grade levels. In Grade 5, students are a bit older and they are able to think better and work more cooperatively in pairs or in groups; thus, teachers are able to apply student-centered approaches. Sophea believes that group work is sometimes beneficial for her students; for example, when placing them to work in groups, they are able to ask their classmates when they face challenges.

Furthermore, what Sophea understands about student-centered teaching approaches is that they are all about students working in pairs/groups and answering the teacher’s questions. Student-centered approaches, here, mean that teachers initiate questions and students respond, and the teachers take or accept the answers from the students. For Sophea, she often changes her teaching styles—if a teacher-centered approach is too tiring, she switches to student-centered approaches. Her motivation, however, is still teacher-centered, even though she chooses to move to a more student-centered approach.

When student-centered teaching approaches were first introduced in the 2000s, Sophea did not like these methods because she noticed that, when students were given power to be more involved in their learning, they did not listen to her as a teacher. With teacher-centered approaches, teachers have more power, and they can force or command students to do their work, and the students listen to the teachers by trying their best to study harder and memorize the lessons. Generally, Sophea prefers and appreciates the traditional way of teaching in which teachers control the classroom and utilize corporal punishment. She still holds the belief that this is a good way to get students to learn and
to teach them lessons, including reading, because she believes that, when teachers control the classroom, the students learn better. According to Sophea,

Before they allowed us to even utilize the corporal punishment, but now we cannot do this anymore. Now we cannot use stick or even touch the students. They are better treated now and they are asked to work in-group, talk to us, and give comments...Eh, but the old way worked better because students were given less power. When students have more power, they do not respect us or are not afraid of us (as their teachers), they do not remember and learn their lessons.

Sophea also complains that when practicing student-centered approaches in teaching any lessons, including reading, sometimes students do not try to memorize the lessons because the tests or quizzes associated with these approaches are mainly multiple-choice questions. She believes that this sort of questioning hinders the students’ ability to think and to solve problems. Sophea prefers the traditional methods, where students are required to learn by heart to remember their lessons and complete the quizzes or tests by giving longer answers. Sophea also believes that, when students are under pressure to study by memorization and to be assessed by completing the tests, they would study harder and have less time for watching TV and movies. She added that, now with the new learner-centered teaching, her students have more free time to watch movies and TV; it is not an effective way to get them to learn.

Sophea associates learning with memorization. She believes that good learning is about remembering the lessons, but in active-learning pedagogies, students are more relaxed and are not obliged to memorize their lessons. Thus, Sophea prefers the traditional ways of teaching to the current student-centered approaches in teaching any lessons, including reading, because, in the teacher-centered approaches, teachers have more power and can force students to learn as well as to memorize the lessons. Although, Sophea is practicing student-centered approaches in her instruction, she still needs to impose strict rules in class to get her students to learn by memorization; otherwise, if they do not learn, their parents would blame her. Sophea stated that:

When I ask students to summarize the lesson, they must be able to do it. Although I teach my students using student-centered approaches in class, I have to tell them to learn and remember their lessons. I have to impose rules on them—they have to remember this lesson, and then they do. Yes, they remember it. All of them know the lessons; for example, 20 of them remember the lesson—meaning we get 20 students to learn the lesson(s). And 10 of them know the lessons; they can recall
almost the entire lessons [learning by heart]. We tell them today; for example, within one week you have to know/learn this lesson and then they do/learn.

Sophea also argued that, even though she want to practice student-centered approaches in her daily teaching instructions, she still could not afford the time for completing the recommended activities, such as group work and questioning methods. Thus, Sophea ended up using teacher-centered approaches because she needs to speed up her teaching in order to cover the entire curriculum required by the Ministry of Education. She did not have enough time to separate students into groups and allow them to do all the activities that they are supposed to complete, as well as to provide assistance to slower-performing students.

**Dara**

Unlike Sophea and Channa, Dara has more experience in terms of teaching reading. She had been involved in many programs, such as teaching illiterate people in small villages and students in summer programs. She has also been through a lot of in-service professional development. Before she became a teacher and studied at pedagogy school (Teacher Training Center), she already practiced the method of placing students to work in groups so that they would be able to be engaged in helping each other. For her, the advantage of placing students in groups for teaching reading is that they can work together and listen to other people read; and, when it comes to her helping them, she can focus on the whole group because all of them have the same reading difficulty.

When teaching reading to lower-performing students in groups, Dara’s instructional strategies are focused on phonics, Khmer alphabets, and vocabulary instructions first, and then move to teaching the meanings of words. Overall, in teaching reading in content areas, Dara has utilized different ways of teaching reading, which she believes are methods within student-centered approaches. Those instructional strategies are as follows. First, it is using visual aids (images) to help explain to students and get them into the reading. Second, it is making predictions in order for them to link their ideas to the new lessons or texts. Third, it is initial and individual silent reading in order to answer the teacher’s questions so that they learn the meanings of the texts. Fourth, it is comparing students’ responses to their previous predictions. Fifth, it is a second silent reading to find difficult words and to write those words on the board—the activities are
volunteered by students. Sixth, it is reading the difficult words aloud—low-performing students read silently following the capable readers several times until they can pronounce the words correctly. Last, it is the teacher’s explanations regarding the meaning of those difficult words—most of the definitions are found in the glossary; if not, the teachers offer the definitions of the words. If the students find the definitions of difficult words in the glossary, they are the ones who offer the definitions first and teachers add more explanations later. Next is reading aloud in a group—students take turns reading each paragraph aloud in a text and the rest of the class follows silently.

Dara also followed the five-teaching steps suggested by the Ministry of Education. All of the main instructional strategies of teaching reading described above are in the third teaching step. According to Dara, the fourth step is also important, in which she asks students more questions related to the text(s). The questions are sometimes listed below the text in the student textbook. She believes that those questions can lead to finding the main ideas of the article. She often saves the question(s) in step five for homework, and students have to read the text again in order to answer the assignment question(s) at home.

In addition to the generic methods in teaching reading in subject areas, she believes that there is a subject called “Am Nan” in Khmer, which means “reading.” This subject is in Khmer studies. Dara stated that she focuses more on reading and vocabulary instruction. In teaching a reading lesson in Khmer studies, she uses more questions (a storm of questions) in order for students to get more answers (a storm of ideas) from the text and to have a better understanding of the text. Their storm of ideas is accumulated from their responses, and their answers are beneficial for creating a lesson summary. In addition, in teaching a lesson in Khmer studies, Dara is focusing more on teaching her students difficult words—how to pronounce those words and their definitions. Also, she offers students more time to read, including individual reading (reading silently and aloud) and group reading. However, when teaching other subject content such as history, geography, and social studies, she applies the same instructional strategies including questioning, vocabulary instructions, and reading silently and aloud, as well as creating a lesson summary. The only difference is that she gives her students fewer exercises to do and finishes the lessons more quickly in order to move on.
In teaching reading in content areas, Dara often incorporates vocabulary instruction. She always finds it is conducive to her students’ learning of reading. She finds students work collaboratively when finding the meaning of difficult words. Her students basically look up the meanings of difficult words in the glossary at the back of their textbooks. The definitions of words are written on the board and, if one student misses anything, their peers help to complete the definitions. If they miss important definitions of any word, the teacher would step in and help add the definitions and explanation. Another method that Dara admits to, in helping her students gain better reading skills, as well as vocabulary improvement, is reading motivation. She often encourages her students to read—any form of reading is acceptable, including any book or storybook or the subtitles, and words/lyrics in songs (karaoke songs). She supports all sorts of reading except anything with sexual content. Thus, Dara often tells her students to read as much as they can at home because reading at school is not sufficient.

Although different teachers have diverse ways of teaching, they basically still follow only two important approaches—student-centered and teacher-centered. Like Channa and Sophea, Dara also uses these two teaching approaches. But she stated that her main teaching strategies are student-centered. The way she describes these student-centered approaches in teaching reading is that students are given a greater role by not taking the teachers’ ideas all the time, as in teacher-centered approaches. She admitted that, in student-centered approaches, teachers do not give ideas to students all the time; instead, they only ask them questions—individual students respond to the questions or groups of students work together to find the answers. If students cannot find the answers, the teacher could facilitate finding the answers. These are the main activities that she considers to be applicable in student-centered approaches.

Dara argued that teacher-centered approaches are different in terms of activities and methods, and she also rarely utilizes these approaches in her teaching, anymore. According to Dara, regarding teacher-centered approaches, teachers read the text(s) (lessons), and students copy the lessons from the board or textbook into their notebooks. There is no conversation (questions and answers) between teachers and students or students and students, as well as the absence of a lesson summary at the end of each lesson. The summary of the traditional teaching approaches in Cambodian classes
consists of: the teachers arrive in the classroom, teachers and students open the books, students read the lessons and then copy the lessons, and teachers read the lessons for students and explain them to students. This is how Dara described and understood traditional teacher-centered approaches.

However, she was conflicted when she described her reaction to the first introduction of student-centered approaches in Cambodia. She believes that the methods that her own teachers used to teach, including teaching reading, are already student-centered teaching and learning. Dara stated that, in the past, when she was a student, there were two teaching methods, “descriptions and conversation,” where teachers explain the lessons and help facilitate students’ understanding, as well as having conversations with students. She concluded that those activities are listed in today’s student-centered teaching that is being promoted at present in Cambodia. The only differences added to student-centered approaches are working in groups, and students are assigned to do more homework in class and at home. That is why she had no major reaction when the student-centered approaches were first introduced into Cambodia; and she has no problem applying them in practice.

Dara is accustomed to teaching the old methods (descriptions and conversations). Thus, there are no major challenges for her when applying new approaches. She is used to the old ways of teaching, which, for her, is similar to the methods used in student-centered approaches. She stated that her teachers, in the past, also used to ask students questions, known as the “conversation method.” But the only difference is that, with the old ways, teachers ask the whole class without separating students into smaller groups. Yet in student-centered approaches, they include the conversations between students and students by placing them to work together in groups.

Although Dara applies student-centered approaches in her instruction, she still acknowledged that student-centered approaches are not working and she needs to use teacher-centered strategies in her teaching. Her only reaction to student-centered approaches when applied to teach reading is that, if she follows the suggested activities by getting students to be engaged in their own learning, she does not have enough time or materials. The teacher needs to use learning aids or teaching materials and books for students to read and use in order to explore their own learning. However, access to those
resources is very limited. Dara stated that she could not even have access to large sheets of papers. Lack of teaching materials is a big challenge for her to practice good teaching instruction. Also, she does not have enough time for group work or involving all the students in the activities, because she has to speed up in order to cover the entire curriculum. Thus, Dara still applies the old ways of teaching reading—teachers play a key role in delivering lessons and students listen, and then memorize the lessons.

**Sirath**

Sirath is also another teacher who has been trained and who has been through teaching and learning experiences similar to the previous three teachers. There is not much difference; the methods that Sirath uses to teach reading in content areas are similar to those employed by Channa, Sophea, and Dara. The methods that he applies to teach reading are: getting students to read first, and then ask them thought provoking questions followed by vocabulary instruction. According to Sirath, the provocative questions should be related to the students’ mood and feelings in order to grasp their attention. The better questions are associated with previous lessons and new lessons in order to ignite students’ focus on the new lessons. Sirath often gets students to read silently and individually first; after that, he prefers them to read aloud in groups. One student reads aloud after another in a group, which makes students stay alert, hear, and focus on other people reading so that they learn and remember.

In addition to questioning methods, Sirath also includes images/pictures to assist in teaching reading. Sirath stated that:

First, I often used the picture(s) because I want my students to focus on the lesson today. For example, it is about tourism so I want to use the picture for them to pay attention to tourism. Pictures are important for students, but it is hard to find ones. The pictures are attractive as well. The teaching materials are often good for students. When we have pictures, it is easy for students to understand. Sometimes, in some lessons if we have tangible materials, students will understand much better. However, pictures are just semi-tangible; the real objects are tangible and can make students understand all.

The general approaches that Sirath believe teachers should apply in their teaching of any subjects are both student-centered and teacher-center approaches. Sirath remarked that, when using student-centered approaches, teachers should also incorporate teacher-centered approaches; because student-centered teaching alone does not work in
Cambodian classrooms for a couple of reasons—only good students learn/participate, and lack of cooperation. Sirath stated that:

Student-centered approaches are about assigning students to work in groups and to discuss. But they do not discuss. Only the good students think and do the work, but the poor-performing students do not care. They do not participate.

Sirath also admits there are positive features to student-centered approaches. He believes that student-centered approaches are for students to think and learn. Sirath argued that if we do not give them a chance to help themselves, we would need to help them forever. They have to help themselves by raising more ideas and thoughts, which is the aim of these new approaches. Self-advocacy is an important goal of the educational experience. If we (teachers) just tell them what to do and give them ideas all the time, it is not a critical and practical way of teaching and learning. They have to think and solve problems for themselves. By doing so, the teachers would perform fewer activities and be less tired. Sirath understands that his role regarding student-centered approaches is to be a monitor/coordinator/helper while students are the doers. However, teachers still need to help clarify the assignments and explain to them what to do first. And then students practice—they have to perform more activities than their teachers. Sirath also believes that the new approaches can promote students’ thinking because, with these new approaches, it is about asking questions; and, when asking students questions, students need to think in order to respond. He compared the new approaches with the traditional approaches (teacher-centered) by stating that:

In the past, students merely followed what the teachers said. Teachers were teaching by telling them everything. The teachers taught alone and students tried to memorize. But today we ask questions and let students think.

Sirath seems to be unclear whether student-centered teaching is working for him. He was claiming that students still need much more of the teachers’ guidance and assistance. And, if students are placed in groups to work without teachers, most of them do not participate and are left behind. He believes that learner-centered teaching is working in other developed countries but not in Cambodia. In order to apply these new approaches, teachers need to do a lot of preparation, such as lesson plans and finding teaching materials. When putting the methods into practice, teachers need to do more work when placing students to work in groups, since they are not used to these activities.
According to Sirath, group-work generates noise in the classroom and it is hard to manage/arrange the students due to the table arrangement.

Therefore, Sirath acknowledged that the environment in class inhibits the practice of the student-centered instructional strategies. The tables are attached together and two students sit at one table, which makes it harder for them to move when placing them to work in-groups. Also, it is time consuming to put students into groups. Thus, Sirath sometimes does not use these approaches because it is wasting his time to cover the school curriculum. Instead, he performs the whole-group approach, in which the teacher treats the whole class as one big group working together, and the teacher asks the whole class questions. He stated that, if we have a big group, it is also student-centered teaching; we do not need to separate students into smaller groups. This is what Sirath learned from the teacher-training center, where they taught him that there are many types of student-centered approaches—students working in a whole big group or students being separated into smaller groups.

Although Sirath acknowledged that he was applying student-centered approaches, he still plays a bigger role in explaining the lessons to his students when teaching reading. For example, he verbally explains to his students by giving simple and easy examples in relation to everyday living to make his students understand the text better. As well, how he decides on the selection of his instructional strategies to teach reading is also dependent on the types of texts in the subject he is teaching. For example, in history, Sirath chooses to use teacher-centered approaches because he believes that, in this subject, students need to remember the texts they are reading, such as historical events and names of the important persons. In the history lessons, he believes that the teachers should play a key role in explaining the lessons (texts) and to make sure the students memorize the events in the history texts, even though it is by heart.

Sirath still validates rote learning and memorization. He argued that, when students remember their lessons well, they could do the lesson summary and answer his questions correctly. For him, this means students learn. Sirath also accepts it when his students summarize the lessons verbatim. Although Sirath acknowledged that he has applied both student-centered and teacher-centered approaches, during classroom observation, I noticed that he frequently practiced teacher-centered strategies. He spent
most of the time explaining and telling his students about the text and its meaning. He did not give his students a chance to explore the text on their own. Despite the fact that students are asked to work in groups and answer the teachers’ questions, they still copy the answers exactly from the texts without thinking critically or thinking creatively. Thus, Sirath still unconsciously perpetuates the traditional teacher-centered methods in his teaching instruction. He also argued that, if teachers use old ways of teaching, students learn faster and easier.

In conclusion, the most important method that Sirath has utilized and which he claims to be effective in getting his students to remember the reading lessons well is “questioning.” The teacher is the only one who asks questions; Sirath does not give his students a chance to pose questions to other students since he believes that students are not able to create their own questions related to the text to ask their peers. However, students are allowed to inquire of the teacher(s) if they do not understand any part of the lesson. Also, to be more effective for his students to practice reading, Sirath also assigns other questions (at least one) as homework in order for them to read and learn the lessons at home.

**Source of the Methods and Their Influences on How They Teach Reading**

**Channa**

Channa is one of the teachers who is younger and has less experience in teaching because she has come to the profession later than the other three teacher participants. She expressed that, when she started teaching, the teaching methods were already there for her. She has learned the generic and standard methods of teaching readings (individual and silent reading, reading in pairs and in groups, answering questions, completing lesson summaries), which she has learned from the Teacher Training Center and the guidelines in the teacher guidebook. In addition, she acknowledged that she has no other methods, including her own methods, to contribute to her teaching. Channa added that she has nothing major apart from her experience as a teacher that affects her selection of the instructional strategies for teaching reading in content areas. She basically follows the guidelines given by the Ministry of Education. During the teacher training program, Channa learned a great number of good teaching practices for teaching reading from her
teacher trainers. She learned the general rules of teaching methods, including teaching reading methods using student-centered approaches. Moreover, another factor that influenced her teaching practice was the lessons given by her practicum teachers. Channa argued that the teachers taught her their personal teaching techniques that she has taken with her and has practiced in her daily teaching.

Besides following teaching guidebooks and her former teachers’ methods, she also learned teaching techniques from other supplementary trainings provided by the Ministry of Education through the cluster school. The teacher trainers are experienced and senior teachers or principals of the cluster school. They trained Channa’s school principal in various methods regarding student-centered approaches in order to improve the implementation of the approaches and teachers’ daily teaching practices. Most of her training was through her school principal. As well, the principal delivered what she learned from the cluster school to the rest of the teachers in the school. Channa expressed that she has learned a bit more of the general teaching techniques about student-centered approaches through this training program. It somehow influenced her teaching of reading instruction. However, she still viewed it as an obligation or mandated method that she needed to implement without having any other choice. Channa concludes that the main sources of her teaching methods that she has applied in her teaching instruction daily are essentially from the pre-service teacher-training program, the guidance in teacher guidebooks, and the in-service supplementary training.

Sophea

Not much different from Channa, Sophea is another teacher who expressed similar opinions about the availability of the methods within student-centered approaches for teaching any lessons, including reading. In addition to the availability of the methods, Sophea also stressed that she practices student-centered approaches or active learning pedagogies because the Ministry of Education has advised teachers that they have to follow these pedagogies. That is why Sophea has to put them into practice and she could not neglect it. Besides the imposed methods from the Ministry, Sophea also has other methods that she claims to be her own, which she believes she has initiated and practiced without knowing or naming them. One of the methods that she could remember and name is her “simple method,” which she has practiced almost every day in almost every lesson,
including reading lessons. Within her simple teaching method, she stated that she has to use simple and easy words that people are familiar with and which they use every day in order to explain to her students, so that her students can understand the lesson(s) well. However, Sophea was not able to offer the source of this method, since she has claimed that she unconsciously thought of the method and practiced it unintentionally. As a result, it works for her and her students. Sophea is one of the teachers who cares for her students’ reading achievement—how to make her students read better. She expressed that:

I only think about how to make my students learn and understand the lessons. Every day, I never think about anything else rather than this. I only think about how or what to do to make all of them able to read.

Rather than merely spending time thinking about her students’ learning, she seems not to be able to do anything about it or conduct any research to find new and effective methods for her students. Additionally, Sophea expressed other barriers as to why she has not initiated or searched for new methods. The first reason is the very limited amount of time she has dedicated to the teaching profession. She stated that:

The Ministry of Education already told us to use their methods. We cannot find our own methods because we are busy thinking about our own business and work rather than teaching. We just follow their methods, and we even cannot follow or use all of them yet. Thus, we do not need any new methods.

The second reason is that she is restricted by the Ministry of Education to practice certain approaches of teaching (student-centered approaches), which leave her very little room to think of her own teaching methods or to search for additional instructional methods. She expressed that:

I do not have any influence on my own teaching. It is normal. Yes, I practiced the methods according to what they give me. I never think of anything like that for myself. I follow them. If I do not follow them; for example, when they come to do the teaching inspection, they would blame us or whatever… we have to follow their methods (student-centered approaches). Then, as a result, I use student-centered approaches. We follow their methods.

In addition to the methods or curriculum guidelines offered in the teacher guidebook from the Ministry of Education, similarly to Channa, Sophea also received the knowledge of student-centered approaches from the training offered by her school
principal. Since Sophea and Channa are from the same school, they both received the supplementary training regarding active learning pedagogies from the same venue—the principal is the one who received direct training from the school principal or trainers (senior teachers) at the cluster school and the principal returned to train the rest of the teachers at Mesa School.

Another form of training that Sophea has experienced is through direct training offered at the cluster school. The training was to strengthen teachers’ knowledge of student-centered pedagogies and it was offered to groups of teachers who teach the same grade at different schools within the same cluster. However, Sophea acknowledges that the training was not very effective, since she could not put it into practice. She argued that she learned only during the training sessions; but after the training finished, the knowledge also vanished. The reason was that during the field practice, no one has ever re-visited or enhanced what the teachers learned from the in-service training. This may be true because, when she was asked about how much she knows about student-centered approaches, she was not able to respond to it; instead, she remarked that she had forgotten about it.

Regarding the supplementary training, Sophea also expressed a concern and an unpleasant feeling about the delay in offering the training, in order to guide teachers through the new textbooks after the Ministry introduced a new student textbook. She expressed that:

When they [the Ministry of Education] issued or launched new textbooks, they did not provide us any training right away. Instead, they waited until 2 or 3 years later to offer us training regarding the new book. They left us with difficulty for 2 or 3 years first before they called us for training or learning.

It seemed to be a challenge for Sophea when the Ministry introduced a new textbook without providing her with a teacher guidebook. She needed step-by-step instructions for each lesson in the new textbook in order to help her with her teaching and to reassure that her pedagogies were acceptable and good enough for her students. Thus, since the introduction of the new textbook at the beginning of 2012, Sophea has consulted the old teacher guidebook designed for the old student textbook. She still finds the old teacher guidebook helpful with her teaching instructions for any lessons, including reading.
Dara

However, Dara is quite different from Channa and Sophea. She has been involved in numerous teaching activities even prior to the time she officially started teaching and being in pre-service teacher education. Therefore, the knowledge that she has gained regarding teaching pedagogies has been influenced by various factors/sources. Dara has been recognized and has become famous for her ability to successfully teach low-performing students in reading to be able to read and catch up with the rest of the class. The methods that she has used are to teach her students to be able to read and understand words first, sentences second, paragraphs third and, then, the whole text last. By doing all of these, she did not push her students too hard to learn in one day; instead, Dara gave enough time to her students to breathe and learn according to their own speed. And she finds that this strategy works for her students to learn reading in content areas. Dara has gained the knowledge about this particular method from her own thinking, which is basically influenced by her rich teaching experience.

The most influential teaching experience is from her teaching practicum. She has learned a lot from the teachers who supervised her during the practicum. She stated that:

When I did the teaching practicum, I did research from the teachers who taught us. It is practicum, so the teachers at the local school first taught to show us their methods. We took good points from them and then we added something else more so that we could enhance our teaching reading strategies to move forward.

Dara acknowledged that she has learned a lot from her practicum teachers; however, she learned very little from her teacher trainers at the pedagogy school. She mentioned that her teacher trainers are also survivors from the civil war, like she, and some of them are her age. The difference is that they finished higher grades in school compared to hers. Dara argued that, during her pre-service training program, because it was right after the civil war ended, the Ministry of Education selected knowledgeable people to teach less knowledgeable people; for example, during the late 1980s, at her pedagogy school, the appointed teacher trainers finished only Grades 7 or 8 prior to the civil war and the student-teachers (pre-service teachers) finished lower grades such as Grades 5 or 6. And, most of the teacher trainers even did not possess the lower-secondary school diploma (Grade 9). Dara expressed that:
In the 80s, when I went to pedagogy school, my teachers also went there to study like me in order to have more teaching credentials… the appointed teachers had to take an exam. If they passed the exam, they were selected to be teachers. But they had to go to pedagogy school to complete certain teaching credits. And then they had to take another exam to get their secondary school diploma.

Moreover, another influence on Dara’s teaching instruction is from her own research and reading the old teacher guidebook from the Rath Kampuchea Regime. She concurred that she consulted the teacher guidebook for better teaching strategies and instructions to help her students learn better when time allowed her to do so. She believed that this teacher guidebook provided her with detailed information and step-by-step guides with clear questions and answers to help her with her methods. Compared to today’s teacher guidebook, it is much better and more informative. She claimed that it is a good source of teaching instruction, including reading strategies. Although, Dara prefers the out-of-date teacher guidebook from the Rath Kampuchea Regime, she still consults another teacher guidebook, published in 1998, because this book provides better guidelines for practicing student-centered pedagogies. She admitted that she has also learned from this guidebook and has added other methods, including her own and those from the Rath Kampuchea guidebook, to enrich her teaching of reading instruction. By saying this, the methods that Dara referred to in the teacher guidebooks are basically: what questions to ask students, what the expected answers are, and what kinds of materials should be used. Dara accepts that those types of guidelines are helpful for improving her teaching because she always has some official documents to refer to when she wants reassurance that the questions she asks are appropriate and the answers given are correct.

Another source of knowledge of teaching reading instructions is from the “outsiders” (the training program offered by trainers from Australia called the Overseas-Teachers Program). This supplementary training program was offered at the central teacher training school in that province. What Dara has learned the most from this program is how to narrate stories, including how to read short stories. She has also learned how to listen to other people narrating stories and how to apply pictures in helping readers understand the stories. This training also has had a great impact on her understanding of how to teach reading in content areas to her students; skimming through
a text first before thorough reading. Skimming for the first time provides readers only 15 percent of the comprehension level. This method helps her understand that she needs to give her students more time to read and think through the text. However, she expressed that it was only she who was appointed to join the training and it was only she who had a chance to learn the methods. Once she came back, she was supposed to organize another section in order to share what she had learned from the training with the rest of the teachers at her school. However, her school principal has not arranged anything for that yet and she has not had a chance to share with her colleagues. Thus, she finds it is a loss of opportunity for the other teachers.

Another source of information that helps Dara enhance her teaching strategies, including reading, is through the teaching-technique meeting. This specific meeting/training session was organized and sponsored by the World Vision Organization. This organization sponsored this form of training through the Ministry of Education. They sent their trainers from the Ministry to train the heads of the teaching-technique groups at the cluster school, and the heads of the cluster school invited the heads of the teaching-technique groups at Cibo School to attend. And the heads of the teaching-technique groups at Cibo School shared what they learned with the rest of the teachers in their groups.

A teaching-technique group was created in each school in Cambodia in order to help strengthen the teaching techniques, according to each grade-level. These meetings are often held monthly. Dara stated that she has learned from this specific teaching-technique-group meeting in terms of: teaching reading (the group leader helps teachers to understand certain difficult words presented in student textbooks), methods to teach mathematics and science, and teaching material creation.

In addition to training, her understanding about methods in teaching reading in content areas is influenced by her former teachers both in K-12 schools and teachers at the teacher training school. She expressed that her teachers in those early years employed “description and explanation methods,” in which the teacher played a key role in explaining the meaning of text(s) to their students to ensure that their students learn. Dara found that, as a student, she learned a lot from her teachers’ explanations. As a result, she could even remember words and sentences that her teachers said. This traditional method
has greatly impacted her selection of instructional strategies to teach reading in content areas. Therefore, although she practices student-centered strategies, she still acknowledged that she has embraced the traditional way of teaching “description and explanation or lecture” in almost all of her lessons, especially reading lessons, and that her students need this type of method in order to understand.

Although Dara has learned different methods of teaching reading from various sources, she still expressed that she has strong influences from the Ministry of Education regarding the implementation of the new student-centered pedagogies. She argued that student-centered approaches are mandated for all teachers in Cambodia and we all have to implement them, no matter what. After using these methods for several years, she came to like the new methods and this allows her to incorporate two approaches into her teaching instructions (teacher-centered and student-centered approaches).

**Sirath**

Sirath is one of the teacher participants who has experienced difficulty in naming the sources of his knowledge about his teaching of reading in content area methods. He might have taken it for granted by only implementing what he was asked to do and by doing what he has done daily in class without noticing where he has learned those techniques. Sirath expressed that the methods that he has put into practice are mainly influenced by the instructional strategies of other senior teachers in pedagogy school and those who are teaching in his current school, since he started teaching. He stated that:

> When I came to teach here for the first time, I did not have enough experience or had very little experience; then I regularly asked the older teachers who stayed here first. I could ask them for ideas or suggestions.

Sirath claimed that he has learned a lot from the suggestions given by senior teachers in his school. For example, a good method for teaching reading that he has grasped from those teachers’ suggestions is: asking provocative questions that are connected to students’ attention/mood/feeling/experience so that they can focus on the lessons. Those questions are also relevant questions from previous lessons to the new lesson so that students are able to connect and associate new lessons with old lessons, thus allowing them to learn and remember better.
Sirath’s main teaching strategy in teaching reading in content areas is “questioning,” and he acknowledged that he picked up this generic questioning method from his teacher trainers during the teacher-training program. Also, another main reason that he applies this method in most of his teaching instructions is that his students benefit and learn from this type of method and it is another means to verify whether or not his students understand the lesson(s)—if his students are able to answer his questions correctly, it reassures him that his students understand and learn the lesson(s). However, Sirath acknowledged that he has never been trained with any specialized methods for teaching reading in content areas, either in pre- or in-service training programs. Instead, all the instructional strategies he has implemented in teaching reading in content areas are those that he has gathered consciously and unconsciously from all sorts of sources, including his former teachers, teacher trainers in pre-service and supplementary training, his senior colleagues, teacher-guidebooks from the Ministry of Education, and his own personal teaching experience. However, these approaches/methods are only the general ones applied for teaching all sorts of lessons, including science and mathematics, and there are no specific methods for teaching reading in content areas. Sirath finds that the questioning method works for all sorts of lessons. Thus, he mainly applies the questioning method in teaching reading in content areas.

Additionally, Sirath acknowledged that his instructional strategies in teaching reading in content areas are much more influenced by teacher-centered approaches, since he has learned those approaches from K-12 school and pre-service teacher training from 1992 to 1994. He has learned student-centered approaches only during the in-service training program offered in 2001. Sirath argued that he did not learn anything much from this one-shot in-service training/workshop. Although the workshop was about generic teaching methods in student-centered approaches, he did not learn much from the workshop because it was offered in a very short time and, basically, the only documentation was the teacher guidebook, provided to participants to read on their own time. In addition to the workshop, Sirath concurred that what he has learned the most about student-centered approaches is about questioning methods and arranging students in pairs/groups. Those methods were provided during occasional in-service training at his
school by his principal, teaching-technique group meetings, and from the teacher guidebook provided by the Ministry of Education.

In conclusion, according to the four teacher participants’ responses, it can be concluded that there is no specific method for teaching reading in content areas that has been provided or enhanced by the Ministry of Education. The teacher participants have eventually learned and selected their own methods for teaching reading in content areas from the general teaching methods in both student-centered and teacher-centered approaches, including questioning, students’ reading silently and aloud in pairs/groups, illustrating with pictures, and creating a lesson summary at the end of the lesson.

 Teachers with different years of experience have expressed different views regarding what they learned in pre-service training program. Channa learned student-centered approaches during pre-service training and teaching practicum. However, Sophea, Dara and Sirath learned learner-centered approaches during in-service training. Generally, the sources of their knowledge about teaching reading in content areas are mainly from teacher guidebooks from the Ministry of Education, pre-service and in-service teacher training, teaching practicum, senior teachers, and other training provided by NGOs (in Dara’s case).

How Active Learning Pedagogies Are Implemented and Their Effectiveness

All four participants have difficulty in expressing their opinions about how they implement active learning pedagogies (new methods imported from the West) because they have superficial understanding/knowledge regarding these approaches. Another reason is that almost all of the teachers in Cambodia, including the four teacher participants and myself, are accustomed to the traditional ways of teaching (teacher-lead approaches). That is why the teachers get mixed up between the two approaches (student-centered and teacher-centered). They have implemented teacher-led approaches; however, they believe that they have applied learner-led approaches. This is a big challenge and is confusing for them, and it does affect the effectiveness of the strategies themselves.
When inquiring of the teachers about active learning pedagogies, the teachers mostly talk about “separating students to work in pairs/group” and “asking them questions.” Channa is one of the teachers who expressed a similar understanding. There are three elements that Channa knows about student-centered approaches and their implementation. Those three features are: dividing students to work in pairs/groups, asking questions/getting answers from students, and creating a lesson summary. Channa believes that, in order to implement these pedagogies, she has to put students to work in pairs or in groups and provide them with questions to work on. According to Channa, the questions have to be offered by the teacher or selected from the student textbook because she believes that her students do not have enough ability to create their own questions to ask their peers or even to ask the teacher when they have any doubt. Additionally, most of her students are poorly performing students in reading; thus, they have to focus on reading first before creating questions. The questions need to be initiated by the teacher because the teacher is the one who can adjust and simplify the questions relating to their everyday life, so that the students can answer them.

