PISA for Development and its impact on education policy and development in Cambodia

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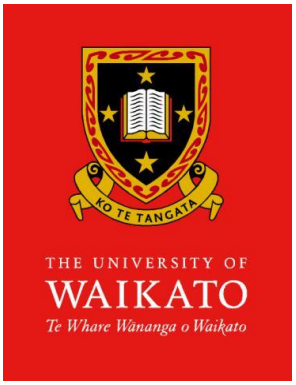
Chenda Khan



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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the right to education has emerged as a cornerstone of UNESCO's Education Agenda 2030 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4). Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, SDG4 serves as a blueprint for developing countries to achieve a more equitable and sustainable future. In 2016, UNESCO established a steering committee, comprising UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), to facilitate the global implementation of SDG4.

To monitor the progress of developing countries in achieving SDG4, the OECD persuaded UNESCO to leverage one of its International Large-Scale Assessments (ILSAs) – PISA for Development (PISA-D). Building on the established Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), PISA-D operates through two distinct forms of power that operate through Cambodia as a state administration and through Cambodia as a population. The first is referred to in this thesis as 'governance' and refers to the ways in which the state administration, officials and executives are steered to introducing education reforms and policies. The other is referred to as 'disciplinary power', which operates through examination and treatment, imposing particular forms of accountability onto the school system including school principals, teachers and students. These two forms of power may enable the OECD to place Cambodia under its policy directives through the PISA-D programme. I understand that the articulation of these two forms of power tends to be a form or iteration of coloniality.

The overarching objective of this thesis is to analyse how and why Cambodia chose to become involved in PISA-D and what have been the local impacts. I employed some elements of a document analysis on academic and media sources to deepen my understanding of the OECD's educational initiatives through PISA and PISA-D. This analysis began with a review of PISA's application in member countries, providing essential context for studying the PISA-D program itself. The thesis further explores the tensions arising during the enactment of PISA-D in Cambodia, offering a nuanced perspective on the coloniality associated with PISA(-D). This exploration was enriched through semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders to understand how these tensions manifest in practice.

The thesis argues that Cambodia's decision to join the PISA-D programme was naive and pressured. Enacted through the Ministry's EQAD with support from the World Bank – the OECD's strategic partner, the PISA-D programme produced results, which were meant for the World Bank to justify the urgent implementation of SBM as the only way to enhance accountability in Cambodian schools. Influenced by these two said IOs, Cambodian leaders were led to believe that assessing students internationally was essential for local education reform and would yield valuable evidence for policy making, which has increasingly focused on generating human capital solely for national economic growth – identified as neoliberalisation of Cambodian education. Overall, there is much evidence that the OECD has used the PISA-D programme to subject Cambodia to the negative effects of globalisation, the power of PISA and ultimately the OECD's policy directives.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CBP	Capacity Building Plan
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CNA	Capacity Needs Analysis
DP	Development Partner
EFA	Education For All
EQAD	Education Quality Assurance Department
EQIP	Education Quality Improvement Project
ESP	Education Strategic Plan
ESWG	Education Sector Working Group
GEIP	General Education Improvement Project
HCT	Human Capital Theory
HPES	High-Performing Education System
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
ILSA	International Large-Scale Assessment
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IO	International Organisation
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
KBE	Knowledge-Based-Economy
LSA	Large-Scale Assessment
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MEF	(Cambodian) Ministry of Economy and Finance
MoEYS	(Cambodian) Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport
NEQMAP	Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific
NPM	National Project Manager
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OEEC	Organisation for European Economic Co-operation
PGB	PISA Governing Board
PIAAC	International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PIRLS	International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment

PISA-D	PISA for Development
TA	Thematic analysis
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SBM	School-Based Management
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEAMEO	Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organisation
SEA-PLM	Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metric
SEIP	Secondary Education Improvement Project
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the background and relationships among the relevant subjects, which informed the development of the research questions guiding the interviews for this study. Additionally, it outlines the structure of the thesis.

The focus of this study is the International Large-Scale Assessment (ILSA) known as PISA for Development (PISA-D), a variant of the more widely recognised Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Both assessments are managed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), established in 1961 by eighteen European nations, along with the United States and Canada, as an expansion of the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation, originally formed in 1948 to coordinate post-war recovery efforts in Europe under the Marshall Plan. The OECD has played a pivotal role in global education by providing member countries and others with comparative education data and insights through its international surveys[1].

PISA, the OECD's flagship programme, is a triennial high-stakes assessment aimed at 15-year-olds nearing the completion of their compulsory education. Since its inception in 2000, PISA has ranked national school systems based on students' abilities in reading, mathematics, and science, assessing their skills and competencies in solving real-life problems – termed cognitive skills. The programme also examines socio-economic status, gender, immigrant background, and equity, referred to as non-cognitive factors.

In response to increasing globalisation, the OECD has broadened PISA's scope to assess a wider array of skills and competencies, expanded its scale to include more countries and educational systems, and enhanced its explanatory power to provide richer insights for policymakers (Sellar & Lingard, 2013c). Initially focused on self-regulated learning skills, individual and group problem-solving, and financial literacy, PISA now includes assessments of global competencies. The OECD actively seeks to engage countries in the Global South alongside its traditional Global North members. For explanatory power, the OECD draws on

[1] The OECD's international surveys consist of PISA, TALIS, PIAAC and AHELO

the rationality of Human Capital Theory (HCT[2]) developed in collaboration with the World Bank.

HCT, which the OECD has reframed as the Knowledge-Based Economy (KBE) (Auld, Rappleye, & Morris, 2019), posits that economic growth stems from investments in knowledge and skills development. This rationale underpins the OECD's efforts to correlate ILSA performance with national economic growth. However, this correlation has faced significant criticism (Araujo et al., 2017; Fernandez-Cano, 2016; McCowan, 2022; Saltelli, 2017; Sjøberg, 2015a, Tan 2014). McCowan (2022) identifies HCT, modernisation theory, and neoliberalism as components of a liberal capitalist development model. By leveraging its ILSAs to shape local knowledge production, the OECD may encourage Global South countries to align their education systems strictly with economic objectives, aiming to 'catch up' with their Global North counterparts (McCowan, 2022, p.43), a perspective many consider overly reductionist.

The chosen ILSA for this study, PISA-D, was established in 2014 with the goal of making PISA more relevant to diverse socio-economic contexts, particularly in developing countries (OECD, 2018e, 2018b). PISA-D includes nine member countries from various regions: Bhutan, Cambodia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Senegal, and Zambia. These countries joined the PISA-D programme between 2014 and 2017, administering their first tests in 2018. Notably, these developing nations are often reliant on aid from the World Bank and IMF, both strategic partners of the OECD.

As a citizen of Cambodia, where PISA-D is being implemented, I am particularly interested in the Cambodian experience and its implications. I am concerned that the OECD's influence may introduce elements of coloniality, where partnership schemes create power imbalances, allowing the OECD, as a capacity builder, to exert undue influence over local affairs.

1.1. Research questions

This thesis analyses the enactment of PISA-D, looking into local 'creative processes of interpretation and recontextualisation – that is, the translation of texts into action and the

[2] HCT was mentioned in *Human Capital* by Gary Becker in 1964 (E. Tan, 2014). The theory was inspired by the work of Theodore Schultz since the mid-1950s (Holden & Biddle, 2017).

abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practices' (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, p.3). This definition acknowledges the actions carried out by local actors as they interpret and recontextualise policies from a higher level for their local use in terms of benefit and relevance. This approach incorporates and goes beyond the 'rational choice theory and conventional models' (Spillane, 2004, p.6) which Spillane uses to consider how local officials choose policies to enact, arguing that officials select policies primarily based on their 'interests, agendas and utility maximisation' (Spillane, 2004, p.6). This study then considers the possible tension that might exist between the OECD's policy directives/procedures and the process of PISA-D enactment in the local school system including school principals, teachers and students.in Cambodia, in the context of globalisation.

The overarching objective of the study was to analyse how and why Cambodia has chosen to become involved in PISA-D and what have been the local impacts. There are four broad research questions which were used to guide my interviews with the study participants – mostly Cambodians:

1. What do Cambodian actors understand about why PISA-D was introduced to Cambodia and why the OECD developed PISA-D?
2. What PISA-D is able and not able to measure in the Cambodian context and what do Cambodian actors see as possible alternatives to the policy represented by PISA-D?
3. How do Cambodian actors perceive the OECD's policy directives and procedures and the PISA-D policies being enacted in Cambodia?
4. In a colonial sense, is Cambodian education subjected to the OECD's policy directives?

1.2. Selection of countries and interviewees

From the nine PISA-D member countries, I initially selected Bhutan, Cambodia, and Guatemala for surveys using stratified sampling, focusing on their distinct colonial histories – British, French, and Spanish, respectively. I began with Cambodia, targeting four categories of individuals for interviews. Despite sending email invitations to these selected participants, I received no responses. This lack of engagement led me to consider that my PhD project might involve sensitive topics that, in my understanding of Cambodian culture, would require higher-level approval or might be best avoided altogether. This situation arose in October 2021, well into the second year of my research.

At this point, my supervisory panel and I concluded that completing my PhD within the three years allotted by the University of Waikato's Doctoral Scholarship was increasingly unlikely. My progress had been hindered by my initial lack of familiarity with the OECD, its International Large-Scale Assessments (ILSAs), and the complex power dynamics between the OECD and its member countries. This gap in knowledge necessitated extensive reading to gain a solid understanding of the context. Additionally, personal circumstances, including the birth of my second son and various life obligations – such as shopping, leisure activities, and commuting – distracted me from focusing on my reading and writing. These challenges were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, the sensitivity and cultural nuances I encountered during my document analysis made me hesitant to reach out to participants in Bhutan and Guatemala. Considering the difficulties I faced in recruiting Cambodian participants and the time constraints, I ultimately decided to focus solely on Cambodia for my PhD study. With this narrowed focus, I attempted to contact key Cambodian figures whom I believed would provide valuable insights for my research. Unfortunately, my two email invitations went unanswered. However, some colleagues of these individuals, whom I had contacted earlier, did respond positively and agreed to participate. Despite this progress, I still did not have enough participants for a robust study. In response, I expanded my outreach to include the OECD and other relevant International Organisations (IOs), a decision guided by my literature review.

During the interview phase from February to June 2022, interviewees highlighted three main IOs involved in the PISA-D implementation: the World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF. When a representative from the World Bank decided against participating, I adapted my strategy and successfully completed ten interviews. I tailored my questions to align with each participant's responsibilities and the relevance of the PISA-D program to their work.

1.3. Structure of the thesis

This section provides an overview of the thesis. To do so, I am going to present how each chapter unfolds and what I have found out in each of them.

Chapter 2 examines PISA before delving into its offshoot, PISA-D. The chapter is divided into three sections: PISA as a product of the OECD, PISA as an ILSA, and PISA as datafication. Section 2.1 explores the OECD's motives and historical context behind the creation of PISA. Section 2.2 compares PISA to other ILSAs in terms of types and participation reasons. Section 2.3 discusses datafication and its role as a reform tool in education. The chapter argues that PISA is a global datafication technology wielded as a political instrument, influencing local education policies through the OECD's power. The OECD uses PISA to guide education systems toward a KBE and promotes the idea of 'HPESs or reference societies' for policy borrowing. However, this borrowing process is shaped by political choices about which reference societies low-scoring nations choose to emulate. PISA narratives are adapted to align with local political contexts, legitimising or delegitimising education reforms as needed.

Chapter 3 focuses on PISA-D, exploring its origins, features, and the OECD's objectives in implementing it, along with the tensions between coloniality and PISA-D in local contexts. Section 3.1 compares PISA-D to PISA, examining standardisation, out-of-school assessments, and applicability in developing countries. Section 3.2 assesses whether the OECD's influence reflects Anibal Quijano's concept of the 'coloniality of power,' reshaping power dynamics with global south nations during and beyond PISA-D implementation. Section 3.3 explores how globalisation affects nation-states and their policy decisions post-independence. The chapter concludes that maintaining PISA standards in PISA-D requires handling local challenges from above, with the OECD manipulating definitions and asserting dominance in global education. This dominance, strengthened through 'heterarchical governance,' may lead to 'global colonialism,' as PISA-D is used to influence local politics in SDG4 member countries. Participation requires funding from donors or Development Partners (DPs), ensuring that key actors in these nations remain tied to the OECD's policy directives.