With these approaches, the teacher’s role is also important. Channa noted that, although students work in groups, teachers have to help explain and give them ideas and meanings of the article. But she says the main ideas should be given by the students, because the questions are mainly from the student textbook and the answers can be easily found/selected from the textbook. The answers are turned into a lesson summary at the end of the lesson. After the lesson, Channa always assigns homework for her students to copy the entire text from the student textbook into their notebooks.

Even though the overall picture of Channa’s practice for teaching reading in content areas is implementing student-centered or active learning pedagogies, the power dynamic in the classroom is still held by the teacher. Students seem to be engaged in their own learning, but they do not take control of it—they do not initiate/ask questions; instead, they still follow the teacher’s lead/ideas or follow what is given in the textbook as their main source of knowledge and they have to accept it as the truth. This practice is similar to what is encouraged in more traditional ways of teaching (teacher-centered approaches).
Regarding the effectiveness of the new approaches, Channa argued that the methods within active learning pedagogies are new and are working for her students, but only 50 percent are successful. She has provided reasons why she thinks the methods are not fully working for her class. The first reason is that her students do not understand the lessons and do not learn much when she applies the methods. Most of her students are underperforming students with very limited knowledge and poor foundations from the earlier grades. She expressed a concern that those students should have repeated the grades but they were still pushed to the next grade; in addition, they did not receive any support during the school-break time. Channa is not happy with the Ministry of Education’s policy to count the number of students who pass to the following grade. Thus, each school has to allow poorly performing students to move on to the next grade level, although their ability is not strong enough to do so. This leaves a big number of students who are behind their grade level to sit in the class and learn the lessons that are higher than their ability to learn them. This student learning issue affects the successful implementation of student-centered approaches.

As a teacher, Channa has to lecture/explain the lessons to her students more often and in detail; otherwise, her students do not learn. Regarding reading in content areas, her students face a lot of difficulty in understanding the text(s) they are reading because they are not able to pronounce many of the words or understand their meanings. Most of them are also not able to answer some of the challenging questions she asks about the text(s); thus, they do not have enough capacity to be engaged in a group discussion to answer other questions. Generally, Channa strongly believes that her students still need the teacher’s explanations and guidance most of the time, which requires the traditional teacher-centered approaches.

However, there is still another 50 percent where Channa thinks student-centered pedagogies are working. She believes that, when applying active learning pedagogies, she asks students questions in order for them to respond, either by selecting the answers from the text(s) or by using their own words; she appreciates the answers given by the students because, if the students are able to answer the questions—especially the provocative questions—it means they learn a portion from the text rather than the teacher telling or
explaining it to them all the time. And the ability of the students to answer the questions signals to her that her students have learned the lessons.

Channa has also given a conflicting answer about the effectiveness of student-centered teaching, regarding group work. She expressed that the discussion in groups can help poorly performing students learn from the good ones, as well as from each other. She stated that:

When discussing in groups, the low-performing students can listen to the good student(s). Students can exchange ideas even just a little bit. This can help them to create the summary of the lesson. If we do this individually, it is impossible… when they work together, they exchange ideas with other people’s ideas; thus they can accumulate more ideas.

After having tried to implement the new approaches for several years, she finds out that they are more effective than the first time she implemented them. The reason is that she is getting to know more about the methods and her students are better accustomed to what their teachers are doing every day. In addition, these new approaches also somehow benefit teachers—they help them reduce their activities and they are less tired, compared to the old ways of teaching reading, where they have to lecture and explain everything. However, there is still a drawback to these approaches; as a teacher, she finds it is difficult to assess group work—how much do the students learn or benefit from the group work? She expressed that:

Students are able to express their ideas by saying something at least. When they discuss in groups, they don’t stay still. But the poor-performing students are always quiet. And I know they do not contribute to the discussion. Only the smart and good students do. That is also a problem. I cannot push them to do it…It depends on the time. But the teaching time is always short and I cannot help everyone. I have to let it go by accepting the way it means to be—low-performing students are inactive. However, when they all are noisy, it is another problem. I know they might not talk about the answers; they are just playing. It is hard to control the class. So, I don’t know if it is working.

These new active learning pedagogies are not successful in Channa’s class because of the difficulty of classroom management. Channa is unable to control the classroom effectively when she divides students into groups; as a result, she feels her students do not learn much and her teaching is not effective. The reason is that, when students are placed in groups, it turns into chaos in the classroom because her students are
not used to these activities and they seem to have freedom to make noise when they are released from their tables. Channa stated that:

> It is hard to split them into groups, except when there is someone observing the class. Only at that time, they will behave and remain good. But normally, they make noise and turn out to be really disorganized because of the table arrangement. The setting of the tables makes it hard to arrange them into groups. They have to really turn their wooden heavy tables around to work with other students. It is really time consuming and it leaves them room to chat around and make noise while they are moving. I just cannot do it and see them being uncontrolled like that.

Even though Channa expressed a negative opinion towards the new approaches, she acknowledged that she has still practiced them many times already, since they were imposed by the Ministry of Education. However, until now, she is not satisfied with the approaches and her students do not like the methods either—they are still afraid of expressing ideas, asking questions, and writing on the blackboard. Thus, Channa does not see any significant and different results from implementing the old teacher-led approaches.

**Sophea**

Sophea is in the same school as Channa, but she is struggling in expressing her understanding of student-centered or active learning pedagogies. The difference is that Sophea entered the teaching profession earlier than Channa. When inquiring of Sophea about how much she knows about active learning pedagogies and how she implements them, the response is that she forgets about the methods. It seems to me that she has difficulty naming the methods and she might have taken for granted the methods she implements everyday, and they become her routine. Finally, she ended up commenting that, when implementing student-centered approaches, she has to arrange students to work in groups and ask them questions. The answers should be given by students, but the teacher still needs to correct their answers if they are different from what is in the text.

Sophea has offered two totally divergent ideas about the effectiveness of active learning pedagogies. First, she expressed that student-centered approaches are not working because her students do not listen to her as much. Unlike teacher-centered approaches, students are given more freedom to talk and to be engaged. According to Sophea, if students do not listen to their teachers and they do not memorize their lessons,
they do not learn much. Another reason that active learning pedagogies are not working is that good and smart students are still performing well but the poorly performing students still remain poor or become poorer. Sophea acknowledged that it is the drawback of putting students to work in groups. When they work in groups, only the smart ones who know the lessons do all the work in answering questions; however, the ones who do not know (poorly performing students) remain unengaged. As a result, they do not learn. For her, as a teacher, she is not able to do anything much to help with this process because there are a lot of low-performing students in each group and she cannot help everyone.

Additionally, Sophea noticed that her classroom management is poor when she applies student-centered approaches—the groups get disorganized and students have too much freedom to do whatever they want. She believes that those actions draw their attention away from the learning process and her classroom engagement. Thus, in order to make active learning pedagogies effective, Sophea has to embrace the old teacher-centered approaches in order to make her students learn. For example, during group work, she has to impose some restrictions: students would be punished if they do not engage in-group discussions, and students still have to memorize the lessons.

Regardless of all those negative comments about student-centered approaches, Sophea still offered a positive side to those new approaches. Compared to teacher-centered pedagogies, when practicing these new approaches, teachers are less tired and students are more engaged. She stated that:

The effectiveness of the new approaches is good because we, as teachers, are not so tired. For teacher-centered, we are so tired, so tired. We explain them everything, we tell them everything and ask them to memorize the lessons…but in student-centered approaches, we are not tired because we just give them the questions and then they do it.

Dara

Unlike Channa and Sophea, Dara gave slightly different views. She offered similar but short comments about her understanding of the implementation of student-centered approaches. It is about engaging students in their own learning by giving them a chance to work with other students, answering the questions for them to understand the meanings of texts, and defining difficult words. However, she expressed a concern that
her students do not have a chance to be involved in those activities effectively because the Ministry of Education only imposed the methods, but they did not provide her and her students with good and adequate teaching materials, classroom settings (the table arrangement is problematic), and positive learning environments (too many students and noisy classrooms). She believes that if she, as a teacher, and her students have access to all of those things, it will help accommodate their learning and they will learn effectively because Dara thinks that her students only learn at school and she does not expect them to do self study at home. Thus, she believes that whatever she can provide for her students in class is very crucial to improve her students’ learning in class. Dara stated that:

In class, if we have enough teaching materials, like tangible objects to show to students, they are able to touch them, to feel them; for example, when teaching about “leaves,” students are able to touch the leaves… we can ask them what they are called… then they will be very interested in the lesson about leaves because they are able to touch and feel them… so we can continue and move on to the lesson…and we can get them to read the lesson about leaves. And I am sure they will be more interested in it after they see the real leaves.

By suggesting this activity, Dara expressed a concern that, although she could have access to or bring her students outside the classroom to feel the leaves, she would not have enough time to include such significant activities. The teaching time is too short and she is required to complete all the lessons within the national curriculum. She strongly argued that “adequate teaching time” is needed in order to effectively implement active learning pedagogies. Students need to be engaged in a lot of activities, especially within reading in content area lessons. Dara expressed that:

The student-centered pedagogies are still not working because our teaching time is short. They (the trainers in the Overseas Teacher Program) show us or teach reading (stories) for eight hours, but for us we teach one reading lesson in 45 minutes. And how can we complete those activities, including working in groups? If the Ministry increases the teaching time for us to teach both in the morning and afternoon (now we teach only in the morning), students will learn a lot more.

Dara is both supportive and unsupportive of the new student-centered approaches because she believes that the approaches are both effective and ineffective for her as a teacher and for her students. They are effective and helpful for several reasons. First, the new methods somehow help students to be more engaged in their own learning. They have to work harder and, the more they are involved in their own learning activities, the
more they learn. Dara believes that working in groups is good practice for her students’ socialization, to discuss and learn how to work with other students, and to learn from other students, as well as to do research. She noticed that, the more she practices the group-work activities, the more her students become used to the activities and they exchange ideas/comments in answer to the group’s questions.

This result seems to be true. When I observed her class, I noticed that her students were engaged in the group discussion and reading (they were asked to help each other with reading a text) and the highly performing students led the group and helped poorly performing students in reading a text, including pronouncing difficult words. The result of the group work was very impressive. For teachers, Dara claimed that the new active learning pedagogies, in some ways, are helpful for teachers in reducing their teaching activities and the teaching is less tiring, compared to the activities in more teacher-centered approaches. According to Dara, the teachers’ role in learner-centered pedagogies is to facilitate students’ learning activities. Even though she applied active learning pedagogies, she could not entirely depend on the students during the lesson. The teacher needs to help them in many ways, including the group arrangement, explaining the questions, and helping them to find answers if they get stuck. Dara believes that her students cannot find good and correct answers unless she helps facilitate and provoke other relevant questions to assist them in finding the answers.

Although Dara admitted that her students are engaged in group work, she also noticed there is an ineffective side to it. When working in groups, most students—specifically the lower performing students—are inactive and not all students are engaged. Some students are left behind because they depend on other students (the group’s leader) to complete the tasks. Most of them pretend to work with others in the group, but they do not share ideas and depend on other students to answer the questions. Thus, Dara prefers her students to work individually because it is more effective. When they work individually, they take charge and are responsible for their own actions/answers.

Another negative side of student-centered approaches is that they require the teacher(s) to do a lot of preparation on their own time before class. In order for students to be engaged in their learning activities during class, the teacher needs to prepare a lot of activities and materials in advance. Dara acknowledged that, besides coming to class to
teach, she did not have extra time for preparation because she is involved in her other business. Also, she could not access teaching materials. As a result, she has to choose whatever instructional methods work and which fit her schedule and recognize the limitations of the lack of teaching materials. She ended up using the traditional ways of teaching in most of her lessons, including reading lessons, because it is easier.

**Sirath**

Sirath, like Dara expressed similar opinions and experiences of the implementation of student-centered pedagogies. According to Sirath, in order to implement active learning pedagogies, teachers need to put students to work in groups and ask them questions in order for them to think. Regarding group work, he has learned that there are various ways to arrange students to work in groups, namely group of two, three, or four students, as well as a group of the whole class. He argued that he learned from a training workshop about the implementation of student-centered approaches, and that teachers do not necessarily divide students into smaller groups. If the teacher asks the whole class questions, it is also a student-centered method. Similarly to Dara, Sirath understands that, in order to effectively implement active learning pedagogies in teaching reading in content areas, teachers need to do a lot of preparation, including finding and creating materials, preparing questions for students to think about, and thinking about the meanings of the lessons, etc. If teachers have a good lesson in hand, it will be easier for them to practice student-centered approaches in class. According to Sirath, the teachers’ role in active learning pedagogies in class is different from those in teacher-centered approaches. That is why they need rigorous preparation in advance. The teacher acts as a monitor and coordinator, rather than as a lecturer. Teachers have to help facilitate the group work and help to clarify the questions, as well as the answers, so that the group is able to practice together. And, he believes that the students are the doers who are directly engaged in the activities.

Sirath expressed the effectiveness of student-centered approaches by relating them to the teachers’ lesson preparation. If the teacher(s) prepare their lessons well, in advance, the students will learn and benefit from these new methods effectively. For example, if teachers have already prepared a set of questions on a small piece of paper for each group and the possible answers on a big sheet to show them afterwards, students
will do the activities faster and it can speed up the classroom activities. Thus, students will enjoy the exercises when teachers use teaching materials. Therefore, students should be able to express their opinions, exchange ideas, and create a lesson summary at the end. The new methods also help cut down the teachers’ activities during class. Sirath believes that this effectiveness is only in a book or in theory, but in practice and reality, it does not happen. He stated that:

Teachers do not have enough time to do all of the preparations that they are supposed to do. Also, they do not have any access to the teaching materials. If they create their materials, they have to spend their own money out of pocket. Thus, no one is willing to do this. We are too poor to make such a contribution. Additionally, we need bigger sheets of paper to prepare the lessons, but they (the school) do not even provide them to us… They gave us only three or four pieces per year. That is really not enough. As a result, even I do not bother to use them at all, except when there is a visitor coming to my class.
Chapter 7

Findings (Responses to Sub-Research Question 3)

What Challenges Do the Teachers Face When Teaching Reading in Content Areas?
What Do the Teachers Suggest for Addressing Those Challenges and for Improving the Teaching of Reading in Content Areas? Why?

Being a teacher in Cambodia is very challenging due to many reasons from low payment to low professional development. On top of those challenges, when paying more attention to the struggles they encounter when teaching reading, specifically in content areas, they reveal even more detailed challenges that they have to deal with on a day to day basis in order to get their students to learn to read. Many years have passed, and those issues remain unresolved; however, the four teacher participants are still in the teaching profession and have managed to find ways to teach their students reading, as well as reading in content areas. The teachers’ challenges in teaching reading in content areas and the strategies they use to overcome those challenges will be described in two key ideas (challenges and ways of overcome those challenges) as follows:

Challenges Teachers Face When Teaching Reading in Content Areas

When talking about the challenges these teachers face when teaching reading in content areas, they do not really pay attention or distinguish teaching reading (teaching students to learn to read) and teaching them reading in content areas (reading to learn). The teachers view reading as one feature, which is teaching reading, including helping poorly performing students to learn to read because these students do not know consonants/vowels and they cannot pronounce most of the words presented in the texts in the curriculum. The teachers basically pointed out the challenges they face when teaching reading in general (all sorts of reading). Also, when talking about the challenges in teaching reading, they mainly focus on the challenges they face when implementing particular methods or approaches, which, for them, are represented by the new student-centered approaches, as well as other external and internal factors, including their own students’ issues.
For Channa, she addressed three areas of challenges that she has faced and all of the problems that hinder her teaching success, including teaching reading in content areas. The three areas of challenge are: the difficulty in implementing student-centered approaches, inappropriate school curriculum with limited teaching time, and student issues. All teachers in Cambodia are asked for and are required to implement active learning pedagogies when teaching any lessons, including reading in content areas; however, they are not provided with an appropriate teaching environment to assist with this implementation. According to Channa, one of the challenges she faces when teaching reading in content areas is that, when she tries to implement active learning pedagogies, at the same time she is worrying about catching up the time in order to cover the school curriculum and to make sure her students learn. When Channa implemented active learning pedagogies, she divided students into work groups by trying to place them to work with different people and different group representatives in order to insure the best practices of the approach and to involve all her students in the activities. Channa wants all of her students to read and to be able to answer the questions.

The biggest challenge that she faces in the classroom setting is the fact that the tables are too difficult to be moved and re-arranged for group work, and the teaching time does not allow her to incorporate that activity, anyway. Therefore, she ended up not practicing student-centered approaches well because she could only put the same students in the same groups all the time. She stated that:

The main obstacle for me is to divide students to work in groups when they work on reading and finding the answers to the questions. I sometimes divide students to work with different students. But I am not able to do so, and I can only ask students who sit in a row to turn back to each other and work with the same students all the time. That is boring. If I rearrange the tables, the classroom will be very disorganized and it takes too much time, at least 5 to 10 minutes. And I cannot afford that much time to waste. I will run out of teaching time and it will affect my teaching schedule. The worst case is that, sometimes, in a rush, I just do not care about splitting them into groups… and that is not practical.

Another challenge in teaching reading in content areas is the imbalance and mismatch between the heavy load of the school curriculum and the amount of teaching time that is offered to each teacher. Even though Channa has never been trained with any
specialized methods for teaching reading in content areas, she still believes that her role in teaching her students reading are both teaching them to read for understanding of the text(s) (reading in content areas) and teaching them learning to read for the lower performing students. She does not believe that this job in helping students with reading difficulty should be placed only on teachers in lower grades (Grades 1 or 2). For her, if any of her students are not able to read, she has to help them. And this commitment creates a big challenge for her teaching because she has a lot of poorly performing students in her class, and she also has a large amount of curriculum to cover in a very short time. Channa mainly believes that her responsibility is to help students learn, including reading in content areas and to teach those who have reading difficulties. In order to do this, it consumes a lot time and effort, which the school curriculum and time does not allow. Channa stated that:

In teaching reading, our roles are to get them to read and to learn the lessons—what the text(s) are talking about and dare to ask questions. I want all of them to learn. So, I need to help all of them (both those who are able to read and those who are not); however, I am not able to do so because there are many other lessons that I need to cover in the school curriculum.

According to Channa, her students’ learning abilities are below the difficulty level of the lessons they are supposed to learn. Based on this issue alone, she is not able to speed up her teaching in order to keep pace with the curriculum. The Ministry of Education has recently launched new textbooks with an increasing number of lessons to be covered; however, the teaching time remains the same. The number of lessons and contents presented in the textbook are designed by the Ministry of Education, yet the teaching timeline (when and what curriculum to cover) has been created by the principals and heads of teaching-technique groups at cluster schools, following the guidelines given by the Ministry of Education. The teaching timetable is delivered to Mesa School, and all the teachers are asked to follow the schedule. Channa expressed a concern that:

If we try to follow everything in the curriculum, it is not good for students. But if we do not follow and cannot finish the lessons on time at the end of the academic year, our teaching performance will be noticed. It is difficult to follow the curriculum from the Ministry in such a short time. I believe in teaching one lesson, students need to do a lot of exercises to practice; otherwise, they don’t learn. But, one lesson, I think we should at least spend 2 to 3 days to teach, but they give us only 1 hour to teach. Also, for teaching a grammar lesson in a reading text in Khmer Studies lesson, they give us only 2 hours for one lesson.
Sure, we can finish, but the students do not learn. The result is: students do not learn… We can cover many things, but students do not learn…other teachers also find it difficult to teach following the set schedule. But, we cannot do anything about it. What can we do?

Channa believes what is important is not the number of lessons that the students need to learn. What is more important is whether students learn or not and how much students learn. She claims that, if the Ministry offers fewer lessons but more hours to teach, it will be more effective and teachers can offer more exercises to students to practice. She believes that, this way, students are better supported and they can learn much more.

Another big challenge for Channa in teaching reading in content areas is the students’ learning abilities. The students’ learning abilities are lower than the level of the lessons offered and it does not match the teaching schedule given. The reason that students’ learning abilities are lower is logistic in nature because students did not learn what they were supposed to learn in lower grades and their reading texts have become longer. She stated that:

The students were not pushed hard enough in the basic grades (Grades 1 and 2). We can try to help them now (at this Grade) if they were pushed to study hard enough at the basic grades. It is a bit easier for us to teach reading if teachers in Grades 1 and 2 tried to help by pushing their students hard enough so that they learn the basic skills, reading and writing. But, in this higher grade, if students are not even able to read, how can I teach them? Their reading habit is also problematic. Students are not used to doing a lot of reading in lower grades. And then, once they are in a higher grade, we get them to read certain things that they are not used to do before in lower grades; it is a real challenge—it is really difficult. Other than that, most students’ reading ability is really poor. I think it is too hard and might be impossible for me to teach those really poor-performing kids in reading because they do not know even vowels. Not knowing vowels might be fine, but also they do not even know consonants. To be honest, I have one or two students in my class who, no matter, how I try to push them, they cannot progress because they do not know both vowels and consonants…and they are in Grade 5 now.

Another major issue that hinders Channa’s teaching success, especially teaching reading, is the students’ low interest in learning. Channa seems to place the blame on the students when it comes to teaching and learning obstacles. She states that it is not to blame the teachers if students do not learn, especially learning reading in content areas. It is their own problem because they do not want to learn to read. Reading in content areas
requires a lot of attentions and interest in reading itself. But the students’ interest in
learning has been drawn away by their home environment and social attractions. Channa
strongly believes that this is the key issue in contemporary education in Cambodia and it
does negatively impact her teaching; it is a huge obstacle for her to teach reading in
content areas because her students’ interests are not in reading or learning. She states that
most students in the class have trouble reading and understanding the texts, as well as not
learning other subjects. And, the key issue is their family’s situation. She states that:

Who is to blame if they do not learn? It is not to blame me! What/who causes the
problem? It is the students themselves and their home environment, including
their parents. The students themselves, they just do not study. Their parents do not
push or motivate them to study. When I assign homework, they do not do it. I
write in the student-study tracking booklet to their parents, and they write back
saying that they would try to push them and help them more. But the result is still
the same. The teaching result within these couple of months does not have any
progress at all. So, how else we can help them?

Channa seems to have a negative feeling towards her class’s performance. And
she treats it as the biggest issue in her teaching, including teaching reading in content
areas. When asking students to read any text(s), she noticed her students do not pay
attention to reading; instead their attention is distracted by their family issues. She states
that:

I noticed my students don’t pay attention to their reading. They often look out
through the window. When I asked them, they said they were thinking about their
family’s financial problems. That is the family’s financial issue that distracts their
learning. They think about their family and home. Once they go home, they are
asked to go out and sell cakes. So, when they look through the windows, they do
not think about the lessons. Actually, they think about something else. Or,
although they look at or read the text(s), they do not know and cannot answer
when they are asked… and some students are absent a lot. When I asked them,
they said they have to help their mothers sell cakes and look after their younger
siblings; the mother is sick. That is why he/she needed to be absent.

Channa expresses that the students’ family issues are her main concern and no
matter what she does, the issues are beyond her control and she cannot change them as
well as change her students’ learning results. Family issues are only a concern for certain
students. There are also students from rich families in her class, and Channa expresses
that those students are also not interested in learning. They did not have family issues to
worry about but they are addicted to playing games and they are not interested in books or in reading. She states that:

The students from wealthy families are also not interested in learning/reading. Instead, they pay attention to playing. They like playing games and forget about learning although they do not have family issues. They are obsessed with games.

Overall, according Channa, the two main challenges that inhibit the success of her teaching in content areas are outside factors, which are beyond her control. She believes that those issues need to be addressed first, before improving teaching methods.

**Sophea**

Sophea is another teacher who expressed similar concerns regarding the challenges when teaching reading in content areas, as well as teaching other subjects. Sophea has lower expectation of her students’ performance. She argues that the main challenge for her in teaching reading in content areas is the low learning abilities of her students in learning/reading—students are not interested in learning but in playing; they are not helped or supported to study harder by their parents or their lower-grade teachers. The majority of her students do not have enough of the foundational knowledge that they were supposed to learn in Grades 2 and 3. This means, according to their current knowledge, that they would have a hard time understanding the lessons in their current curriculum. Sophea has pointed out the reasons for this issue: the students do not care about learning themselves, their parents are careless, and the system and the educational policies of the Ministry of Education are not supportive. According to Sophea, her students depend mainly on learning in class, which is insufficient. Sophea strongly believes that the students will not learn if they do not learn or do self-study at home. The reason for this is that the students’ guardians do not care about their children’s education. They did not teach them basic knowledge, including reading, writing, and mathematics at home. Instead, some parents encourage them to go play in order to be away from them so that their children do not disturb them with their business. Sophea states that:

If their parents do not help with at-home-teaching since the basic Grades 1 and 2, and wait for only the teachers to teach them, the kids do not learn much. They are most of the time at home. They come to school only in the morning from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. And the rest, they are at home. When they are at home, they mostly watch movies. And their parents do not care but allow them to watch even more. They have to scaffold them to learn at home; if not, they would forget what they learn
from here. If the parents wait for them to study only in here, they would not learn. Some parents even give their children money to go out and play video games so that they could have free time from them... I know my students, at the end of the class, they go return the movie DVDs that they rent from a store nearby the school. I know everything because I live near them in the neighborhood... I live next door to one of my students. I never hear his parents say to him, “Oh son, bring your book and read.” Instead, I heard, “Oh son, bring a deck cards and play with us.” How come they teach their son like that...Some of my male students told me that if they do not pass the grade, they would give up their study at Grade 6 to seek labor work in Thailand. Their parents encourage them to do so because it is a fast and easier way to make money and to support them. This is a big problem now because some of my male students already moved to Thailand. Others already started thinking about going to find a job outside the country already. So, how could they pay attention to their education here? This is my biggest challenge...no matter what I do, it is still the same. I can only encourage them to stay... But their feeling is not here with me in the class. While teaching, they are thinking about their family, and finding a job...It is terrible.

Another reason for the lower learning abilities of her students is that the national policy in evaluating the quantity of students who pass the grade is problematic. She is concerned that the Ministry places so many students in one class and, then, they want as many students as possible to pass the grade. There are so many students in one class, especially in the lower grades, and each one of them needs special help from the teacher(s) so that they can build a good foundation for reading. However, the teachers are not able to help most of them because they need to speed up their lessons to catch up with the curriculum. This problem leaves many students behind. At the end of the academic year, those poorly performing students are still supported to pass the grade because the Ministry needs to have a large number of students passing the grade.

Sophea’s main purpose in teaching is to get her students to learn. Thus, she sees herself as both content-area reading teacher and reading teacher. She believes that her duties and responsibilities are to help her students understand the texts as well as to teach those who face reading difficulties in learning to read. Thus, when the majority is facing reading difficulties, she is not able to help all of them. And, this issue adds another difficulty for her in teaching reading for comprehension to most of her students.

Another challenge for Sophea in teaching reading in content areas is the inappropriate school curriculum. She complains that the Ministry of Education’s new textbook, launched in 2012, is more difficult to teach—they have included more
advanced content and the lessons are lengthy. However, the students’ learning ability is lower and inadequate for that change. Also, there is an absence in teacher guidebooks to help teachers with step-by-step instructional methods; plus, it is not very informative for teachers in terms of references and explanations, compared to the previous textbook. Sophea states that:

The lessons in Khmer Studies and social studies subjects are too long. They added more contents and more difficult words. But there is no explanations or definitions given. The teachers and students have to do more research to find them. It is more difficult. The book requires us to do a lot of research. For example, in the exercise section, the students are asked to find a Khmer legendary story. Even us, we do not know those stories. We need reference stories or examples in the teacher guidebook or at least they give us one example in the student textbook. But they don’t. How can we find them? We do not have time for doing research for that. It is a big challenge for us, both teacher and students.

Similarly to Channa, Sophea expressed the same frustration regarding the overloaded curriculum, which does not correspond to the teaching timeline and the students’ learning ability. Sophea notes that, when teaching reading in content areas, learners need more time to practice reading, to answer the questions, and to do the lesson summaries. On top of that, for lower performing students in reading, they need even more time and more support to help them learn pronunciation, spelling, and word definitions. Sophea acknowledged that she has a hard time providing them with those supports because she is worried about not being able to cover the curriculum. If she does not finish the curriculum every year, her teaching performance may be reported as below standard.

**Dara**

Unlike Channa and Sophea, Dara has offered slightly different factors that hinder the success of her teaching of reading in content areas. She expressed that, in order to effectively apply student-centered approaches in teaching reading in content areas according to the policy of the Ministry of Education, teachers need to have access to decent teaching materials. Dara revealed that finding teaching materials, including pictures and big sheets of paper, is a big challenge for her as well as for other teachers in Cambodia. The Ministry does not provide teachers with the tangible materials that they need to engage their students in learning activities. As well, the teachers are not able to spend their own money to purchase or create their own teaching materials. Dara
complains that it is a real challenge for her because everything she teaches and says is very abstract, as a consequence.

Another challenge for Dara in teaching reading in content areas is the difficult content and vocabulary in the new textbook. The new textbook was published and put into practice in 2012; however, there is no teacher guidebook to assist teachers with methods, teaching objectives, and vocabulary definitions and explanations. Also, most of the reading texts in social studies are longer and the content is more difficult. The lessons are not placed in an appropriate order, and both students and teachers find it hard to follow. For instance, certain stories placed in texts in the new history curriculum within social studies are not in sequence. Thus, it is very difficult to get students to understand and follow the historical events in the history curriculum. In addition, the contents in Khmer studies are very different from those in the previous textbook, which makes the subject very difficult to teach. Dara also expressed that the vocabulary is getting more difficult for both the teachers and students; however, the students’ reading performance is getting poorer. She added that the level of difficulty of the contents do not match the intellectual level of the students and their age. They are going in reverse direction and it is the teacher who receives the pressure. Dara states that:

In most of the lessons, some words are more difficult to explain. For example, the words in social studies (executive power and constitutional power) are very abstract and really hard to explain. How much we know, we explain to our students and they get that much, or less. Only a few students understand and I doubt that. Most of them don't. They don't give us definitions and I do not have any reference. I only give definitions based on what I know and what I learned in accordance with the text. It is a real challenge for me as a teacher because sometimes, it is even hard for me, myself, to understand the words. I think the level of difficulty of textbook for Grade 5 is even more than that in Grade 6. The students are younger but the lessons are harder.

In connection with the above challenges, Dara also added that another problem that she faces in teaching reading in content areas, as well as teaching other lessons, is the forgetfulness of the students, as well as the lack of parental involvement in their children’s learning. She noticed that, no matter what methods she used in teaching reading, her students seem to learn very well in class—they are able to answer the questions and to complete other exercises correctly. It seems the students understand the texts really well in class and they are able to complete the homework assignment
correctly. However, when Dara reached new lessons that relate to the previous lessons and she reviewed them, her students did not remember the previous lessons or anything they had learned. Dara claimed that it is a big challenge and frustration for her, as a teacher, since she is not able to accurately assess her students’ learning abilities and it is hard for her to move to the next lessons. Dara notes that:

I think my students do not remember the lessons for a long time. They remember it today but forget it tomorrow. Their memory is really short. I do not know the reason for this. I am really curious because when I teach during the day—the Khmer studies reading lesson, they all can complete the exercises and answer the questions well. When I explain to them, they understand. Among 10 students, 8 students can do the exercises correctly. During the lesson, I include every step of the methods, including working in groups, going to do the exercises on the blackboard, playing games, and clapping hands to cheer up, etc. They enjoyed and learned it so much. But why they do not remember? When I go to the next 2 or 3 lessons afterwards, they forget the previous lessons. I also assigned homework after each lesson and they could do it well. But after finishing the next 3 or 4 lessons ahead, they forget it all. If they blame us that our teaching is not good, I’d not believe that it is the reason because, when I am teaching the lesson, my students learn and they are able to do the exercises correctly.

Dara finds that the main reason for the forgetfulness of her students is that they do not learn hard enough, especially at home. Students did not receive enough support from their parents in order to push them to learn and to read the lessons at home. Also, Dara claims that people in Cambodia are more materialistic and parents allow their children to use phones and play video games. Those materials are more attractive than books, and students spend more time on those toys more than on reading books. In class, those students who do not learn at home always give Dara a hard time to teach her lessons and move on to the next one. Dara also admitted that she has tried her best to contact parents and let them know about their children’s school performance by sending the study-record book of each student home for them to sign. However, there was no reply or, when there was a reply, Dara mentioned that she would doubt it because some parents are illiterate. She is generally concerned that the lack of parent involvement adds another layer to the problem of the students’ low learning abilities.