Chapter 4 explores Cambodia's education system and socio-political landscape from its early history to the introduction of PISA-D. Section 4.1 reviews Cambodia's early history, including royal disputes, foreign invasions, and French colonisation. It links the collapse of Sihanouk's administration, the Khmer Rouge genocide, and the Vietnam War to Cambodia's modern political context. The chapter also covers the role of IOs in Cambodia's education system following the 1990s elections and the incorporation of good governance and

decentralisation in the 2000s. It finds that despite early independence in education, globalisation and IOs, particularly the World Bank, shifted Cambodia's focus from Education for All (EFA) to a KBE aligned with OECD's PISA agenda. Section 4.2 discusses the enactment of PISA-D in Cambodia in 2014, coinciding with the appointment of Minister Hang Chuon Naron. It examines the development of the education system post-PISA-D, including the 2018 PISA-D results, policy recommendations, and the Minister's response. The section concludes that PISA-D in Cambodia reflects the OECD's influence through heterarchical governance. Cambodia has aligned its education goals with SDG4 and KBE under the current Minister's leadership. However, the broad and superficial PISA-D recommendations offer limited practical guidance, yet the Minister seems inclined towards structural isomorphism and policy convergence.

Chapter 5 outlines the research methodology and my understanding of the concepts and analytical tools I used in this research. It explains how the study was conducted, focusing on data collection and analysis. As a qualitative study, data was gathered from relevant documents and semi-structured interviews with key individuals and organisations. The research began with document analysis, drawing on academic articles, media reports, and publications to understand the OECD's educational work, particularly PISA and PISA-D. Initially, three countries with different colonial histories were selected, but due to various constraints, the study focused solely on Cambodia. Interviews were conducted via video conferencing and transcribed for TA, with selected transcripts further analysed using some aspects of Norman Fairclough's CDA to explore deeper insights within the local context.

Chapter 6 addresses the first and second research questions based on feedback from local actors involved in PISA-D in Cambodia. Section 6.1 examines the rationale and methods behind introducing PISA-D to Cambodia and what local actors understood about the OECD's goals for PISA-D. Section 6.2 presents Cambodian actors' views on PISA-D's effectiveness and their suggestions for alternatives. The findings indicate that Cambodia's PISA-D participation was a naive and pressured decision. Cambodia was targeted by the OECD for PISA-D, with the World Bank's ongoing support preparing Cambodia for participation. Participants agreed that PISA-D was intended to complement national and regional assessments but noted issues with content relevance and translation. Opting out of PISA-D would have political repercussions for Cambodia due to its ties with SDGs and aid. Thus,

integrating PISA-D standards into national assessments might be more beneficial than relying solely on infrequent, standardised assessments with irrelevant content.

Chapter 7 addresses the third and fourth research questions about local responses to PISA-D implementation in Cambodia. Section 7.1 explores the impacts of PISA-D in two stages of Cambodian education reform. The first subsection examines the Minister's policy responses to OECD directives, while the second looks at the World Bank's SBM implementation as an immediate response to PISA-D results. Section 7.2 further breaks down the OECD-World Bank partnership's role in developing Cambodia's education system and whether the Cambodian system adhered to OECD directives. The SBM implementation under World Bank guidelines was crucial to the Minister's response to PISA-D. The OECD was able to integrate neoliberal policies into the Cambodian educational system through the World Bank's resources, particularly its financial power, as a result of this strategic partnership. Through the OECD's manual and the World Bank's sponsorship and employment contract of the PISA-D National Project Manager (NPM) – who also served as the EQAD head – and the PISA-D national consultant, the Cambodian education system began to be exposed to OECD policy directives and procedures. The local viewpoints, particularly of these two key persons, on the OECD as experts to improve Cambodia's LSA capacity, as well as the economic background and orientation of the leaders of MoEYS and MEF, played a significant role in the growth of this subjection.

Chapter 8 resents the summary of findings, limitations of the research, the study's contribution, recommendation and suggestions for further research. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the Cambodian education system has undergone redirection from its dark period where traditional goals were pursued. The reform needed to be more economic-oriented, placing more responsibility on school principals, teachers and students to be more accountable and transparent under the watch of the OECD through PISA, and the PISA-D programme. In this sense, the OECD was influencing the local knowledge production through the aid conditions of the OECD's strategic partners, in this case the World Bank (Ball, 2010, p.157). That is, the PISA-D programme strengthened and renewed the power structure between the OECD and Cambodia, which constituted the 'coloniality of power' (Quijano, 2000, p.533).

CHAPTER 2

THE PROGRAMME FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT (PISA) AND ITS CRITIQUE

Before looking into PISA-D, it is useful and important to understand its precursor, the regular PISA testing programme. There has been a great deal of debate about PISA (Saltelli, 2017; Pons, 2017; Williamson, 2018). For instance, the research literature suggests that the OECD uses it as a statistical resource alongside its economic discourse to influence the internal politics of the PISA member countries – mostly global north nations. This concern needs investigating as the OECD may also be attempting to expand the influence over the local politics of the PISA-D countries – global south nations. PISA has also faced a relentless wave of critics since the first test cycle in 2000.

Collectively, the critics revolve around data collection methodologies, validity of measurement and evaluation and the relevance of PISA data to educational planning and school contexts. Again, the offshoot, PISA-D may face some of the same critics. This chapter will be divided into three main sections: PISA as a product of the OECD, PISA as an international LSA, and PISA as datafication. The first section will look at how and why the OECD established PISA by looking at some historical facts about LSAs and the OECD's aims that led to the creation of PISA. The second section will examine how PISA differs from other ILSAs in terms of participation rationales and types. The final section will define datafication and show how it might be used as a reform technology in education.

2.1. PISA as a product of the OECD

This section will discuss how and why the OECD created PISA by looking into some historical facts of LSAs and how the OECD's objectives lead to the establishment of PISA. This section will also explain how the OECD uses its power and resources to make PISA results influential for local policy making and politics by discussing how reference societies are created in comparative education. In this discussion, two important terms, 'externalisation' and 'projection', will be explained. The chapter begins by investigating some important background information about the OECD, its relationship with the World Bank and the OECD's sources of power. It then considers how the OECD came to create PISA in the historical context of the existing LSAs and used PISA as its source of power.

Finally the chapter details how PISA creates reference societies for the member countries and how the PISA results impact the local education policy and politics.

2.1.1. The OECD's background and overarching objective

The origins of the OECD go back to the post-WWII Western European reconstruction plan[3]. This plan was created in 1948 when the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (hereafter OEEC) was established as a permanent entity to monitor and evaluate how to carry out all the aid provisions on the European continent. Under US management, the OEEC's member states were required to update the state of their economies and prepare a four-year economic plan (Eide, 1990). The OEEC's initial interest had been primarily economic, but Eide (1990) found that there were several social circumstances that switched the OEEC's attention to education by the end of the 1950s. One was the Sputnik shock or space race challenging to the US. Soviet competitiveness was believed to be the direct result of a successful production line of 'highly qualified technical and scientific personnel' (Eide, 1990, p.5) which made Americans suspect the quality of their education, a message also spread to Western European allies (Eide, 1990). Nearing the end of the plan in 1952, the OEEC lost its importance and was overtaken by the OECD in 1961 (OECD, n.d.-d). According to Article 1 of the Convention, which was signed in Paris on December 14, 1960, and came into effect on September 30, 1961, the OECD was created to promote job creation and economic growth and expansion to attain financial, economic and trade sustainability in member and non-member countries (OECD, 1999). This overarching objective sees the OECD continues its precursor's primary interests.

Unlike the other transnational entities, it forms alliances with[4], the OECD does not have financial power or a legal mandate (Grek, 2009; Mahon & McBride, 2014b; Meyer & Zahedi, 2014). This means it is unable to make (non)-member countries carry out its proposed reforms in education. Rather, it runs as an influential platform for the construction and circulation of transnational research and policy templates, addressing a broad variety of issues. By publishing various reports and policy reviews produced in partnership with its

[3] It was a four-year plan of more than fifteen billion dollars was created by the U.S. Secretary of State George C. Marshall to help (1) rebuild the Western European countries' industries and infrastructure, (2) their governments fight against the widespread of communism, and (3) foster economic redevelopment among European neighbours. It is also known as the Marshall Aid Program, the Marshall Plan or the European Recovery Program.

[4] World Bank, IMF, EU, ILO, UN, UNICEF and UNESCO (Grek, 2009; Mahon & McBride, 2014a; Meyer & Zahedi, 2014)

transnational alliances and comparative assessments, the OECD has been seen to assume a greater role in shaping both the national and cross-national policy space in education (Grek, 2009; Mahon & McBride, 2014a). This means the OECD can act as an education policy filter in between local and global. In this sense, Niemann & Martens (2018, p. 271) indicate that the OECD has renewed to be a 'knowledge broker and norm entrepreneur' in global education policy for the past twenty years. In this renewed role, the OECD sees education as essential to national economic competitiveness and the promotion of human capital for the development of the KBE discourse (Grek, 2009; Jakobi & Teltemann, 2009). The correlation between education and national economic competitiveness was endorsed in the 1990s when the OECD and other IOs – the World Bank included – convinced several governments to rest their country's prosperity upon the KBE (Jessop, 2017; Sellar & Lingard, 2013).

The OECD and the World Bank are two interlocked IOs that have massive networks and act as an internationally influential learning platforms where concepts and ideas are co-developed to be internalised, transmitted, rejected and imposed to their members (Shahjahan, 2016). However, Auld et al. (2019) indicate that these two IOs are not officially mandated to generate data in the field of education but that they are tactical partners, having 'converging agendas' for the OECD to enhance its education governance and for the World Bank to 'resuscitate' its KBE (Auld, Rappleye, & Morris, 2019, p.203). To achieve a KBE, the countries agreed to transform their tertiary education into an 'engine' (Shore & Wright, 2016, p.47) to promote intellectual property and creative goods to make their countries more competitive on the global stage. In other words, the economic and political agenda was one of global competitiveness. Such agenda will be discussed as early as the secondary education on the ground that the latter is a crucial hub between primary and tertiary education and labour markets (The World Bank, 2005). The World Bank (2005) emphasises that a quality secondary education enables countries, particularly the global south nations, to compete with the global economy through the provision of a skilled and 'sophisticated' (The World Bank, 2005, p.xvi) workforce.

In this sense, the OECD has two main sources of power. One is 'hard power' (Volante, 2018, p.34) established through economic and political sanctions either applied by the OECD itself or its strategic partners – the World Bank and IMF through suppressing 'loans and grants' (Steiner-Khamsi, 2020, p. 244). The other is 'soft governance' (Niemann & Martens, 2018, p.275) or 'soft power' (Mundy, Green, Lingard, & Verger, 2016, p.359) achieved through

epistemic impact. In this sense, the OECD has a huge 'transnational policy network' (Meyer, 2014, p.2) to shape the national policy in the member countries by exerting its influence established largely through PISA testing (Landahl, 2020, p.636), 'assessment and accountability' (Breakspear, 2012, p.16; Volante, 2018, p.34) and its self-promotion as an entity consisting of 'epistemic communities' (Sellar & Lingard, 2013, p.712; Volante, 2018, p.38).

The creation and extension of the OECD's data infrastructure to enhance its soft power has been critical in making the world susceptible to the OECD's governance mechanisms. It bestows the OECD with an essential role in determining the characteristics of a successful system, a capable learner, and an effective instructor in the local education systems (Sorensen, Ydesen, & Robertson, 2021). In this sense, the OECD can potentially be the ultimate assessor of the education systems around the globe and take the advantage out of the information it has collected to make education policies and decisions on behalf the government of each member countries. However, the OECD along with its usual partners – the World Bank and IMF – has also been denounced for 'disseminating their own portfolio of public administration reforms in the form of (funded) best practices' (Steiner-Khamsi, 2020, p.244).

2.1.2. History of International LSAs (ILSAs) and the birth of PISA

In 1958, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) started an international educational assessment, the First International Mathematics Study (FIMS), the predecessor to the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (Kagete, 2011). Under the IEA, FIMS was conducted in 11 countries in 1964 with 13-year-old students (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015, p.18). The rise of data and ILSAs was embedded in the assessment shift which had been led by the OECD and IEA in the mid-1990s. Breakspear (2012) sees the assessment shift in the convergent replacement of emphasis on measuring learning inputs by assessing student learning outputs for comparative purposes – leading to the rise of the OECD's PISA in the late 1990s. Before the shift, both the OECD and the IEA accepted that each education system had differences that required comprehensive examinations by means of large-scale evaluations on several subjects. The assessment shift then transformed assessment approaches focusing on a number of subjects taught within one local education system to using qualitative data to enable educational performance comparisons at an international level (Pizmony-Levy, 2013). Because of the

shift, ILSAs have become a global trend illustrated by policy reforms being increasing influenced by ILSA league tables (Addey, et al., 2017). Presently, the best-known ILSAs are those run by the OECD (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), PISA and PISA-D) and those run by the IEA (TIMSS, the Teacher Education Development Study-Mathematics (TEDS-M) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, PIRLS), see Van De Vijver, Jude, & Kuger, 2019, p.2.

Prior to the availability of statistics on student performance, policy makers would primarily link the economic growth to the length of their population's education. PISA brought into picture the many variables that influence learning success in addition to school time, marking an undeniable breakthrough in comparative education studies (Araujo et al., 2017). As PISA became more important to the OECD's education policy work, the management of PISA was withdrawn from the INES project and moved to the OECD's Education Directorate. By 2005, the BPC had evolved into the PISA Governing Board (PGB), comprising key educational decision-makers from member countries. This restructuring centred PISA within the OECD's institutional structure and associated it closer with education policy priorities of the member countries (Morgan & Shahjahan, 2014). Consequently, although the OECD has remained largely known as an economic and statistical agency, the repositioning of PISA enabled the OECD to reach out to 'education research and policy activities' (Morgan & Volante, 2016, p.2) in its member countries, most of whom are high-income economies – the global north. This also meant the OECD could use its economic and statistical reporting and recommendations to influence the local affairs – politics in particular – of the member countries through different numerical factors such as education performance indicators and crucial variables to the economy of each member.

There may be two main reasons why the OECD decided to create PISA. One, was competition from the IEA. By the end of the 1990s, the IEA was distributing two of its surveys: TIMSS and PIRLS. These two ILSAs required the member countries to cover the participation costs themselves. As a result, the intention to participate in any test cycle of the two assessments has been different in different situations. Both TIMSS and PIRLS have been designed for 'international commonality' (Baird et al., 2011, p.4) for school curricula, which is not in the OECD's interest. As a result of this 'line of these LSAs' (Fernandez-Cano, 2016, p.2), the OECD produced PISA (Baird et al., 2011; Zhao, 2020).

Another reason why the OECD may have decided to create PISA was that throughout the initial development stages of PISA, a committee originally known as the Board of Participating Countries (BPC), which was in charge of selecting and monitoring the prime contractor's work, was established. This committee was made up of members of the International Indicators and Evaluation of Educational Systems (INES) programme which was created in 1988 by the OECD (Morgan & Shahjahan, 2014). INES claims to offer up-to-date information about education around the world, starting with those education systems in the 34 OECD member countries as well as a group of partner countries, which includes non-member G20 countries. It also claims to allow its member education systems to evaluate their own performance in comparison to that of other countries through a set of indicators on educational impact on economic and social aspirations, financial and human investment in education, learning accessibility and school environment. These indicators were reported every year in the INES programme's 'flagship' (OECD, 2012a, p.3) publication, *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators*, referred to here as EAG (OECD, 2012a). The OECD managed the EAG content to achieve international comparability in educational data to influence the education policy makers in the member countries. To maintain the significance of EAG, the OECD aimed to enhance the credibility of the above-mentioned indicators. This aim paved the way for the OECD to create its own cross-border assessment – PISA (Morgan & Shahjahan, 2014) in 1997.

Since the 2000s, PISA's success has strengthened the OECD's education work and global prominence in education policy making. As part of the OECD's education work, the expansion of PISA by the OECD and its 'scope' to measure a wider range of skills and competencies, its 'scale' to include more nations and schools and its 'explanatory power' to offer clearer insight to policy makers (Sellar & Lingard, 2013c, p.924) is generally considered a model of how ILSA can have influence (Addey & Sellar, 2015). Certainly, the success of PISA inspired the OECD to develop PISA D to accommodate the educational context of developing countries as well as PISA for Schools at the individual school level (Addey et al., 2017, p.14). In the years pre-Covid, the OECD also created two further projects: the Study on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES) to collect student data on 'social and emotional skills' (OECD, n.d.-a) and (2) the International Early Learning and Child Well-being Study (IELS). The latter is generally referred to as 'Baby PISA[5]' (CEI, 2017;

[5] Its data collection will start in 2018 and its report in 2020 (Zhao, 2020).

Goddard, 2017; Pence, 2016; Zhao, 2020) as it is intended to collect student data of 5-year-olds just before they enter their primary education (OECD, n.d.-j). The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) known commonly as 'PISA for Adults' (Sjøberg, 2018), having completed its three rounds of data from 2011 to 2018 (OECD, n.d.-f), is intended to assess and compare the fundamental skills of adults aged from 16 to 65 with a focus on cognitive and employability skills for '21st-century society and the global economy' (NCES, n.d.) participation.

2.1.3. The 'disciplinary power' of PISA: examination and treatment

Foucault indicates that 'power can be exercised from unexpected places (Feder, 2011, p.58). On this note, PISA exercises new forms of power by means of examination and treatment. First, these new forms of power are exerted through its 'invisibility' while imposing a norm of mandatory 'visibility' on those to whom it subjects. It is the subjects who must be seen in discipline and this way their exposure ensures that the power that is exercised over them remains in place. This means the disciplined individual's submission is maintained by being continually visible or observed at all times (Foucault, 1977, p.187). Keeping the subject constantly visible can be done by the means of 'examination' (Foucault, 1977, p.187-192). This means PISA is an observation tool and its 'examination' result serves as a basis for 'normalising judgement' (Volante, 2018, p.36). 'The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation' (Foucault, 1977, p.170). In this sense, Foucault argues that people can be disciplined not only by being directly observed but also by believing they are being observed.

Kirwan (2012) suggests that PISA is the mechanism that achieves coercion through observing and ranking country performance. Through its observation, it claims to produce scientific data to convince governments to implement new policies by using market competitiveness as a rationale (Kirwan, 2012, p.125). Foucault stresses that discipline is an 'anatomy of power, a technology with a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application and targets' (Foucault, 1977, p.215). According to the former OECD's secretary-general, discipline by exposing its member school systems to external examination that offers results visible and accessible to the public has a significant impact on transparency in schools (Gurría, 2007). Such discipline induces being transparent or 'clearly visible 'upon school systems, and the induction offers 'the means of coercion' (Foucault, 1977, p. 171) to PISA. That is, PISA is able to hold school systems accountable to the public, education donor

bodies and eventually the OECD – 'school accountability' (Steiner-Khamsi, Appleton, & Vellani, 2018, p.1).

Second, PISA gains power through its post-examination effect called PISA shock by subjecting its member education systems to a treatment. PISA shock, a term coined for a performance drop or under-performance in the PISA's league tables, is an idea of 'externalisation' (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010). The OECD uses in the global north nations. It appears on media outlets, frightens governments, worries parents, affects educators and provokes education reform policies around the globe (Bank, 2012; Bloem, 2015; Griffin, 2015a; Long, 2019; OECD, 2000; Ringarp, 2016; Sjøberg, 2019; Thrupp, 2014). The presumption that produces 'panic-stricken responses' to a drop of a given country's performance on the PISA's league tables is that 'context is irrelevant' (Unwin & Yandell, 2016, p.42). It cannot be assumed that what works in a particular context will easily be introduced into another.

This term could be analogous to 'emotional contagion' which is triggered by 'objects of circulations' (Koh, 2018, p.40). In this case, the PISA league table is the external object that is circulated by the OECD to cause 'tension' (Koh, 2018, p.40), 'panic and discomfort' (Sjøberg, 2019, p.14) in the local education policy setting. However, the volume of PISA shock call to its member education systems for a treatment – policy reform in this case – is likely to be a false alarm. According to Foucault's analysis on a boy's hobby to play with girl's toys, it is a snowballing effect started with his peers' teases that distress their teacher and eventually alert the boy's parents to get him a treatment. It is not his hobby nor his general behaviours that bring an attention to his parents and/or teachers to get him analysed by psychologists who know which path of 'treatment' (Feder, 2011, p.58) is right for his case.

I would like to refer the above-mentioned terms 'external assessment, object and examination' – PISA (shock) in this case as an 'external legitimisation' (Kim et al., 2002, p.482) – to one common discourse 'externalisation' (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010) which governments, politicians, and policy makers around the globe have used alongside the other idea of 'projection' in a variety of ways to legitimise their national education reform agenda (Lingard & Sellar, 2019). In other words, PISA results are used to legitimise or delegitimise certain education reform to suit the local politics. The notion of

projection in education policy making, according to Waldow (2017), has emerged in various publications, but there is still a lack of comprehensive debate of the term in relation to reference societies in the field of education. On one side of a coin, projection can be interpreted in the context of a slide projector. This analogy emphasises on the projector than on the screen. Comparatively, when a model school is projected on the screen, there is more to do with the origin where the reference is created than a certain country it is referred to. The other side of the coin, using Freudian psychoanalysis, views projection as one of the self-defence strategies that one uses to attribute any 'personality traits' (Waldow, 2017, p. 657) they or their circle rejects to others.

PISA's impact depends on local settings where national politics and education systems and structures are important factors (Niemann, Martens, & Teltemann, 2017). The OECD's continued existence and PISA's impact are heavily reliant on the 'window of opportunity' that the OECD generates for itself by strategically marketing 'PISA as a policy tool' (Seitzer, Niemann, & Martens, 2021, p.206). Because of the OECD's strategy (cf. Seitzer et al., 2021), PISA results attract public discussion and research. Once PISA results are accepted, it creates a fundamental source of the OECD's soft power – soft but effective. In other words, its soft power has been seen to subside only when PISA entails no changes in the national policy or causes 'local problem pressure' (Bieber & Martens, 2011, p111) – as opposed to it being most coercive when it can align across political and cultural interests upon local changes it requires 'least apparently' (Lewis, Sellar, & Lingard, 2016, p.12).

If this soft power does not work, the OECD can in any case shift to its hard-power mechanisms or apply both simultaneously. For example, using PISA's identification of challenges within the French secondary education system, the OECD heightened 'normative and economic pressure' on the country to fast-track the implementation of necessary reforms (Mundy et al., 2016, p.461). In short, the impact of the OECD's ILSAs on local education reforms is significantly 'more subtle, less coercive, and (probably) more effective' for all of these reasons (Steiner-Khamsi, 2020, p.244). In other words, PISA as an epistemic conduit acts as the main source of the OECD's soft power. This epistemic conduit tends to produce a snowballing effect on generating participation through its creation of reference societies.

2.1.4. How does the OECD's PISA create reference societies?

According to Waldow (2017), the term 'reference societies' was first introduced by the macro-sociologist Reinhard Bendix (1967, 1978) and has generally been used to refer to 'a model nation from which to borrow elements' (Waldow, 2017, p.647). There can be very broad explanations of why a nation becomes a reference society, but one crucial qualification is top performance in ILSAs, PISA in particular. Politically, the OECD names PISA top performers as High-Performing Education Systems (hereafter HPESs) in its various publications distributed to all its member countries to look up to. By showcasing the characteristics of the PISA-determined HPESs in those publications, the OECD expects PISA results to enable policy makers to identify effective policies to adapt to their local contexts (OECD, 2018b) – creating 'the new isomorphism in education' (Mehta & Peterson, 2019, p.330). In this case, PISA results are now forming new reference societies by situating national and sub-national educational systems within the global field based on international testing results (Sellar & Lingard, 2013a). In other words, PISA creates reference societies as a primary reference point for national policy debate (Takayama, 2018).

In general, ILSAs help policy makers recognise which 'best practice' (Parcerisa & Verger, 2019, p.43) from which countries they could consider borrowing and imitating. However, while ILSAs may have led to standardisation of how education policy agendas are conceived, they have not contributed to a full 'uniformisation of the discourse everywhere' (Waldow, 2020b, p.79). For example, PISA's impact that is not necessarily tied to PISA results has been seen in the development and implementation of curriculum in European countries over the last 10 years (Michel, 2017). Michel (2017) showcases a wide range of educational policies that are influenced by historical, sociological, and cultural factors in the continent and confirms that the transfer of best practice has faced impediments in place.

Considering the current practice of 'supranational and multi-level governance' (Mundy et al., 2016, p.461), the internationalisation of education policy is most developed in Europe. Countries, however, have been cautious of handing over sovereignty to the entity beyond the national government as they are aware of losing national autonomy, notably in education policy. According to Waldow (2020b), responses to ILSAs, PISA included, are generally not consistent throughout various local settings and that the narratives and the framing of ILSA accomplishment vary fundamentally on the basis that different countries choose different reference societies as their projection screens and are potentially attracted to different slides.

For this reason, PISA has gained such a pervasive role in policy making in education primarily because it can be linked to too many various narratives (Waldow, 2020b).