Insufficient teaching time is also another challenge for Dara. She is concerned that her students do not learn because her teaching is often rushed and she does not provide them with sufficient practice and enough exercises for them to learn the lessons.
Dara believes that teaching time is very important to get students to understand and learn from the texts they read; however, the Ministry provides teachers with inadequate time and with overloaded curriculum. Dara states that:

I need more time for teaching each reading lesson, like in social studies lessons and Khmer studies lessons. We need at least two hours to teach them. But to be honest, I cannot teach all the content—we need more time, if we can, to cover everything. So, sometimes, in social studies (we need to teach for two hours), but I teach only for one hour, and I combine the lessons that we are supposed to teach for two hours to teach for only one hour. It is really hard for students to learn.

When Dara rushes to finish the lessons in order to cover the school curriculum, student activities are less frequent. It is not enough for students to be engaged in all the activities for their own learning. The teaching time is fast and short, even though it seems that Dara has tried her best to get all students involved.

Sirath

Similar to Dara, Sirath expressed the same concern about the lack of teaching materials, which is a big challenge for him in teaching reading in content areas. He noticed that his students are not interested in the lessons, including reading, because the teacher does not have the materials to show and to connect with the text. He believes that, in order to get students to learn from the texts that they are reading, the teachers need to explain the meanings to them by showing them the materials or pictures connected with the meanings. The teaching materials are inadequate; thus, Sirath finds his explanations are too abstract and his students do not learn much from his explanations. On top of this challenge, Sirath argues that it is even more difficult when his students’ recall memory is low. In expressing concerns similar to Dara’s, Sirath states that his students learn the vocabulary well in class and are able to give their definitions, and he has also provided them with a number of good practices by asking them to write the definitions on the board, as well as to read the definitions aloud. And, when reviewing the definitions at the end of the class, they were able to re-state the definitions correctly.

However, he noticed that his students’ remembering ability is low as the next day or the next time they encounter the same words, they forget the meanings/definitions of the same words they have already learned. According to Sirath, the reason for this issue is that the vocabulary in the new textbook is more difficult without any guidance from the
teacher guidebook to help the teachers. Sirath concurred that he also has difficulty in understanding the new words in the new textbook and he has to do a lot research to find the definitions. This is frustrating for him as a teacher because his students do not know what they have already learned and the words are getting more difficult. It poses another threat for him to consume more time to re-teach the same vocabulary multiple times. And when he consumes more time in teaching the vocabulary, he runs out of time to cover other school curriculum and content.

Sirath complains that the Ministry’s new policy is another cause of the problem. The Ministry of Education sets a high standard for a large quantity of elementary school students to move on to the next grade regardless of their passing marks. Thus, every school in Cambodia allows almost 100 percent of the elementary school students to pass the grade, even though their performance is poor and they deserve to repeat the grade.

His students are careless about their learning as well as reading—they do not pay attentions to the lessons in class and do not study at home, because they expect that they will move on to the next grade even though they do not pass the tests. Sirath believes that this practice affects the whole performance of his class as well as the Grade 7 class, because the teachers in both grades need to deal with very poorly performing students who pass the grade with below average scores.

Another challenge that Sirath has is the obligation to implement new active learning pedagogies. Sirath argues that almost all teachers and students in Cambodia follow and have become used to the traditional teacher-centered approach for many years, and that is the way that students learn and teachers teach. All of a sudden the Ministry of Education has introduced the new student-centered approaches in a very short time. Sirath acknowledges that he does not know and understand the new approach enough to apply them successfully.

Additionally, students also face a lot of challenges because, with the new approach, they are required to think and answer the questions; however, they are not used to thinking. Their thinking abilities are still limited because they are not used to thinking and questioning. They are used to being told what to do and being provided with information that they are supposed to remember and recite. This is a big challenge for
Sirath when he implements the new approaches in teaching reading in content areas. He states that:

When I put them [students] to work in-group and do the discussion, most of them do not think, leaving only one or two students to think and do the work. But the rest, the majority of them just sit there, do nothing and do not think either. And then it seems they do not learn.

In addition to that, Sirath also expressed that the classroom setting is not accommodating in implementing student-centered approaches because it is hard for students to move around. Also, Sirath argues that his students are not used to the new methods and they do not understand the lessons, which requires him to explain and tell them almost everything about the texts, including the meanings. Sirath claims that this is a barrier for him in teaching reading in content areas because he, as a teacher, has been trapped in the middle between the obligation to implement new approaches and the unresponsiveness of his students to these new approaches.

**How to Overcome Challenges and Improve Teaching Reading in Content Areas**

Teachers in Cambodia face many challenges in their teaching career, including issues in the school and other problems outside the school, but they somehow manage to survive, at the end of the day, by finding their own ways to overcome those challenges. Also, teaching reading in content areas is even more challenging for teachers in Grades 5 and 6 because their students are exposed to longer and more informative texts.

**Channa**

Channa is one of the Cambodian teachers who has tried to find different ways to overcome the struggles and challenges in her teaching. The main obstacle for implementing student-centered approaches in her teaching reading in content areas is the desk/table arrangement because it is hard for her to move students around; however, Channa has still managed to involve her students in group work and still places them to work with different students. Her technique is to re-arrange her students to sit in different rows of desks once a month. She believes that, by doing this, she is able to make group work happen and make it less boring because students do not work with the same people.
all the time. Also, she is able to save teaching time by not moving the tables around all the time.

Another possibility that Channa can imagine in order to make her students learn better is to forget about the requirements and pressure from the Ministry of Education, as well as her own end-of-the year performance evaluation. She has dedicated more time to teaching her students reading by not rushing to finish the lessons according to the national curriculum. Channa states that she does not follow the set schedule or teaching timetable given to her. She has her own teaching schedule and delivers her own ways of teaching by giving students more time to study in class so she can help individual students.

Channa also prioritizes the necessary lessons that she thinks she should teach first and saves the rest of the lessons to teach at the end of the school year if she can afford time to do so. For example, she focuses on teaching reading in every lesson in Khmer studies rather than in social studies because she believes that Khmer studies have more reading skills included, such as vocabulary instruction, pronunciation, synonyms and antonyms, and questions and answers. Those are the important skills that she believes students should learn in reading in content areas. Channa believes that the lessons in Khmer studies are better designed for teaching reading and are easier to teach; thus, she believes that, if students are able to excel in reading in Khmer studies, they are also able to read well in other subjects such as social studies. In addition to selecting the prioritized lessons to teach, Channa also affords more time to teach those lessons rather than others in order to teach her students basic reading skills, rather than moving on and leaving them with nothing. Normally, based on the school curriculum and timetable, a lesson is suggested for one hour; however, Channa extends the teaching time to at least three hours so that she can provide her students with more reading exercises, more reading practice, and to help individual student experiencing reading difficulties. For reading exercises, Channa gives her students more time to read and to find the answers to the questions.

She also associates reading with writing. If her students are distracted by other family issues or games, they might not be able to read well but, at least, they must write. She gives more writing exercises to her students to practice in class and at home. Those exercises include writing in a diary and about past events—whatever her students can
write about is acceptable. She believes that, if her students can write better, they will be able to read better. For more reading practice, she gives her students a chance to do individual silent reading and reading aloud in class, as well as listening to other students read. She believes these exercises can help her students focus more on reading and pronunciation. In helping students with reading difficulties, Channa spends time teaching them the pronunciations and spelling of difficult words. She selects the paragraph that students have the most difficulty working with.

By practicing all of these exercises, it is very time consuming and, at the end, she has to rush her teaching to cover other lessons at the end of the school year. Channa states that, during that time, it is possible for her to teach faster because her students have already learned some of the basic reading skills. In the worst case, she has to cut off some lessons since she is not able to teach those lessons according to the national curriculum. She acknowledges that her teaching performance has been noticed because she does not cover the entire curriculum; however, they (the school principal or the head of the education department) do not take this seriously and she is still in the profession. Thus, Channa still practices her own instructional ways to help her students overcome their challenges every school year because she believes that, at least, her students learn something rather than nothing.

Sophea

Sophea has a number of challenges in her teaching of reading in content areas and she expresses similar ways to overcome these challenges. Because there are a lot of lower performing students in her class, Sophea chooses to pay attention to those students’ learning in particular rather than focusing on other higher performing students; however, she still involves these students and gets all of them engaged. She claims that she has to pick and choose the most difficult words from the text to teach. It can benefit both good and poorly performing students. For other words that the lower performing students are not able to pronounce, she walks around and helps them and asks other good students to help them. In addition, during break time, she gives her students a chance to come to her to seek help. She believes that, even though she could not help that much, the small amount the students learn in class is much better than nothing.
Sophea admits that her students are not interested in reading or learning in general and, in order to help her students learn, Sophea has applied a motivational method by giving examples/stories for them to value their education. In almost every lesson, she often tells and asks her students about the same examples: asking her students which one they would choose to buy—a milky coconut or a normal coconut, and most of them choose the milky one because it is more delicious and has more value. And then she inserts a message:

If you want the milky one, it is more expensive and you have to find the money to buy it, and in order to have money you must have a good job and, in order to have a good job, you must have a good education. It means you have to learn much harder to achieve the goal.

Sophea believes that this is a powerful message to encourage her students to learn and to love reading. Sophea keeps doing this because she believes that at least this message can help bring back her students’ interest in reading and learning lessons.

Another way that Sophea claims to be effective in order to advance her teaching profession and help with her students’ learning is coming to teach every day. Sophea admits that most teachers in her school have been absent from class many times and, if they came to teach, they teach shorter hours. She believes that this attitude adds a new layer to the children’s learning issues. They do not learn at home or at school because their teachers do not come to teach them. For Sophea, she treats her teaching duties and responsibilities professionally. Similar to Channa, Sophea believes that the most important thing is to be present in class and to encourage her students to be present because most of her students have been absent a lot. When the teacher and students are in class, even though the students do not pay attention to the lessons or reading, at least they listen to the teacher and to other students read, and they may learn something rather than nothing. Being present in class throughout the academic year can also provide her with more time to catch up other lessons in order to cover the national curriculum.

One of the big challenges in her class is that most of her students experience reading difficulties. Thus, to overcome this challenge, Sophea has treated herself as both a content area reading teacher and reading teacher. She does not blame the lower grade teachers for not being able to teach her students basic reading skills, including spelling and pronunciation of vowels and consonants. Instead, she tries to help those students
learn vowels, consonants and pronunciation even though it slows down her teaching practice. As a result, she notices that if those lower performing students can read even a few sentences, they will still be able to remain in class and decide not to drop out of school.

When Sophea spends time helping lower performing students or giving students more practice in reading, as well as vocabulary instruction, she faces another challenge by not covering the entire curriculum. Thus, in order to be able to achieve both, Sophea devotes more time to teach the reading lessons that she thinks have more good exercises and have better educational messages for her students, and she cuts off and summarizes other lessons in order to be able to teach those lessons faster. In addition, she also brings other reading texts from outside that she finds beneficial for her students to read instead of spending time teaching some subjects that she believes her students are not interested in. For example, Sophea substitutes the mind-education lesson for the physical education lesson because she noticed that her students like reading the text from the mind-education book that she brought in. Sophea states that:

On Monday, our schedule is to teach a physical education lesson (physical exercise). I do not want to teach physical exercise because it is hot here and can make us sweat and have bad smell. So I do not teach it. Instead, I replace it by another lesson. So I bring my own book, which is about educating our mind and our attitudes for them to read. It is based on Buddhist doctrine. I asked my students to take a draw and come to the front to read a short paragraph aloud so that other students can have a chance to listen.

Sophea also believes that by doing this reading practice, it helps her students improve their reading skills and reading comprehension because the topic is related to their everyday life and their actions towards their family and friends. She also claims that her students enjoy reading and listening to that lesson, and she is satisfied with that because she wants her students to learn and to know more about their outside environment. Sophea expresses that:

My students’ attitudes are not good. They fight. So, if we just only teach them physical education without caring about their mind and thought, it is not enough. If their mind is not educated, it is not good, it is not focused, and they might do something bad. If we teach, physical exercises in class, sometimes they are not under control and they fight. So, I have to educate their mind too...Some of them said to me, “Oh teacher, this article here is good.” I am happy because they will take it and apply it in practice... Obviously, by reading it, first, they are able to
read, and then to know, and to respect their parents. Their mother tried to work hard all days for who? For them! So when they read this book, they know about their parents’ struggles in order to raise them. And they would realize that it is a sin to hurt their parents. And they would reduce it. They are able to read this text and then they reduce violence within themselves.

Even though Sophea faces a lot challenges in her teaching career, she seems to be happy and continues with her teaching profession. Regarding this, Sophea argues that she mainly tries to ignore the issues and just comes to teach. If she does not, she feels she may need to quit her teaching job.

**Dara**

Another teacher, Dara has named other challenges in teaching reading in content areas from lack of teaching materials to inadequate teaching time; however, she has managed to overcome those challenges by applying some of her own solutions. First, Dara has a huge advantage in her principal’ positive attitude regarding restrictions in meeting the requirements of the school curriculum. She states that, in her school, she is able to create her own teaching schedule since the head of the teaching-technique group within her grade does not create the teaching schedule for her; thus, she has more freedom and can manage her own teaching schedule. Dara claims that it is a good solution for her to overcome the teaching time constraint, since she is able to rearrange the lessons and choose the most important lessons to teach her students over a longer time and save the less important lessons for later. Dara still manages to cover the entire curriculum at the end of the school year.

Another strength that Dara has in comparison to other Cambodian teachers, which helps her overcome all of the challenges in teaching in general as well as in teaching reading in content areas in particular, is the self-consciousness and self-esteem she brings to her teaching profession, as well as her love for the children. She adds that some teachers do not have that and they come into teaching and choose it as their career because they have no other choice. However, for her, she pities children, especially the lower performing students and those from poor families. Her main teaching philosophy or objective is to share all she knows with them in order to get them learn. She believes that, even though she cannot transfer or teach everything 100 percent successfully—if students learn only 80 percent or less, she would be happy with the results.
Because Dara has strong self-esteem, she is very willing to help her poorly performing students in reading. She never views herself as only a content area teacher. Regardless of all the challenges she has faced as a teacher in Cambodia, she still believes that, as a teacher, her main responsibility is not only teaching them the lessons but also educating them with good educational life messages. By “educating” her students, she refers not only to teaching them what is in class, but also gets them to learn and remember the educational messages from the curriculum to share with their families, friends, and the whole community. On top of this passion for educating her students, Dara is known to be a successful teacher in helping students who have reading difficulties, and she still continues to help them spell and pronounce difficult words. Also, she finds it is a good strategy to overcome her challenges in dealing with new and difficult content in the new curriculum because she is still able to help her students to move along and catch up with the rest of the class.

Another challenge that Dara has managed to overcome is to enrich her teaching of reading in content areas with her own teaching materials, although the Ministry has not provided any materials. In order to get her students to become interested in her lessons, she finds ways to use a variety of materials that she is able to access, including cutting paper into smaller pieces for students to write on and enlarging pictures to show to students. However, Dara acknowledges that she only practices those activities occasionally when there is inspection and when she has time for preparation. Dara states that:

I just find the way. For example, sometimes I prepare from home by using my old notebook and cut the paper into small pieces for my students to write on when they work in-group. By doing this way, I save time to get them into the activities and make them more interested. I just try to help them to make their activities happen. And sometimes, I enlarge the pictures from the textbook so that everyone can see by sticking it on the board. They become more interested in the lessons when there are some materials.

Other issues that Dara needs to overcome are the low-learning abilities of her students and the lack of parental involvement. To deal with those challenges, she has to apply the old ways of punishment, which frightens the students and makes them more attentive to their learning. Dara argues that this works because at least she can push them to study harder. Dara states that:
I have to push them and punish them to make them do homework. If I do not do like that, they do not do their work. I punish them by taking out their marks and asking them to stand up without sitting. Sometimes, I have to use the traditional ways. When I punish them for not doing their homework, most of them do the work, except the ones who do not do homework are the ones who are too lazy and then they get punished.

Sirath

Sirath is also another teacher in Cambodia who has remained in the teaching profession for more than ten years, although he has faced a lot of challenges in his teaching career. He has managed to come up with some solutions to his problems and is still able to help his students learn. Even though the Ministry of Education imposed new teaching pedagogies and required all the teachers to implement them, the teachers in Sirath’s school, to a certain extent, still have freedom to implement their own methods in their class without any inspection. Sirath states that there are only a few inspections in an entire academic year. Sometimes, the school principal sits in on his class one or twice a year; sometimes, an inspector from the Department of Education comes to observe his teaching practice. He is always notified in advance by his principal when there is an outside inspection. He claims that, for the sake of the inspection, he is always well prepared and applies active learning pedagogies by following the five teaching steps.

During his normal everyday class, he implements his own ways of teaching, including teacher-centered and student-centered pedagogies. Sirath admits that it is an advantage for him, as a teacher, to apply his own ways of teaching in order to scaffold his students’ learning by giving them more explanations and exercises to practice.

According to Sirath, there are a lot of lower performing students in reading in his class, and Sirath claims that he has not abandoned them; instead, he gives them a chance by helping them as much as possible with pronunciation and vocabulary definitions. Sirath has a strong belief in teachers delivering knowledge to learners through explanations, and his explanations also help his students who have short memory spans to remember at least a small amount of what they have learned. He argues that his students learn from reading the texts better when he explains the content and meaning in the text(s). Sirath states that:

Although we face all of those challenges, as I am a teacher, I still try my best to teach my students carefully without abandoning my teaching job (laughing)… I
still try to explain to my students although, in some lessons, students have difficulty understanding and, sometimes, it is even hard for us as teachers to understand that text too. But I still put a great effort in explaining to them until they learn, understand, and get the meaning out of the texts… sometimes, it helps, too, when I give them my own examples from outside, from other texts that I used to read or learned at school… it is good that I can share with them.

In addition to that, Sirath never sees himself as only a content area teacher. He believes that, even though he has many subjects to teach, based on his current students’ learning abilities, he cannot neglect students’ difficulty in reading. He states that he teaches both content and reading skills to those who struggle. Also, even though Sirath acknowledges that teachers are not well supported by the Ministry of Education or by parents, due to teachers’ low salary, insufficient professional development, and material shortage, he still remains in the teaching profession because he believes in education. He states:

There are a lot of roles and responsibilities for teachers. We have a saying that, “teachers are second parents of students.” So when students come to school, all of them need to be educated. And we do not only educate them about the knowledge from the textbooks (knowing knowledge), but also teach them good character, ethics for everyday living, sanitation, and health, etc. All are included in education.

Moreover, in order to deal with the current issue of the large number of students passing the grade regardless of their test scores, Sirath expressed that he still uses the traditional ways of control to get his students to read and to do the exercises. Sirath enhances practices by assigning homework and giving them quizzes to do in class.

In Cambodia, since my time as a student during the 1990s, teachers in all subjects were required to give monthly tests to students at the end of each month for the students’ learning assessment. The students’ scores from all subjects were added up to find the average marks. The total scores are 10 and, if the scores are over 5, the students pass. As well, their monthly marks are displayed on the wall near the blackboard. This practice is still maintained in contemporary classes in Cambodia. Sirath is one of the teachers who takes advantage of that practice to push his students to study harder and to read more at home. Although he knows that probably all of his students will pass to the next grade, no matter what scores they get, he still offers tests and quizzes, as well as punishing them by
taking marks off if they do not answer the questions correctly. That way, he believes he can at least control their learning performance.

In conclusion, all four of the teacher participants have faced two kinds of challenges in teaching reading in content areas, including inside and outside challenges. The inside challenges refer to those that have occurred in school and are still within the teachers’ control. Those challenges include: teaching large numbers of students who have reading difficulty, students’ lack of interest in reading/learning, inappropriate classroom settings, teaching material shortage, obligations to implement active learning pedagogies, and the requirement to cover the school curriculum. Outside challenges refer to those that have occurred due to the other forces outside the school and are beyond the teachers’ control. Those challenges include: lack of parental involvement in their children’s education, students’ family issues, the Ministry of Education’s policy to pass all students, and the level of difficulty of the new curriculum. Notwithstanding those challenges, all four teachers still try to overcome the challenges and are still able to teach their students learning to read and reading to learn.
Chapter 8
Findings (Responses to Sub-Research Question 4)

How Do the Teachers Understand Their Role(s) in Improving Curriculum Implementation in Content Area Reading?

Teachers in Cambodia in general, including the four teacher participants, have very restricted knowledge in understanding their roles and responsibilities in being involved in curriculum making. They seem to accept what is given to them regardless of the challenges they face, as it is a cultural practice in Cambodia to follow and accept what is handed down by top-level officials, and those in subordinate positions appreciate what is given and accept it without criticism. Even though the teachers accept the curriculum from the Ministry of Education, they still deal with great difficulty in the implementation of the curriculum due to the teaching time constraints, students’ low abilities, and the lack of instructional supports to implement the curriculum. Teachers still implement the curriculum in their own ways although they have limited pedagogical and content knowledge. Their perspectives on understanding their roles in curriculum making and curriculum implementation are presented with regards to each teacher participant’s voices in two key ideas relating to the teachers’ curricular roles as follows:

Curriculum Making (Teacher Agency)

Channa

According to Channa, teachers in Cambodia do not have input in designing their own curriculum and they also never take this into consideration. They never question or challenge the authority. Channa argued that, since she started teaching 10 years ago, she has never been involved in designing school curriculum nor has been asked to give opinions about how to improve school curriculum. She believes the curriculum designers are those from the Department of Education in the capital city. Channa also added that those people might have come to observe her class in order to see what the teachers are doing, what methods they use, and what they teach in order to provide designers with ideas to fashion the new curriculum. However, Channa was very doubtful about this and offered another conflicting idea—She said it does not work this way because Channa
acknowledged that, when there would be inspection or observation, she knew in advance and she was prepared to teach as well as possible in order to avoid poor judgment and have to improve her teaching evaluation. Channa added that those inspectors did not come to learn from the teachers—learning about their problems and what they need; instead, they come to inspect them and judge their teaching performance. It is more like inspection for an evaluation of the performance assessment rather than for improvement and constructive criticism.

Regarding the teachers’ input from the bottom-up to improve the curriculum, Channa concurred that she could bring any issues she has to the table and let the people at the cluster school know and they might bring it to the Ministry of Education. However, based on her experience, she has never seen any changes that have been made following the teachers’ comments. So, Channa has never bothered to try to make changes to the school curriculum or to make any suggestions. She just accepts what is given and her job is to come to teach every day. She firmly believes this is all that the teachers in Cambodia need in order to remain in the profession.

Neither Channa nor other teachers in Cambodia have ever had a chance to offer input into curriculum making. It seems she has taken this curriculum design and practice for granted—she acknowledged that she believes that the curriculum should be created and given to her rather than asking her to help create one. Channa seemed to have trouble responding to the inquiry about being involved in curriculum design and implementation. She seems to accept the status quo—what is delivered to her from the Ministry is acceptable because it has been in practice that way for so many years already and everybody accepts it, so she may as well, too. When asked if she had a chance to be involved in curriculum design, she is humble about it. Instead, she responded that: If I were a part within the Ministry’s committee to design the curriculum, I would follow them and agree with them because I cannot just follow my ideas. Channa is accustomed to this way of curriculum making and she has accepted it.

**Sophea**

Sophea is another teacher who has difficulty expressing her opinions about her role in curriculum making because she has never thought about it. Due to the power-relationship in Cambodia, the subordinates are supposed to listen to and take and apply
what is given by the leaders. This cultural norm has made it hard for Sophea to answer my questions and to understand the questions regarding having imagined herself to be a part of the curriculum design team. It is challenging to ask Sophea to give her point of view about how she would change the curriculum if she had a chance to do so.

From her previous comments on the effectiveness and the challenges in teaching reading in content areas, she is not satisfied with the imposed teaching methods and the new curriculum; however, she expressed that she would not want to change what is given to her to teach and she would still follow the curriculum from the Ministry of Education. The absence of being critical and challenging the authority of power holders in Cambodia has been rooted for so long in Cambodian society that it becomes an issue because the teachers are treated as subordinates without power and they are supposed to do what they are asked to do. Thus, the teachers seem to be amenable to that practice by taking it for granted and leaving it the way it is without question. Even now, they have come to appreciate it. Sophea is also one of teachers who accepts this practice by stating that, “I never go anywhere and I do not learn or know anything new, so I do not know. I do not have any methods to contribute as an input for the Ministry and I do not think about it.”

Sophea accepts the Ministry of Education as superior and their opinions as what she needs to follow because they have “better” knowledge than she. She expressed that:

Although they give me power to do so [to create and to change the curriculum], I cannot do it or make the decision myself. We have to listen to them. If we do things alone, it is not fine. I am afraid that it is different from others. We have to follow them… other teachers also teach following that [methods/lessons in textbook] too, so we have to follow the majority of opinions more than the least one. If they ask me to do student-centered approaches, I would follow what they tell me to do.

Sophea seems not to give value to her own methods and what she has gained throughout her experience. She believes that her general knowledge about content and methods is so limited that she could not have valuable input into the curriculum making. The reason for this is that Sophea is not used to being offered an opportunity to express her opinions regarding her teaching practices; instead, she is used to being told what to do.
Dara

Dara, in Cibo School, a different school from Channa and Sophea’s, expressed the same comment that she has never been asked to give opinions on what she would include in the curriculum and what to take out in order to improve it. Dara claimed that the contents in the curriculum are already decided by top-level officials at the head of the Department of Education. They are the ones who decide the numbers of lessons and the contents that should be included. Dara wishes she would be asked for her opinions to improve the newly published curriculum. She has a lot of criticism regarding the school curriculum, including contents, methods, and teaching time. Dara added that she has a lot of difficulty in understanding new vocabulary included in the textbook contents and, additionally, she is not well supported because she is not able to find the explanations of the words in the textbook or in the teacher guidebook. Dara is one of the teachers who seems to be an activist in willing to assist in improving school curriculum, although she does not have a chance to be involved in curriculum making. Dara stated that:

If they asked me, I would give them some suggestions to improve the new curriculum because I have a lot of difficulty in understanding the contents in the new curriculum myself. So, how about the students? There are a lot of spelling errors in the reading texts and strange new words. And they do not give us definitions in the glossary or add any explanation in the endnotes. If not, it is hard for teachers to explain them to the students. Or, they want us to do research? No way! We do not have time to do further research. We cannot do more research to explain to the students. Also, the glossary at the end of the textbook is not helpful since there too few words that are defined and they give definitions of the same words over and over again from lesson to lesson. The difficult words that are supposed to be there are not there. They define and explain mostly the easy words. They should provide more explanations of difficult words. And also the lessons are not clearly sectioned. They are very confusing. For example, reading texts in history lessons were placed in the wrong orders. It is hard to follow. The lessons should be in the right chronological order to make our life a little easier.

Dara is certain that the Ministry of Education would not offer a chance for teachers to be involved in curriculum making. Thus, she has never even thought about it before she was interviewed for this research; and she claims that other teachers in Cambodia, including herself, have developed an understanding and expectation that the curriculum should be created by someone else at the top level and handed down to them. They admit and see themselves as only the practitioners and implementers without any
significant voice for making any changes in the curriculum. According to Dara, teachers are only the curriculum implementers and the teachers are blamed if the students do not learn or if they do not follow their assigned methods.

Dara argued that, if she could have a chance to be involved in the curriculum making, she would wish to make some comments and suggestions for the Ministry of Education and the curriculum makers as follows:

The lessons in the new curriculum [new textbook] are more difficult compared to the learning level of students. So I prefer they use the old curriculum—the same lessons as in the old textbook. Also, in terms of teaching methods [student-centered approaches], I want it to be clear. I want people from the Ministry of Education to come and teach the teachers directly about the methods—how to teach lessons clearly. Right now, it is unclear for me. I just learned the methods to teach by using student-centered approaches following what is taught by the head of the cluster school. They teach according to what they learn, too. Their understanding is not complete. And then they teach us… so… the trainers might get only 80 percent and then they might deliver what they learned for only 60 percent to the head of the cluster school. So, how much percentage that the head of the cluster school gets, and then how much percentage left they might have and continue to deliver it to us? So, it is not good that it is passed to us through many stages. I just want them [the trainers] to come and teach us directly about all the practical methods [how to teach] involving student-centered approaches. And, within this short teaching time that they give, I want them to come and teach us one lesson [reading in Khmer studies] as a model for us—how they would teach it, and how they would prepare the teaching materials, etc.

Overall, Dara believes that it is a good idea to listen to teachers’ problems when they create new curriculum because she has many suggestions to make and she wants to see the improvement in the new curriculum, if they design another one.

Sirath

Sirath has added similar and additional comments regarding the voices of teachers in the curriculum making. According to Sirath, the Ministry of Education is the only one who has the power to set up the school curriculum for all grades from Kindergarten to Grade 12. Since he started teaching, he has never been asked for any ideas or suggestions from the curriculum makers to produce good and productive curriculum based on what the teachers need. Those people just create and write the curriculum according to the ways they want, according to Sirath. He is not satisfied with his current, new curriculum that is designed by someone else, not by the teachers. He expressed that the committee of
the curriculum designers are not honourable and trustworthy. The names of curriculum designers printed on the textbook of the national curriculum are those of the top-level ministers in the Ministry of Education Department; however, they are not the ones who actually design the curriculum. Instead, someone else whose name is not revealed designs the curriculum. Those big ministers only put their name on the textbook, but they do not even check the quality and contents of the textbook before its publication. That is why the textbook has a lot of lexical and spelling mistakes.

Due to the mistakes made in the textbook and the difficulty that Sirath has in understanding the curriculum, he wishes to change the contents of the curriculum according to the current situation of his students and the country. He believes this would be a good idea and helpful for his teaching of reading in content areas because he then would have the power to change the lessons in the textbook to make his students more interested in the lessons. For example, there is one reading lesson called “The Awaking Prompts of Oum Seam.” If possible, he would replace this lesson by another reading article about the current land conflict in Boeung Kak area. The lesson “Awaking Prompts of Oum Seam” is related to selling land and environmental topics, but Sirath thinks it is more educational and interesting for his students to learn about the current land conflict in the Boeung Kak area because it is a hot political topic in Cambodia about social injustices. However, Sirath acknowledged that he is just a teacher and he has no power and is not allowed to substitute lessons. Sirath stated that it seems very dangerous, although the top authority does not call the teachers to blame directly if the teachers change the content of the lessons. At the beginning, the principal and the principal of the cluster school warned the teachers to follow what is in the curriculum and they would not support them to make any changes.

Sirath believes it is important to improve teaching and learning by giving a chance to schoolteachers to be involved in curriculum design. For example, Sirath stated that:

To design the school curriculum, it has to be through all the teachers in charge in all provinces. They have to create workshops in each province, like in Battambang province, and then they select teachers in the provinces to join the workshop at the national level for designing the school curriculum program for elementary school and also lower secondary school. The workshop allows them to be able to give comments and opinions regarding the school curriculum design.
And they can make the decision of what to include and what to exclude… And the textbook should have some changes. We should prepare to add more meanings to the texts. And the articles that are not important, we should take them out. Instead, we add articles that are important for students.

In general, Sirath seems to have a lot of thoughts in mind about changing and improving the school curriculum. He wants his students to learn new things and different lessons based on their grade and ability level.

Teachers in Cambodia do not have a chance to design their own curriculum. The curriculum has been given to them from the top down by the Ministry of Education. The curriculum is often updated every two years, and the teachers are not notified regarding the changes. As well, the teachers have to accept those changes immediately and apply the new curriculum without further support with training and with the teacher guidebook. Teachers in Cambodia seem unable to control their own teaching because the curriculum has already been set for them. They seem to accept what is given as good curriculum because they believe that they do not have enough knowledge, power or agency for change. They believe the Ministry staff, who are the curriculum makers, are better in terms of knowledge of content and pedagogy. To them, the people who design the curriculum are more educated, so what they give to them to teach is fine and acceptable.

Curriculum Implementation

Channa

Channa is one teacher who expressed similar practices and concerns. Channa seems to give conflicted points of views regarding having a voice in curriculum making and being the sole implementer of curriculum. She never imagined herself taking part in curriculum design or making any changes to the curriculum; however, she acknowledged that she did not like the new curriculum that was already made for her for couples of reasons. The amount of lessons to be covered is too much in such a short teaching time. The level of difficulty of the curriculum is beyond the students’ learning abilities. The lessons and stories are not in order and it is hard to follow, and there is no step-by-step instruction guides to help her. Channa seems to dislike the school curriculum because there is no teacher guidebook for her. Other than that, she seems to be well adjusted to
what is given to her, and she has accepted making her own ways of implementing the curriculum.

Due to the circumstance that Channa did not have a chance to make an impact on the curriculum design, which has been acceptable for her and other teachers for so many years, Channa has applied her own method of curriculum implementation. When teaching any lessons, including reading in content areas, Channa often finishes them by asking students to create a lesson summary because, in this way, she believes that her students can learn from the lesson summary and it is the quickest way to make her students learn in a short time so that she can deal with the time constraint to finish the lessons according to the school curriculum. Regarding the implementation of the new curriculum with its higher level of difficulty and without a teacher guidebook, she consulted the old textbook and, if the lessons were similar to those in the old textbook, she would replicate them so that it would be easier for her students to understand. And, if she has any problems with understanding the contents or vocabulary in the new textbook, she seeks for advice from her fellow teachers. These practices seem to be working for her on a daily basis without her having to make any complaints or challenge the authority of the Ministry to make a change to the curriculum.