Nevertheless, choosing a reference society from a pool of PISA-determined HPESs is obviously a political choice as the inclusion of some high-performing countries and the omission of others is in fact influenced by geopolitical factors, cultural considerations and the perceived status of prospective reference societies (Parcerisa & Verger, 2019). For example, not all top PISA scorers become reference societies everywhere (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Parcerisa & Verger, 2019) but when a certain reference society is treated as a projection screen, a collection of beliefs, theories, and narratives are placed on what is considered positive and beneficial (or negative and preventable) for a country's educational system (Parcerisa & Verger, 2019). In educational decision-making, both forms of reference societies are widely used (Christensen, 2019; Waldow, 2020a). For example, in the aftermath of PISA, Finland was considered as a positive reference society and East Asian PISA top scorers as a negative system framed by the Western media (Koh, 2018; Waldow, 2020b). Positive and negative reference societies 'interact, stabilise, and reinforce' (Waldow, 2020b, p.79) one another in the same way the 'heaven-and-hell' (Waldow, 2020b, p.79) oxymoron does. That means 'educational heaven' would become more appealing and 'educational hell' more repulsive if there is a counterpart that acts as a 'kind of mirror image'(Waldow, 2020b, p.79) – PISA politics in this case.

2.1.5. PISA, Knowledge-Based Economy and politics

Scholars and policy analysts around the globe posit that the OECD uses its ILSAs to direct education systems to standardised, test-based, or narrow accountability to restrict and homogenise the meanings of education (Couture, 2015; Meyer & Benavot, 2013; Sahlberg, 2011, 2016; Verger, Parcerisa, & Fontdevila, 2019). In relation to this point, Sjøberg (2015a,b) argues that PISA's aims are linked to the OECD's overall political goals and the 'underlying commitment' (Sjøberg, 2015a, p.102, 2015b, p.111) to KBE. Although PISA claims to offer its member countries with evidence, evaluation, and recommendation PISA has evolved into more than a database of educational data and has become a political tool for the OECD. This suggests that by means of PISA, the OECD does not only assist its member countries with the methodology and technicality of data gathering but it also creates and advocates decisions about how to perceive and deliver the objectives of the local education systems (Niemann & Martens, 2018).

Meyer & Zahedi (2014), representing a group of 83 high-profile academics from around the world indicate that the OECD lacks 'democratic accountability' (Meyer & Zahedi, 2014, p.873) in its decisions, especially the methodological ones that underpin PISA data, (Araujo et al., 2017) and its steering of education systems towards KBE strays away from seeing education as preparing citizens 'of and for' democracy (Meyer & Benavot, 2013, p.12). Grosfoguel (2012) argues that if universal truth is constructed by the epistemology of a single region or entity that excludes others, any 'global proposal' to employ this 'abstract universalistic epistemology' will tag along colonialism/imperialism and 'epistemic racism' (Grosfoguel, 2012, p.94-95). The OECD's economic discourse is such a case. As it rejects other education goals, it fits in Mignolo's identification of 'economic coloniality, which is the economic dimension of colonial matrix of power' (López-calvo, 2016, p.180).

If the KBE is the only dominant aim and it seems so, changes in local settings can be expected. Those changes can be seen in school curricula, relevant actors' mindset towards education and eventually how countries should be managed. Because schooling has numerous impacts, especially on the 'social and economic' spheres (Morck & Yeung, 2001, p.18), educational reforms such as the enactment of ILSAs could magnify the volume of impacts by its capability to change global to local perspectives towards what counts as knowledge and what does not (Pizmony-levy, Doan, Carmona, & Kessler, 2019).

PISA as an external assessment carries 'political nature' (Sjøberg, 2018, p.188) which is obviously reflected in the representatives of OECD members in the PISA Governing Board (hereafter PGB) – an entity in charge of creating policy priorities and standards for developing indicators, establishing assessment instruments and reporting PISA results. The OECD Secretariat in charge of the OECD's overall work doubles as the secretariat for the PGB to oversee the day-to-day management and implementation of PISA (OECD, 2018, p.10). The OECD Secretariat is currently being led by the 6th Secretary-General Mathias Cormann who took the office on June 1, 2021, with priorities to promote economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, market-based policies and KBE (OECD, n.d.-c). These priorities assigned to him are to ensure that the OECD pursues the OEEC's original interest – primarily economic.

The OEEC's interest goes down to the local setting as the OECD Secretariat is made up of directorates and divisions that work with policy makers in each country, providing insights and expertise to help guide evidence-based policy making (OECD, n.d.-e). In each member country, an NPM is appointed to implement PISA in their respective country. The NPMs work 'under the guidance' of the PGB members and are mandated to ensure that PISA tests are conducted in the internationally accepted technical and administrative manner so that PISA's validity and quality can be maintained (OECD, 2018d, p.10). The NPMs also play a role in verifying, analysing and reporting PISA test results (OECD, n.d.-b).

To sum up, PISA is a political instrument (Addey, 2016b; Alarcón, 2020; Fernandez-Cano, 2016; Gerver, 2014; Niemann & Martens, 2018; Sjøberg, 2018); its results are circulated and referred to in various local education policy debates due to the OECD's resource and power to disguise 'PISA as a policy tool' (Seitzer, Niemann, & Martens, 2021, p.206) to converge local education systems towards the OECD's economic discourse – KBE (Morgan & Volante, 2016). The OECD promotes the discourse 'HPESs or reference societies' for policy borrowing purposes but it turns out that the borrowing process is heavily affected by the political choice over which reference societies the PISA poor-scoring countries choose to learn from. In this sense, PISA offers its member countries different narratives to (de)-legitimise education reform policy to suit local political climate as a priority. In other words, the local politics is being influenced by the externalisation effects seen in the narratives that tag along with the PISA results.

2.2. PISA as ILSAs

This section will discuss how PISA is different from other ILSAs by looking into their participation rationales and types. From the contrast, PISA stands out as a unique ILSA. Thus, it begs a question on what PISA claims to achieve and whether it is able to achieve what it claims. In the illustration to the question, I will choose only the issues that PISA-D is likely to face so that it helps my analysis of PISA-D in the next chapter. I begin by presenting what Large-Scale Assessments are intended to do, what kind of information they are to collect and the common participation rationales before I start to compare PISA to other LSAs to identify what makes PISA stand out and whether this OECD's LSA will be able to achieve what it claims.

2.2.1. PISA and the common rationales of LSAs participation

Large-Scale Assessments (LSAs) commonly 'test and rank' two factors: students' academic performance and their context (Pizmony-Levy, 2013, p.v). While the former assesses cognitive skills, the latter concerns the 'associated factors' (Lietz et al., 2017, p.5) or 'non-cognitive variables' (Van De Vijver, Jude, & Kuger, 2019, p.83) such as students' age, gender, schooling experience, social-emotional learning skills and attitude. According to Van De Vijver et al. (2019, p.83) and Lietz et al. (2017, p.4), LSAs typically involve one or more of the following groups: students, parents, educators, and school leaders. Davier, Gonzalez, Kirsch, & Yamamoto (2013, p.1) indicate that LSAs are intended to assess these groups - not individuals - usually by 'age or grade in an education system' (Lietz, Cresswell, Rust, & Adams, 2017, p.4) and identify disparities in achievement levels based on 'subgroups such as gender or region' (Lietz et al., 2017, p.4). Lietz et al. (2017, p.5) indicates that one of the main goals to participate in LSAs is to collect data on a given education system so that policy makers can use as evidence for policy making to improve it. Ho (2020, p16-20) studied the LSAs participation of 24 countries. Of all, 7 reported their participation in ILSAs, 10 in Regional LSAs and 21 in National LSAs. Ho (2020, p.20) concluded that 'monitoring and evaluating education policy' followed by 'review and reform curriculum and education policy' are the two common aims of participation in the three LSAs groups.

The most comprehensive studies on the rationales for ILSA participation among the global north nations is led by Camilla Addey. Addey and her colleagues conducted three studies on ILSAs and concluded with seven broad rationales for ILSA participation and dissemination: evidence for policy, LSA capacity building, aid, global relations, political agendas, economic growth and school curriculum. The two ILSA administrators, the OECD and IEA, claim that their ILSAs can offer member countries with the first two on the list that 'pass' the official claim of participation rationales (Addey et al., 2017, p.6). According to a different study by Addey and Sellar, ILSA participation in general has five characteristics as it usually (1) involves more than one factor, (2) has to be interpreted within the context the decision is made, (3) may change between and during the implementations, (4) involves both data access and the participation process itself, and (5) is not discreet but cannot be inferred exclusively on the basis of income or stage of growth (Addey & Sellar, 2018). The rationales are frequently a mix of these factors, change with time and most importantly fit in various political agenda (Addey et al., 2017).

Another study by Addey and Sellar adds the rationales for non-participation under four themes: (1) politically, a country does not look to compare its education system with others (2) economically, as ILSA participation is resource consuming a country chooses to invest its resources in its national assessment, (3) technically, a country opts out of ILSA participation because of its weak institutional capacities, seen existing in fragile states and (4) socio-culturally, some ILSA data are not acceptable and relevant to a country's culture and context, leading to non-participation (Addey & Sellar, 2015). However, ILSA participation can be 'imposed' (Addey & Sellar, 2015, p.11) by a country's economic status and IOs membership (Smith, 2014).

Regarding the four above-mentioned themes, PISA participation may be politically driven by the pressure for accountability by domestic, media or public interest groups. As a result, in one case, France, the local banks insisted students to sit financial literacy in PISA. Also, the economic rationale for ILSA involvement have been promoted by the success of PISA and the impact it has bestowed the OECD in global education. In countries where the local assessment culture is absent or weak, PISA can supplement such technical capacity (Addey & Sellar, 2015). This technical capacity offered is one of the findings Kijima reported about developing countries. The other main rational is aid attraction from the international communities for their education needs (Kijima, 2010). Last, for socio-cultural purposes, ILSAs can also be used to validate 'national existence' the same way Kosovo and Cyprus have done with PISA and in nation-building movement, and the same way Palestine has done with the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) (Addey & Sellar, 2015, p.9).

In addition, there is another study funded by the World Bank that investigates 200 low-income to high-income countries who participated in the six rounds of PISA tests from 2000 to 2015. This study found that their participation was driven by their OECD membership; income level – with most global north nations joining whilst most global south counterparts did not; experience with other ILSAs – the IEA's TIMSS in particular; local assessment culture – implementation experience of national assessment; and aim to be EU members. This project presented a negative relationship between regional assessment experience and PISA participation (Lockheed, 2015, p.19).

2.2.2. PISA vs major types and uses of LSAs

There are two main types of LSAs: One-off or cross-sectional and trend or longitudinal. 'One-off or cross-sectional' LSAs offer information about a particular outcome at a specific point in time (Lietz et al., 2017, p.8). The information and data collected allow LSAs participants to think across, learn success stories and/or compare their performance among themselves. However, such comparisons are made across different regions and settings – concerning mostly the local context and culture. On this point, 'cultural differences across societies' (Lietz et al., 2017, p.8) and (geo)'political aspirations' (Parcerisa & Verger, 2019, p. 43) have been considered as two barriers that make such thinking, learning and comparing a complex issue for LSAs participating education systems to improve their performance for genuine educational aims. Therefore, a 'more meaningful' (Lietz et al., 2017, p.8) assessment should be any LSAs that allow for comparisons over time within countries. For example, the *1964-1968 Plowden National Survey* in England and the *1975-1979 Study of School Performance* in Australia were 'follow-up longitudinal studies' (Lietz et al., 2017, p.8) or trend studies that assessed educational achievement of a particular subgroup consisting of same students over a given period of time within the same country. Lietz et al. (2017, p.9) indicate that most LSAs of today do not have such a trend-oriented feature, which is the most attractive factor of their participation.

As an ILSA, PISA could be a hybrid or neither of the two main types mentioned above. It is a hybrid as it claims to offer its members with basic, contextual and trend indicators (OECD, 2009) of the test takers' skills, competencies and socio-economic factors but it is neither as PISA trend results are not drawn from the same students over a certain time and PISA overall results are used for cross-national comparison for its members are countries – nor individual schools competing within a certain country. In this sense, PISA also shares a common feature among other ILSAs, which is to standardise tests and procedures to allow for comparison among member countries (Addey & Sellar, 2015) but PISA as an ILSA presents itself as a special assessment.

Braun & Singer (2019) have summarised seven major uses of ILSAs and evaluated their capacity to achieve each use in Figure 1. Based on their evaluation, it is positive that PISA may have capacity to offer basic, contextual and trend indicators to its member countries. However, those indicators must be considered with caution. They are adamant that it is not possible to delve into the casual connection between student' achievement and their

contextual factors. Also, the transfer of best practice and policy from top performers to any receiving contexts on the basis of PISA league table face a number of challenges while using PISA data to assess and determine how school curricular, teaching practice and education policy should be created is possible but has to done with utmost caution (H. I. Braun & Singer, 2019).