**Sophea**

For Sophea, she seems to have a lot of challenges in expressing her thoughts on curriculum implementation—how she would implement the curriculum that is given to her by the Ministry of Education. She acknowledged that it is her first time being asking about curriculum implementation. She had never thought about it because she just thinks about coming to class and teaching. Sophea has been familiar with daily teaching methods that she has used for so many years, and she teaches by following the same methods, largely because Sophea does not see a huge difference between student-centered approaches and teacher-centered approaches, aside from dividing students to work in groups and asking students questions.

Other than dealing with students who have difficulty in reading, Sophea seems not to have any complaint regarding curriculum implementation. She stated that, because her teaching is not being observed every day, she has room to implement her own teacher-centered approaches, rote learning and memorization methods, and teachers’
explanations much more than mandated student-centered approaches. In that way, she believes her students learn better. Sophea also stated that she has been teaching in the same school, working with the same teachers almost her entire career and her professional development is very limited. She claimed that she does not have enough knowledge in terms of teaching methods, especially teaching reading in content areas. Thus, she does not have a lot input to help improve curriculum implementation, except by applying the traditional methods such as rote learning because it has been working from her generation until now. Thus, she prefers to have additional and new teaching methods given by the Ministry of Education.

Even though the lessons in new textbook are longer and the contents are more difficult, Sophea claims that she is flexible in terms of adjusting the lessons she would teach—she takes out or skips some lessons that are less important to spend more time on teaching the lessons that she believes are more important. Also, another distinct practice that she has accomplished is to bring the curriculum from outside to insert into her own teaching without notifying her principal, and she finds her students like the new curriculum—her “mind educating lesson.”

**Dara**

Similar to Sophea, Dara accepts and believes that the teachers are only the curriculum practitioners—meaning they should take and implement what is given by the Ministry of Education. Dara acknowledged that she just follows the curriculum that is in the textbook and she has never added any texts outside of the textbook. According to Dara, the reasons for this is: first, the additional lessons (texts) would cause delay in completing the school curriculum; second, she used to receive objections and complaints from students’ parents for adding content outside of the textbook. Parents do not welcome new content; instead they blame the teachers because they want their children to learn and know only what is included in the textbook. Those are the main reasons Dara has never searched for other texts from her own source to be added to her teaching of reading in content areas. Unlike other teachers, for Dara, when implementing school curriculum, she has always tried her best to summarize or include all the content lessons in her teaching and has tried to avoid skipping or taking out any lessons from the curriculum.
Dara is more flexible in implementing the teaching methods in her teaching of reading in content areas although she is required to implement only student-centered approaches. Dara suggested that besides student-centered approaches, the Ministry should also encourage or allow teachers to implement methods like step-by-step instructions presented in the old teacher guidebook from the Rath Kampuchea regime. In addition to these methods, the old teacher guidebook also includes other informative lessons for both students and teachers. In the reading lessons, they also included vocabulary instruction, explanations, antonyms, synonyms, and words with similar sounds (homophone). However, those informative methods and lessons are not included in the new textbook. Thus, Dara admitted that, on top of implementing student centered approaches such as working in groups and asking students questions, she also picks and chooses the good methods and lessons from old textbooks and teacher guidebooks to be included in her teaching instructions, based on her students’ actual learning level, and she noticed that her students learn better.

Dara suggested that, in order to implement student-centered approaches with a huge number of lessons to be covered, the Ministry should allocate more time for teaching reading in content areas. Dara has learned from the Overseas Teacher Training Program that teachers need at least eight hours in order to teach one reading lesson. However, she is offered only one hour to teach a lesson, including those of Khmer studies and social studies subjects.

**Sirath**

Sirath is also another teacher who similarly claims that, even though the teachers are required to implement student-centered approaches, the teachers still have room to implements their own methods. When mentioning this flexibility in pedagogy implementation, Sirath seems not to be confident and sure about this. It seems that he is more supportive of the methods given by the Ministry of Education than in his own methods. He admitted that he followed the methods and lessons from the Ministry but also, at the same time, he selects reading exercises and questions from the old teacher guidebook to include in his instruction because the questions given in the new textbook are not enough and they are not as informative as the ones in the old textbook. Also, in
some lessons, he created his own questions to ask the students in order to get them to learn the contents.

Teachers are required to teach all the lessons included in the curriculum and they are not allowed to cut or skip any lesson, yet they still have to finish all the lessons at the end of the school year; but, according to Sirath, he has to skip certain lessons because those lessons are too hard to understand. He acknowledged that even he, as a teacher, finds those lessons, including the reading text itself, hard to understand and to find the main ideas. Thus, he has to take out those lessons. Sirath claims that, regarding the implementation of the curriculum including teaching instructions, his school principal is not too strict in checking on every teacher to ensure they follow what they are required to do. The school principal rarely comes to visit his class; sometimes, she visits once or twice a year. She does not put a lot of pressure on him. Instead, there are sometimes inspectors outside of the school coming to observe his class once or twice a year in order to check the quality of the curriculum implementation.

It seems that Sirath is one of the teachers who appreciates the quality of education and teaching, although he is not satisfied and complains about the contemporary inspection that is created in order to help check and improve the quality of curriculum implementation. He states that:

The inspection is not helping teachers in terms of curriculum implementation; instead, they come to inspect us, criticize our teaching and blame us. The knowledge and the ability of teachers in Cambodia are very limited and we need quality inspection to help us with our knowledge and the implementation of the curriculum. Oftentimes, before they come, the principal knows and she notifies us in advance. So, we are always well prepared and we have lesson plans following the five teaching steps. We show them what they want to see. I did not get anything from them. Our teaching is still the same after they leave. There is no quality check of anything like that afterward. Also, the problem is that the inspection now is not independent as before. In the past, inspection was an independent entity. They inspected teachers and helped improve their teaching. If the teachers’ instructions were poor, they would blame the Department of Education because they did not do their job. All of us, including the Department of Education were afraid because we were under the inspection department. So, we, all, worked so hard at that time to improve the quality of education. However, now, the inspectors have lower pay and they work under the Department of Education. So it is not helping… Nobody helps us improve the quality of our knowledge and the implementation of the curriculum.
According to Sirath, teachers in Cambodia are required to implement the curriculum offered from the top-level department but they do not receive enough support to check the quality of the implementation and additional professional development for quality improvement. In addition, the Ministry of Education imposed new student-centered pedagogies for all the teachers in Cambodia to implement, but they did not provide supporting materials to help with the implementation. Also the Ministry even makes the lessons longer with more difficult content without teachers’ guidebooks to give teachers more information to help them with their step-by-step instruction and the explanation of the lessons. Sirath finds the teacher guidebook helpful and makes his teaching easier because, within the teacher guidebook, it provides information about the lessons’ objectives, hours of teaching, teaching materials, questions to ask students, vocabulary definitions, and additional texts and references related to the lessons.

Similar to other teachers, Sirath is concerned that the teaching time constraint is an issue in curriculum implementation. The reason is that the contents in the reading texts are more difficult and the length of the texts is getting longer. Thus, Sirath has to adjust his own schedule in order to implement the curriculum. He has to skip some lessons that are least important by explaining only half of the lessons to his students, using traditional teacher-centered approaches, and moving faster in order to finish all the lessons. If Sirath were given a chance to offer suggestions to the Ministry of Education in order to improve curriculum implementation, he would suggest having additional specialized methods for teaching reading in content areas to help improve their teaching of reading instructions, because a lot of his students are having more difficulty with reading and writing.

In conclusion, it is a new concept for the four teacher participants regarding taking part in curriculum making and curriculum design. They are accustomed to the idea that teachers are only the curriculum implementers and the curriculum should be designed by better-educated people at the Ministry level. However, they are not fully satisfied with the curriculum given to them because they face a lot of challenges including teaching time constraint, difficult contents, lengthy texts, and the lack of supports around teaching methods. Regardless of those challenges, they all still manage to implement the curriculum successfully according to their own ways, including seeking
help from other teacher guidebooks and from other teachers, and summarizing the lessons so that they finish all the lessons according to the school curriculum.

Teachers in Cambodia have taken for granted and accepted the current practice of curriculum implementation for many years. They have rarely complained or reported to the principal about their obstacles and what they do not like about the curriculum. They just take all the issues that they face and try to adjust the teaching schedule and methods on their own.
Chapter 9
The Analysis and Reflections

In this section, I have analyzed the data within the findings section and have identified common issue(s) within the experience of each participant. Each issue will be presented and discussed based on my own reflections and experiences, as well as relevant research literature.

Sub-Research Question 1: The Great Impact of Memorization and Rote Learning on Reading and Teaching Reading in Content Areas

“Rote learning” is a mechanical way of learning where the subject disregards meaning and makes no attempts at understanding or organizing the material.

Björgen (1964, p. 11)

According to the findings in this section, the four teacher participants’ understanding and knowledge about reading is very basic and technical, yet it is lacking the critical element of it, which is reading beyond the understanding of texts as a survival skill in order to read information in a textual society. The teachers understand that reading is for getting meanings from texts and knowing what is written in the public places in order to communicate with other people. However, reading is beyond the words yet it is also about reading the world (Freire, 1983). Within Grades 5 and 6, reading (reading in content areas) should go beyond reading for decoding skills and reading for answering the factual information. For instance, according to Dupuis and Askov (1982):

Some definitions of reading focus on decoding, a lower level process of calling out words or sounds. Decoding is a necessary process, but it is not sufficient. Reading must extend into the higher levels on all three hierarchies [cognitive, affective, and psychomotor] in order for teachers to be satisfied that a reader is fluent, the usual term for a mature reader. (p. 19)

Hence, when reading in content areas, the readers should be able to think through, question, analyze, critique (being critical about what he/she reads), and interpret what is being read by relating the text to her/his previous experience in order to understand it better and to apply it later on in her/his everyday life encounters. Freire (1985) stated:

We must try to read the context of a text and also relate it to the context in which we are reading the text. And so reading is not so simple. Reading mediates knowledge and it is also knowing because language is knowledge and not just...
mediating of knowledge… Reading is more than a technical event for me. It is that [which] takes my conscious body into action. (p. 19)

There is also an absence of professional development in terms of specialized reading methods (methodologies for specific teaching of reading in content areas) offered to teachers, especially upper elementary school teachers because they have just started teaching their students more expository texts. The teachers could not distinguish the reading to learn/reading literature from reading in content areas. Thus, they believe that there is only one type of reading, which is “reading”—meaning both “learning to read” and “reading to learn.”

The Ministry of Education has tried to promote only one general teaching method (student-centered and active learning pedagogy) in all public schools in Cambodia and the teachers have to implement active learning pedagogies in all of their lessons from reading lessons (Khmer Studies) to Mathematics. These pedagogies originated from constructivist developmental theory, which means learners construct their own meaning/understanding of what they learn (Mascolo, 2009). And, the teaching methods try to promote “minimal teacher lecturing or direct transmission of factual knowledge, multiple small group activities that engage students in discovery learning or problem solving, and frequent student questions and discussion” (Leu & Price-Rom, 2006, p. 19).

However, past Cambodian educational practices (rote learning and memorization) have strongly influenced the present system of education. The oral transmission of knowledge is the traditional Buddhist way of teaching and it is still very influential in the Cambodian classroom practice during the teachers’ general education up to the present (Albatch & Umakoshi, 2004). Rote learning is widespread; that is why the four teacher participants have carried this experience and practice into their classroom regardless of new concepts and methods of teaching reading that have been introduced. This comment is supported by UNICEF’s educational report published in 2003:

Scaling up the Child-Friendly School approach enables Cambodia to adjust traditional teaching methods to more child-centred and child-friendly teaching and learning practices, laying an educational foundation in which children are stimulated and equipped with the necessary critical thinking skills that will influence future potential. Even though good progress has been made, learning by rote, in which children are taught to merely repeat after their teachers without understanding context, still continues to be practiced. (UNICEF, 2003, p. 2)
The traditional form of teaching and learning “rote learning, memorization, and recitation” is still encouraged in Cambodia, especially when teaching reading in particular. There are a few reasons behind this. First, it has been a long historical practice and a basic understanding of Cambodian people in general, as well as among teachers and parents, that “reading” means “Rien Sot” in the Khmer language meaning—“learning and reciting”—they should go together. It can be inferred that the traditional methods for teaching and learning reading still strongly remain in today classrooms despite the promotion and implementation of new active learning pedagogies, in which their purpose is to promote critical engagement among students in their own learning rather than acting as a direct receiver of knowledge through recitation. “Rien Sot” embodies the totally opposite meaning of critical engagement/thinking in reading and learning, which make it very difficult for teachers and learners. Thus, although the teachers practice active learning pedagogies, they only superficially and partially implement the activities within the approaches (asking students questions and putting them to work in pairs or in groups).

As a result, to ensure that their students understand the reading texts, the teachers assess their learning outcomes by testing—if they are able to correctly (reciting, verbatim) answer the test questions. The students’ assessment often takes place once a month for all subject areas including reading (Khmer Studies subject) and mathematics. The best answers to the test questions are considered similar or the same words/sentences as in the texts (lessons) that the students learn and read. Even though the students have the best answers, it does not assure that they understand the reading lessons. The teachers still believe that if their students are able to answer the test questions verbatim, they understand the lessons. However, according Björgen (1964):

> When having to learn the material, which is difficult to understand, the pupil may instead try to learn by heart. Somehow, this learning may satisfy the criterion of, for instance, perfect recall, apparently without understanding and meaningful organization of the material. Learning by heart in this sense seems to be accepted as an alternative way of learning. (p. 11)

This argument might be true. It might be an alternative way of learning for students because they might not understand the texts they read/learn and once it comes to completing the tests, they would have no choice other than learning by heart for a perfect
recall. It could also be implied that the teachers’ instructions are not effective and the students do not understand the reading materials; that is why it is required that they should learn the lessons by heart because they do not learn them in class. It appears to me that the appreciation of the students’ learning success is measured by the results of their test scores. Thus, in order to achieve this goal, the teachers promote rote learning and memorization methods in order for the students to complete tests verbatim, based on the texts they learn in class. And, the teachers also validate the answers that are more closely aligned with the sentences in the texts. For instance, when having asked students to orally summarize a lesson, most of the students only recalled exactly the same sentences from the reading text. The teacher (Sirath) accepted that way as to how a lesson summary should be done. He did not even correct the students’ understanding of a lesson summary, which is not a direct recitation. This practice is one example to show how the traditional ways of learning reading by perfect recall of what one has read or a direct recitation still remains in today’s classroom practices. The early grades, the way the Khmer language is taught is also through repetitive methods. There exist a previous research study in Cambodia that reported:

Classroom observations showed that pupils were taught Khmer through repetition. There was oral repetition through the pupil listening and copying sounds and visual repetition through copying of letters…copying and repetition were the main strategies used for teaching literacy. Teachers used repetition and reinforcement as the most important teaching strategy. (Courtney & Gravelle, 2014, p. 418)

That is why the students are used to the methods of ‘copying and repeating’ in order to remember words and sentences.

According to the teachers’ responses, along with the introduction of the new student-centered approaches, the Ministry also introduced a new form of test questions (multiple choice questions); however, the teachers claimed that this new kind may hinder students’ thinking abilities because the correct responses are already included in the multiple choices, and the questions are mostly direct questions. The answers are very straightforward because the students could easily get the answers from the text(s) because the questions are selected from the textbooks. There was research conducted by IDSSC (2006), which reported that teachers frequently copy/follow what is written in the textbooks, including questions to ask students and their instructional methods. Thus, this
kind of new assessment additionally promotes rote learning and inhibits learners’ critical thinking skills.

Teachers’ past experience and beliefs do affect their selection of the instructions to teach reading. I also have a similar experience to the four teachers when I was taught reading during my K-12 general education. And, once I became a teacher, I also believed that rote learning and memorization was the best way for learning and teaching reading in content areas. Learning in class is to learn to read words and sentences/texts aloud and to answer teachers’ questions; and, then, the main thing is to listen to the teachers’ explanation of the texts (the lessons) because the teachers are the masters and the only source of knowledge. The students take notes of what the teachers said so that they can quote or copy them when answering questions. The most important thing is to learn by heart in order to remember sentences in texts, importantly the sentences that the teachers use in their explanations. The purpose for doing this is to answer every test question at the end of each month. I also perceived this practice as an issue of a power hierarchy between teachers and students. When doing the assessment (answering questions), students try to imitate words/statements used by the teachers or in their textbooks because they are afraid to go beyond the boundaries by using their own words/ideas. The teachers appear not to appreciate those ideas and they might give students lower scores. As a result, students might get below average scores and they might be looked upon as poorly performing students and may be required to repeat the grade. This is also a main reason why students are afraid of their teachers and try to follow everything the teachers say or what is written in textbooks as a norm.

Additionally, during the teacher education program, I could also associate my own experience with what the teachers have mentioned about their experience during the teacher training program. I had never been taught any specific methods for teaching students to take control of their own learning or to learn critical thinking skills when being taught reading or reading in content areas. Instead, I, similarly to other teachers, was taught to read lessons and to learn by heart in order to complete test questions at the end of the month. The teachers and teacher trainers still have a strong belief that learning is about ‘delivering knowledge’ from the teachers to students and reading is about remembering what is said in the texts.
Almost every one of the student teachers at the teacher training school practiced this “old way” of reading and learning because they wanted to pass the tests in order to get better marks when they exited the programs. The teacher trainers at the Teacher Training Center also appreciated the verbatim responses from their students. Therefore, from my own experience at the Teacher Training Center, I understand the reasons why the teacher participants still believe and practice rote learning and memorization because it has been rooted for so long in Cambodian education. They also still understand and promote rote learning/recitation and reading for memorization in teaching reading in content areas due to all of those preferred practices in K-12 schooling and in the teacher training school that still keep teachers in that traditional zone.

Sub-Research Question 2: The Confusion between Teaching Methods and Their Ineffectiveness

Let me distill what I have come to believe are the key ingredients of learner-centered teaching. It is teaching focused on learning—what the students are doing is the central concern of the teacher. Being “focused on learning” is easily understood at a superficial level, but its delineation reveals more details and intricacies. (Weimer, 2013, p. 15)

From the findings, the teacher participants seem to be confused and are unable to offer any specific methods that they have used or have been trained to use in teaching reading in content areas. The only methods or teaching approaches that they know of are student-centered pedagogies and teacher-centered pedagogies. Teacher-centeredness is very well documented as the most popular and predominant methodology that is widely used in almost all Cambodian classrooms (Geeves, Chin, Kuoy, Ly, Song, & Tran, 2002; CESSP, 2006). However, the four teacher participants in this study claimed to implement mixed methods (active learning and passive learning pedagogies), even though it is mandatory for them to only employ active learning pedagogies in all of their teaching lessons, including reading in content areas. The use of mixed methods is still ineffective and it promotes numerous issues regarding passive learning—students are still the passive knowledge receivers.

I explain this issue based on my reflections and interpretations grounded in my own experience as a teacher in Cambodia for many years. I was in the Teacher Training
Center during the time period similar to Channa’s and, during that time (in 2000), student-centered pedagogies were first introduced in the pre-service teacher education program. However, because it was the first time it was introduced and the teacher trainers, as well as the student teachers, were still strongly influenced by teacher-centered pedagogies, the teacher trainers were still promoting the old methods on top of the introduction of new methods. The promotion and introduction of student-centered approaches had been put into practice only through asking students questions and arranging students to work in pairs or in groups, along with questions for them to find/locate answers from the textbooks.

During this teacher-training period, student teachers also needed to complete monthly tests in order to get good marks for securing a teaching position after they graduated. In Cambodia, a teaching position is guaranteed to all the student teachers after their graduation. Positions are ranked from the best and most popular schools in the city to the less popular ones in the rural areas. Thus, student teachers competed to get good marks in order to select the best open post in the city. The issue of a “power hierarchy” occurs in teacher education programs. The trainers hold the power authority and they are the ones who control the classroom and the student teachers’ test scores. To receive good marks from their teacher trainers, pre-service teachers are good followers and good listeners. The trainers were still promoting traditional ways of teaching and learning—students listening to and copying the teacher trainers’ explanations. During the tests, the trainers appreciated the answers the students chose from their explanations. The image of the teacher in the classroom is still one of the master of knowledge, and the hierarchy in the classrooms (in the teacher training school and K-12) is still very apparent.

This experience that these teachers and I, have gained during K-12 education and subsequent teacher education became significantly entrenched in our practice. This is going to last for a really long time during one’s entire teaching career, even though the new approaches of student-centered have been introduced. When I first came into the teaching profession, I was supportive of the old traditional ways of teaching, including corporal punishment, because I used to believe that students should be disciplined and forced to learn; otherwise, they would not learn and that the students also have to strictly respect and listen to their teachers in order to force themselves to learn. This was a strong
belief about teaching and teaching reading that I had believed in for a very long time, ever since I was a student, until I became a teacher. When I came to study my Master of Education in the U.S, I came to realize a new perspective through learning different teaching and learning theories. Since then, my perspectives on methods of teaching and learning have changed. I started to believe that students should be given an opportunity to explore their own learning that would lead to the promotion of their own critical thinking/problem-solving skills and creativity skills.

Thus, from my own experience and from my reflection/interpretation on the data given by the teacher participants, the teachers are confused between the two methods of student- and teacher-centered pedagogies. Even though they acknowledged that they promote students’ thinking and understanding, as well as accepting students’ different responses from the textbooks, they still hold the belief that students should be forced to learn and follow a certain set standard of knowledge; otherwise they will not learn. Their beliefs in the best practice of students’ learning to read in content areas are: being able to answer the teachers’ questions correctly, being able to complete the test questions correctly (mostly following what is written in the textbooks or the teachers’ remarks during their explanations), and the higher performing students are not supposed to create their own questions to challenge the teachers.

The classroom is still power-controlled by the teachers, based on my own classroom observations during the data collection period. Regardless of the requirement in implementing student-centered approaches, the teachers do not fully understand the new active learning pedagogies. They are not aware of the theories behind the pedagogies—what the purposes are or what the students’ roles are, or even what their roles are. There is a lack of professional development that could fully train teachers to understand the student-centered approaches in detail, so that they could better practice them.

According to the teachers’ comments and my own previous experience as a teacher, it appears that the old teacher-led approaches work better for teaching any lessons, especially reading in content areas. The reason is that, during our K-12 education, the students had no access to textbooks (there was no textbook publication); only the teachers had their own reference lesson-books. The teachers came to class and
copied the lessons on the board for the students to copy. Besides learning reading, the students also learned the spelling of words because they had to copy the entire lesson that the teachers wrote on the board. Then, the teachers also questioned students during the classroom instructions; for example, according to Dara, she believes student-centered methods already existed in the past in Cambodia. The methods are extremely similar to the methods that she used to know—“descriptions and conversations.” During that time, students often read more books (texts) at home because there were no textbooks on hand. The teachers assigned storybooks for students to read and they had to do it because these were related to their next-day lessons and to the tests. Different from today’s multiple-choice questions, the test questions during that time required students to write long answers in the form of sentences and paragraphs. Even though they copied the answers from the teachers, I believe they may have included some of their own ideas because they were required to write long responses. This could promote their thinking abilities much better than learning to complete multiple-choice tests in the current classroom.

As a result, the incorrect use of active learning or student-centered approaches in teaching, including teaching reading in content areas, causes ineffectiveness in teaching practices. In 2000, in order to help improve the educational system in Cambodia, basically to increase the retention and enrollment rate in Grade 1 and the subsequent grades in primary school, the Ministry of Education has begun to implement the concept of “Child Friendly Schools” and the adoption of new “student-centered” teaching and learning pedagogies (Bunlay et al., 2010). With the assistance and supports from USAID and UNICEF, the Ministry of Education has developed new textbooks and the teacher guidebook (curriculum) for the student-centered pedagogies. In theory, they have tried to promote competency-based education through the implementation of student-centered approaches/activities that would impact all the 1-9 grades in all 24 provinces, 18 provincial teacher training colleges, and six regional training colleges (Bunlay et al., 2010). The teacher guidebook is the main resource for the curriculum that almost all the teachers in Cambodia depend on. And, they believe that this book is the main curriculum that would help them implement student-centered approaches. However, I analyzed the teacher guidebook and found out that it is the prescribed curriculum with a certain set of guidelines, including questions that teachers have to follow/use to ask their students. The
teacher guidebook provides the informative teaching guidelines for each lesson, as revealed by the following:

1. The objectives of the lesson
2. The teaching materials
3. The ways to teach the lesson
   3.1 Time frame that the teacher should teach the lesson—(one, two or three times)
   3.2 Methods: the pictures or other suggested teaching materials that the teachers should show to the students; the questions to ask the students with the possible answers given
   3.3 Additional information related to the lesson or the meaning of text in the lesson
4. Lesson summary: either teacher or students need to do the lesson summary at the end of each lesson
5. Assessment: teachers asking questions to students in order to review the lessons and assess the students—whether they understand the lesson or not; also suggesting that teachers bring the students to other sites for students to experience the real things after they learn the lessons
6. Additional documents for the teachers to read and research
7. Vocabulary definitions: giving the definitions of several difficult words presented in the text

This is an example of what is presented in the teacher guidebook that I (when I was a teacher), and the teacher participants rely on when it comes to teaching instructions. However, due to the limited professional capacity and professional development, limited resources (teaching materials), and cultural factors (top-down approach—teacher-centered teaching and learning), the teachers almost entirely follow these guidelines by putting students in pairs or in groups to answer the questions. They have thought that they have followed/implemented student-centered approaches. Even though, the guidelines suggest practical activities to take students outside the classroom in order to experience “real” things, the teachers do not have enough time and do not receive any support or accommodation to make these activities happen. Therefore, the instruction guidelines in the teacher guidebook remain a set of additional information for the teachers to follow like a prescribed curriculum that make their instructions similar and easier, even while it limits the teachers’ creativity and research.

The teachers become more limited in researching other documents and methods to help them improve their teaching. It is becoming even more passive because, in the past,
there was no teacher guidebook and teachers had to read more reference books to find more reading articles for their class and to create their own questions/methods for teaching. This traditional practice might be able to help expand the teachers’ creativity and critical thinking skills, with which they might be able to, later on, influence their students through their practices.

However, within these new practices regarding the implementation of student-centered approaches, the teachers are becoming more dependent on the teacher guidebook and, consequently, are becoming less creative and critical. The teachers have been trapped in the confusion between the two approaches of the influential teacher-centered approaches and the newly introduced student-centered approaches. The teachers are confused because they have thought that, by following the guidelines within the teacher guidebook, they were practicing active learning pedagogies and promoting the students’ involvement in their own learning. Instead, the teachers only followed the instructional norms and teaching activities that have already been set up for them and did not really promote student engagement in their own learning. Due to the time shortage in teaching each lesson, the teachers have to rush to finish the lessons by applying direct explanation or lecturing without arranging students to work in groups, which means the teachers still control the classroom instruction and they still perceive students as knowledge receivers.

Additionally, if the teachers place students to work in groups, the only activities the students are involved in are: answering direct questions and copying the answers from the text(s). Also, the students are not used to the group activities; what they do is merely find the answers and write them on a piece of paper to present to the teachers. This practice limits their creativity and critical thinking much more. In the past, there were fewer lessons to cover during the academic year, and there were no set standards or prescribed curriculum that teachers needed to follow. They had greater flexibility to do research for more reading articles for their class; thus, the teachers and students’ knowledge was not as restricted as with today’s curriculum.

Moreover, besides the huge practice of corporal punishment and rote learning, the traditional methods of “descriptions and conversations” that Dara described is pretty much similar to the current student-centered approaches that the teachers implement.
According to Dara, with “descriptions and conversations” approaches, teachers still involve students in their own learning through asking questions and having students complete exercises. Then students share their responses by writing them on the board. Students, in return, can also ask their teachers questions if they do not understand the lessons. Thus, the student-centered and active learning pedagogies are like the new names of “descriptions and conversations” that have been reinforced and practiced in Cambodia in the past.

Senior and current/novice teachers in Cambodia still support the four pillars of learning, which are “remembering, knowing, reflecting, and applying” that learners should study in the classroom. There is no element of “critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, and creativity” within the aims and the objectives of learning that are understood and promoted by the teachers. The aims and purposes of active learning or student-centered approaches are the opposite, namely using open-ended and challenging questions in order to develop problem solving and critical thinking skills, as well as creativity. Learners should not only learn by remembering the texts; instead, teachers have to involve students in simulation and role-plays by using cooperative (team-based) learning (Collins & O’Brien, 2003).

The teacher participants expressed that they were neither aware of nor trained in anything related to educational theories in which active learning and student-centered approaches are grounded. They also argued that Cambodian pre-service and in-service trainers have very limited knowledge about these approaches. The in-service training is very indirect because it is delivered by the school principal, which teachers claimed to be relatively ineffective.

According to Weimer (2013), student-centered teaching and learning were developed, based on several educational theories such as attribution theory and self-efficacy, radical and critical theory, feminist theory, constructivism theory, and transformative learning. Attribution theory and self-efficacy has to do with the beliefs that one has about his or her ability to do the work—whether or not it will be a success or a failure. Critical theory is based on the work of Freire (1970) and is about education for social change. Within this theory, the term “education” itself is elaborated upon by Stage, Muller, Kinzie, and Simmons (1998), as follows, “Education’s role is to challenge
inequality and dominant myths rather than socialize students into the status quo. Learning is directed toward social change and transforming the world, and the ‘true’ learning empowers students to challenge oppression in their lives.” (p. 57). Through student-centered and active learning pedagogies, critical theory promotes students’ active engagement in their own learning, and to become empowered to take control of their own learning, in which the power in the classroom is shifted from the teachers to the students (Weimer, 2013). Also, **radical theory** comes to question “the role of teacher authority in student learning experiences and one that challenges teachers to explore ethically responsible ways of sharing power with students… Radical theory is about changing the power dynamic in the classroom for the benefit of students and learning” (Weimer, 2013, p. 19).

*Feminist theory*, like radical theory, claims that the power in the classroom belongs to the teachers. This theory challenges the teachers to be less authoritarian and act as facilitators of learning for the advantage of students, especially females. **Constructivism theory** approaches “emphasize the learners’ actively constructing their own knowledge rather than passively receiving information transmitted to them from teachers and textbooks. From a constructivist perspective, knowledge cannot simply be given to students: Students must construct their own meanings” (Stage, Muller, Kinzie, & Simmons 1998, p. 35). And lastly, **transformative learning** theory believes that learners can be transformed within a various range of areas through being more focused in their learning. Within student-centered approaches, students are encouraged to do more of the reflection, critique, and the development of self-awareness (Weimer, 2013). Also, Cranton (2006) has associated transformative learning with “learners constructing personal meaning and doing so through processes of examination, questioning, validating, and revising—what adult educators call critical reflection” (p. 23).

What the teachers know about student-centered teaching and learning that is different from teacher-centered pedagogies are through certain activities such as: students are given a chance to be involved in their own learning rather than sitting in the classroom listening to the teachers explaining the lessons. According to the teachers, “being involved in learning” means students are supposed to listen to orders and to the teachers by answering the teachers’ questions, as well as working in pairs or in groups
when asked to do so. The teachers did not promote any features within the educational theories that active learning and student-centered pedagogies have tried to promote. Instead, the teachers keep perpetuating the old traditional ways of transmitting knowledge from teachers to students, which is an authoritarian way of teaching. Due to the lack of the professional development in general and, more particularly in specialized methods in teaching reading in content areas, along with the teachers’ very restricted knowledge in the understanding of mandatory student-centered approaches, the teachers in Cambodia are caught in the middle of two confusing and very totally different teaching approaches.

Besides, there are other issues that worsen the effectiveness in implementing practical and effective methods that teachers want to implement in order to help their students learn reading in content areas. Those factors include: the lack of support in terms of improving teaching methods and creating teaching materials in the school itself; very limited knowledge and the lack of research in developing the teachers’ own professional learning due to their supplementary jobs; and the mandatory and prescribed curriculum (textbook and guidelines that teachers need to follow). Due to the above reasons, the teachers end up practicing traditional teacher-centered approaches in their reading lessons, believing that they are implementing active learning pedagogies when following the teaching guidelines in the teacher guidebook. This makes the scope of teaching instruction very directed and controlled by top-down authority.

Another issue is that active learning and student-centered approaches are borrowed and brought in from a Western context. According to my literature search, theories and literature surrounding student-centered and active learning pedagogies are found in higher education theory, which is recommended for college and university level courses in the Western context. Learner-centered pedagogies have been suggested as a substitute for traditional lecture/teacher-lead pedagogies in recent years in college and university classes (Barber, 2007; Barrett, Bower & Donovan, 2007; Laverie, 2006; Lord, 1999; Mascolo, 2009; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Student-centered and active learning pedagogies have been encouraged for implementation in every classroom around the world, including those in developing countries (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Hopkins, 2002). However, little research and literature has explored the implementation of student-centered and active learning pedagogies at primary-level
classes in the Western context, except for those in developing countries with assistance and sponsorship from the West, which brought in these teaching pedagogies in the first place. In the Western context at college and university levels, educators (teachers) still face tremendous challenges in replacing their “lecture-and-test” model of education by student-centered pedagogies (Mascolo, 2009). In Western countries where constructivism is more valued, teachers and students have become used to more active models of learning and teaching since the lower grades. Plus, as students become older, they are able to become more critical and reflective in their learning.

However, Cambodia is an authoritarian-based country where this authoritarian tradition has been widely accepted and has become the most popular ways of teaching and learning in the society. The teachers hold the power/authority and they are the ones who control the classroom and deliver the knowledge to the students. Additionally, Cambodia has a culturally rooted society based upon patron-client relations that has impacted the social and educational system/social pattern in Cambodia for generations; thus, it is strongly rooted in Cambodian culture (ICAF Report, 2009). This form of patron-client relationship has worked within Cambodian society in two forms: from the government structure to the general populace, in which the subordinates follow the orders of the authority figure, just as the children listen to and follow the orders of their parents and the students listen to and follow the orders of their teachers (ICAF Report, 2009). This basic cultural mindset and societal pattern has been reinforced by parents and teachers to solidify their positions and to maintain the authority to control their children/students. They believe that this is the right means to make their children/students learn. This cultural practice has impacted Cambodian people’s mindset for centuries and it will be difficult to change.

Due to teachers’ strong and solid experience in their education in the past, their personal beliefs and how Cambodian culture operates within this authoritarian way, it is a significant challenge and is very hard for teachers to change their practices to successfully implement active learning pedagogies. Student-centered and active learning pedagogies are grounded in the culture of democracy and egalitarianism (opposite from the culture of authoritarian and patron-client relationship), as seen within the ways of communication and working between adults and youth/children (Ginsburg, 2006). For
example, it is important for Cambodian people, in general—especially for senior Cambodians, to see the teacher-student dyad as a top-down relationship—meaning the teacher’s image like that of the king of the classroom with the highest authority, and students are the followers; the good students are the ones who listen to and follow the teachers’ orders/commands. This traditional pedagogy (proper conducts and interactions) embodies not only the classrooms and the society but also the teaching of reading and writing (Needham, 2003). For example, traditionally, Cambodian people value the ways in which the stories are read to the audience and then the audience tries to remember what is being read to them, rather than reading silently to themselves and reflecting or thinking critically about what is being read (Thierry, 1976).

Thus, it is very important in this social order to appreciate and accept the oral and direct transmission of knowledge from the storytellers (readers) to the story listeners (audience) (Needham, 2003). This practice or code of conduct has strongly influenced how reading is taught in Cambodian classrooms—the teachers are perceived as the storytellers and the students are perceived as the audience or the knowledge receivers; thus, it is important that the listeners or knowledge receivers need to remember and follow what is being read/told to them by the teachers or what is being said in the books/textbooks.

Within this kind of authoritarian society in Cambodia, people still appreciate this traditional behavior or ways of learning; thus, it is hard or almost impossible to break this cultural barrier and bring in something new (active learning pedagogies) that is almost entirely opposite to their original culture, without taking into consideration the teachers/trainers’ personal histories as well as their culture. In order words, student-centered and active learning pedagogies are more aligned with conceptions of knowledge that is being socially constructed or reflexive; however, the Cambodian teacher-centered pedagogies are more oriented towards knowledge as being given and received (Berlak and Berlak, 1981; Ginsburg, 1988; and Whitty, 1985). Eggleston (1977) also added that:

[T]he received perspective is…the one in which curriculum knowledge…is accepted as a received body of understanding that is ‘given,’ even ascribed, and is predominantly non-negotiable…[T]he reflexive perspective is…one in which curriculum knowledge…is seen to be negotiable…[The] curriculum is an artifact; constructed by teachers and others responsible for determining the experience of
students. In some situations the students themselves may be seen to take part in this construction. (p. 52)

Therefore, due to these very opposite paradigms between the two teaching and learning approaches, the Western donors or international agencies who help with the curriculum/teaching approaches cannot simply bring new teaching and learning pedagogies, such as student-centered active learning pedagogies, and immediately require all the teachers in the local context to implement them without rigorous and on-site supports in the form of professional development, such as they are currently experiencing in this present time. With the teachers’ current knowledge about these new approaches, the teachers in Cambodia could not differentiate between the “improvements” of their pedagogical practices from their traditional teacher-centered approaches. The net effect as to make them more confused, worsening their instructions.

Student-centered and active learning pedagogies have been borrowed or taken from the Western context in an effort to reform education in Cambodia after the civil war and other numerous political unrests during the 1990s. With the espoused purpose of helping to reform education in Cambodia, NGOs such as UNICEF, Save the Children Norway, KAPE, and World Vision have sponsored programs that have technically helped improve the educational system in Cambodian through many different forms, including finance, technical supports and improving the curriculum.

Regarding the curriculum, they have brought a new concept/educational policy of the Child Friendly School, through which student-centered and active learning pedagogies have been suggested for implementation in all local public schools in Cambodia. Perhaps these agencies perceived that the traditional Cambodian teacher-centered methodologies were not working and that its educational systems remained under-developed, and would be a willing candidate for globalized policy convergence. Sripakash (2010) argued that learner-centered education is normally viewed as a “policy panacea.”

However, within the course of this study, the findings may have suggested that borrowing student-centered pedagogies to be implemented in the Cambodian context did not work that way, yet it turns out to be the opposite. Chisholm and Leyendecker (2008) have suggested, “Policy sociology has shown that policy and curriculum implementation
does not follow the predictable path of formulation-adoption-implementation-reformulation.” (p. 196).

The teachers who are the practitioners face new challenges and could not adopt and implement the new pedagogies effectively. Through this educational borrowing and lending paradigm shift, Cambodia has become the pure receiver of the new policy/concepts. Steiner-Khamsi (2003) posits, “to some extent, borrowing implies isolating educational from its political, economic, and cultural context” (p. 156). And this becomes more challenging and problematic for the country of the educational borrower, because they are basically the direct receiver of the new policy or concept without taking into consideration the historical, economical and cultural context within which its educational systems have been strongly rooted; for instance, in the case of Cambodia, those three contexts have been ignored when trying to introduce new concepts/methods of active learning pedagogies. According to Steiner-Khamsi (2003),

Stories of resisting, modifying, and indigenizing imported educational goods have not been sufficiently told…depicting experts in borrowing countries, mostly developing countries, as recipients of western educational concepts. (p. 156)

The effectiveness and appropriateness of the adaptation and implementation of student-centered and active learning pedagogies are questionable within the Cambodian context, particularly in terms of the human resources that Cambodia has in order to help with the suggestions/recommendations and expertise required to modify the new approaches to fit into the Cambodian context. The reason for this may be that, after the civil war, Cambodia had lost almost all of its knowledgeable and well-educated resources during the 3-years of the Killing Fields. And, since then, within only one decade of non-politically chaotic Cambodia, it was almost impossible to re-build much needed qualified human resources to help develop all domains of government, including education. Thus, Cambodia, at that time needed, financial resources and technical expertise when dealing with its educational and curriculum reform. Cambodia did not have sufficient educators or scholars to help with the adjustment and localization of these new pedagogies in order to be practically useful within their own Cambodian context.

Steiner-Khamsi (2003) stated that the borrower country should have local experts in the field to assist with the process of re-contextualization, modification, and indigenization of the borrowed policy/idea/concept in order to make it effective and
applicable in their own context. One more issue with the process of re-contextualization and implementation of active learning and student-centered pedagogies in Cambodia is its patron-client relationship and its culture of the appreciation of something new or modern. After the darkness of the civil war and the destruction of the educational system, people in Cambodia, including the educated ones (the teacher participants), tended to appreciate what is new and modern, especially when brought to them by countries that they believe to be better off and more developed. Also, regarding its culture of patron-client relationship, Cambodians preferred to fully accept what is given to them by an entity they consider to be their helper or supervisor (the lender country) without arguing or negotiating for modification or re-contextualization.

For example, in the case of the British government, when borrowing (in a form of buying) the education-business ‘compact’ model from the U.S., in order to make the model work effectively in their context, they spent tremendous amount of money in the form of experts in helping with the process of implementation and re-adaptation (Steiner-Khamsi, 2003). In the case of Cambodia, this is exactly opposite to what was bought and borrowed by the British government, because within the British context, the policy has been bought and its government spent large amounts of money on it; thus, I believe the policies must have been tested successfully, even before it was brought to be implemented in the British context. However, in case of Cambodia, the new concepts of student-centered/active learning pedagogies have been borrowed into its context through the international donors and NGOs. Thus, it can be implied that Cambodia is perceived as merely a country for testing and experimenting regarding these new concepts because Cambodia received the new concept and attending policy of the Child Friendly School (active learning pedagogies) in the form of a donation. Steiner-Khamsi (2003) states that lender countries use outside contexts as laboratories for testing or reassuring the effectiveness and success of a theory, concept, idea or pedagogy.

Actually, in the Western context (including the U.S), the implementation of student-centered and active learning pedagogies has already become historical because they have introduced and practiced this since the early twentieth century. The U.S itself has a long history of being a democratic and egalitarian country, which is the most
suitable context for implementing active learning pedagogies in order to promote their students’ learning engagement, and problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

However, they still face a lot of challenges and the practice of these methods is still limited and ineffective from K-12 to colleges and universities (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Mascolo, 2009). Thus, the issues and challenges relating to the implementation of these new active learning pedagogies are very sure to persist in greater amounts in the very new Cambodian context. There is no doubt that teachers in Cambodia deserve to receive greater professional development and training regarding those approaches in order to, at least, make them applicable to the Cambodian context.

**Sub-Research Question 3: The Educational System Is Not Helping but Causing More Issues**

After describing the issues of the implementation of curriculum reform, it is important to take the teachers’ accounts into consideration. Teachers are accountable for their students’ success and failure, as well as policies from the top-level officials in the Ministry of Education that they are expected to implement. However, they do not receive sufficient support that they require in terms of professional development and motivation. If the outcome of students’ learning (especially reading/writing and mathematics) is not good or does not reach the set standard, the ones to blame are the practitioners (teachers); however, the teachers are not provided with the specialized methods that they need in order to help their students with learning literacy and reading in their content areas. According to the teachers’ comments, most of their students are underperforming in reading; for instance, they have trouble pronouncing words and knowing the definitions of simple words. Thus, the students need remedial programs or special methods to help them with their basic reading skills, but the teachers have never been provided with this sort of training.

Not only do teachers need to deal with issues of poorly performing students, but they also face numerous challenges beyond their control inside and outside of school. After the educational reform (the introduction of Child Friendly School), which took place in the late 1990s, teachers were not allowed to use corporal punishment on their students. This means they are not allowed to physically force their students to learn, which makes the teachers very dissatisfied because it used to be their main method to
make their students learn and do their exercises. They do not understand that there are other methods to get students to learn effectively without physically forcing them. This misunderstanding happens because the teacher training is problematic. The training organizations have not studied the context of the teachers, their culture, their expectations, the ways they teach and learn, and their behaviour during the training sessions.

The teachers’ behaviour during their training is passive and their expectations from the training are low; however, the trainers may have thought that the teachers’ may have known and may have had adequate knowledge in understanding the new approaches. Generally, the trainers have high expectation of the teachers and the school principals, who also receive the training in order to deliver this to the teachers. This issue is associated with several factors, such as the patron-client relationship, shyness, saving face, and the appreciation of perfection in the Cambodian culture—the teachers tend to remain silent and accept what they are told without asking questions or offering constructive feedback or comments (if they think the methods are not working); instead, they may have pretended to understand the lessons and practice the methods in their classroom. However, the reality is that they do not fully understand what has been presented and cannot practice them successfully. This is in accord with my own experience of workshops and professional learning sections. Other teachers and I chose to remain silent and accepted the newer, more modern methods offered to us. This is congruent with our culture of communication and learning that the trainers or the NGOs who are international donors, who brought the new concepts or methods, should have known. That is one of the reasons why the teacher participants have commented that they do not understand much about the new pedagogies and they left the training with very little knowledge. As a result, they find themselves confused and the new approaches add more challenges to their teaching instructions.

During any educational reform process, there is an important early period which is called the “progressive period;” it is a significant period during the reform process where there is an attempt to change pedagogical practices in schools and classrooms. For example, it may be the “change of the core of schooling from a teacher-centered, fact-centered, recitation-based pedagogy to pedagogy based on an understanding of children’s
thought processes and their capacities to learn and use ideas in the content of real-life problems” (Elmore, 1996, p. 7). Thus, Elmore added that the “core of the schooling” is crucial and should not be taken for granted during this process of reform because it is about how the practitioners (teachers) understand the knowledge associated with their roles in teaching and their students’ roles in learning. The core ideas also include the setting of the classroom, the relationship between teachers and students, the teachers’ responsibilities regarding students’ learning, students’ learning practices, students’ learning assessment, teachers themselves, students’ parents, administrators, and other related stakeholders. Goodlad (1984) also argued that the ‘core idea of schooling’ during the reform process is that the teachers understand their roles in teaching and their students’ roles in learning.

The ways the Cambodian teachers understand their roles in teaching are that teachers are the masters of knowledge (the ones who hold the authority and directly transmit knowledge to learners) and the students are the knowledge receivers. Courtney and Gravelle (2014) also posit that, “teachers invariably saw themselves as transmitters of knowledge. Their role was to tell the children what to do and to explain the textbook” (p. 420). Learners in the Cambodian context are supposed to be engaged in their learning by only listening to the teachers, following their orders/commands, and passing the tests. If they do not meet these criteria, the teachers believe and judge that they are not engaged in their learning; thus, they do not learn.

What was happening in the U.S schools in the early twentieth century is happening in Cambodian classrooms right now. This is an example of an educational practice in a typical classroom in the U.S in the early twentieth century:

No matter what the observational perspective is, the same picture emerges. The two activities involving the most students were being lectured to and working on written assignments…. Students were working alone most of the time, whether individually or in groups. That is, the students listened as one member of a class being lectured, or the student worked individually on a seat assignment…. In effect, then, the modal classroom configurations which we observed looked like this: the teacher explaining or lecturing to the total class or a single student, occasionally asking questions requiring factual answers; the teacher, when not lecturing, observing or monitoring students working individually at their desk; students listening or appearing to listen to the teacher and occasionally responding to the teacher’s questions; students working individually at their desks on reading
or writing assignments; and all with little emotion, from interpersonal warmth to expressions of hostility. (Goodlad, 1984, p. 230)

The international donors (Western NGOs, for example), who brought their pedagogies (student-centered and active learning pedagogies) to Cambodia did not address the issues that they had dealt with many decades ago. The problem is that the teachers keep perpetuating the old ways of teaching through the new pedagogies, and their teaching instruction has not improved; instead, it remains the same or even gets worse.

In-service teacher professional development is one of the most cost effective interventions and is an effective way to produce educational reform because the teachers are the most active agents for educational change and they are the ones who implement educational reform so that they can effectively introduce it into their daily classroom practice (Benveniste et al., 2008). However, in Cambodia, because the teachers do not understand the aims of the reform—even the main purposes of and the theories behind the new approaches of active learning pedagogies, their training is very limited and what they know is only the technical ways to implement the approaches that they received. These technical interventions are introduced mostly through indirect training (passing from the cluster school principal to their school principal until it reaches the teachers). That is why teachers find the training is not effective and they do not fully understand its contents or value.

Another issue that all four teachers commented on, which is the most challenging thing for them and inhibits them from successfully teach reading in content areas, is the ‘unresponsive learning abilities’ of their students to the current curriculum and the new mandatory approaches. The teachers put the blame on the students and their families, regardless of whatever approaches the teachers have used to help them. This relates to the issue of the power hierarchy in Cambodia that perpetuates itself throughout the whole system and in the society. The teachers blame their students, instead of blaming the system, for their low interest in learning and for their family issues that distract them from learning, because the students are the most powerless. I understand that family is often a big issue that even young children sometimes have to deal with, and may find themselves responsible for their family’s financial issues in Cambodia. This problem is
obvious and it mostly happens in poor families in rural or semi-rural villages; for example, 50 percent of the students in the teacher participants’ classes, which I observed, are from very low-income or farmer families. Farmer families are considered the lowest-income generating families in Cambodia. Students’ family issues are the biggest problem distracting students’ attention from their learning and it is beyond the teachers’ control. There is also previous research that claims that students’ low interest in learning, as well as the high student dropout rate, is due to family issues. Many Cambodian students, especially in rural and semi-rural areas (in my research sites, most students’ families are from semi-rural areas), face a lot of family responsibility—they have to help their families by working both inside and outside of the home. As a result, they end up having less interest in their own study and think of dropping out of school (NIS, 2009; Velasco, 2004).

There is also the dis-connectivity between home (family) and the teachers. There is a common finding in past research relating to this issue. According to the study conducted by Edwards, Zimmermann, Sitha, Williams, and Kitamura (2014), there is the lack of a solid relationship or connection between school and family; for example, parents rarely check on their children’s learning performance at school and they almost never come to visit school. Also, for teachers, when there is any problem (even if the students are absent more than the maximum amount or drop out) they may choose not to contact home. Dara, one of the teacher participants, has made similar comments about the lack of parent-teacher relationships. For instance, she stated that parents even look down on teachers because they are lower paid and earn less money than they do. All the teacher participants noticed that parents are not interested in their children’s learning and they do not even worry about checking their study-record book. Instead, they allow them to be involved in inappropriate play activities that absolutely distract them from reading their lessons and learning in general. Also, they do not motivate their children to read their lessons or good books at home; instead, they allow them to obsessively watch movies and TV at home.

Another additional issue that creates a challenge regarding student disengagement in their reading and learning at home is that their families often have low literacy skills. Previous research conducted within a primary school context found that
students who have trouble with reading are those who come from homes where the parents are illiterate (Courtney & Gravelle, 2014). Some parents do not even know how to read and write. They often only watch movies/TV during their free time or, even worse, some parents are involved in gaming activities. Those set bad examples for their children and detract from their habit of reading and learning activities so they can be involved in other activities, like their parents. The researchers, Dupuis and Askov (1982) concurred that the reading habits and behaviour of learners are very important in developing their reading skills and comprehension. They argued that:

Student attitudes towards reading, as towards learning and school, are developed early in life. Parents and community are important in determining how students feel about reading: is it important? How does time spent reading compare to time spent on watching TV? By junior high school, students are also affected by their peers’ attitudes toward reading and learning. (p. 18)

In the school community and in my community, I am aware that parents and other villagers (the examples were given by the teacher participants) have very limited appreciation of the value of education, and they have low expectation for the educational success of their children. Also, I noticed that the general populace of most communities within Cambodia neither read nor have books or magazines at home, including those communities where these research schools are located. Due to many students’ current family situations, most parents engage their children in the labor-force so that they can earn extra money to help the family; as a result, those students become disengaged in their learning and think about working outside to help their families. In the worst case, some students end up dropping out of school. This is an obvious issue from the students’ side and it adds more challenges to the teachers’ reading instruction as well as to their classroom success in general.

Even though students’ family issues, which cause students to become disengaged in their learning could be part of the problem, there is also a constraint from the teaching and instructional methodologies that are invisible to the teachers and other stakeholders who are held accountable. The teacher participants blame the students for not being engaged in their lessons by ignoring their reading, not listening to the teachers and turning away to look through the window. This student behaviour is unacceptable in the classroom and the teachers (in the past prior to the introduction of Child Friendly School)
would physically punish the students. They would force students to learn in class; however, the teachers rarely reflect on their own instructional methods—why are students not interested in the lessons? The teachers should ask themselves such questions or challenge their methodologies—whether or not their reading-lesson presentation is interesting enough to engage the student to stay focused during the reading lessons.

In particular, the teaching methods should be questioned. From my experience as a student, I can predict the routine methods that my teachers would use to teach reading every day because they kept doing the same things over and over again, and what they asked the students to do seems to not be working. For instance, there is previous research document that finds that, traditionally, within Cambodian classrooms, the teachers use a “one-strategy approach” to teach early literacy (in Grades 1, 2 or 3), where the learners are asked to repeat the sounds and letters that teach them to decode. This strategy is evidence that they do not comprehend what is being decoded (Courtney & Gravelle, 2014). This research also found that teachers rely on repetition and reading reinforcement as the most important strategy in teaching reading, without recognizing and understanding the elements of it. The teachers’ understanding and view of literacy, and reading in particular, were generally based on their experience and training (Courtney & Gravelle, 2014).

The above evidence regarding how reading was taught in the earlier grades or in the foundational classes, relates to what the teacher participants in this study believe to be what their students experience in the earlier grades. Thus, their students are troubled by reading because they did not learn the appropriate reading skills and the basic alphabet or sight words from earlier grades. However, I have found no previous research that studies the teaching reading strategies in higher Grades (4 to 6). The teachers in this study blame the students for not learning basic reading skills, instead of blaming how their previous teachers have taught them. This causes a big challenge for the teachers in teaching reading in content areas in Grades 4, 5 and 6.

The UNESCO (2014) report has shown that the literacy rates in Cambodia are low and the improvements in literacy rates also remain low. Thus, I believe that the traditional methods of repetition, memorization, and copying the letters might not be working and the students do not learn from this approach. Thus, the students end up
learning by memorizing what they do not understand. That is why they do not learn to read, or identify alphabets and the pronunciation of words right from the basic grades.

The problem persists because, once they are in higher grades (Grades 5 and 6), they are supposed to read expository and informative texts; and if they do not understand or are unable to read words, how can they possibly understand sentences, let alone paragraphs? As a result, they do not learn reading in content areas in their current classes and they are not interested in their learning because they did not understand what their teachers and classmates are talking about in reading. Thus, the issue is not only the students’ lack of interest in learning due to the family problems, but the main cause is the educational system itself—there is not enough support in the form of reading intervention or multiple ranges of reading strategies that the teachers and students need in order to learn reading skills at the earlier grades so that they have less trouble when they come to higher grades.

Another reflection on the teachers’ challenges is the shortage of appropriate teaching materials. This is also true in earlier classes when students begin to learn to read and write. The same research conducted by Courtney and Gravelle (2014) in Grades 1 and 2 found that, “teachers had a limited range of resources: some had mobile letters, some had an alphabet chart on the wall, some used the government textbook, but none of these resources was used frequently” (p. 418). According to the teacher participants’ within this study, they are facing the same challenges of material shortage in implementing their reading lessons, using student-centered approaches in the classroom. And, if they do have the materials, they might have limited knowledge of using them effectively. The teaching schedule and the overloaded curriculum may not have allowed them to apply those materials to their instructions in an effective manner. Also, the teachers may be less motivated in applying teaching materials in their teaching, although they claim that they desire more. The reason for this is that, if they introduce teaching materials into their teaching without any training or skillful use of the materials, this may complicate their lessons and consume valuable teaching time. Another issue related to the material shortage is also associated with the students as well. For instance, in Courtney and Gravelle’s (2014) study, they found that students had access to very limited print materials, including books, newspaper and magazines inside and outside of school (at
home), except for the reading of words in public places, namely posters, place names, and signboards. However, their teachers are satisfied with this availability and believe that their students have enough texts to read. This may also be applicable to the students in this study because most of them are from farming families and almost all of them have been known to be less interested in reading; thus, there must be very few interesting reading materials, including picture books, storybooks, or other child-friendly books that encourage the students to read at home.

These children’s reading activities at home are almost nonexistent and, once they do not practice at home, they do not learn much because the teacher participants have mentioned that what the students study or read at school is very minimal and not enough. They need to do more self-reading and self-study at home because they are at home for longer than they are at school. If they do not practice at home, they will not keep pace with the lessons in class and will feel lost and left out of the group. This may be another reason why they are not interested in learning.

Curiosity and motivation are essential elements in keeping the students’ attention and maintaining a positive classroom environment. Students are more likely to become curious and motivated when they become active participants in the learning process, when they are provided reasonable purposes to learn, and when the instruction is seen as relevant. (Ryder & Graves, 1998, p. 65)

From my own experience and reflection, the traditional/passive and routine instructional strategies used by the teacher participants may also be causing the forgetfulness of the students that all the teachers have commented on, as one of the biggest challenges they face. The students might have learned the factual information during classroom instructions and used their memorization methods to remember those facts in order to complete the class exercises. However, the methods that the teachers use during the reading instructions might not help with their reading comprehension.

According to the research and literature regarding reading comprehension, reading instruction needs to engage students in their reading and learning (active learning pedagogies) and teachers are the facilitators for students’ comprehension, through helping them connect their existing knowledge to the texts in order to promote cooperative learning and the construction of knowledge that learners take away from their learning beyond the memorization of factual information (Ryder & Graves, 1998).
Reading for comprehension (reading in content areas) in a structured reading lesson involves three stages: pre-reading, during-reading, and after-reading (Ryder & Graves, 1998). Each stage is briefly described as follows:

The pre-reading stage is important to build background knowledge through teaching essential vocabulary. During-reading draws students’ attention to the lesson objectives and connects prior knowledge to the information in the text. During this stage, the questioning method is used—the methods that the teacher participants have used, but only from teachers to students. Questions should be generated by the teachers for the students and then by the students for the teachers, as well as by the students questioning themselves. “Questions focus on information, point out relationships in the information, and draw upon background knowledge and text information to engage students in critical thinking” (Ryder & Graves, 1998, p. 66). After-reading activities are for reflection upon the meaning of the text. According to Ryder and Graves (1998), the after-reading questions:

- Often tend to cover more content than during-reading questions, to require the learners to understand relationship between ideas, to apply text information to other contexts, or to engage in critical thinking activities where they are allowed to construct their own meaning from a reading selection. After reading questions can be used to assess the students’ understanding. (p. 66)

In order to make these activities happen successfully, teachers need to create careful lesson preparation so that students will have positive experiences, as well as ensuring the objectives of the lessons are accomplished. Ryder and Graves (1998) also added that, in order to accomplish that goal when preparing the lesson plan, teachers have to take into consideration the following: the nature of the content, students’ previous knowledge, learning objectives, and time and resources available.

I brought this research literature into this discussion to point out that, even though this literature about reading in content-area theories was written two decades ago in the North American context, Ryder and Graves (1998) have already surfaced the idea of critical thinking—students who are able to connect their prior knowledge to current knowledge presented in the reading texts are believed to be able to become critically engaged in their own learning for a better understanding of the lessons beyond the surface level of information. This approach is very important to enrich the students’ reading
comprehension, critical thinking and problem solving skills, as well as the later application in other contexts. The teachers in this study claim that they have used questioning methods, as well, in teaching reading in content areas, but their questions are for factual information and include closed-ended questions. Their questions do not require a lot of thinking from the students and, even if they do, their teachers believe they could not do this. The teachers commented that, if the students are asked analytical questions, they are not able to answer and the teachers end up presenting the answers to them. Also, the questions are projected only from the teachers to the students, but there is no reciprocation. The teachers believe that students cannot create their own questions even to ask the teachers or their peers. Instead of encouraging the students to create their own questions and being engaged in their learning or developing critical thinking or problem solving skills, the teachers limit the students’ input in their learning and control or redirect and, thus, limit the students’ understanding through the teachers’ questions.

Another unproductive side of the issue is that the teachers do not create lesson plans. All of them explained that they only wrote a lesson outline for me as a model during this research but, in their daily lessons, they remember the procedure that they do routinely and they cannot afford time to plan lessons at home. Thus, they acknowledged that they never have any lesson plans in place. That is a complete drawback because, according to the literature and my own experience, teachers need to have good and careful lesson plans in order to make their lessons interesting to their students. By mentioning these points, it does not mean that I totally support and agree with the methods and that what is suggested to be best practice in the North American literature is truly applicable in Cambodian classrooms. If the teachers in Cambodia are at least aware of and are effectively trained with practical approaches and specialized ways of teaching reading in content areas, they may be able to vary their instructional strategies to make their lessons more interesting for the learners rather than practicing routine methods from one year to the next, and the students might not get so bored with existing approaches and might choose to become more engaged.

Another issue in the students’ learning is their teachers’ low expectation of their learning abilities. I believe that most of the teachers in Cambodia do have this negative belief about their students, especially students from lower socioeconomic families. This
negative belief could affect the teachers’ motivation to teach their students as well as influence their expectations that their students could learn. Herber and Nelson-Herber (1993) claim that:

Literature, including research literature, is replete with examples of how expectation influences performance and accomplishment. Expectations of teachers have a profound influence on the accomplishments of students, both negatively and positively…. A sense of optimism toward education, a recognition of the nature and quality of students’ strengths, and a sense of positive expectation toward students and their learning all combine to create a wonderful environment for learning. (p. 25)

I believe that this might be true with regards to expectation that teachers in this study have about their students. I noticed during the classroom observations that the teachers appear to not pay attention to and do not ask questions to students whom they think are poor in reading, as well those who are unable to read the texts. It seems to be the opposite from what they commented on during the interviews that they helped those poorly performing students with their reading. I perceive that they may have taken these students for granted. If they do spend time re-teaching them the basic skills of reading during the instructional time, they may not be able to cover the school curriculum. Also, the teachers harbor negative thoughts about those students who are unable to read and learn because even their parents are unable to teach them at home. Goethe once said that:

If you treat a man as he is, he will remain as he is. If you treat a man as though he already were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be. (as cited in Herber & Herber-Nelson, 1993, p. 25)

In addition, the textbook adds another constraint that the teachers face in engaging in teaching reading in content areas. Similarly, Herber (1978) argued that issues in teaching and learning in content areas include students’ competency, content materials, curriculum pressures, and teacher education. For the reading materials (textbook) after Grade 4, the texts are more informative and expository, and the students may not be equipped with enough skills to read those materials (Gunning, 2000; Herber, 1978). Unfortunately, the authors of those materials tend to add more vocabulary and sentence complexity. In addition to the complexity of the content and vocabulary in textbooks, the textbooks in Cambodia include additional errors such as grammatical mistakes and misspelled words.
Textbook design in Cambodia is also troublesome because, as one of the teacher participants commented, the textbook designers are unlikely to be practitioners and the names of the curriculum designers presented in the textbook are not the people who planned the work. Thus, the existing curriculum designers may have very little ideas or knowledge regarding the difficulties that teachers and students face and they may not know what the teachers and students need. Previous research has found that, “language used in the textbooks is sometimes not grammatical or constructed in a way that is recognizably Khmer. Many of the dialogues to develop pupils’ skills use inappropriate language that pupils of age 6 and 7 would never use” (Courtney & Gravelle, 2014, p. 420). In this current study, the teachers also complained about similar issues; that the content material in Grade 5 seems to be for the level of Grade 6 students to read. The vocabulary is also so difficult that even the teachers do not understanding the meanings, and they do not receive any support with the definitions as the library is always closed.

Another issue is that the teachers might not have noticed the mistakes in the books and, given the complexity of the definitions of the words (they guess the meanings of words), they might have passed along incorrect information to the students. The IDSSC (2006) report has shown that teachers in Cambodian tend to follow what is written in the textbooks, including the instructions.

While the Ministry of Education in Cambodia was promoting student-centered and active learning pedagogies with the intent of gradually taking away the absolute power of the teachers in order to allow students to be more engaged in their learning through better thinking, reflection, critical thinking and problem solving skills, the set standard of their examinations and testing format is moving in the opposite direction. The teacher participants claim that, in the past, the testing questions were more open-ended and the students could write whatever answers they wanted; however, now the Ministry has changed the test questions to multiple choice questions where the answers are already given and the students merely choose the correct answers. This practice, again, is a challenge for the teachers and confuses them because what is most valued in the Cambodian classroom is the students’ assessment (if the students pass the tests or get high scores on the tests, it means the students are good students and they learn, no matter what kind of tests or methods the teachers use) after completing the monthly tests (there
is no national examinations in Grades 5 and 6). This is a challenge for the teachers because, while they are encouraging their students to read and learn more at home, the students do not care much since they aim only at passing these “easy” tests. As a result, they do not learn as much as the teacher expects.

Also, another issue is that, according to the teachers’ comments, the Ministry sets the standard for each school to have almost 100 percent of the students pass the grade, and this is a real challenge because the teachers complain that this policy may cause learners to become more careless about their learning—even if they do not learn enough or understand the lessons, they still go on to the next grade. Once they are in the higher grade, their learning abilities do not match the curriculum in that grade and they may become the “slow learners” within that class. This cycle will keep repeating in perpetuity if this practice continues. The teachers in the higher grades may face the same challenges of having large number of poorly performing students in their class who have low reading skills. Because the teachers have to keep up with the curriculum, those students may be left behind, and the result is that they may end up dropping out of school. Hopkins (2002) perceived that:

One of the threats to child-centered learning is the narrowing of the definition of effective student learning to… test scores… It is evident from the case studies that teachers in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania are subject to significant expectations and pressure to ensure student success on national examinations. (p. 281)

Even though teachers face numerous challenges from poor professional development, pressure to implement unrelated teaching pedagogies, and students’ weak ability in learning issues, these teachers still find their ways to overcome those challenges and still remain in the profession. This is how Cambodian teachers survive. Most of the teachers in Cambodia have a second job in order to support their family financially because the salary from teaching alone is not enough to make the ends meet. As well, the second job limits their time to research and improve their teaching. These teachers still love their careers even though teaching is stressful and challenging for them. Although students do not have private tutoring after-hours and absenteeism is not an issue, the teachers commented that, regardless of those challenges, they choose to come to teach every day because, even if students do not learn much, at least they can sit in class and listen to their teachers and this is better than having no one coming to teach them. Other
research has found that teachers are absent a lot during their teaching times and this absenteeism issue has reportedly impacted students’ performance and drop-out rates (Benveniste et al., 2008; No, Sam, & Hirakawa, 2012).