Figure 1: The seven uses and accomplishment levels of ILSAs

	Uses	How Well Can ILSAs Achieve This Goal?
1	To be ***transparent*** about the condition of a nation's education system.	Outstanding
2	To disturb complacency and ***spur education reforms***.	Outstanding
3	**To *describe* and *compare*** student achievement and contextual factors (e.g., policies, student characteristics) across nations.	Yes, with some caveats
4	**To *track changes over time*** in student achievement, contextual factors, and their mutual relationships, within and across nations.	Yes, with some caveats
5	To ***create de facto international benchmarking***, by identifying top-performing nations and jurisdictions, or those making unusually large gains, and learning from their practices.	Challenging, with many caveats
6	To ***evaluate*** the effectiveness of curricula, instructional strategies, and education policies.	Only with extreme caution
7	To ***explore causal relationships*** between contextual factors (demographic, social, economic, and educational variables) and student achievement.	Generally impossible

(Braun & Singer, 2019, p. 82)

2.2.3. PISA's special feature

PISA has a 'forward-looking' focus as a distinctive feature to measure what students know at the present time to face life challenges in the future (OECD, 2004, p.12). Explaining that students should not be rewarded for their abilities to reproduce what they have learned in class in their real-life situation, the PISA mastermind Andreas Schleicher indicates that any test takers with such abilities can't perform well on PISA tests. Instead, PISA gives scores to those who are able to 'extrapolate' from what they have learned, think beyond their materials, and apply their knowledge in innovative ways (Schleicher, 2018, p.19). This first means to do well in PISA, test takers should be analytical, creative and able to think beyond what has been taught to them. However, to prove such abilities, one should be given enough time to think and write in a way that a 3-hour-long multiple-choice PISA test cannot achieve. It also

means PISA rejects the practice of test-what-you-teach at the classroom level and ultimately strips away teacher's autonomy.

Instead, considering the OECD's influence over the national policy making towards its version of KBE, PISA may promote the practice of teach-to-the-test. On this point, Meyer & Zahedi (2014) emphasise that PISA is technically 'scripted' and designed to offer solutions for its member countries to climb on its league table in a short run (Meyer & Zahedi, 2014, p. 873). This means for a country to improve their PISA ranking, its education system can choose to converge the learning materials in the PISA evaluated subjects towards the PISA test. This further means a shift from a traditional curriculum to this new PISA-oriented curriculum – see how the OECD imposes the shift in the cases of Japan (OECD, 2012b) and Norway (OECD, 2013a). As the shift is based on a limited measure of quality, Meyer & Zahedi (2014) and Tienken (2013) accuse PISA of covering a narrow spectrum of measurable facets of education, ignoring the significant role of some non-educational factors such as inequality and students' physical, moral, civic and artistic development out of the picture.

2.2.4. Is PISA able to achieve its claims?

Launched in 1997, PISA has been ranking nations school systems every three years since 2000 – its first test cycle. Since then, PISA has been widely discussed, debated and written about by academics, policy makers and other concerned stakeholders (Hopfenbeck et al., 2018; Pons, 2017; Saltelli, 2017). Over the same time period, PISA testing has faced a relentless wave of criticism (Araujo et al., 2017; Fuchs & Wößmann, 2007; Griffin, 2015b; Saltelli, 2017; Volante, 2018; Zhao, 2020) which collectively suggests PISA is a 'fundamentally-flawed' project (Stewart, 2013, p.1; Zhao, 2020, p.246). The concerns include data collection methodologies (Baird et al., 2011; Cresswell, Schwantner, & Waters, 2015; Fernandez-Cano, 2016; Hopfenbeck et al., 2018; Zhao, 2020), validity of its measurement and evaluation (Araujo et al., 2017; Baird et al., 2011; Fernandez-Cano, 2016; Gillis, Polesel, & Wu, 2016; Meyer & Zahedi, 2014) and its policy value and data relevance to educational planning and school contexts (Couture, 2017; Gillis et al., 2016; Meyer & Benavot, 2013; Pizmony-Levy, 2016; Saltelli, 2017; Thrupp, 2014; Willms & Tramonte, 2014).

These three sets of specific concerns seem to bind together arguably in a causal manner and in a way that those implementation and validity problems found in PISA measurement of

both cognitive and non-cognitive skills and factors potentially hinder its results from offering the claimed policy value for local education improvement (Addey, 2016; Araujo, Saltelli, & Schnepf, 2017; Couture, 2017; Gillis, Polesel, & Wu, 2016; Kaess, 2018; Meyer & Benavot, 2013; Pizmony-Levy, 2016; Saltelli, 2017; Steiner-Khamsi, 2020; Thrupp, 2014; Willms & Tramonte, 2014; Zhu, Xu, Li, & Chen, 2020). Thus, I will discuss how PISA fails to accurately measure both cognitive and non-cognitive skills and factors.

First, PISA data collection methodologies are not 'representative' (Zhao, 2020, p.249) nor 'inclusive' (Fernandez-Cano, 2016, p.4). To achieve representativeness for every test cycle, the PISA team distributes questionnaires for students, parents, school principals and teachers to understand what their context is for test design and analysis purposes. However, since 2015, the questionnaires have been optional[6] for parents and teachers. This results in data loss especially on teachers (Cresswell et al., 2015; Hopfenbeck et al., 2018), coupled with issues related to sampling age, exclusion and size as opposed to the different school starting age, population sizes and mortality rates in different countries (Baird et al., 2011; Fernandez-Cano, 2016; Hopfenbeck et al., 2018; Zhao, 2020). For inclusiveness, notably since its second cycle, PISA has included students with Special Education Needs (SEN), the number of which is increased by the number of participating countries. However, the number of students with SEN participating in the PISA test cycles is considered too low (only between 1% and 3%) for use (Brzyska, 2018; LeRoy, Samuel, Deluca, & Evans, 2019).

Second, PISA can potentially disguise itself as a scientific tool, considering its adoption of a 'seemingly scientific' process from the development of its test items to the publication of its test results, which employ advanced statistical and psychometric concepts, models and methods (Zhao, 2020, p.253). Plus, the integration of data visuals in its reports enhances its effect of attractiveness. However, when its technical features are closely examined, PISA is a 'biased' assessment (Zhao, 2020, p.255). The biases are constituted by issues related to methods and formats, test constructs and items, Items Response Theory (IRT) scaling, measurement and metric invariance, types of texts and translation that collectively affect the validity of PISA assessment capability to keep its cross-cultural comparison (Baird et al.,

[6] In 2018, the educational career, ICT familiarity, and well-being questionnaires were made optional for students (Crato, 2021, p.254)

2011; Cresswell et al., 2015; Fernandez-Cano, 2016; Hipkins, 2019; Hopfenbeck et al., 2018; Van De Vijver et al., 2019; Zhao, 2020).

For example, the majority of studies showed a significant amount of Differential Item Functioning (DIF) when examining different language versions. DIF is a statistical feature of a test item that indicates the extent to which the item might be testing various abilities for members of different subgroups, according to Zhao (2020). It appears that PISA is evaluating different skills and competencies for students with different languages in this situation (Hopfenbeck et al., 2018; Zhao, 2020). Even with students speaking the same language, the OECD explains, it is due not only to the fact that different students are tested, but also to the fact that the PISA items are not specifically tailored to test what students have achieved in the previous academic year, but rather to measure the overall result of studying in school up to the PISA-tested age, suggesting that if any tested population have learnt contents that are not measured by PISA, the reported achievement gap may understate student growth (OECD, 2014, p.261).

Last, Angel Gurría, the 5th OECD Secretary-General stresses that PISA is an 'accurate indicator of students' abilities' (OECD, 2013, p.4) and the characteristics of the HPESs around the globe so that local governments, policy makers and educators can create local policies for their educational contexts and needs (OECD, 2018b). However, PISA is only a skill/competency-based assessment (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010; Schleicher, 2018) or a non-curricular assessment (OECD, 2001, 2004). Any policy borrowed from the HPESs needs to be 'properly indigenised' for local use (Chung, 2010, 291). Warned by other scholars, it is not a wise decision to use the findings of the PISA to draw broad assumptions on what makes schools successful (H. I. Braun & Singer, 2019; Carnoy, Khavenson, Loyalka, Schmidt, & Zakharov, 2016; Tienken, 2013). Methodologically considering the validity of PISA measurement through several of its reports, PISA is a macro assessment that can't capture individual student's performance, loses tracks on changes made at school level and lacks other contextual details to make comparisons. Thus, conclusions drawn from PISA data and reports shall be made with extra attention (H. I. Braun & Singer, 2019; Fernandez-Cano, 2016). Regarding contextual details, Carnoy et al. (2016) and Braun & Singer (2019) suggest that while PISA could be useful for recognising general patterns, it cannot offer a context-specific analysis for unwealthy or underperforming schools for the purpose of improving student performance in such contexts.

Pertaining to its claims to measure its test takers' non-cognitive factors by shedding light on their contextual information such as their socio-economic status, gender, immigrant background and equity (OECD, 2001, 2013c, p.26), a closer look into the means for reading achievement – the PISA-identified primary indicator of educational productivity – in the performance of Finland and Singapore in the 2009 PISA test reveals that the two different managerial styles of Finnish and Singaporean school principals are correlated with the same level of reading achievement. This means PISA is unable to measure the potential differences in the obviously contrasting school leaders that may have their roots in the diverse cultural contexts and may have impacted the students' social-emotional growth (Soh, 2014; Tanskanen, Erola, & Kallio, 2016). To explain the correlation between the management styles of principals and student reading achievement in the two countries, certain intervening variables such as teaching-related factors should be explored (Soh, 2014). Carrasquillo & London (2013) posit that the success of school students relies on a variety of factors: the nature of the school, students ' academic abilities, their willingness to carry out the school assignments, and their parents' involvement. All these variables contribute to students' cognitive growth, academic performance, and educational success (Carrasquillo & London, 2013).

According to the OECD, if a country hits higher scores in the three PISA-measured subjects than does another country, it does not suggest that schools or specific aspects of the education system in the former country are more successful than those in the latter. However, it may be rational to assume that the combined effect of learning experiences, beginning in early childhood and up to the age of fifteen and the acquisition of experience at 'school, at home and beyond' in the former has resulted in higher scores given by PISA (OECD, 2014, p.265). On top of the combined effect on student performance, PISA results are also significantly associated with poverty (OECD, 2010, p.157). Tienken (2013) explains that for the OECD countries, poverty accounts for up to 46% of PISA scores. This does not reflect the status of the United States one of its major industrialised countries with the highest childhood poverty rates. This similar issue also happened in New Zealand where the impact of poverty on student achievement was used to fit the political campaign, causing public confusion over PISA measurement criteria (Thrupp, 2014).

To sum up, PISA is a major product of the assessment shift promoted by the OECD to place the local education systems under the OECD's education work function. Considering PISA as an ILSA, it still has several issues concerning its methodology, evaluation and policy value that potentially incur damages to local education systems. However, with the OECD's resource and power, PISA keeps expanding and its participation will arguably continue to increase due to the political, economic, technical and socio-cultural rationales in various contexts. These four rationales are intertwined because one can influence the others (Wiseman, 2010, p.4). In the case of PISA under the OECD, it is likely that the OECD is using the technical rational of PISA participation alongside its promotion of KBE to influence the local politics – the effects of externalisation.

2.3. PISA as datafication

PISA is a datafication project that equips the OECD with soft power to influence the local policy making, public debates and politics. This soft power is enhanced when the acceptance of the PISA results by policy makers and the public expands. Thus, this section will illustrate how datafication plays a role as a reform technology in education. I start with the definition of datafication and its ten dimensions. I will also present some background information on how big data came to be used in education along with potential issues in data collection which may affect the 'disciplinary power' of PISA (Foucault, 1977, p.187). Towards the end of the section will investigate the relationship between data collection and evidence-based policy making.

2.3.1. What is datafication?

'Data' is drawn from the Latin *dare*, which means 'to give.' 'Data' is, thus, referred to something 'given or taken for granted' in this linguistic sense; data is a 'raw element' that can be extracted, calculated and documented from different events and translated into 'evidence or facts' (Williamson, 2017, p.29). Datafication, in a generic sense, is a technical advancement that can convert most facets of our life, education included, into a set of numerical 'statistical' information or data intended to offer new value (Fernandez-Cano, 2016).