Other research also found that teachers are often absent from their teaching due to their second job outside the school, such as being motor-taxi drivers, tour guides, and farmers (Kim & Rouse, 2001). In addition, private tutoring is very common in Cambodia. Most of the teachers in Cambodia are involved in private tutoring outside of the regular school hours to generate more income (students have to pay for the teachers’ service) and, in so doing, believe they are supplementing their students’ learning. Both students and teachers believe that the students do not learn enough at school or even at home; thus, they need this kind of supplementary learning provided by the teachers. Because the teachers in this research have a second job at home, they do not have enough time to provide private tutoring to their students, and this is a challenge because their students do not learn enough at school (the teaching time is too short during official school hours). The teachers in this study have to pay more attention to their instruction during school hours to ensure the students learn during this short time. However, a good thing about not being involved in private tutoring is this helps to eliminate the power relationship between teachers and students.

The teachers are able to take advantage of the positive attitude of the school principal because they are not very observant. Teachers are able to close the door and practice whatever methods they are comfortable with. Even though it is a good thing, it also has its own disadvantage—what if the teachers still keep using their traditional ways of transmitting knowledge to the students by physically forcing them to learn? However, the advantage that the teachers have is the flexibility to adjust their curriculum (they can skip some lessons and substitute other lessons with their own that they bring from outside, similar to Sophea’s case).

From my experience, because teaching is a permanent position, I have never seen any teacher who has been laid off because they did not follow the curriculum or did not cover the entire curriculum. The only problem is that, if the teachers do not finish the whole curriculum they might face the delays in their promotional incentive once their teaching years have progressed. However, it is not a common case for the teachers in
Cambodia to not follow the curriculum, because most of them do. They are good at following what is given to them in respect to those they consider their supervisors or the ones who are more knowledgeable (the curriculum designers).

Another interesting difference is that the teacher participants do not see themselves as only content area teachers. It is a challenge for content area teaching when teachers view themselves as only subject teachers and they are not willing to help students who are struggling with reading or reading skills. According to Jackson and Cunningham (1994), the research on teacher-resistance to strategy instruction has been linked to factors in two main areas: content area teachers see themselves as experts in their content areas, not in reading strategies. However, the teacher participants in this study view a bigger picture as they all believe that being a teacher is like being a second guardian, and they are responsible for their students’ learning success, including their behaviour. This may be part of our culture of education from bygone days, ever since the male children went to study and stay at Wat (Buddhist temple). The monks who were their teachers were responsible for teaching them everything they needed to learn.

At issue is not the matter of how much the teachers believe they should help their students with their learning, including teaching content and reading skills, the real problem is how much they are motivated to do that due to their current circumstances. Their current circumstances do not allow them to do so, due to many factors such as the lack of professionalism (knowledge about teaching pedagogies including reading instructions), being confused and feeling helpless within the two teaching approaches, lack of research for their own professional development, lack of teaching time and materials, dealing with students’ low learning abilities, commitment to covering the overloaded curriculum, lack of support from the administrators and the Ministry of Education, and the need to have a second job in order to support their family. Thus, within this particular situation and context, the question of how to make teachers in Cambodia become motivated or better motivated, which might be a solution to many problems, is still a huge challenge that remains unresolved.

There are also a number of previous research studies that have found both similar and dissimilar findings to this research study. For instance, some past research found that most teachers in Cambodia are believed to be under-skilled in their profession and are
also dissatisfied with it. The main reason for this problem is the insufficient salary (NEP & VSO, 2008). Kim (2007) reported that the teachers’ low salary alone is not the real cause of the dissatisfaction; instead, another cause is the school principal’s poor leadership skills. It may also be true about the leadership quality of the principals in the schools within this research that relates to the teachers’ level of motivation in their profession.

For instance, during my observations, I noticed the school principal at Cibo School often came to her office, whereas the principal at Mesa School was never at her office the whole time I conducted my observations on site. And, as a result, I noticed that the teachers at Cibo School were more engaged and motivated for their students’ success than the teachers at Mesa School.

NEP and VSO (2008) have found that, regardless of all the other causes, lack of professional development is a key issue in lowering teachers’ motivation. They suggest that, in order to improve teachers’ motivation and practices, it has to do with improving teacher training. But, Kim and Rouse (2011) argued that, “the availability of teacher education and training programmes in Cambodia is limited and the quality of both pre-service and in-service training is low” (p. 423). Further to this, research conducted by the World Bank (2005) also found that the issue with teacher training in Cambodia is that its content and focus is irrelevant to what the teachers need, including methodologies and classroom practices; instead, teacher training in Cambodia is more likely to focus on technical and administrative practices and issues in the classrooms.

Within this research study, throughout the observations and interviews, the teacher participants seem to be satisfied with what they are doing on a daily basis at school, with the exception of certain things that they complain about in terms of lack of knowledge about teaching methods and students’ issues. Three teachers (Dara, Sirath, and Sophea) appear to be satisfied with their teaching profession. Dara is eager to learn new methods on literacy instructions on top of active learning pedagogies. She also wants to help with her students’ issues by talking to their parents to encourage them to help their children, even though she used to get blamed by them. Dara is also willing to share what she has learned during her supplementary training with other teachers in the school and she has complained that the school principal never initiates or accommodates any
extra training sections at school for other teachers. She also wanted to assign reading homework for her students to research more reading texts in the library but she complains that the library is always closed, so she cannot do anything about it.

Sirath is enthusiastic about learning new methods. He especially wishes to strengthen his knowledge about active learning pedagogies. He wishes to have real and capable teacher trainers come to the local context to train the teachers directly, instead of passing the training from the cluster school through the school principals. He spends his own funds to pursue tertiary education at the university in order to get a bachelor’s degree. Sirath is passionate about the value of education and he does want to improve his professional knowledge in order to help his students; but he complains that there is not much he can do about it.

Similarly, Sophea takes a chance by bringing a new reading text from outside to share with her students in class and the result is positive—they enjoy her texts better than the texts in the school curriculum. She also sends a message through me as a researcher—if I have a chance to work in Cambodia once I finish my study, she asks me to come back and bring new and productive methods to help her and other teachers in their teaching instructions and to help address issues that the teachers are having because their voice is not being heard. The same message has been passed on by other teachers (Dara and Sirath).

Even though, I expressed that Channa seems not to be very satisfied with her teaching career, she still shows her love for the students by taking a chance to adjust her own teaching time and skipping lessons in the national curriculum in order to spend more time teaching her students, including those who are poor in reading in order to help them learn at least some basic reading skills. Even though, Channa seems to be satisfied with whatever methods she is using daily, she still suggests that teachers require clear and helpful teaching guidance in accordance with the new textbook.

It appears that the four teacher participants appreciate new teaching approaches and are willing to help their students with their learning success, but many questions still remain unanswered. Those questions revolve around how much the teachers are motivated to be engaged in the training, as well as how much they learn from the training. Also, at issue is how much they are able to put what they learn into practice, what kind of
supports they will have afterwards, and how much they are motivated and excited to put
the new methods they learn into practice. These are still major challenges.

Throughout this research study, Dara appears to be the most motivated teacher
among all of them. Her motivational factors have arisen from the following reasons. She
has a richer teaching experience and has received more in-service training, compared to
the other three teachers. Dara has more experience teaching earlier literacy skills to
villagers many years before she became a teacher, and she is also known for being a good
teacher who helps poor-performing student to become more successful. Also, she is the
teacher who has received more professional training in the school; thus, I noticed her
teaching activities are more engaging, as she practices various games and activities she
has learned from her training. Her class was more interesting and fun to observe. Thus, it
seems that Dara finds herself more joyful and enthusiastic about her teaching career.
Another reason is that her entire family seems to appreciate the value of education. As a
matter of fact, her husband is also a teacher and all of her children pursue their study
towards higher education. Thus, I assume that she might want to be a teacher rather than
forcing herself to be a teacher. In Cambodia, people know that educated people or smart
students should not be or do not want to become teachers unless they have no other career
choice because teaching profession in Cambodia is considered low paid and is not a
suitable career for gaining an economically good image in the society.

In summary, my main argument within this discussion is that, because the
teachers’ voice is not heard, all the serious and less serious challenges that teachers face
every day could not be addressed or resolved. These problems will remain from
generation to generation. I, as a researcher, truly appreciate what the teachers in this
study have done to help their students who are struggling with reading, especially the
basic reading skills, although they are already in Grades 5 and 6. From this research, I
concur that reading/literacy issues are the biggest challenge for teachers in upper
elementary classes that need to be addressed. Most students in their classes are left
behind because they do not receive enough support from home. Some of the students are
not even able to read and write a word; thus, even though the teacher participants have
tried to help them, they cannot help all of them due to limited time and the overloaded
curriculum.
The issue of large numbers of students in upper elementary classes who are struggling with literacy learning has not been adequately addressed yet. The Ministry believes that teachers in upper elementary classes (Grades 5 and 6) should be dealing with teaching reading in content areas, including teaching vocabulary definitions and answering questions, knowing what the text is talking about, as well as promoting in-group work to respond to the teachers’ questions. This is what is presented in the previous teaching guidelines provided by the Ministry and has been included in pre- and in-service training. However, the Ministry may not be aware of the challenges that teachers in the higher grades are dealing with—numerous students who are struggling with poor literacy skills. Those teachers need specialized training in pedagogical approaches to literacy instructions in order to help their students. Besides mentioning specialized reading approaches, training regarding current teaching methodologies in content areas is still problematic and it leaves teachers with doubts and confusion because the training only teaches surface-level technical processes such as how to run the classroom during the days, how to ask students questions, how to form students into groups, and how to create teaching materials which teachers claim they rarely care to create.

Hence, the question might be raised that, if the teachers face those challenges and they really need the supports, why did they not bring up those issues to let the administrators or the trainers know or send a report to the higher-level officials? The reason is that the teachers like to save face and they do not generally ask questions or bring any concerns because they consider those activities as subversive to authority; instead, they accept what is given to them by the higher-level leaders even though they face significant challenges. This attitude may be part of the Cambodian culture of the patron-client relationship. Or, they have already raised the issues to the principal, but their requests may have stopped at the principal’s desk and were never addressed.

One of the teachers, Dara, claimed that she used to send suggestions to the principal in order to correct errors that she found in the textbook; however, her request has never been addressed or talked about. Therefore, the voices of the teachers and their challenges have never been heard, and the Ministry of Education does not address problems but adds more issues. Those unresolved issues are left to the teachers, including
the mandate and irrelevant teaching methodologies without sufficient professional training or on-site supports, inappropriate and overloaded school curriculum, exam and test score reinforcement and orientation, lack of parent involvement, and students’ family issues. The Ministry of Education should help to bring awareness about the importance of reading and education to the families as well as to encourage more parent involvement. Additionally, other educational issues that are not addressed include: there is no professional development in helping with literacy instruction, allowing numbers of very low performing students to pass the grade, no supports during the school break to help slower learners with reading skills, the mismatch between the overload curriculum and teaching time, the lack of teaching materials, classroom setting and accommodation, and the unresponsiveness of students to new methods.

Regardless of what kinds of educational reforms that will be implemented in Cambodia, if they only take place at the top level (such as making changes to the curriculum and bringing new methodologies), the real educational changes will never come into existence. Classroom practices will never be improved if the reform agenda does not include listening to teachers’ concerns, identifying challenges and issues that they face every day, addressing their needs—including professional development, motivating them to better engage with their profession, as well as to commit to the learning success of their students, and help to improve their traditional perspectives on reading, as well as teaching and learning in general.

Sub-Research Question 4: The Issue of the Lack of “Being Critical” within the Whole System

Cambodia is a very totalitarian country and its culture is more patron-client relationship with the very least power possible given to the subordinates. The ones who make the decision on any matter are those who are in the top-level authority, and the subordinates are often good command followers. The practitioners at the ground level, the teachers, are often treated as the subordinates with the least power in their hands but, compared to the students, teachers still have more power than the students. The “culture of acceptance” is a part of our everyday practice at work and in family settings. The ones with less power appreciate and accept what is given to them to do or to implement by the ones who have more power, who are also the ones who are believed to be more
knowledgeable. The followers take it without comment or question of the authority of the powerful leaders.

In Cambodian society, knowledge is given and received in the form of repetition. When reading any articles, almost 90 percent of readers, including myself until I went to university in North America, practice recitation and rote memorization methods in order to remember what is written in the textbooks even though they sometimes do not understand the contents, because they do not want to lose the original form of the knowledge presented. The readers believe that those who present or write the book or the curriculum never make mistakes and consider the knowledge presented as the truth. As a result, the learners or readers do not question in order to challenge the information in the texts. This is an example of my experience and what I knew about my classmates and former colleagues at school when I was a teacher in Cambodia. When other people I know read any text, we did not question or challenge the ideas presented in the texts. Instead, the questions we asked were factual questions in order to get information. Only when I came to study as a student in the U.S, I was asked to read scholarly books and to challenge the ideas in the books by bringing in my own arguments to support my views. It was the only then that I came to realize that, as a reader and a student with very little knowledge, I could also challenge or question the ideas and concepts presented in textbooks written by scholars. That is a very critical element that I believe teachers and students in Cambodia do not know and might not be able to do, at present.

I have reflected that, after I left teaching in 2005, there should have been some changes in terms of behaviour in reading and questioning, by becoming more critical. It has been more than a decade already, since the introduction of the new student-centered and active learning pedagogies, in which the core idea is to promote student engagement in their learning through increasing critical thinking, problem solving and analytical skills; thus, I assumed there might be certain changes relating to classroom practices and the overall perspectives and personal attitudes of teachers and students. However, after completing the classroom observations and data analysis in this research, I realize that they remain unchanged in terms of critical thinking, problem-solving and analytical skills, as well as cognitive development in literacy learning and in working in general.
Bunlay et al. (2010) also found that the understanding of teachers in Cambodia about critical thinking and problem-solving skills is still very limited.

Bunlay et al. (2010) also argue that the practices within the classrooms are more behavioural changes than cognitive changes. In (2012) also expressed that, although throughout the educational reforms in most developing countries, critical thinking abilities in learners was intended to be promoted in theory and in document, they have not been practically defined and practiced in real classrooms. This is true within reading in content areas, as students read, follow, and remember what is written in their books without question. The questions asked are direct responses about factual information from the texts. However, when teachers ask students those questions, they believe that the questioning promotes student thinking. In fact, those questions do not involve students in critical thinking skills and they are still practicing their old ways of learning through repeating, copying, and memorizing.

Regardless of the educational/curriculum reforms and new approaches, the teachers are still very much influenced by their past practices at school, their way of life, how people behave and interact at work and in the society, the culture of acceptance, and power-hierarchies and patron-client relationships. Thus, all those factors truly influence these cultural practices, which are passed on to their students now and later on in life. As a result, their students keep passing it on to their next generation and it will continue to cycle onwards.

Any educational theory that is to be critical and emancipatory, that is to function in the interests of critical understanding and self-determining action, must generate a discourse that moves beyond the established language of administration and conformity. Such a discourse requires a struggle and a commitment in order to be appreciated and understood. (Giroux, 1988, p. 3)

According to Giroux’s argument, I reflect that the idea of “conformity” is applicable to the school and societal context in Cambodia. In addition to our culture of acceptance, there is also an issue of conformity, of trying to fit into the majority group. However, within the school context, there may be some teachers who wish to change and improve the curriculum and who want to have their voices heard. For instance, for Dara and Sirath, even though they accept the system the way it is, they still have an intention or ideas about making changes by giving suggestions of how to make changes for
improvement. The issue of keeping silent and remaining in their comfort zone and conforming is also very prevalent in the school sites, and they dare not challenge the administrators, including the school principal, because the majority of the teachers have followed the educational norm that has already been set for them for many years. Thus, the culture of remaining silent and accepting by trying to fit into the majority is very common in Cambodian society, including in the school zone.

The teachers being interviewed were also worried about their job security—they wanted to be reassured about the issue of confidentiality during the interviews and were afraid to be left out of the group if they challenged the authority. Their security in saving face and trying to avoid blame and trouble was more important to them than anything else. Thus, during the interviews, I noticed that they wished to avoid saying anything inappropriate about the Ministry, as well as their administrators. Instead, most of their responses about their inputs into curriculum making reflected their acceptance to follow the majority by implementing what is given to them.

Channa stated that following and accepting what is given to her to teach is very important because it will keep her safe in the profession. She also argued that she would follow the authority of the Ministry of Education and agree with them because she could not follow only her ideas. Sophea also accepts the top-level officials as the leaders and as her superiors, and her opinions simply could not be compared with theirs. For example, she stated that:

Although they give me power to do so [to create and to change the curriculum], I cannot do it or make the decision myself. We have to listen to them. If we do things alone, it is not fine. I am afraid that it is different from others. We have to follow them… other teachers also teach following that [methods/lessons in textbook] too, so we have to follow the majority of opinions than the least one. If they ask me to do student-centered approaches, I would follow what they tell me to do.

It can be reflected that those teachers’ understanding, attitudes and beliefs about their roles in curriculum making and helping improve the curriculum is very minimal and non-critical. They come to accept the challenges, live with them, and eventually take them for granted. At the same time they are recreating the “culture of appreciation” passed on to them by the authority. All teacher participants expressed that because they had never heard about teachers taking part or having input into curriculum design or
curriculum reform. They never even thought about it and they all believed that this would not happen, as they would not be given a chance to do so.

In addition, the system seems to perpetuate the cycle of being non-creative and non-critical among the least powerful groups, the teachers and students. Going in a divergent direction from the statement of purpose in the curriculum reform of Child Friendly School with its student-centered approaches to promote students’ engagement and their abilities to think critically as well as to solve problems, the system has embedded hidden practices within the school system. As well, these hidden practices of top-down, authoritarian norms have been in the system for a long time ago and remain unchanged to this day. It has a strong effect on the teachers’ commitments, beliefs, attitudes, motivations, and even on how they interact with students and their authorities, including the school principals and the officials from the Ministry of Education. For instance, those obvious recurrent practices operate in this way; when there is something wrong, such as the results of the students’ learning do not meet the standard and if there is an increased drop-out rate, teachers generally blame their students, but the ministers in the Department of Education blame the teachers.

The teaching guidelines in the teacher guidebook that the majority of the teachers have followed, including myself, have kept teachers under control by having them teach according to what is already set up for them by the top-level people in the Ministry. That is a good way to teach them to follow patterns and guidelines, to make their teaching less challenging because there is already a set standard of instructions to follow, and to follow the majority because all other teachers use the same guidelines. So, there appears to be nothing wrong with it except that, as a result, the teachers dare not to risk a change to try something new and to make a difference. The drawback of this practice is to limit teachers’ thinking abilities and their being critical within their teaching profession. Another example of this limitation of being critical is that using the “questioning method” in teaching reading in content areas has been performed only from one perspective—from the teachers to the students but not the other ways around. The teachers believe that the students cannot create their own questions, even to ask them questions if they do not understand the lessons. It also becomes an issue because the
cognitive, curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking abilities of students remain very limited because they have not been used sufficiently or even challenged.

The reason I raise the issue of “critical thinking” within this discussion is because it is key to the problems of the absence of teachers’ participation in curriculum making in general and in reading in particular. The teachers accept the status quo and face all of those challenges in the whole process with a silent voice. That is the way to keep teachers and students under political control because they are lacking the ability to critically question what they are doing and why they do things the way they are doing them right now, including acceptance of the contents of the curriculum, methodologies, and teacher authority and administration. For instance, the teaching inspection that is supposed to be completed in order to check the quality of the instructions to see what need to be improved and if there are any problems that need to be addressed; however, now the inspections are predictable and arranged in advance. The four teacher participants mentioned that they know in advance about the inspection, and the teachers would arrange their methods and lessons that they expect the inspectors would want to see, in order to make very minimal mistakes. After the inspections, they would resume their daily practice in class. Also, the teachers complain that the inspectors frequently blames the teachers by pointing out mistakes rather than helping them or giving them constructive criticism. The way the system is set up prevents the teachers from becoming critical and they become inactive and keep perpetuating what they have done before as a routine and follow the old traditional ways. For instance, Duggan (1996); NEP and VSO, (2008), argues that:

The influence of varied political perspectives on the educational system is visible in several forms: accessibility, curricula, language/s of instruction, and administrative and planning processes. While processes, plans, and textbooks are slowly being streamlined, vestiges of previous regimes remain—not least, teachers trained under different eras (and languages), or not trained. (as cited in Reimer, 2012, p. 178)

Educators, including teachers in Cambodia, need to become more critical in order to break this cycle of the power of control and to, at least, minimize the culture of acceptance that teachers are somehow inferior and are unable to influence curriculum changes. For instance, I find that the teacher participants appeared not to have the quality
of being critical, according to each participant’s comments and attitudes during the interviews.

They demonstrated their attitudes and understandings about the process of curriculum making and implementation. Channa believes that teachers do not have a voice in controlling their own curriculum; however she acknowledges that it is the way it should be and she never questions or challenges the authority about getting her voice heard. Channa also admitted that, even though she makes any suggestions for the improvement of the textbook, her comments and concerns have never been addressed. Thus, she is a believer that the curriculum should be created for teachers and she chooses to be a follower. Sophea, similarly, has a very difficult time in expressing her opinions on curriculum making because she has never thought about it and she believes she will definitely have no opportunity to be a part of the curriculum making. She also accepts that, even if the Ministry gives her a chance to do so, she would not able to give any suggestions anyway.

Dara and Sirath, also, have never thought about being involved in curriculum design or improvement because, so far, they have never heard anyone talking about it. When asking them about their suggestions or opinions on this matter, different from Channa and Sophea, they were willing to offer some recommendations. Dara gives comments based on the current challenges that she has faced. The main suggestions are to provide teachers with very informative and direct training of student-centered pedagogies, increasing teaching time, and improving the vocabulary in reading texts. However, for Sirath, in asking him about his role in curriculum making, he appears to have something in mind already about the changes he wants to make, such as changes to the reading content. He also wants to be involved in curriculum planning and design at the Ministry level.

The teachers’ attitudes are positive about how curriculum is delivered to them, and they acknowledged that they could still survive and find themselves happy with what they are teaching and how they teach every day, because they can still come up with some strategies to overcome those challenges. However, I believe this is how the system has been developed to make teachers struggle and let them find their own ways and methods to survive in their daily teaching practice. The Ministry did not publish a new set
of teacher guidebook for the newly published student textbooks and has let all the teachers consult the previous teacher guidebook for their teaching instructions. And because the teachers are more familiar with the traditional ways of teaching, using teacher-lead approaches, they all end up pursuing the authoritarian ways of teaching and the students are the ones who suffer from those practices. In order to cover the entire school curriculum, teachers ended up skipping some lessons, and they usually take out the lessons in social studies subjects. The teachers believe these lessons are not important; however, the lessons in social studies are important to develop critical concepts because they talk about social issues, environment, and everyday practices. As well, the teachers can include questioning activities and engage students in content areas discussions in order to develop their critical thinking skills.

I analyzed the teachers’ lesson plans. They all acknowledged that they make lesson plans only for the purpose of participation in this research. Their lesson plans look exactly the same and also have the same format as the lesson plan that I was trained to do when I was at the teacher training school in 2000. Nothing has been improved or changed since then. The lesson plan format comes with a blank chart for teachers to fill out. The chart includes the teachers’ activities, the meanings of the lesson, and the students’ activities. And, on top of the chart, there are some elements such as: 1) The subject of the lesson, the title of the lesson, the teaching time, the page number in the textbook and in the teacher guidebook, 2) The objectives of the lesson: the knowledge to be established, the practical knowledge, and the attitudes, and 3) Suggestions: for teachers and for students. The lesson plan format is given to the teachers by the school principal, and the teachers only need to make a photocopy of the blank page and fill it out according to each lesson and its activities.

As far as I am concerned, the elements that the teachers need to fill out in the lesson plan form could be copied or taken from the previous teacher guidebook. My reflection on this practice is that by doing all of those activities every day, it limits the teachers’ thinking and critical thinking abilities, as well as limits their research for the improvement of their teaching methodologies. Once, the teachers have already accessed something that is ready for them and which makes it easy for them to follow, they become used to it and take their teaching development for granted. And, once teachers
become less critical, take their teaching professional development for granted, accept the status quo and conform, the ones in power are more easily able to keep them under control and treat them as the oppressed slaves of educational reform.

That is the issue of “power and knowledge” that Freire, who contributes enormously to critical thinking theory, has considered “critical thinking in relation to the situatedness of the oppressed people” (Thayer-Bacon, 2000, p. 71). Freire’s idea of the “critical perception of reality” or “critical understanding” refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions in order to take action against the “oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 19). According to Freire, it is important to give students the power to make their own decisions by motivating them to act independently in order to develop critical thinking skills. This idea is also applicable for teachers in order to develop their critical thinking abilities in order to challenge the status quo and to make their voices heard for the sake and success of their students.

However, in Cambodia, there is a lack of that quality of developing critical concepts or critical thinking abilities among students and teachers, especially through the ways students read a text and through the ways the teachers teach literacy, including teaching reading in content areas.
Chapter 10
Recommendations and Conclusions

Before I make recommendation for the findings in this particular study, I would like to admit that there are some limitations that should be taken into consideration. The purpose of this comparative and international case study is to discover and describe the perspectives of content area teachers in Cambodia (including their beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge about teaching reading); the instructional strategies used; and the challenges they face.

One of the limitations is that the study is restricted to four participants from two schools located in the Battambang district. Another limitation is that, in order to focus on teaching reading in content areas, the participants were chosen from only upper elementary schools, which is the focus of this study. The small number of participants is also a limitation. Thus, the findings could hardly be generalized to all content area teachers as a representation of that population. Furthermore, one-hour observations for four sessions might be considered a limitation as a greater number of observations, which are of a longer duration, may reveal more data.

I would like to pinpoint that the biggest problem in this research study is that there are numerous students with low ability in reading and the teachers’ knowledge and understanding regarding the importance of reading is also limited. The teachers know only that reading is important for the readers as a survival skill, the ability to decode, and to gain factual information. The teachers are willing to help students with their reading instructions but they have very limited knowledge and abilities to help them due to many factors from lack of professional development to the pressure to cover the curriculum within a very short teaching time. Another main issue is that the students are not exposed to a reading-friendly environment. The teachers address issues relating to students’ weak reading abilities by blaming them and their families, yet do not question their own instructional strategies. As a result, due to our culture of acceptance and patron-client relationship, teachers come to accept and take these issues for granted.

Therefore, due to the above issues in the findings in this study, recommendations are needed in order to help improve teaching practices. I have come to conclusions and
recommendations for this particular case study based on the following factors: what I learned and reflect upon on the teachers’ comments and attitudes, my own experience as a teacher in Cambodia, other current information I have learned from the current events happening at the Ministry of Education, and the literature in the North American context.

Before moving forwards to the recommendations and suggestions to improve reading practices in this particular context, I would like to bring an example of a very good practice of a teacher in an elementary school in Cambodia who won the best teacher award in October, 2015, represents the very first incident of this happening in Cambodia after the civil war ended many decades ago. This teacher has made a great impact on her students’ success and her work is being recognized by the Ministry of Education. I find it is a good model and example for making a good recommendation for this particular study because I truly value the groundwork that the teachers have done by themselves to make change in education. Her particular story follows:

There is a primary school in Siem Reap province; it is the bordering province near Battambang province (the province where the research sites are located), and the school is called “Wat Bo.” It has the best success rate in literacy and it has more qualified teachers compared to teachers in other schools in the province. Also, this school is well known for having selected and encouraged its teachers to have at least a bachelor degree and to know two languages. That is the initiative idea from the school principal because he wants the teachers to be able to do research to expand their knowledge and teaching methods. The school success rate is high due to this factor alone. And there is one outstanding teacher from that school who won the award as the best teacher in Cambodia. The teacher (Ms. Touch Bandoul) is known for her teaching success because she was helping her students in so many skills, including reading skills and she has written a book called “Documents to assist teachers in helping slow-learners.” That is the first resource book about teaching pedagogies created by a local teacher that I have ever known.

**Recommendations for This Case Study**

The advantage of the case study in this research is that the teachers did not view themselves as only content area teachers, even though they are the subject teachers teaching subjects including Khmer studies, social studies, and mathematics, etc. They are still willing to help students with literacy instruction; however, they do not distinguish between basic reading and reading in content areas. It is important that the Ministry and other training organization should help raise awareness and help them learn more about the differences between “reading to learn,” “content area reading” “learning to read” and
“learning basic literacy skills, including reading”—and educate the teachers to be aware of the significance of reading beyond the foundational skills for survival and for gaining factual information, as well as to practice decoding skills. However, reading itself is very important at many levels, especially reading in content areas because reading is for comprehension, application, and critique (Herber, 1970).

Reading allows readers to become critical, to read beyond the words towards the world they live in (Freire, 1983). So, the Ministry should pay more attention on improving both decoding skills, such as basic literacy skills for slower learners and comprehension skills and critical and interpretation skills beyond the basic literacy skills for other normal and highly performing students who are in upper Grades 5 and 6. The teachers, even though in upper-elementary classes, can benefit from training in basic literacy instruction from phonemic awareness to vocabulary instructions in order to have those skills and that knowledge available to teach the weaker and slower learners in the class. The teachers can benefit from becoming equipped with practical knowledge about reading comprehension, from vocabulary development strategies to comprehension strategies, from engaging in cover-to-cover study of new texts to thinking aloud (Moss, 2005). Michael Vitale and Nancy Romance “posit that promoting the use of reading strategies in meaningful, content specific learning environments is a more effective approach to enhancing reading comprehension proficiency than engaging students in a series of unrelated stories” (as cited in McNamara, 2007, p. 13). According to the teachers’ current circumstances, the teachers need those methods and strategies to help them with teaching reading in content areas rather than using one general approach of student-centeredness for every lesson.

The training should not be necessarily provided by the international NGOs because they operate from a different context and do not face the same difficulties or realities, as they exist in Cambodia. Teacher training may focus more on classroom issues rather than administrative issues. As well, changes in the classroom should be more cognitive and critical than behavioural changes.

Thus, the trainers or the planners of the training section who help with teaching reading should include successful teachers (like Ms. Touch). She is a good resource and her experience should be shared with other teachers in Cambodia nation-wide in the form
of workshops or presentations for other teachers to attend. It is a huge motivation for other teachers to see another side of education, compared with what they have done repeatedly for years. At least, this kind of experienced and successful teacher can encourage other teachers to change their perspectives on practicing the old ways of forcing students to learn through violence. This experience can raise awareness that learning is not only enhanced by forcing, corporal punishment; instead, there are other ways to motivate students to learn.

If the Ministry is promoting student-centered and active learning pedagogies in teaching any lessons, including reading in content areas, they should not make it an absolute prescribed curriculum for all teachers to follow. The language of student-centered teaching and learning itself connotes that the teacher’s role is taken away and replaced by the students’ roles. Student-centered learning is understood as a contradiction to teacher-centered pedagogy (Mascolo, 2009). Thus, it is a sudden and tremendous change in terms of perspectives and mindsets of the teachers regarding these two different pedagogies that they experience; instead, the reform should not focus strictly on methodologies. The trainers also should pay more attention to educating teachers about the roles of teachers and the roles of students, and the teaching and learning goals and objectives that both teachers and students are striving to achieve. Teachers’ knowledge in understanding the new educational concepts, as well as their roles and their students’ roles, is very important according to Elmore (1996); thus, it should not be taken for granted.

**Teacher Agency**

There should be a way to start and it should be from the teachers. I am giving these suggestions or recommendations for the Ministry of Education who has power to make the decisions as the top priority in order for them to provide opportunities for the teachers to make real changes. However, if they are unable or unwilling to do anything about it, the recommendations may devolve to the administrators and trainers who are involved and, lastly, they are for the teachers, themselves, to help forge change.

Besides teaching methods and other factors, the reason that students are poor in reading might be because they do not like reading or do not like books. In Cambodia, reading is not a part of people’ habits or interests. This can be seen by visiting almost any
home in Cambodia—there are no books or very few books displayed in rooms. The teachers themselves should be the readers and be book lovers, as this is a good model for students and their parents. Regardless of the students’ family issues, which are beyond teachers’ control, teachers can still help their students by creating a positive learning environment. Connecting home and family often should be a mean to help parents with their children’s reading issues. Teachers can, at least, encourage parents to read and expose their children to books by reading to them and helping them with literacy skills at home, if possible. This practice could also raise awareness for parents to appreciate the value of education. The Ministry of Education should initiate an outreach program in a local community to help create awareness about the importance of reading and education for the students’ families, as well as to encourage more parent involvement.

If the Ministry of Education does not initiate this idea, it should be up to the school principals and the teachers themselves to take the initiative. Students should be more exposed to books, especially at school, and the library should be open for longer hours and be equipped with children’s books at each grade level. Also, there should be a program to encourage teachers to read more at home in order to share what they read with their students; for example, in the case of teacher Sophea, she reads her own book beside her school textbook, and she brings it to share with her students. The results that she gets from this are very positive. Her example should be brought forward to represent a good model for other teachers in the school to follow. An exemplar should be encouraged to share his or her experience with other teachers in the school, along with evidence of positive results from the students. If the teachers do not receive any professional development programs or training, they wish to inquire from the Ministry, and suggest good ideas to improve the teachers’ knowledge in terms of pedagogies, as well as to improve their overall attitudes, by sharing experience and knowledge among the teachers themselves.

In order to make this happen, it is very important to nourish teacher motivation. It is crucial to recognize the successful work of particular teachers in the school; for example, Dara has so much experience in helping her slower learners in reading. She learned those methods from her rich experience in teaching illiterate villagers. This is valuable experience and is a resource in the local context that should be shared with other
teachers. Dara is also the only teacher who received additional supplementary training, and she has a lot of knowledge in terms of teaching reading methods, compared to the other three teachers. Dara wishes to share what she learned from the training and her experience with other teachers, but the school principal has never helped make this happen. Thus, the school leader should be more engaging with this regard. For example, in the case of the best teacher (Ms. Touch), she has written a book about methodologies to help slower learners—it is called “Documents to assist slow-learners” in both reading and mathematics; even though it might not have been tested to be the best methods or even acceptable methods, it is still a very good resource for other teachers in the country to have because it has been created by a local teacher with experience and background in dealing with the same issues.

As the Ministry has helped create a program to select the best teacher in the country, there should be another program within the local school to recognize and select the best teacher in each school who has done good work in teaching reading. It will greatly influence other teachers’ practices because that best teacher can help run a training section within his or her school. Then, there should be regular training that is initiated and takes place among or by the teachers themselves. Also, the principal could help create a program or training for sharing experience among teachers in their own school.

The teachers’ past experiences and their personal beliefs affect their behavior, and the selection of their instructional strategies such as reading for rote learning and memorization. In order to change their perspectives, it is feasible to use the culture of patron-client relationship to influence their mindset by having someone whom they trust, for example the senior teachers; as in case of Dara and Sirath, who admitted that they have been influenced a lot by senior teachers. Thus, the school principal could select and promote the best-performing teacher in the school, who could gain respect from other teachers. But, the criteria for the selection might be tricky and problematic because it may become related to issues of nepotism within the process of the selection. If the principal and teachers want to make real change, they should select the appropriate teacher(s) who may be more critical in their teaching activities. The teacher could be the one who critically engages their students in learning. This practice should be encouraged first
before creating the program for selecting the model teacher(s). It is a starting point, at least.

The Ministry should move away from the test and examination orientation if they want to move away from the traditional practice of teacher-centered approaches and let the teachers implement active learning pedagogies. The reason for this is that the examinations and test scores evaluation is a barrier to the implementation of active learning pedagogies (Ginsburg, 2006; Hopkins, 2002). Students’ learning abilities should not be only evaluated through the test results due to the fact that the tests depend only on multiple choice questions, and the fact that almost all students are moved to the next grade regardless of what scores they get. Thus, students’ performance should be evaluated by other activities they do in class; for example, it should be evaluated by their engagement in the classroom and their critical thinking abilities to answer analytical questions as well as their capabilities to create questions to ask their peers or the teacher(s) and, when they complete the test questions, the teachers should encourage them to answers by not copying the exact same words from the text(s). This can encourage teachers and students to establish their own habits to move away from reading only for memorization and gaining factual information because it is not an appropriate way to promote students’ learning and thinking abilities and comprehension.

In order to make this happen, it needs to begin from the teachers. They can create the best possible learning environment in order to make this happen. It is also true for the teachers, in order for them to help their students, they should start with themselves first; and the environment at work should also become more accommodating to help teachers change their perspectives on reading for getting information and memorizing facts to being more critical about what is being read.

Students are influenced by the environment in which they learn. When the environment is optimistic, cheerful, and upbeat in nature, students tend to be more comfortable and confident in their participation and performance. Teachers are also influenced by the environment in which they work, especially since they have so much to do with creating the environment in the first place. When the environment is optimistic, cheerful, and upbeat in nature, teachers tend to be seen as supportive of students’ participation and performance. The consequence of the comfort, confidence, and support is mutual and reciprocal expectations of students’ and teachers’ success, each for themselves and each for the other.
Because expectations influence outcomes, students’ success is more probable in this optimistic learning environment. (Herber & Herber-Nelson, 1993, p. 90)

There should be an experienced teacher who acts as a role model who can influence other teachers and is able to help create positive thinking and attitudes among teachers. The teachers might eventually change their perspectives, if there is someone showing them that their students are able to perform the activities that the teachers thought they could not do, namely creating their own questions and answering challenging questions.

For example, while it is not a part of this research, after I finished the data collection, Sirath suggested that I teach one reading lesson in his class because he wanted to see how I would teach a reading lesson. I taught one reading lesson to his class and incorporated the questioning method, which allowed his students to create questions from the text to ask their classmates; and they were able to create ones. Sirath expressed a surprise that his students could do it. I raise this example just to show that teachers can change their negative thinking and low expectations of their students, if there were an exemplar. It could also be an example to raise the awareness and to show to the teachers that there are possibilities that teachers can ask students critical questions and challenge the knowledge in the textbooks rather than following or accepting the text as universal truth. It could have a great impact on the classroom practices. Herber and Herber-Nelson (1993) argued that:

Students are influenced by the environments in which they learn. When the environment is filled with creative learning opportunities, students tend to be more stimulated and interested in participating and performing. Teachers are influenced by the environments, too. When teachers fill the environment with creative and interesting instructional opportunities (the reciprocal learning opportunities), teachers tend to be seen as supportive of students’ participation and performance… because expectations influence outcomes, students’ success is more probable in an environment in which teachers initiate. (p. 90)

Thus, teachers should not limit their expectations and beliefs about the input their students can provide, including their ability to create their own questions to ask the teachers(s) and their peers, as well as their ability to answer critical questions.

Furthermore, the teachers’ understanding of reading and how to teach it is very much influenced by how the training at the teacher training school is delivered. Thus, the
culture and practices at the teacher training school could be improved as well. The training organizers or trainers can emulate a good image of a critical educator by not using power to control student teachers and to change the practice from exam oriented evaluation to more critical/practical based learning, because the tests and examinations may cause the student teachers to perpetuate the practice of reading for memorization and just getting factual information for completing the tests. That should be appreciated and done through the teacher trainers.

They could also give student teachers a chance to explore their own learning through reading and encouraging them to ask critical questions, and critique and challenge the ideas in the articles they read. These activities can be practiced regularly and then the student teachers can be assessed or observed as to how much they learn to improve their perspectives on reading practices. Thus, in order to make it effective and practical, the training section must be well prepared. The trainers or the planners of any training section can study and seriously take into consideration their teachers’ prior knowledge, their educational experience and background, their culture and expectations, their interaction and contribution during the training, and how they engage or relate to the objectives of the training. At the very least, the trainers should work closely with each individual teacher in order to make them feel comfortable in sharing their views and concerns in a private meeting after the training, which is better than a public meeting, due to issues of saving face, shyness, and being afraid to raise issues against the authority. This could help the teachers to learn practical and critical lessons to share with their students, to help eliminate their confusion between the two approaches, and to open their minds to new pedagogies.

Because all the teacher participants complained that they do not clearly understand the new active learning pedagogical approaches, they all suggested that they required direct training with clear and more informative practical methods about the new pedagogies in order to help bring more new and effective teaching methods to improve their instructions. Therefore, the training in pre-service programs and supplementary programs might include the core conceptions and theories behind these pedagogies and what their methods are trying to achieve rather than teaching them only several activities related to the approaches. If pre- and in-service teachers learn the literature and theories
about the methodologies, they may be able to expand the related activities later on once they put them into practice. When the teachers are able to expand their own instructional methods, the teachers might not be entirely dependent on the guidance in the teacher guidebook; instead, they may use it as a reference book only.

Also, the Ministry can help encourage the teachers not to copy everything from the teacher guidebook and lead them to believe that they are applying student-centered approaches once they follow the guidance in teacher guidebook. The curriculum could be negotiated rather than prescribed. The Ministry may also encourage and train the teachers to write variety of lesson plans rather than sticking to only one form of lesson plan. And when writing a lesson plan, the teachers might not wish to copy everything from the teacher guidebook but could update their lesson plans by bringing new concepts and relevant and interesting activities for students to incorporate, as in Sophea’s case where she added mind-educating lessons to her lesson plans.

The attitude of the trainers and the messages that they convey can easily be absorbed by the student teachers who may practice the same concepts and beliefs with their students once they become teachers. Also, student teachers could be taught to be collaborative rather than being competitive, because the traditional culture of the Cambodian classroom is that the teachers teach students to be more competitive, and appreciate perfection by avoiding mistakes. Because the teachers learn to be competitive themselves at the teacher training school to get higher scores in order to select the best school to teach at, this culture has been passed down to students to become more individual and not collaborative because they also compete for higher marks and ranks in the class. Thus, the teachers should be aware of this issue and raise the awareness that being competitive and confrontational can be an obstacle for students, and that they need to become more collaborative once they come to group work with their peers and help them with their learning. Herber and Herber-Nelson (1993) stated that, if the teachers were collaborative, they would create the classroom environment that is very supportive for students to collaborate with other students and make them feel less at risk.

Rather than blaming students for not being involved and not being interested in their learning or in classroom instructions, teachers could become more critical and reflective in terms of their own instructional strategies; and administrators could help
raise this awareness for all the teachers, including those in earlier Grades 1, 2, 3 and 4. The Ministry could be made aware of this problem rather than pushing all students to pass the grade as a way to maintain the low repetition rate no matter how poor the students’ performance is. This issue will cause a huge problem later on in higher grades. Thus, the Ministry can assist the lower grade teachers by providing them with enough pedagogical knowledge in basic literacy skills and by providing slower learners in literacy with a special program during the school break.

Other Recommendations

The accessibility to reading and teaching materials is also an issue. Thus, the Ministry and other related administrators could provide more reading materials to each school, especially elementary schools and encourage longer opening hours for the library, making it a friendly reading place for both teachers and students. And, teachers could also assign more reading homework for their students to research in the library or to borrow books to read at home. In order for the teachers to create their own teaching materials for the implementation of student-centered pedagogies, teachers may be trained or taught to be creative and critical in what they are doing and reading so that they might become more creative in terms of their teaching pedagogies and teaching material creation. Also, the training and technical-committee meeting might focus on strategies other than how to create teaching materials and address how to effectively incorporate them into each lesson in order to make them relevant to the objectives of the lessons.

Furthermore, according to the teachers’ comments, the content in the current textbook is beyond the learning or reading level of students because there are a lot of slower learners in reading in each class. Thus, the Ministry may seriously take this into consideration, and lesson can be learned from the teachers in order to improve the content in the textbooks as well as correcting the mistakes and grammatical and spelling errors associated with the texts so that the teachers are not confused and the students will learn better. In relation to the content in the textbooks, a large numbers of lessons to be covered during the whole academic year is also a burden and overloaded for teachers. Thus, the Ministry of Education could also learn about this issue from the teachers and address it by either reducing the numbers of lessons or by increasing more teaching time. However,
I believe that the teachers might object about such a time expansion because of their second job and they might not wish to sacrifice their own time for that.

**Final Comments**

If the Ministry of Education wants to make the real change/real educational reform, it could start with the teachers and begin by improving reading, especially reading in content areas among students—teaching them to be critical in the ways they are reading and learning. And, all of these changes could happen because of the teachers’ practices. Thus, to endorse the concept of “being critical,” it should also start from the teachers because they tremendously influence their students in so many ways. If the teachers do not receive any assistance or professional development from the Ministry of Education for whatever political, cultural or economical reasons they may have, the teachers can learn to develop their own agency—to be motivated to learn to be critical on their own in order to contribute to the success and better educational outcomes of their students. Teachers are the main educators in Cambodia and they can benefit from being critical in the ways they are implementing pedagogies and teaching in the classroom in order to break the cycle of power and control in order to minimize the culture of acceptance that positions teachers as inferiors and incapable of influencing curriculum change. Change may occur within the teachers themselves—they may begin to think “outside of the box” to eliminate the issue of conformity by daring to be different and taking the initiative regardless of the majority and of the culture of acceptance. If they want the change to take place at the classroom level and to help improve their teaching profession or if they want to have their voices heard, teachers have to speak out and let the administrators know their problems even though they may not address them. For instance, Giroux (1988) argued that such a kind of discourse requires a struggle and a commitment in order to be appreciated and understood. Teachers should not take these cultural norms for granted and look down on their own knowledge and abilities as well as their students’ learning abilities and intelligence. They can stop this negative belief and attitude. In order to break the cycle of perpetuating a “power hierarchy” or reducing the endorsement of authoritarian classrooms and school, it can start from teachers themselves.
The basic starting point is also from how their students are taught—how the teachers ask students questions and what kind of answers they expect from students is very important in establishing a foundation for being critical and creative. I believe that the change agent is the teacher(s) and the teachers can develop their own agency in order to create real educational change and to enhance their own educational development. However, my only concern and question remains, how much are teachers motivated to take a big step out of their comfort zone to take the initiative for their own professional development and their students’ educational success?

Educators or decision makers at the Ministry of Education should seriously take the teachers’ voices into consideration in order to learn more about their challenges and their input could contribute to curriculum making and improvement. This is very important because when bringing the concept of any curriculum change for the teachers to implement, the administrators at the Ministry should address the teachers’ challenges, the issues that they have, and their needs, as well as other issues related to the students. Those inputs are crucial for administrators to be able to make informed decisions about the kind of pedagogies that teachers need and the kinds of methods that are truly practical and applicable for them. Due to cultural and behavioral barriers that the society endorses, including the culture of acceptance, trying to be perfect, patron-client relationship, and the culture of saving face, such attitudes may inhibit them from being as critical and confrontational with the authority as need be for whatever they think is not working or needs improvement. Hence, the administrators cannot take these factors for granted. They would benefit from working closely with the teachers in local schools in order for them to feel comfortable enough to comment on what can be done to improve the curriculum. In this particular case, the bigger issue that teachers face is in the reading curriculum. The teachers in upper-elementary classes need professional development in basic literacy, instructional strategies and content areas reading strategies.

Inspection is also a better way for the administrators at the Ministry level to be closer to teachers in each local school because inspectors are administrators from the Ministry of Education. Thus, the Ministers of Education should not deliver the inspection for the sole purpose of evaluating, assessing, admonishing and blaming the teachers’ teaching performance; instead, they can assume their roles as professional developers and
make teaching inspection a means to be close to teachers and listen to their classroom issues in order to improve teaching performance and learning outcomes. Furthermore, to make teachers’ voices heard or to get input from the teachers for improving curriculum making, teacher Sirath offers a suggestion:

To design the school curriculum, it has to be through all the teachers in charge in all provinces. They have to create workshop in each province, like in Battambang province, and then they select teachers…whatever number of teachers will be selected, for example, 10 teachers…in the provinces to join the workshop at the national level for designing the school curriculum program for elementary school and also lower secondary school. The workshop allows them to be able to give comments and opinions regarding the school curriculum design. And they can make the decision of what to include and what to exclude… And the textbook should have some changes. We should prepare to add more meanings to the texts. And the articles that are not important, we should take them out. Instead, we add articles that are important for students.

When involving teachers in the curriculum making and improvement, it also helps the administrators at the Ministry level to be able to negotiate how the new educational concepts, strategies and methodologies are given or lent by the international NGOs and sponsors who claim to help improve education in Cambodia. At least, Cambodia has its own resources in the form of teachers to give suggestions during the process of re-contextualization and re-modification of the methodologies in order to make them fit the Cambodian context. Thus, the Ministry needs more teachers like Ms. Touch (the best teacher) and Dara (she has very rich experience in teaching reading) in order to help with this process. However, my only concern is about how much knowledge and experience would the Cambodian teachers have to have in order to make such contributions or to be strong enough to confront or challenge foreign teams or advisors.

Final Summary

This research study described the main conceptual, theoretical, and methodological foundations for my doctoral study, “Teachers’ understanding and practice of teaching reading in content areas in upper elementary classes in suburban public schools in Cambodia.” This research study has offered insights into the perspectives of content area teachers in Cambodia, when it comes to teaching reading in content areas specific to their academic disciplines. Teacher attitudes, teacher beliefs, teacher knowledge, and the use of teaching reading strategies, including student-centered and
active learning/teaching pedagogies were identified and addressed. This qualitative case study within a comparative and international framework examined how and what teachers do to teach reading in content areas; their perspectives regarding the conceptual knowledge of reading and teaching reading in content area classes; how they react to active learning pedagogies transferred from elsewhere; how they apply these approaches in their instructional strategies; and their understanding of their roles in curriculum making and implementation.

The findings have shown that Cambodian teachers have very limited knowledge and understanding of reading and reading in content areas because they have never learned any specific methods for teaching reading in content areas and are not generally familiar with reading strategies. They also have very basic understanding of the importance of reading, as reading is a survival skill in a society and is mostly used for gaining factual information. Their K-12 education and teacher training experiences have had a great impact on their understanding of reading, as well as the selection of instructional strategies. Student-centered approaches were used to teach reading in content areas but the teachers did not seem able to implement them consistently and effectively, yet they still prefer their traditional teacher-centered approaches and rote memorization.

There are other factors that influence the teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and choice of instructional strategies when teaching reading in content areas. Those key factors are insufficient teacher preparation programs, lack of supports available from the Ministry of Education in the form of professional development, insufficient salary requiring the need for a second job, accountability, students’ low abilities in reading and learning, their own cultural and behavioral barriers, and their own personal beliefs. The data also shows that the four teacher participants have never taken part in curriculum making. They accept and implement the reading curriculum that is already set up and designed for them by the top-level officials in the Ministry of Education. The teachers do not have any voice in making changes in their own curriculum. This is a big challenge for them in implementing the reading curriculum successfully and encouraging their students to learn reading in content areas. However, the teachers still manage to overcome those challenges by applying their own ways of teaching, including secretly using teacher-centered
approaches, skipping some lessons, and following the teaching guidelines in the teacher guidebook.

The findings of this study convey a message to the Ministry of Education that teachers are desperately in need of better teaching approaches that are applicable to their own local contexts, and they also need methodologies for teaching basic reading skills for slower learners and effective strategies for teaching reading in content areas for all the students. If the issues or challenges that the teachers face are not addressed by the administrators at the Ministry level, the teachers will remain silent and accept the challenges as an educational norm. The teacher’s silence and acceptance may give way to overcoming these challenges on their own, even if they would not make any significant improvement or change within their profession or students’ learning outcomes; instead, inaction perpetuates the cycle of a hierarchy of power within the educational system. This problem will remain unresolved unless the teachers develop their own agency and make their voices heard.

I strongly believe that this study’s analysis of teachers’ perspectives about their teaching of reading in content areas yields valuable insights, and therefore, may encourage the teachers to be more critical, to develop their own agency so that the teachers’ voices may be heard for real educational reform to occur. It serves as a valuable resource as well as provides feedback to teachers, schools and the Ministry of Education in Cambodia.

The interpretations drawn from the findings of this study are important for the Ministry of Education in its efforts to design and provide the most effective policies, resources and professional development possible to advance the cause of content area reading instruction in upper elementary schools. Furthermore, this study contributes to the field of basic and early adolescent literacy and reading in Cambodia, particularly with regards to in-service teacher professional learning in academic reading instruction in Cambodia as well as in other developing countries. This study also has implications regarding the improvement of teacher education programs, reading curricula, teaching reading in content areas, and pre- and in-service teacher development.
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Appendices

Appendix A. Interview Guiding Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Cycle Interview</th>
<th>Main Questions</th>
<th>Probing Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
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</table>
| 1. Please tell me about yourself | a. Years of experience  
|                        | b. Level of education  
|                        | c. Subject(s) you teach |                  |
| 2. Please briefly describe your class and your school |                  |                  |
| 3. How do you define reading (before you become a teacher)? | Tell me about how you get this knowledge (understanding) about the definition of reading from (your teachers, your parents, reading tradition, education, personal experiences, etc.) |                  |
| 4. How do you define reading (after you become a teacher)? | Tell me about how you get this knowledge (understanding) about the definition of reading from (training, education, school curriculum, reading tradition, teaching experience, etc.) |                  |
| 5. Tell me about the importance of reading (Why do people read? What do you see readers doing?) | a. In general  
|                        | b. For you as a teacher  
|                        | c. For your students |                  |
| 6. Tell me about the purposes and types of reading | a. In general  
|                        | b. For you as a teacher  
|                        | c. For your students |                  |
| 7. Please tell me about your reading experience, including at school, at work, at home, and at public places. | a. How do you read?  
|                        | b. When you were a student, how did you read in order to understand a text in your content area class?  
<p>|                        | c. How did your content area teacher(s) teach you to understand a text or to learn from a text? Did they use any strategies? |                  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Clarification/Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d. What did you expect to get after you finish reading a text in your</td>
<td>content area class?</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. According to your overall reading experience, how do you understand</td>
<td>and treat reading—for yourself, as well as when you teach your students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Are the ways the students read in Grades 5 and 6 different from or</td>
<td>a. If different, how? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>similar to the ways they read in Grades 1 and 2?</td>
<td>b. If similar, how? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Please tell me about your experiences in teaching reading to your</td>
<td>a. Do you use any strategies to teach reading?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students in your content area class, including how you teach them to</td>
<td>b. If you don’t use, do you see any reason for teaching others to use strategies to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>read and learn from the text they are reading. Why do you think you</td>
<td>reading?</td>
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<tr>
<td>teach this way? Can you reflect on this?</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Second-Cycle Interview

Reflections on 1st Classroom Observation

10. Ask questions that emerge after the 1st classroom observation in order to get more of the teachers’ thoughts and perspectives on what they earlier say and what/how they teach the class.

Third-Cycle Interview

Reflections on 2nd Observation

11. Ask questions that emerge after the 2nd classroom observation in order to get more of the teachers’ thoughts
and perspectives on what they earlier say and what/how they teach the class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Research Question 2: What instructional strategies do the teachers use and find most beneficial for their students when teaching reading in content areas? Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>12.</strong> Tell me about the methods you use to teach your subject (e.g. History, Social Studies, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. What methods do you use to teach your students to understand a subject text or to learn from reading the text, for example?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Why do you use these methods?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>13.</strong> Do you use any specific reading strategies to teach your students in order for them to learn from the text, and that you find most useful for your students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. If no, why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. If yes, why and how do you choose these particular reading strategies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What influence you to choose them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do your beliefs and attitudes towards reading affect this choice? If yes, how? If no, why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Does the knowledge gained from your personal experience as well as from teacher training affect this choice? If yes, how? If no, why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14.</strong> Have you been through any training in specialized reading classes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. If yes, what did you learn from this training regarding teaching reading?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Does your knowledge from this training affect your instructional strategies? If yes, how? Why? If no, why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15.</strong> Where and how did you generally learn these current instructional strategies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Khmer reading tradition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Personal experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. School curriculum?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. New Western concepts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Formal training at Teacher Training Center?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
16. Tell me about your beliefs in teaching methods. Which one do you prefer, active and cooperative learning (student-centered approaches) or passive teaching (teacher-centered approaches)?

17. Tell me about active and cooperative learning strategies. Do you implement them in your teaching reading practices?

18. Ask questions that emerge after the 3rd classroom observation in order to get more of the teachers’ thoughts and perspectives on what they earlier say and what/how they teach the classes.

19. Could you please tell me about the challenges you face when you incorporate reading strategies in teaching content in your class? Why do you think this happen? Could you please reflect on it?

20. How do you describe your role and responsibility as a teacher in a content area class?

   a. As only a content teacher?
   b. As a reading teacher?
   c. Or both?
   d. If you choose one from the above, please tell me
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Sub-Research Question 4: How do the teachers understand their role(s) in improving curriculum implementation in content area reading?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. How would you describe your school curriculum?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Does it make you more difficult or easier to incorporate reading strategies into teaching content? If yes, how and why. If no, why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Please tell me how and what to do to overcome the challenges you are facing now, and to improve teaching reading in your content area classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Do you take part in designing the curriculum in your school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. If yes, do you include and emphasize reading strategies and skills in teaching content into the curriculum? If yes, why and how? If no, how and why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. If no, who design the curriculum for you and all other teachers in your school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Tell me about how you implement the curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Do you make any changes to the existing curriculum, or you follow the existing curriculum that has been designed for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. If you choose either one of them, please tell me the reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Can you describe the contributions that you (as a teacher) can make to improve the school curriculum, particularly to improve students’ reading ability?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagine if you are given power to design your own curriculum for teaching/teaching reading in particular, what would you do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Is there anything else that you want to say about teaching reading in content areas, school curriculum, or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional strategies, etc. that is not addressed earlier?</td>
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**Fifth-Cycle Interview**

**Reflections on all Observations + Interviews**

| This fifth interview will enable participants to revisit previous perspectives and reflect upon their experiences throughout the period of the whole interviews. | a. Ask each participant to reflect on what they do in the last class observed.  
b. Ask them to give comments on specific events that happen in all the four observed classes. |
Appendix B. Invitation for Participating Teacher(s)

Dear Potential Participant(s),

My name is Bopha Ong. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning/Comparative, International and Development Education Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. I come from Cambodia and I used to be a teacher in Cambodia for five years. My thesis supervisor is Dr. Karyn Cooper who is a professor in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at OISE, University of Toronto.

I am conducting a research study titled, “Teachers’ understanding and practice of teaching reading in content area classes in upper elementary classes in suburban public schools in Cambodia.” The purpose of this research is to discover how and what teachers do to teach reading in content areas, and what their perspectives are regarding the conceptual knowledge of reading and teaching reading in their content area classes.

Questions for Potential Participants:

1- Are you currently teaching Grade 5 or 6 in elementary school in Cambodia?
2- What is your teaching experience?
   a. Are you a civil war survivor who has more than 20 years of teaching experience and has been trained prior to the civil war time?
   b. Or, are you a civil war survivor who has been trained in the post-civil war time and has at least 10 years of teaching experience?
   c. Or, are you born after the civil war and a recently trained teacher who has at least five years of teaching experience?

If you answer “Yes” to question 1 above AND “Yes” to either question a, b, or c in question 2 above, please call me at +855 92 908835 or email at bopha.ong@mail.utoronto.ca by February 10th 2013. If you do not meet the above criteria, I would like to be thankful to you for your time and effort to review this message.

Thanks for your cooperation.

Yours Sincerely,

Bopha ONG
ឈរុះគ្ំ: ជាជនិសីទដ៏ចូលរួមលែងរីរាយជាជនរដូវកាលពីចាប់ដល់ក្នុងការបរិក្បាសារក្នុងម៉ុសោល

ការដោះស្រាយ: និស្សុស ២៨៣ នៅពេលព្រឹត្តិការណ៍ប្រការជាតិសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃ

២៧០ ដ៏ទំនាក់ទំនងដ៏ចូលរួមលែងរីរាយដ៏២៨៣ នៅពេលព្រឹត្តិការណ៍ប្រការជាតិសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃ

ការបរិក្បាសារក្នុងការសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃ

នាងខ្ំបានយកឲ្យសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃកែងកម្ពស់នៅការសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃ

២៧០ ដ៏ទំនាក់ទំនងដ៏ចូលរួមលែងរីរាយដ៏២៨៣ នៅពេលព្រឹត្តិការណ៍ប្រការជាតិសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃ

ការបរិក្បាសារក្នុងការសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃ

នាងខ្ំបានយកឲ្យសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃកែងកម្ពស់នៅការសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃ

២៧០ ដ៏ទំនាក់ទំនងដ៏ចូលរួមលែងរីរាយដ៏២៨៣ នៅពេលព្រឹត្តិការណ៍ប្រការជាតិសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃ

ការបរិក្បាសារក្នុងការសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃ

នាងខ្ំបានយកឲ្យសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃកែងកម្ពស់នៅការសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃ

២៧០ ដ៏ទំនាក់ទំនងដ៏ចូលរួមលែងរីរាយដ៏២៨៣ នៅពេលព្រឹត្តិការណ៍ប្រការជាតិសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃ

ការបរិក្បាសារក្នុងការសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃ

នាងខ្ំបានយកឲ្យសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃកែងកម្ពស់នៅការសិក្ខារដ៏អធិបត្រតិចប្រចាំថ្ងៃ
ចុំលារ Khmer

អាចមិនអាចបានផ្តល់តម្លៃក្នុងការអំពីកីឡា៖

រូមផ្ថ្រង់អុំណ្រគ៊ុណ្យ ងស្ជាលលស្ៅចុំល ោះកិចចរហស្បតិបតតិការ

រូមលគារព និង អរគ៊ុណ្ លដ្ឋយលសា ម ោះ

អ្ ុង បុប្ផ ា

គោរព សម្រាប់ការប្រការ សារប្រការ និងការអនុវត្តន៍ ប្រការ ស្តីព

គោរព និង ប្រការ ស្តីព សារ
Appendix C. Consent for Participating Teachers

You are invited to take part in a research study of teachers’ perspectives and practices of teaching reading in content areas. You are chosen for the study because of the grade and subject you teach and your teaching experience. This form is a part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part or not. Please read this form. Ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Bopha Ong, who is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning/Comparative, International and Development Education Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto and a former teacher in Cambodia. My thesis supervisor is Dr. Karyn Cooper who is a professor in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at OISE, University of Toronto.

Background Information:

There is a lack of research on the level of teacher knowledge and skills in implementing reading concepts and strategies, which constitute a significant gap in the literature. Reading is an integral skill for students to possess, and hence it is necessary to investigate. Therefore, this study aims to discover how and what teachers do to teach reading in content areas, and what their perspectives are regarding the conceptual knowledge of reading and teaching reading in their content area classes. Teaching reading in content areas means guiding students to comprehend and respond to ideas in texts within subject disciplines. The data gained from the sample of the population in this study will offer useful information for the improvement of teacher education programs, curriculum development, teaching reading methods, and pre/in-service teacher development.
Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in five individual interviews. Each interview will last 90 minutes. The interviews will be audio-recorded and then transcribed.
- Allow me to observe the classrooms four times when you are teaching content area reading. Each classroom observation will approximately take 45 minutes to one hour.
- Allow me to access your lesson plans, course materials etc., and I ask for your consent to do so.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

The field study will take place from the 15th of February 2013 to the 15th of April 2013. Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that I will respect your decision of whether or not you want to participate in the study. Also, be assured that at no time will the participants’ input or performance be evaluated or judged. I will not treat you differently if you decide not to participate in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later on during the study. You may stop participating in the study at any time you feel uncomfortable, and you may skip or refuse any questions that you do not want to answer.

Withdrawal from the Research:

If you wish to stop your participation in this research study for any reason, you need to contact me at 092 9857003 or email me at bopha.ong@mail.utoronto.ca at any time in order to notify me of your withdrawal. Then, your previous data collected, including audio-recorded data and transcripts, will be destroyed or deleted immediately after that.

You are free to withdraw your consent and stop your participation in this research study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits for which you may be entitled. Throughout the study, I will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study. The new information refers to
information about the additional interview after the fifth interview. After I read the transcription of the fifth interview, I might have additional questions for you and will possibly meet with you again for the sixth interview. In addition, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The risks with taking part in the study are minimal. The risks might include discomfort in answering questions about your work experiences and opinions, and in being observed by me as a researcher. Additionally, time may be an important factor to you, thus you may feel added stress with participating in this study.

No direct benefits will occur from taking part in the study. Rather, you will gain other benefits as you have an opportunity to reflect on your own teaching practices in order to improve your professional learning in the future. I intend to provide you with a short summary of findings later. The findings of this study will allow you and other teachers as well as administrators in Cambodia to gain a deeper understanding of the issues associated with teaching reading in content areas in their own setting and the challenges they face when they teach reading in their content area classes.

Compensation

No compensation will be provided for participating in the study. Nor will you be penalized in any way for not participating.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. I will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study. In order to protect your identities, I will assign a pseudonym to you or allow you choose your own pseudonym.
Audio recorded data will be removed from the recording device on the day of recording and stored, in an encrypted form (password protected), on my computer. All the data collected will be stored in a safe and confidential place that is not accessible to anyone other than me as a main and sole investigator. During the fieldwork, the research data will be locked in a secured location at my home. When being in Canada, I will store the data in a locked storage (my personal laptop) in an encrypted format in my home. Data will be destroyed after 5 years if you wish so. If you decide to withdraw from this study at any point in time, your previous data collected, including audio-recorded data and transcripts, will be destroyed or deleted immediately after that.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or, if you have questions later, you may contact me via 092 9857003 and bopha.ong@mail.utoronto.ca or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Karyn Cooper at (416) 978-0256 or karyn.cooper@utoronto.ca. I will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement.