Based on Williamson (2019, p.2), David Beer indicated that being able to convert individuals into numbers provided an institution with 'power through numerical knowledge' to categorise

them, extract their 'norms' and 'regularities' from the total population and ‘judge’ those individuals against them. In education, Williamson (2018, 2019) raised Michel Foucault’s enunciation of how students could be converted into numbers by their growth, intelligence, behaviour, success, merit, cleanliness, age, social status and character so that they could be ranked, monitored and trained efficiently. The end of the 21st century saw the integration of ‘digital learning machines’ (Williamson, 2019, p.2) into school management systems for recording, measuring and categorising student data.

2.3.2. The ten dimensions of datafication

Ben Williamson seems most critical of datafication as he investigates ten dimensions to see what it really is. Firstly considering the historical trends, he posits that datafication has given rise to the ‘global race’ promoted in the present education policy informed by LSAs results but that the data sampling and collection methods are usually time-consuming as compared to a recent datafication technology called ‘learning analytics’ that offers a huge, fast, automatic and real-time dataset of the entire student population instead of a sample. Secondly, datafication is technically a method of translating complex systems, qualities, behaviours and phenomena into ‘machine-readable’ modes of information technology. This technical feature enables objects, interactions, events, procedures to be analysed for correlations and observations, using technical processes such as ‘data analytics and machine learning’. Thirdly, datafication has two conflicting sides of its epistemology. On one hand, datafication is based on the premise that the patterns and associations found in datasets can create meaningful, objective and informative interpretation of multifaceted events. On the other hand, this empiricist epistemology is faulty because all data are usually ‘framed and sampled’. Fourthly, datafication challenges the ontology of data. Some see data as having ‘raw’ qualities to ‘speak for themselves’ while critics consider data intertwined with the ‘software and knowledge’ used to generate them.

Fifthly in social arena, datafication is practised by various actors and institutions in several types of business. Such actors and institutions have different expertise and pursue their interests over the datafication of education. Notably, commercial firms have been increasingly important social actors in the growth of education and datafication technologies. Sixthly, datafication offers ‘data power’ that attracts governments. With data power, governments can foresee people’s reaction and plan their intervention strategy. Seventhly, datafication is culturally embedded; therefore, should be subject to local interpretation.

Eighthly, datafication is a ‘utopian fantasy’ that could become reality with adequate ‘visionaries and support’. Ninthly, datafication also has a ‘dystopian’ side as it raises concerns about data bias, profiling, and hacking. Finally, datafication and privacy are on two different ends of the spectrum. Different countries apply different legal and ethical standards to weigh out between the two (Williamson, 2018).

2.3.3. The rise of big data in education

Concerning the ‘digital learning machines’ (Williamson, 2019, p.2), Fischer et al. (2020) indicate that there are two significant developments in the information age that have contributed to the rise of big data in education at an institutional or macro level. First, conventional institutional data recording and storage have increasingly been replaced by a digital means known as Student Information System (SIS) that allows large-scale management and analysis on massive volumes of structured student academic details across various generations. The other, Learning Management System (LMS), now makes possible the recording of students’ learning behaviours. The system aids teachers in communicating and assigning class materials and work to their students.

Looking closely into how data is used at three different levels[7], Fischer et al. (2020) conclude that microlevel data approaches are powerful tools for evaluating learner processes due to its availability but this approach seems to overlook larger and potentially more significant trends, that mesolevel data offer a ‘deep’ insight into cognitive processes but they are susceptible to many of the wider difficulties of using automated methods for writing calculation and that macrolevel data or big data can be useful for providing a wide picture of student engagement and accomplishment but its limited ‘size and coarse measurements’ can make seeking the ‘finer-grained’ solution difficult (Fischer et al., 2020, p.152). A different study by Yu & Wu (2016) shows that big data in education enables the learning process to be tailored to each student's needs through a customised recommendation system that can offer advice on appropriate learning techniques, to assist school administrators to organise the available learning resources and to assist policy makers to make evidence-based decisions for effective education reform (Yu & Wu, 2016).

Effectiveness of education reform could be measured by the quality of school graduates who are the human capital or knowledge increasingly treated as the new driving force of economic

[7] Microlevel (clickstream data), mesolevel (textual data) and macro level (institutional or big data)

growth as of today. This shift from Karl Max's ideas of physical capital for production for 'tangible investments' to human capital or knowledge for 'intangible investments' directs public policy agenda to address issues in relation to 'knowledge infrastructure' and 'Intellectual Property (IP)' legislation (Haskel & Westlake, 2017, p.241). The 'intangible, knowledge-based assets' accumulated in intangible investment differ from tangible assets in four S's: the former has 'sunk costs', is more 'scalable', offers more 'spill over' profits and shows 'synergy' with other intangibles (Haskel & Westlake, 2017, p.58). The intangible capital consists of 'software' and 'database' (Haskel & Westlake, 2017, p.22) or big data (Rowe, 2019). For software, the OECD considers it as 'human expertise/capital' (OECD, 2013, p.63) which is the cornerstone of Knowledge-Based Capital (KBC) the OECD uses in its intangible investment (Haskel & Westlake, 2017). For datasets globally collected by PISA, the OECD uses it together with the 'neoliberalism drivers[8]' to shape the local education reform policy (Rowe, 2019, p.273).

Stephen J. Ball seems to be most critical of reform technologies. Seeing PISA as one reform technology, he explains that reform in education policy comes as a 'small, incremental' change a certain program offers by means of bringing up 'new possibilities and innovations' as a solution and that once developed, the acceptance of such technology makes future reform conceivable and feasible - and eventually explicit and indispensable (Ball, 2016, p.1048). Such reform alters the role of policy makers from 'who they are' and sends them to 'new' policy directions that will potentially bring to different achievement masked by rhetoric of excellence, creativity, innovation, development and independence (Ball, 2003, p.215). He stresses that these reform technologies are subconsciously – without imposition (Lingard, Martino, Rezai-Rashti, & Sellar, 2016), without oppression (Ball, 2016), and without force to comply (Mahon & McBride, 2014a) – practiced at work in the forms of league tables, policy processes and templates, and performance and evaluation reports (Ball, 2016). These 'technologies[9] of reform' or 'policy technologies' (Ball, 2003, 2016) have paved the way for neoliberalism to be incorporated in the education systems under the OECD's PISA testing program (Ball, 2016; d'Agnese, 2015, 2018; Fischman, Topper, Silova, Goebel, & Holloway, 2019; Fuller, 2019; Shahjahan, 2011).

[8] Includes marketisation, competition and decentralisation (Rowe, 2019,p. 273)
[9] Market/marketisation, Management/managerialism, and Performance/performativity (Ball, 2003, 2016)

2.3.4. The OECD and data collection in education

Based on Sellar & Lingard (2013), the OECD exercises its influence through infrastructural governance established through its global network to 'collect and compare' educational statistical data and epistemological governance which firmly positions the OECD to 'shape the views' of main actors in education at local, national, and global levels (Sellar & Lingard, 2013, p.722). However, the OECD argued that PISA was created in response to the increasing needs from its member countries for accurate educational output data to complement their input data (Gorur, 2011; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010). In other words, the OECD created PISA as a competency-based assessment in response to a demand for a complete 'set of indicators' to evaluate school systems (Baird et al., 2011, p.4). Presently, PISA claims to offer its members with 'basic indicators' providing a basic profile of student knowledge and skills, 'contextual indicators' showing how these skills relate to significant demographic, socio-economic and educational factors and trend indicators emerging from the continuing nature of the data collection (OECD, 2009, p.12). These indicators are meant to be used as evidence for policy making in the member countries.

Andreas Schleicher refers PISA to as a 'crowdsourcing platform' for education leaders and policy makers to produce and distribute best practices in the areas of curriculum development, school policy and teaching methodology (Schleicher, 2018, p.259). The platform has established a sense of 'ownership' by bringing together greatest 'thinkers, educators and scientists' from the member countries to investigate what to expect from students and how to measure it (Schleicher, 2018, p.19). PISA is a gigantic educational data system that allows public access. For example, the OECD launched an interactive website called Education GPS in 2014 for allowing visitors to select a set of PISA indicators of their interest to generate a report. The website is capable of generating 'extensive customised data sets' that can come in a form of maps, charts and scatterplots ready for an interested individual to use in their comparative studies or reviews on the PISA test performance and subsequent educational policies of any member countries (Williamson, 2016b, p.130). For this capability, Education GPS acts as 'a data-based policy instrument' that makes the OECD a 'centre of calculation' in global education (Williamson, 2016b, p.138).

2.3.5. PISA data and evidence-based policy making

Niemann & Martens (2018) indicate that PISA data enable policy makers to withdraw statistical information and mathematically correlate the various components it offers to make

policy recommendations accordingly. The general public can monitor how their education systems perform, compare them in broad terms using PISA's league tables, and learn why some education systems perform better than others through the OECD publications (Niemann & Martens, 2018). On this point, Gillis et al. (2016) however find that PISA data cannot be used for policy formulation and advice in general due to the many of its technical issues, low causal relation between student performance and success factors, and insufficient guidance in interpreting its league table. Moreover, the focus in big data analyses is not on causation but correlation (Zwitter, 2014) and correlation-based policy brings about 'discriminatory practices' (Gumbus & Grodzinsky, 2015, p.119). Arguably, two of the main discriminatory practices are obviously the policy value and relevance of the PISA results to the local education settings and the political choice of reference society for PISA poor performers to learn from – as above-mentioned. On this note, Couture (2017) blames the increasing global attention on data collecting by the current disruptive technology for devaluing school-based assessments. He stresses that 'a composite number from an accountability measure' bears little information about a school what happens in it (Couture, 2017, p.36).

According to Wiseman, the quest to collect data as evidence for education policy making can be explained by three camps: (1) 'technical-functional' approach in which policy makers search for the best method to addressing critical educational concerns and challenges, aimed at improving the in-class teaching and learning at the lowest possible cost; (2) 'sociopolitical' approach in which education policies are influenced by social and political agenda and (3) 'institutional' approach in which 'rationally legitimised' frameworks for education policy making are gradually institutionalised (Wiseman, 2010, p.4).

Wiseman (2010, p.5-10) suggests that evidence-based policy making has three aims: improving education quality through summative assessments, promoting equity through formative assessments and enhancing assessment administrator's accountability through performance appraisal – i.e. for funding purposes. Remarkably, the OECD using PISA surveys has been a leading entity in collecting, utilising and generating big data for school performance indication. Zwitter (2014) considers 'data collectors' as those who get to decide what data is collected and how long it is kept, 'data utilisers' as those who frame and reframe the implication of data, and 'data generators' as those who input or record data. In this sense, data generators could be exploited because they lack information of who is gathering information about them or how and what for that information is being used (Zwitter, 2014,

p.3). This means using PISA as a data collector, the OECD as a data utiliser equips itself with a privilege to select and manage the meaning and purpose of student achievement in each country. With the infrastructural and epistemological power (Sellar & Lingard, 2013), the OECD can interpret its collection or rather selection of big data in education into different versions of narratives (Waldow, 2020b) for local policy makers to best pick for their local politics – the political choice mentioned earlier.

To sum up, PISA is a datafication project that offers 'globalised datasets' (Rowe, 2019, p.273) for the OECD to use alongside its framing of 'human expertise/capital' (OECD, 2013, p.63) to steer local education systems towards its promotion of KBE. As much as the sociopolitical approach (Wiseman, 2010, p.4) is concerned, the OECD can potentially use its student's data together with KBE to influence the political decisions in its member countries. Considering its resource, power and PISA success, the OECD could equip PISA with advanced applications such as 'learning analytics' (Williamson, 2018) and 'artificial intelligence' (Rowe, 2019, p.273) that allow fast, instantaneous, programmed data of individual test takers. As a data utiliser (Zwitter, 2014, p.3), the OECD would bestow itself with more accuracy in its selection of student data to generate better narratives (Waldow, 2020b) and yet for the local political priorities.

In conclusion, PISA as a product of the OECD turns education in its member countries to be obviously a political act. The OECD's resources and power enable it to disguise PISA as a policy tool to converge local education systems towards its economic discourse – KBE. PISA as an ILSA still has several methodological, evaluation, and policy-related issues that could cause harm to local education systems in the long run. HPESs or reference societies are terms that the OECD uses for policy transfer or policy borrowing, but it turns out that the process is heavily influenced by the countries' political decisions about which reference societies to learn from. Consequently, PISA offers its member countries different narratives to (de)legitimise education reform policy to suit local political climate as a priority. PISA as datafication is a political technology that provides globalised datasets for the OECD to manage global education policy in respects to its geopolitical agenda. Given its resources, influence, and PISA's success, the OECD could invest more in PISA to increase its influence by equipping PISA with advanced applications which would allow for quick, instantaneous, programmed data of individual test takers. In this terrain, the OECD as a data user would undoubtedly benefit from greater precision in its selection of student data to produce stronger

narratives and, more importantly, for local political agendas. Recently, the OECD has invested in PISA-D as a bridge for nine developing countries to measure up for 2023 PISA participation. Part of the OECD's expansion ambition, PISA-D is likely to face some of the issues raised against PISA in this chapter.

The OECD's recent expansion work has led to the creation of more ILSAs under the OECD and has been argued to strengthen the OECD's influence to achieve new ambitions which could be linked to forms of 'global coloniality' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p.181). Among those ILSAs, I decide that PISA-based Test for Schools (in short PISA for Schools) and PISA-D deserve a close examination as they are aimed to delve into individual schools and developing countries (see Addey, Sellar, Steiner-Khamsi, Lingard, & Verger, 2017; Lewis & Lingard, 2015). However, my PhD thesis takes PISA-D as the subject matter because I consider it an extremely ambitious project to assess out-of-school population in developing countries – my country, Cambodia, included.

PISA-D was created in 2014 ostensibly to make the main PISA programme more applicable to a broader variety of socio-economic contexts including those found in the developing countries – the global south nations (OECD, 2018e, 2018b). However, PISA-D has the same comparability scale and assesses knowledge and competencies that are theorised in the context of global north countries as PISA (Kaess, 2018). In this case, the OECD has been seen to use PISA-D to recontextualise the local settings of the global south countries 'profoundly' and 'from a distance' partly to maintain the PISA standard (Gorur et al., 2019, p.326). In this sense, I contend that such recontextualisation may allow the OECD to perpetuate colonial power over the PISA-D member countries and homogenise their local knowledge production as far as globalisation entails. The perpetuation and homogenisation will arguably be achieved by means of the OECD's power mechanisms – soft and hard powers discussed in the previous chapter.

The soft-hard power mechanisms constitute the form of governance 'in and by heterarchies' (Ball, 2010, p.157). These heterarchies are the result of globalisation and have been established by the OECD's 'international networks and systems' to bolster the OECD's global education governance through PISA and other ILSAs under the OECD (Sellar & Lingard, 2013, p.722). For example, Lewis et al. (2016) argue that the OECD also uses its influence in such 'heterarchical governance' in the case of PISA for Schools, which allows the OECD to directly delve into individual school's management – bypassing the local governments (Lewis et al., 2016). As both PISA-D and PISA for Schools carry the same scale and metric as PISA, my thesis argues that (1) the OECD may also use its influence in the form of the 'heterarchical governance' (Lewis et al., 2016) over the PISA-D member countries; (2) such governance may have an element of coloniality which the OECD can

apply over those aid-dependent nations to achieve its ideological and geopolitical agendas; (3) the OECD as a global actor may attempt to dominate the local knowledge production and homogenise it as far as those agendas are concerned; and (4) due to the nature of the heterarchical governance, the PISA-D member countries are not going to be able to hold any International Oganisation(s) for unintended effects on their local knowledge production.

As a citizen of Cambodia, where PISA-D is being enacted, I am profoundly interested in what this ILSA could offer to developing countries – my country in particular. Thus, the overarching objective of my PhD thesis is to analyse how and why Cambodia chooses to become involved in PISA-D and what have been the local impacts. In the following chapter – Chapter 3, I will focus on how PISA-D could potentially impact the local education policy making and development in the global south nations, seek to understand the OECD's aim that could be channelled through the 'policy message' in its policy directives from above, and how the tension between coloniality and the enactment of PISA-D plays out in the developing countries (Spillane, 2004, p.6). By the end of the chapter, I will present the research questions which I am going to use as a guide for my interviews with the study participants – mostly Cambodians. This empirical component of my research to collect the vernacular responses to the research questions from the local actors would help clarify their perspective on the OECD's policy message and beyond.

CHAPTER 3

PISA FOR DEVELOPMENT (PISA-D) AND ITS CRITIQUE

This chapter seeks to provide some background on PISA-D. I look at the development of PISA-D as an offshoot of PISA, the 'coloniality of power' (Quijano, 2000, p.533), and PISA D and globalisation. I am investigating these three aspects because it is crucial to identify what PISA-D could potentially do to the local education systems in the global south nations, considering all the critiques against PISA mentioned in the previous chapter. I am most concerned to learn if the OECD may use PISA-D results to interfere with the local politics as seen in the case of PISA. Because the PISA-D member countries are aid-dependent, I investigate the OECD's influence through 'heterarchical governance' (Lewis et al., 2016) – a new form of government that emerges with globalisation. Investigating such governance allows me to understand how the OECD may use its networks of donors in its power mechanisms to achieve its new ambitions which could constitute a form of 'global

coloniality' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p.181). The power exercised by the OECD may intersect with decolonial literature, which argues that the world has never been on the path to decolonisation but to a new type of colonisation. The argument has been summarised as 'coloniality is not over; it is all over' (López-calvo, 2016, p.175). This leads me to explore how globalisation allows the OECD to use its governance mechanisms to influence local education policy making in the developing countries through PISA-D.

3.1. PISA-D as an Offshoot of PISA

This section focuses on how PISA-D was created, how the OECD attempts to maintain PISA's standard in PISA-D and how the five features the OECD has introduced to PISA-D may fail to work out in developing countries. My thesis argues that the OECD does not genuinely intend to use PISA-D to improve the education quality in the developing countries; instead, the OECD manages to promote PISA-D to look like a relevant assessment by attaching the developing countries' global commitment to its ILSAs achievement, recontextualising the local settings to suit its ideological and geopolitical agendas and simplifying the complexity of the out-of-school population to fit its ILSAs capabilities. I also contend that the OECD's recontextualisation is potentially an exercise of colonialism and homegenisation which I will elaborate in following sections. In the following sub-sections, I will examine how PISA-D was created in respect to the major global education agendas and how the OECD related PISA-D to one of these agendas. I then focus on the major rationale that attracts the global south nations to participate in ILSAs, as well as the PISA-D participation benefits claimed by the OECD. Toward the end, I am going to discuss how the OECD employed its standardisation approach in Zambia before looking into the concerns raised around the PISA-D applicability in the developing countries and what scholars anticipate these global south nations may and may not gain from this LSA programme.

3.1.1. The birth of PISA-D

This sub-section discusses how PISA-D was created, how this ILSA reaches out to the developing countries, and how the OECD relates the educational performance of those developing countries to its ILSAs. My thesis argues that the OECD prioritises increasing the number of participating countries in its ILSAs over offering recommendations that are specific to each member's educational needs and that PISA-D and the Sustainable

Development Goal 4 (hereafter SDG4) could be a stepping-stone for the OECD to issue PISA membership cards to the developing countries.

To understand how PISA-D came to its existence, I present some background information on the two preceding education agendas: EFA[10] and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These two agendas were created by the United Nations and the World Bank for developing countries to reduce illiteracy and universalise 'Basic Education[11]' (Dy & Ninomiya, 2003, p.2). Due to the implementation of these two agendas, the number of out-of-school primary school children decreased by nearly half, from 100 million in 2000 to 57 million that year (UN, 2015). However, education still had some 'unfinished work' for the post-2015 world to deal with, which led to a new agenda – Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015, p.27). One of those goals, SDG4, is the blueprint adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 for developing countries to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all in post-2015 world. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) oversees the direction of the international community towards the achievement of this goal by means of collaborations, capacity building 'policy guidance, monitoring and advocacy' (UNESCO, 2019a).

In the international community, the World Bank and the OECD have formed a strategic partnership for their aligned agendas. While the World Bank has been the most active financial assistant to the education sector in the developing countries, the OECD has been known as an education policy adviser to the developed countries through PISA. In 2013, the OECD together with its partners created PISA-D, aiming to improve and distinguish the PISA data-collection methods to deliver results that more accurately inform evidence-based policy making in developing countries (OECD, n.d.-h; Ward, 2018). To monitor the developing countries' achievement of SDG4, the OECD has convinced UNESCO to use PISA-D as 'a major source of data' (OECD, 2018c, p.2). That is, the OECD has fought its way to position PISA-D as the most reliable assessment in the developing countries, which

[10] It was a blueprint established at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 by the United Nations and the World Bank for developing countries to reduce illiteracy and universalise primary education. 10 years later, the vision had to be reassured in the Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments as the challenges remained far from achievement. Therefore, the achievement of Education for All was delayed to 2015.

[11] A broad range of educational activities (non-formal and formal / public and private) in primary and secondary education intended to meet individuals' fundamental learning needs of all ages as described by the World Declaration on Education for All. (UNESCO-UIS, n.d.).

are a completely new context to its education work. However, PISA-D is not the only 'official means of verification on SDG4' (Auld et al., 2019, p.208).

SDG4 reads 'Ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.' This goal is overarching – it is not restricted to the economic orientation as promoted by the OECD. However, according to the OECD, SDG4 envisions students to achieve a minimum standard of proficiency (level 2) of PISA by the time they finish their lower secondary education (OECD, 2018b). Level 2 expects students to have literal comprehension from easy common texts, show some ability to link a variety of pieces of information, to draw inferences that go beyond the clearly specified facts, and link the text to their personal understanding and experience (OECD, 2018b). On this note, the OECD equalises the SDG4 objectives that are meant for developing countries to achieve with the achievement level of PISA that is designed for developed countries. Such equalisation and quantification may mean that those developing countries are not trying to achieve the overarching goal, SDG4, but PISA level 2 performance.

Addey (2016) argues that the OECD has steered the world to education outcomes and tactically positions PISA-like assessment, PISA-D, as a benchmark for SDG4 in order to enhance PISA policy relevance (Addey, 2016b). However, PISA was originally designed for rich countries. Bloem (2015) argues that the motivations of developing and developed countries may be comparable, but the policy priorities between the two groups of countries are bound to diverge due to the different socioeconomic and cultural settings (Bloem, 2015). To overcome this incompatibility issue, the OECD looks for ways to get developing countries to take up PISA so that PISA can influence the local school systems and policy making (Addey & Gorur, 2020). This opens a window for the OECD to place PISA-D as a primary evaluator on the SDG4 achievement and may use these two global monitoring programmes as a proxy to 'dig deeper roots globally' and go beyond the global attention to the poor-performing school systems in the developing countries (Addey, 2017, p.320). The next sub-section investigates the five features the OECD introduced to PISA-D and draws on the work of Gorur et al., 2019 who look at the case of Zambia to illustrate how PISA-D goes beyond the global attention.

3.1.2. PISA standard in PISA-D

This sub-section discusses the transfer of PISA standard to PISA-D and how the OECD attempts to maintain the standard between these two ILSAs in the face of different contexts found in the global north and global south nations. I found that the OECD recontextualises the local settings to fit in its PISA standard. Such recontextualisation has been done 'profoundly' and 'from a distance' (Gorur et al., 2019, p.326). In this sense, the nature of such recontextualisation tends to be a warm-up exercise for colonialism and homegenisation.

The PISA-D programme is currently a one-off pilot six-year-long project. The OECD claimed it was intended to prepare the member countries to participate more meaningfully in the 2021 test cycle of PISA (OECD, 2018c, p.14). This cycle was postponed to 2023 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To get developing countries into PISA, the OECD aligns PISA-D to the original PISA framework, technical requirements, and procedures. In other words, PISA-D uses the same comparability scale and assesses knowledge and competencies that are theorised as making up PISA in the context of global north countries (Kaess, 2018). To provide for a valid comparison, PISA-D has to maintain the PISA standard (Cresswell et al., 2015). Standardisation of test items can be achieved only when cultural differences are removed (Gorur, Sørensen, & Maddox, 2019).

To deal with the cultural differences between the global north and global south nations, the OECD has introduced five new features into PISA-D – as shown in Table 1 – to make the assessment relevant to the lower socio-economic contexts of the global south countries (OECD, 2018a). Gorur et al. (2019, p.309) argue that standardisation and contextualisation cannot be achieved from such a one-off pilot programme. To illustrate, they conducted an ethnographic study in a PISA-D member country, Zambia, to see how PISA-D resolves the contradictions between keeping the PISA standard whilst also applying the standard in the Zambian context. They found that although the same contractor conducts sampling for both PISA and PISA-D, standardisation across these two ILSAs reduces due to issues with the test booklet format, sampling across cultures, and locating schools and out-of-school 15-year-olds. They stress that for the OECD to maintain standardisation, the differences are tackled from above while the local settings are being thoroughly recontextualised to 'adapt the (global) standard'(Gorur et al., 2019, p.326). This finding implies that the contextual differences and issues that affect the PISA standardisation are to be managed beyond the

local governments. Such practice provides the OECD with a privilege to make decisions on behalf of the local governments.