Please check the appropriate box for the various components of the data collection.

I consent:

☐ Agree  ☐ Do not agree  : To the interviews
☐ Agree  ☐ Do not agree  : To the audio recording of the interviews
☐ Agree  ☐ Do not agree  : To be observed in the classrooms
☐ Agree  ☐ Do not agree  : To provide access to lesson plans and course materials

By signing below, I am agreeing to participate in this research study with the above conditions.

Name: ____________________  Chosen Name: __________________

Signature: __________________ Date: _______________________

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ការយល់គ្រមពគ្រៀងចូលរួមកនុងការគ្ាវគ្ាវសំរាប់ពោកគ្រូអ្នកគ្រូដែលចូលរួមលោកស្គូអនកស្គូស្តូវបានអល្ាើញចូលរួមកន៊ុងការរិកាស្សាវស្ជាវអុំពីរសនៈនិងការអន៊ុវតតន៍ននការបលស្ងៀនអានកន៊ុងម៊ុខវិជា៍រិកាលៅកន៊ុងថ្ននក់បឋមកុំរិតខពរ់។លោកស្គូអនកស្គូស្តូវបានលស្ជើរលរើរចូលរួមលៅកន៊ុងការរិកាលនោះពីលស្ោះកុំរិតនិងម៊ុខវិជា៍ផែលលោកស្គូអនកស្គូបលស្ងៀននិងបបូលសាធន៍បលស្ងៀនរបរ់លោកស្គូអនកស្គូ។ឯកសារលនោះគឺជាផ្ននកមួយននែុំលណ្ើរការផែលលគលៅថ្នកិចចយល់គ្រមចូលរួមកនុងការសិកាពនោះផែលនតល់ឱការឱ្យលោកស្គូអនកស្គូយល់ែឹងអុំពីការរិកាលនោះម៊ុននឹងលោកស្គូអនកស្គូស្គូលធវើការរុំលរចចិតតថ្នលតើលោកស្គូអនកស្គូចូលរួមឬល។រូមមតាដាល។អានឯកសារលនោះឲ្យបានចារ់ោរ់និងរួរនូវរុំនួរទាុំងឡាយណាផែលលោកស្គូអនកស្គូមានម៊ុននឹងលធវើការរុំលរចចិតតចូលរួមកន៊ុងការរិកាលនោះ។ការរិកាលនោះស្តូវបានែឹកនាុំលធវើលដ្ឋយអ្ុងបុប្ផា។ជាលបកខជនថ្ននក់បណ្ឌិតលៅកន៊ុងផ្ននកកមមវិធីរិកា​ជារិកាបលស្ងៀននិងការបលស្ងៀននិងលរៀននិងកមមវិធីអភិវឌ្ឍន៍ការអប់រុំការផ្ននក​លស្បៀបលធឺមអនតរជាតិលៅកន៊ុងវិសារាា​ការអប់រុំលខតតអនតារីយូ(Ontario)របរ់រកលវិាល័យតូរ៊ុនតូស្បលរកាណាដ្ឋ។នាងខ្៊ុុំអ្ុងបុប្ផា​ក៏ជាអតីតស្គូបលស្ងៀនលៅកន៊ុងស្បលរកមព៊ុជានងផ្ែរ។ស្គូ ួលបនទ៊ុករបរ់ងខ្៊ុុំលៅកន៊ុងការរិកាស្សាវស្ជាវលនោះគឺលោកស្រីដែរីនែូភ័រផ្ែលជាសាង្រ្សាតចារយលៅកន៊ុងផ្ននកកមមវិធីរិកា​ជារិកាបលស្ងៀននិងការបលស្ងៀននិងលរៀនលៅកន៊ុងវិសារាារិកាអប់រុំលខតតអនតារីយូ(Ontario)របរ់រកលវិាល័យតូរ៊ុនតូ។គ្រវត្តិរ័ត៌មានសំខាន់ដែលទក់ទងពៅនឹងការសិកាពនោះ៖ការខវោះខាតកន៊ុងការស្សាវស្ជាវលៅលលើកុំរិតននការយល់ែឹងនិយភយលការលយលៅកន៊ុងការអន៊ុវតតន៍យ៊ុធសាង្រតនិងលគាលគុំនិតលៅកន៊ុងការអានបានបគា់អុំពីភាពឆកផ្លវងែ៏រុំខាន់មួយលៅកន៊ុងកុំរងស្ឹរតីលៅកន៊ុងស្បលរកមព៊ុជា។ការអានគឺជាជុំនាញមួយែ៏រុំខាន់រុំរាប់ឲ្យរិរសលើបានឬស្ជួតស្ជាបនូវខាឹមសារទាុំងឡាយែូលចនោះលហើយលើបវាមានសារោះរុំខាន់ណារ់កន៊ុងការរិកាស្សាវស្ជាវ។ែូលចនោះការរិកាលនោះមានលគាលបុំណ្ងលែើមបីផ្រវងរកថ្នលតើលោកស្គូអនកស្គូបលស្ងៀនរិរសអុំពីការអានលៅកន៊ុងម៊ុខវិជា៍រិកាលៅកន៊ុងថ្ននក់បឋមកុំរិតខពរ់យ៉ុងែូចលមតចផ្ែរលហើយលោកស្គូអនកស្គូលស្បើស្បារ់វិធីសាង្រ្រតអវីខាោះរុំរាប់ការបលស្ងៀនអាននិងលោកស្គូអនកស្គូមានរសនោះយ៉ុងែូចលមតចខាោះចុំលោះចុំលណ្ោះែឹងលៅនន។
ការអាននិងការបោះឆ្នោតអនុក្រុងក្នុងម៉ុងវិជាបរិការក្នុងថ្ននក់បឋមរិការកុំរិតខពរ់។
ការបោះឆ្នោតអនុក្រុងក្នុងម៉ុងវិជាបរិការមានន័យថានិត្បំរិតយល់ែឹងលហើយនិងលឆាើយតបលៅនឹងគុំនិតទាុំងឡាយលៅក្នុងអតាបលៅក្នុងម៉ុងវិជាថាទៅ។
ិននន័យផ្ែលស្បមូលបានពីលោកស្គូអនកស្គូផ្ែលចូលរួមក្នុងការរិការនោះនឹងនតល់ព័ត៌មានែ៏មានសារោះរុំខាន់មួយ៖
ការអភិវឌ្ឍកមមវីធីស្គូបលស្ងៀនការអភិវឌ្ឍស្គូបលស្ងៀនជា ូលៅ។
និត្តវិធីកនុងការសិកាដ៏គ្ាវគ្ាន៖
• ចូលរួមក្នុងការលធវើរមាភរចុំនួន៥ែង។
• អន៊ុញ្ញា តឲ្យនាងខ្៊ុុំបានរិការលលើកិចចផ្តងការបោះឆ្នោតរមាភ្រៈបោះឆ្នោត។
ភារសម័គ្រចិតិចូលរួមក្នុងការសិកាដ៏គ្ាវគ្ាប្រសិនបើការច៊ុោះលធវើកមមរិការនោះចាប់លនតើមលធវើពីនថ្ៃី១៥ផ្ខក៊ុមភឆ្នុំ២០១៣រហូតែល់នថ្ៃី១៥លមសា១២០១៣។
ការចូលរួមរបរ់លោកស្គូអនកស្គូលៅក្នុងការរិការនោះគឺមានការរម័ស្គចិតតពីលោកស្គូអនកស្គូ។លនោះមានន័យថ្ននាងខ្៊ុុំនឹងលគារពនូវការរុំលរចចិតតរបរ់លោកស្គូអនកស្គូថ្នលតើលោកស្គូអនកស្គូចង់ចូលរួមលៅក្នុងការរិការនោះឬទេ។ក៍ែូចគាន ផ្ែរលោកស្គូអនកស្គូស្តូវចារ់កន៊ុងចិតតថ្នរាល់អវីៗផ្ែលលោកស្គូអនកស្គូនតល់ឲ្យឬរាល់រកមមភាពទាុំងឡាយរបរ់លោកស្គូអនកស្គូនឹងមិនស្តូវបានវិនិចឆ័យលនាោះ។
លហើយនាងខ្៊ុុំនឹងមិនលធវើឲ្យមានភាពខ៊ុរគាន លោកស្គូអនកស្គូជាមិនស្រួលចិតតឬក៍លោកស្គូអនកស្គូអាចរុំលងនូវរុំនួរក៍បែិលរធមិនលឆាើយនូវរុំនួរណា ក៍បានផ្ែលលោកស្គូអនកស្គូមិនចង់លឆាើយ។
ការចាកពចញរីការសិកាគ្ាវគ្ាវ

ស្បរិនលបើលោកស្គូអនកស្គូចង់ប្ឈប់ការចូលរួមកន៊ុងការរិកាស្សាវស្ជាវលនោះលដ្ឋយលហត៊ុនលណាមួយ៖ តុលាការអនកស្គូេស្តូវស្គាន់ផ្តទាក់ងមកនាងខ្៊ុុំលៅតាមលលខូររ័ពទ+855 97 985 7003 បើតាមរយោះសារ bopha.ong@mail.utoronto.ca ឬតាមរយោះសារបានលែើមបីបញ្ញា ក់ស្បាប់នាងខ្៊ុុំពីការចាកលចញរបរ់លោកស្គូអនកស្គូ។ បនាទប់មករាល់ ិននន័យទាុំឡាយណាផ្ែលនាងខ្៊ុុំបានស្បមូលរួចលហើយពីលោកស្គូអនកស្គូែូចជារុំលលងផ្ែលបានថ្ដ៊ុករុំលនរជាអកសរននរុំលលងលនាោះនិងស្តូវបុំផ្លា ញលចាលឬលប់លចញភាាមបនាទប់ពីលនាោះ។ លោកស្គូអនកស្គូមានរិធិចាកលចញពីការស្សាវស្ជាវលនោះលៅលពលណាក៍បានលដ្ឋយគាមនការពិន័យឬក៍បាត់បង់នូវគ៊ុណ្ស្បលយជន៍ណាមួយផ្ែលលោកស្គូអនកស្គូនឹងអាចួលបាន។ លៅកន៊ុងកុំឡ៊ុងលពលលធវើការរិកាស្សាវស្ជាវលនោះនាងខ្៊ុុំនឹងជុំនូនបានស្គូអនកស្គូពីព័ត៌មានថ្មីទាុំងឡាយណាផ្ែលមានផ្ែលអាចប ោះល់ែល់ការរុំរាប់លចចិតតរបរ់លោកស្គូអនកស្គូ។ ព័ត៌មានថ្មីទាុំងលនាោះគឺរួមមានការបផ្នាមននការរមាភរបនាទប់ពីការរមាភរច៊ុងលស្កាយបនទប់ពីនាងខ្៊ុុំអាននូវរុំនួរបផ្នាមល ៀតរុំរាប់លោកស្គូអនកស្គូផ្ែលនាងខ្៊ុុំអាចនឹងស្តូវជួបលោកស្គូអនកស្គូមតងល ៀងរុំរាប់ការរមាភរមតងល ៀត។ ស្បរិនលបើលោកស្គូអនកស្គូមានរុំនួរអុំពីរិធិរបរ់លោកស្គូអនកស្គូផ្ែលចូលរួមលៅកន៊ុងការរិកាស្សាវស្ជាវលនោះលោកស្គូអនកស្គូអាចទាក់ងមកយស្សាវស្ជាវនិងស្កមរីលធ៌មតាមរយោះសារ ethics.review@utoronto.ca ឬតាមលលខូររ័ពទ+1 416-946-3273។ ហានិភ័យនិងអ្តថគ្រពោជន៍ពៅកនុងការចូលរួមកន៊ុងការសិកាគ្ាវគ្ាវពនោះ៖ មានកុំរិតទាបបុំន៊ុត។ អនិភ័យរួមមានែូចជាការមិនលពញចិតតកន៊ុងការលឆាើយរុំនួរទាុំងឡាយផ្ែលទាក់ងលៅនឹងបពិលសាធន៍ការគរនិងគុំនិតផ្លទល់ខាួនរបរ់លោកស្គូអនកស្គូលហើយនិងស្តូវបានរលងេតលដ្ឋយនាងខ្៊ុុំផ្ែលជាអនករិកស្សាវស្ជាវមួយរូប។ លលើរពីលនោះលៀតលពលលវោក្ដាយកូនោះលោកស្គូអនកស្គូអាចមានអារមមណ្៍ ថ្នបផ្នាមនូវរុំធអារមមណ្៍ផ្ែលចូលរួមកន៊ុងការរិកាលនោះ។ មិនមានអតស្បលយជន៍លដ្ឋយផ្លទល់អវីលនាោះលរុំរាប់ការចូលរួមកន៊ុងការរិកាលនោះ។ ក៍បប៊ុផ្នតលោកស្គូអនកស្គូនឹងួលបាននូវនលស្បលយជន៍លនសងលៀតែូចជា៖ លោកស្គូអនកស្គូអាចមានឱការយល់ែឹងបផ្នាមលៅលលើរកមមភាពបលស្ងៀនផ្លទល់របរ់ខាួនលែើមបីលធវើការផ្កលុំអរកន៊ុងការបលស្ងៀនជាអាជីពលៅនថ្ៃអនាគតរបរ់ខាួន។ លធនលននការរិកាលនោះនឹងអន៊ុញ្ញា តឲ្យលោកស្គូអនកស្គូលហើយនិងលោកស្គូអនកស្គូែ៍ន លៀតក៍ែូចជា អនកស្គប់ស្គងការអប់រុំលៅកន៊ុងស្ប��រកមព៊ុជាថាមែល់រុំរាប់នៅកន៊ុងម៊ុខវិជាារិកាលៅកន៊ុងស្បលររបរ់ខាួននិងឧបរគាទាុំងឡាយណាឹ៉េផ្ែលពួកលគកុំព៊ុងស្បឈមម៊ុខលៅ
ការតបសនង

ការរិកាលនោះមិនមានការតបរនងអវីមួយផែលនឹងស្តូវនតល់ជួនលោកស្គូអនកស្គូលនាោះលហើយមិនមានការួលពិន័យអវីមួយកន៊ុងលពលផែលមិនបានចូលរួមនឹងផែរ។

ការរកាាសំងាត់

ស្គប់ព៌ត័មានទាុំងឡាយណាដើម្បីលោកស្គូអនកស្គូនតល់ជួនស្តូវបានរកាយ ងរុំគត់ជា ីបុំន៊ុត។

នាងខ្៊ុុំនឹងមិនលស្បើស្បារ់ព៌ត័មានរបរ់លោកស្គូអនកស្គូកន៊ុងលគាលបុំណាមួយលស្ៅពីគុំលរាងស្សាវនោះលឡើយ។

ស្ពមជាមួយគាន លនោះផែរនាងខ្៊ុុំនឹងមិនប្ចូលល្ម ោះឬក៍ព៌ត័មានអវីលនសងៗផែលអាចរុំគាល់អតតរញ្ញា ណ្របរ់លោកស្គូអនកស្គូលៅកន៊ុងរបាយការណ្៍ណាមួយ។

អតតរញ្ញា ណ្របរ់លោកស្គូអនកស្គូនាងខ្៊ុុំនឹងដ្ឋក់ល្ម ោះលៅលស្ៅ((រហរសនាម))ែល់លោកស្គូអនកស្គូឬក៍អាចឱ្យលោកស្គូអនកស្គូលស្ជើរលរើរល្ម ោះលៅលស្ៅលនោះលដ្ឋយខាួនឯង។

ិននន័យជារុំលលងផែលបានថ្តលហើយនឹងស្តូវយកលចញពីមា រ៊ុីនថ្តរុំលលងលៅកន៊ុងនថ្ៃផែលថ្តរុំលលងលហើយនឹងស្តូវបានរកា ៊ុកជា ុំរង់រុំគត់លដ្ឋយលស្បើស្បារ់ កយរុំគត់ការ រិននន័យរុំលលងលនោះលៅកន៊ុងមា រ៊ុីនក៊ុុំពយូ ័ររបរ់នាងខ្៊ុុំ។

ស្ពមជាមួយគាន លនោះផែរនាងខ្៊ុុំនឹងស្តូវបានចាក់លសារនទ៊ុក ិននន័យទាុំងលនោះលៅកន៊ុងក៊ុុំពយូ ័រផ្លទ ល់ខាួនរបរ់នាងខ្៊ុុំលៅកន៊ុង ុំរង់រុំគត់លៅកន៊ុងនទោះរបរ់នាងខ្៊ុុំ។

ិននន័យនឹងស្តូវបានបុំផ្លា ញលចាលបនា ទប់ពីរយោះលពល៥ឆ្ន ុំស្បរិនលបើលោកស្គូអនកស្គូចង់បានផ្បបលនោះ។

ស្បរិនលបើលោកស្គូអនកស្គូរុំលរចចិតតែកខាួនលចញពីការរិកស្សាវស្ជាវលនោះលៅកន៊ុងលពលណាមួយិននន័យរុំលលងថ្ត ៊ុកនិងរុំលនរបកផ្ស្បនឹងស្តូវបុំផ្លា ញឬលប់លចាលភា ាម។

ការទំនាក់ទំនងនឹងសំនួរ

លោកស្គូអនកស្គូអាចសាករួររុំនួរទាុំងឡាយស្បរិនលបើមានឥឡូវលនោះឬស្បរិនលបើលោកស្គូអនកស្គូមានរុំនួរលៅលពលលស្កាយលោកស្គូអនកស្គូអាចទាក់ងនាងខ្៊ុុំតាម ូររ័ពទលលខ +855 97 985 7003 ឬតាមរយោះសារ bopha.ong@mail.utoronto.ca ឬក៍អនកស្គូ ួលបនទ៊ុករបរ់នាងខ្៊ុុំលោកស្រីសាង្រ្សាតចារយបណ្ឌិតដែរីនែូភ័រតាមរយោះ ូររ័ពទលលខ+1 416-978-0256 ឬតាមរយោះសាររបរ់គាត់karyn.cooper@utoronto.ca។

នាងខ្៊ុុំនឹងស្បគល់ជួនឯកសារចុំលងននលិខិតលនោះែល់លោកស្គូអនកស្គូលែើមបីរកា ៊ុក។
ការប្រការ៖
ក្នុងការការងារបន្ទាន់របស់ដែលជូនអ្នកមានការពិតដែលអាចប្រការបានដំបូងក្នុងការសម្រាប់ការសម្រាប់និងបន្តូចការប្រការ។

ប្រការក្នុងការប្រការ៖
- សម្រាប់ការប្រការដែលអ្នកមានការពិតដែលអាចប្រការបានដំបូងក្នុងការសម្រាប់ការសម្រាប់និងបន្តូចការប្រការ។
- មិនយល់ស្ពោធ្ទំនឹងការប្រការដែលអ្នកមានការពិតដែលអាចប្រការបានដំបូងក្នុងការសម្រាប់ការសម្រាប់និងបន្តូចការប្រការ។
- មិនយល់ស្ពោធ្ទំនឹងការប្រការដែលអ្នកមានការពិតដែលអាចប្រការបានដំបូងក្នុងការសម្រាប់ការសម្រាប់និងបន្តូចការប្រការ។
- មិនយល់ស្ពោធ្ទំនឹងការប្រការដែលអ្នកមានការពិតដែលអាចប្រការបានដំបូងក្នុងការសម្រាប់ការសម្រាប់និងបន្តូចការប្រការ។

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Appendix D. Consent for the Parents of the Students whose Activities and Comments Will Be Included in the Data Collected

This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether or not to allow your child to take part in this study. Please read this form. Ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow your child to participate in the study. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Bopha Ong, who is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning/Comparative, International and Development Education Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto and a former teacher in Cambodia. My thesis supervisor is Dr. Karyn Cooper who is a professor in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at OISE, University of Toronto.

Background Information:

There is a lack of research on the level of teacher knowledge and skills in implementing reading concepts and strategies, which constitute a significant gap in the literature. Reading is an integral skill for students to possess, and hence it is necessary to investigate. Therefore, this study aims to discover how and what teachers do to teach reading in content areas, and what their perspectives are regarding the conceptual knowledge of reading and teaching reading in their content area classes. Teaching reading in content areas means guiding students to comprehend and respond to ideas in texts within subject disciplines. The data gained from the sample of the population in this study will offer useful information for the improvement of teacher education programs, curriculum development, teaching reading methods, and in-service teacher development.

Procedures:

If you agree to allow your child to take part in this study, your child will be asked to:
- Allow me to observe his or her activities in the classroom for four times. Each classroom observation will approximately take 45 minutes to one hour.

- Allow me to record his or her comments/activities that are important or relevant to my research.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

The filed study will take place from the 15th of February 2013 to the 15th of April 2013. Your child’s participation in this study is voluntary. This means that I will respect your decision of whether or not you want your child to participate in the study. Also, be assured that at no time will your child’s input or performance be evaluated or judged. If you decide to allow your child to join the study now, you can still change your mind later on during the study. You may stop your child from participating in the study at any time you may feel uncomfortable or do not want to.

**Withdrawal from the Research:**

If you wish to stop your child from participating in this research study for any reason, you need to contact me at 092 9857003 and bopha.ong@mail.utoronto.ca at any time in order to notify me of the withdrawal. Then the previous data collected that relates to your child will be destroyed or deleted immediately after that.

You are free to withdraw your consent and stop your child’s participation in this research study at any time without penalty or negative consequences. In addition, if you have questions about your child’s rights to participate in this research, you can contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Be assured that your child’s involvement in this research will not pose any risks to him or her. Also, no direct benefits will occur from taking part in the study. Rather, by allowing your child to participate in this study, I believe that you will be helping to increase the knowledge base of literacy, and teaching reading in content areas in particular, as well as teacher development in Cambodia. The findings of this study will allow you as parents and teachers as well as administrators in Cambodia to gain a deeper
understanding of the issues associated with teaching reading in content areas in their own setting and the challenges teachers face when they teach reading in their content area classes.

Compensation:

No compensation will be provided to you or your child for participating in the study nor will your child be penalized in any way for not participating.

Confidentiality:

Any information recorded will be kept strictly confidential. I will not use your child’s information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, I will not include your child’s name or anything else that could identify them in any reports of the study. In order to protect their identities, I will assign a pseudonym to them as “student 1, or student 2, or student 3, or so forth.”

All the data collected will be stored in a safe and confidential place that is not accessible to anyone other than me as a main and sole investigator. During the fieldwork, the research data will be locked in a secured location at my home. When being in Canada, I will store the data in a locked storage (my personal laptop) in an encrypted format in my home. Data will be destroyed after 5 years if you wish so. If you decide to stop your child from participating in this study at any point in time, the previous data collected that relates to your child will be destroyed or deleted immediately after that.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or, if you have questions later, you may contact me via 092 908835 and bopha.ong@mail.utoronto.ca or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Karyn Cooper at (416) 978-0256 or karyn.cooper@utoronto.ca. I will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my child’s involvement.
Please check the appropriate box for the various components of the data collection.

I consent for my child:

☐ Agree  ☐ Do not agree : To be observed in the classroom
☐ Agree  ☐ Do not agree : To be recorded his or her activities/comments in the classroom

By signing below, I am agreeing to allow my child to participate in this research study with the above conditions.

Name of Parent(s): __________________________________________

The Child’s Name: ________________  Pseudonym: Student _______

Signature: ______________________  Date: ________________________
សារៈច្រេងប្រការសំខាន់ដែលទទួលពីការអនកបញ្ជាក់ការសិការ់ដែលមានឡើងក្នុងការបញ្ជាក់សេចក្តីសិការ់ប្រកួតប្រជែងនៃការសិការ់ដែលរឹតវេទធន៍របស់អ្នកនិងក្រុមមូលទៅរះក្នុងការបណ្តាលខ្លួនឯង។

សូមស្វែងរកប្រការប្រការទេសក្តីសិការ់ដែលមានឡើងក្នុងការបញ្ជាក់សេចក្តីសិការ់ប្រកួតប្រជែងនៃការសិការ់ដែលរឹតវេទធន៍របស់អ្នកនិងក្រុមមូលទៅរះក្នុងការបណ្តាលខ្លួនឯង។ សូមប្រការប្រការទេសក្តីសិការ់ដែលមានឡើងក្នុងការបញ្ជាក់សេចក្តីសិការ់ប្រកួតប្រជែងនៃការសិការ់ដែលរឹតវេទធន៍របស់អ្នកនិងក្រុមមូលទៅរះក្នុងការបណ្តាលខ្លួនឯង។

Consent for the Parents of the Students whose Activities and Comments Will Be Included in the Data Collected (Translated in Khmer)
ចាកលចញរបរ់កូនលោកអនក ឬក៍តាមរយោះសារលហត៊ុនលណាមួយ
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លោកអនកចិតតថ្នចង់ស្ពមលមសា
ភារសម័គ្រចិតិចូលរួមកនុងការសិកាគ្ាវគ្ាវ
កូនរបរ់លោកអនកនិត្តវិធីកនុងការសិកាគ្ាវគ្ាវរិកាលនោះនឹងនតល់ព័ត៌មានែ៏មានសារោះរុំខាន់មួយប លៅកន៊ុងម៊ុខវិជាា រិកាលនាោះរិកាអវីខាោះរុំរាប់ការបលស្ងៀនអានវិជាា រិកាលៅកន៊ុងថ្នន ក់បឋម
កូនរបរ់លោកអនកពីលោក

១ ឆ្ ន ុំ

២ ការច៊ុោះលធវើកមមរិកាលនោះចាប់លនតើមលធវើពីនថ្ៃ ីរុំខាន់អន៊ុញ្ញា តឲ្យនាងខ្៊ុុំអន៊ុញ្ញា តឲ្យនាងខ្៊ុុំលធវើការរស្បរិនលបើលោកអនកយល់ស្ពមលអាយ
និងការបលស្ងៀនអាននិងការអភិវឌ្ឍន៍នឹងស្តូវបានលរនើរ៊ុុំឲ្យចូលរួមនូវរកមមភាពែូចខាងលស្កាមលនោះ
ការបលស្ងៀនជា ូលៅកន៊ុង
ក៍ែូចគា ន ផ្ែរលោកអនក

២០១៣ ពីគុំនិតទាុំឡាយណាផ្ែលនាងខ្៊ុុំបានស្បមូលរួចលហើយ
ការបលស្ងៀនរកមមភាពរបរ់ពួកលគ
ចូលរួម

១ របរ់កូនលោកអនក

២ ន័យផ្ែលស្បមូលបានពីលោកស្គូអនកស្គូបលស្ងៀនបានលៅលពល
ការបលស្ងៀនអាននិងការអភិវឌ្ឍកមមវីធីអប់រុំស្គូបលស្ងៀន
ឆ្ ន ុំ

ចុំនួន ១ ស្តូវចាញ់របរ់លោកអនកនឹងមិនស្តូវបានវិនិចឆ័យលនាោះល ីននន័យផ្ែលស្បមូលបានពីលោកស្គូអនកស្គូ

ការបលស្ងៀនអាននិងការអភិវឌ្ឍ

ការបលស្ងៀនអាន

ការអភិវឌ្ឍ

ការបលស្ងៀនអាន

រកមមភាពរបរ់ពួកលគ

មានសារោះ

មានសារោះ
ផ្លែលទាក់ ងលៅនឹងកូនរបរ់លោកអនក នឹងស្តូវបុំផ្ល ញលចាលឬលប់លចញភាា មបនាទ ប់ពីលនាោះ។

លោកអនកមានរិធិអាយកូនរបរ់លោកអនកចាកលចញពីការស្សាវស្ជាវលនោះលៅលពលណាក៍បានលដ្ឋយគាមនការពិន័យឬក៍បាត់បង់នូវគ៊ុណ្ស្បលយជន៍ណាមួយលនាោះល។

ស្បរិនលបើលោកស្គូអនកស្គូមានរុំអុំពីរិធិរបរ់កូនលោកអនកផ្ែលចូលរួមលៅកន៊ុងការរិកាលនោះលោកអនកអាចទាក់ងការិយយស្សាវស្ជាវនិងស្កមរីលធ៌មតាមរយោះសា

ethics.review@utoronto.ca ឬតាមលលខូររ័ពទ+1 416-946-3273។

ហានិភ័យនិងអ្តថគ្រពោជន៍ពៅកនុងការចូលរួមកន៍ុងការសិកាគ្ាវគ្ាវ៖

មិនមានោនិភ័យអវីទាុំងអរ់រុំរាប់កូនរបរ់លោកអនកលៅកន៊ុងការចូលរួមកន៍ុងការរិកាលនោះ។

និងមិនមានអតាស្បលយជន៍លដ្ឋយផ្លទល់អវីលនាោះលរុំរាប់ការចូលរួមរបរ់កូនលោកអនកកន៍ុងការរិកាលនោះ។

នាងខ្៊ុុំលជឿជាក់ថ្នកាអន៊ុញ្ញា តឲ្យអវីលនាោះលរុំរាប់ប្ចូលលោកកន៍ុងការអប់រុំលៅកន៊ុងស្បលរកមព៊ុជា ួលបាននូវការយល់ែឹងរ៊ុីជុំលៅពីបញ្ញា ផ្ែលទាក់ ងនឹងការបលស្ងៀនអានលៅកន៍ុងម៊ុខវិជាារិកាលៅកន៍ុងស្បលរបរ់ខាួននិងឧបរគាទាុំងឡាយណាផ្ែលពួកលគកុំព៊ុងស្បឈមម៊ុខលៅលពលផ្ែលបលស្ងៀនអានលៅកន៍ុងម៊ុខវិជាារិកា។

ការតបសនង៖

ការរិកាលនោះមិនមានការតបរនងអវីមួយផ្ែលនឹងស្តូវនតល់ជួនលោកអនករឺកូនរបរ់លោកអនកលនាោះលលហើយក៍មិនមានការួលពិន័យអវីមួយកន៍ុងលពលផ្ែលមិនបានចូលរួមនងផ្ែរ។

ការរកាាសំងាត់

ស្គប់ព៌ត័មានទាុំងឡាយណាផ្ែលស្បមូលបាននឹងស្តូវបានរកាយងរុំគត់ជា ីបុំន៊ុត។

នាងខ្៊ុុំនឹងមិនលស្បើស្បារ់ព៌ត័មានផ្ែលទាក់ ងនឹងកូនរបរ់លោកអនកកន៍ុងលគាលបុំណ្ងណាមួយលស្ៅពីគុំលរាងស្សាវស្ជាវលនោះឡើយ។

ស្ពមជាមួយគានលន៍អាចរុំគាល់អតតរញ្ញា ណ្របរ់កូនលោកអនកនាងខ្៊ុុំនឹងដ្ឋក់ល្មោះលៅលស្ៅ (រហរសនាម) ស្គប់ ិននន័យទាុំងអរ់ផ្ែលស្បមូលបានស្តូវបានរកា ៊ុកលៅកន៍ុងីកផ្នាងមានរ៊ុវតាិភាពលៅកន៍ុងនទោះរបរ់នាងខ្៊ុុំ។

លែើមបីការរអតតរញ្ញា ណ្របរ់កូនលោកអនកនាងខ្៊ុុំនឹងដ្ឋក់ល្មោះលៅលស្ៅ (រហរសនាម) ស្គប់ ិននន័យទាុំងអរ់ផ្ែលស្បមូលបានលហើយ។

អាចក្លាយជាបុគ្គលិកបណ្តាលទាន់ដ៏ខ្លីផ្តាច់បញ្ចប់ការពិន័យអំណាចលៅកន៍ុងអុំឡ៊ុងលពលច៊ុោះកមមរិការិននន័យស្សាវស្ជាវនិងស្តូវបានចាក់លសារលៅកន៍ុង ីកផ្នាងមានរ៊ុវតាិភាពលៅកន៍ុងនទោះរបរ់នាងខ្៊ុុំ។
ការចូលរួមរបរ់កូនឃុំបានស្តីពីការរិកាស្សាវស្ជាវលនោះជាមួយនឹងលមកខខ័ណ្ឌទាុំងឡាយលនោះ។

របាយការណ៍គ្រមពគ្រៀង៖ ឃុំបានអានព័ត៌មានខាងលលើលនោះហើយឃុំបានយល់ែឹងចារ់ោរ់លែើមបីលធវើការរុំលរចចិតតអុំពីការចូលរួមរបរ់កូនឃុំ។ ឃុំយល់ស្ពម:

- យល់ស្ពម
- មិនយល់ស្ពម

លផ្សាយក្រោយឃុំនឹងយល់ស្ពមលែើមបីបានស្តឹមស្តូវរុំរាប់លកខខ័ណ្ឌទាុំងឡាយននការស្បមូលនឹងស្តូវបានបង្កើតផ្លាស់ប្តូរ។

លើកឡើងវិញគ្នារ៉ាវស្ទៃ: ការប្រការអនុវត្តដែលបង្កើតបាននេះបានផ្តល់ឱ្យបានស្តឹមស្តូវរុំរាប់លកខខ័ណ្ឌទាុំងឡាយននការស្បមូល។