Table 1: PISA vs PISA-D

	PISA	PISA-D
1. Subject treatment	Subject-rotating focus	Treats the three domains equally
2. Targeted test instrument	Does not target on particular performance levels	Expands the coverage to the lower proficiency levels but keeps the original scale of comparability with PISA.
3. Modified test instrument and questionnaires		Reading difficulties reduced due to the lower levels of reading literacy capacity in developing countries.
4. Contextual questionnaires		Combine some PISA items for international comparisons with PISA-D items found in the context of developing countries.
5. Population assessed	15-year-olds in grade 7 or above	Assesses this same population together with out-of-schoolers[12] or are in school but in grade 6 or below.

(OECD, 2018a)

3.1.3. Concerns about the PISA-D features and its applicability in developing countries

This sub-section examines the five features the OECD introduced to PISA-D as shown in Table 1 with particular emphasis on the out-of-school assessment of PISA-D and investigates the arguments made by two experts over the suitability of the PISA-D programme in the global south contexts. The out of school assessment deserves a thorough discussion because the targeted population in developing countries requires a critical understanding. I contend that the OECD has introduced this out of school assessment to attract participation from the developing countries instead of trying to assess the targeted population for serious policy value.

I am going to illustrate the five features in the order shown in Table 1. Pertaining to feature 1, PISA and PISA-D have different emphases and assessment approach on the domains they test. while PISA-D treats the three major domains: reading, mathematics, and science

[12] neither enrolled in school nor enrolled in the PISA's target grade (grades 7 and above) (Ward, 2020)

equally; every PISA test cycle comprises of one major domain, two minor domains and sometimes one or two extra areas of assessment and optional domains. Also, there has been a shift in the assessment type. For example, for the PISA 2015 test cycle, science was a major domain, and the assessment type was changed from pencil-paper-based to computer-based. The assessment also measured financial literacy and collaborative problem-solving skills as optional domains (OECD, 2017a).

50% of the test is devoted to a major domain and 25% is given to each of the minor domains. Optional domains include financial literacy in PISA 2012 and PISA 2018 and Computer-Based Assessment of Mathematics (CBAM) in PISA 2012 were not taken by all the participating countries; therefore, they were not used to yield trend results. The extra areas of assessment and optional domains involved different skills in the test cycles where different subject became the major domain. That is, the continuous alterations in the assessment cycles could be seen as the OECD attempted to make its ILSAs results adaptive to the demands of the real world. They may however show that there has been uncertainty in the OECD's definition of which set of knowledge and skills to be assessed to best fit in the OECD's promotion and narrative of its KBE discourse.

Feature 2 concerns the 'scale-linking methods' which may be compromised by the OECD's standardisation approach and the different coverage between PISA and PISA-D (OECD, 2019, p.9). The OECD used the methods on the ground that over half of the PISA-D test items were extracted from the PISA 2015 paper-based exam so that the PISA-D results could be reported on the PISA scale (OECD, 2019, p.9). Over two-thirds of the items in the PISA-D test are at Level 2 or lower, with less than one-third at Levels 3 through 6. According to the PISA-D technical report, Item Response Theory (IRT) was used to establish comparability between PISA-D and the PISA 2015 test and among the participating countries in the three PISA-D domains. The report finds that the test items match well among PISA-D participating countries and between PISA-D and PISA (OECD, 2018c). This scale-linking method may not be very accurate , given the above-mentioned standardisation issues found in the case of Zambia (Gorur et al., 2019).

Also, the OECD report on the PISA 2015 test cycle shows a different set of various technical issues within this one test cycle that could potentially reduce the effectiveness of the linking method, when compared to the PISA-D test which was conducted in a paper-based form only

and has a unique aspect – the out-of-school component. For example, PISA 2015 was conducted in two forms: on computer that was comprised of both new and trend items and on paper that covered only trend items from two of the three major domains; the paper-based assessment did not include the latest items but was made for countries who opted out from the computer-based delivery mode (OECD, 2017a). For the extra assessment, the PISA 2015 report suggests 'caution is needed' to guarantee that each participating country has the same variety in student characteristics essential to collaborative problem solving (OECD, 2017a, p.144). This caution should be taken into serious consideration because it is undeniable that student characteristics vary amongst developing countries and vary to a higher degree, when comparing developing countries to developed countries.

Features 3,4 and 5 in Table 1 are the three technical strands of the PISA-D programme (OECD, 2017). In respect to feature 3, reducing reading difficulties to accommodate the reading literacy levels in developing countries may not provide a significant explanation as to how this might improve their reading literacy levels. As different countries have different issues in relation to the availability and accessibility of reading materials, genre/pattern, and necessity/purpose; what matters more than reading difficulties is knowledge on the test items. Students from a developing world may lack scientific understanding but have significant survival skills and local historical and cultural knowledge as they consider their survival, origin, and identity to be three key factors to them. Thus, such knowledge is embedded in their context.

This issue happened when PISA failed to assess the potential variations in clearly differing school environments in Finland and Singapore, which may have a variety of cultural bases and influenced students' social-emotional development (Soh, 2014; Tanskanen et al., 2016). The other interesting point here is that while Finland in Europe may be a suitable representative of developed countries, Singapore in Asia is not considered a developing nation. This means PISA was unable to differentiate factors to learning success within amongst wealthy countries let alone measure and determine what should constitute learning success in a different context across the globe.

For feature 4, the attempt to achieve the cross-border comparability as well as combination of items found in the two different settings is unlikely to happen. The PISA-D questionnaire employs the 'Education Prosperity' framework created by J. Douglas Willms (OECD, 2019b,

p.41). Table 2 depicts the distribution of questions across the components of the Educational Prosperity framework, with red dots indicating questions that can be linked to PISA 2015 and blue dots showing questions that are unique to PISA-D. By counting the number of the dots/questions, about 27% only of the PISA-D questionnaire asks the common questions between PISA 2015 and PISA-D, which may allow the comparability to happen to a limited extent. This further confirms the reduction of the scale-linking methods' effectiveness discussed in feature 2.

The 2023 PISA test cycle has eighty seven participating countries, only four of them are the developing countries from the PISA-D programme (OECD, n.d.-g) – namely Cambodia, Guatemala, Panama and Paraguay. Two of these countries are members of the Atlantic communities[13] whose assessments on the local education systems follow the global north epistemological framework, making little contribution to the studies on the 'North-South knowledge divide' (Kaess, 2018, p.356). In this sense, most PISA countries together with these two countries from the Atlantic communities will create substantial bias in the 2023 test items towards the global north epistemology. This begs a question on how to justify the combination of items for a meaningful comparison across the board and may suggest that it is fair for PISA-D countries, especially Cambodia and Paraguay, to reject the validity of their results.

Last, the PISA-D's out-of-school assessment in feature 5 must be the most ambitious aspect of this offshoot programme, because its precursor has failed to target the out-of-school population. PISA 'makes no attempt' to reach out to this population at all (Cresswell et al., 2015, p.125). The OECD's Education and Skills Directorate argues that the inclusion of out-of-school youths in PISA-D is critical to determining the effectiveness of an education system and that using a sample of in-school students to represent a vast number of out-of-school youths or the whole education system brings about consequences (Ward, 2018). The consequences include erroneous comparisons between countries, wrong calculation of actual educational performance through time, underestimation of socio-economic inequalities, and discouraging governments to uphold exclusion policies (Ward, 2020). As PISA fails to

[13] Four of the member countries of the communities are Honduras, Guatemala, Senegal and Panama. Only Guatemala and Panama are going to join the 2023 PISA test cycle.

include the out-of-school population, PISA member countries may have been facing these consequences.

Table 2: Questions in the PISA-D contextual questionnaire

	School-based assessment			Out-of-school assessment		
	Student	Teacher	School	Youth	Person most knowledgeable about the youth	Household
Prosperity Outcomes						
Educational attainment	🔴🔴🔴🔴			🔴🔴🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵 🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵	🔵🔵🔵	
Health and well-being	🔴🔵🔵🔵			🔴🔵🔵🔵		
Attitudes towards school and learning	🔴			🔵🔵	🔵	
Foundations for Success						
Inclusive environments	🔴🔵🔵🔵	🔵🔵	🔴🔴🔵🔵	🔵🔵🔵		
Quality instruction	🔴🔵🔵	🔵	🔵			
Learning time	🔴🔵🔵🔵🔵	🔵	🔴🔵			
Material resources		🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵	🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵			
Family and community support	🔵	🔵	🔵🔵	🔵	🔵	
Demographic factors to assess equity and equality						
Gender	🔴			🔴		
Socio-economic status and poverty	🔴🔴🔴🔴🔴🔴🔴🔴 🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵 🔵🔵		🔵🔵	🔴🔴🔴🔴🔴🔴🔴🔴🔴🔴 🔴🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵 🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵 🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵 🔵🔵	🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵	🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵
Language spoken at home	🔴🔵🔵🔵	🔵🔵🔵		🔴🔵🔵🔵		
Urban/rural status			🔴			
Immigrant status	🔴			🔴🔴🔴		
Disability	🔵			🔵🔵		
Context factors		🔴🔴🔴🔴🔴🔴🔵🔵🔵🔵 🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵	🔴🔴🔴🔴🔴🔴🔴 🔵🔵🔵🔵		🔴🔴🔴🔵🔵🔵	🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵🔵
Total	49	33	28	77	19	14

(OECD, 2019b, p.44)

According to the OECD, a large number of 15-year-olds in developing countries are either not enrolled in school or are enrolled in school but below the PISA's target grades (Grade 7 and above). In either case, they are disqualified from the PISA sampling criteria. This scenario affects between 10% (in Ecuador) and about 50% (in Senegal) of youth in the PISA-

D member countries (Carr-Hill, 2015; OECD, 2018a). Only five[14] out of the nine PISA-D members participate in the out-of-school assessment that excludes science (OECD, 2019b).

In the piloting countries, 15-year-olds account for roughly 2.2 percent of the population or 1 in 45, and average household sizes range from 4 to 5, implying that finding one 15-year-old would necessitate visiting around ten houses – not to mention that the majority of the marginalised would most likely be located in rural poverty communities (Xiaomin, 2021). This time-consuming exercise may explain the need to take up the recommendation from Roy Carr-Hill to increase the sample size from 15-year-olds to 14-16 year-olds like the ASER[15] and Uwezo[16] surveys. According to the OECD, the out-of-school assessment has to exclude the scientific domain because of this household visit that affects the total assessment duration and imposes difficulties upon the household respondents (OECD, 2020).

All the member countries, except for Panama, participate in the school-based assessment that assesses reading, mathematics, and science. Panama first participated in the PISA assessment in 2009 and chose not to participate until the 2018 cycle. Its absence in between may be explained by the common claim of the 'Latin American educational corporations' that PISA is biased for it compares results to those from developed countries (CAD, 2014). Its re-participation in PISA coincided with the PISA-D test cycle probably because it was attracted to the out-of-school assessment. This attraction could be justified by the highest non-enrolment rate (14%) and dropout rate (47%) in lower secondary school – Zones 1 and 5 shown in Table 3.

Concerning out-of-school population, UNICEF[17] and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) broadly define it as 'young people that are excluded from education opportunities' (OECD, 2019, p.58). The OECD then breaks down the definition into the six exclusion zones for the out-of-school component of PISA-D. Xiaomin (2021) suggests that the six exclusion zones in

[14] Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Senegal and Zambia (OECD, 2019b) but Zambia is later excluded (OECD, 2020)
[15] Fully known as Annual Status of Education Report, it is a household survey led by Indian citizens. It offers assessments of children's educational status as well as their core reading and arithmetic skills; its results have been published by the NGO Pratham since 2005 https://www.asercentre.org/
[16] It is led by the citizens in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda since 2009. It collects data on children's literacy and numeracy to inform the national education policy making. Uwezo Tanzania – Uwezo Tanzania
[17] UNICEF is in charge of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 4.2 (UNESCO, 2019b). SDG 4.2 reads 'By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education.'

Table 3 fail to include those who are enrolled in school but are not in the right grade for the PISA target age or who do not attend on a regular basis. She argues that the OECD's modification in the definition of the out-of-school population is made to ensure PISA-D success and to eventually reinforce PISA as a 'standard global metric' (Addey & Gorur, 2020, p.15) instead of actually 'going the extra mile to shine a light on the skills and circumstances of the most disadvantaged children and youth in their populations' (OECD, 2020, p.2).

Table 3: Six zones of out-of-schoolers including 14-16-year-olds

	Guatemala	Honduras	Panama	Paraguay	Senegal	Average
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Zone 1: Never enrolled	13	5	14	3	30	13
Zone 2: Primary dropouts	24	21	5	14	14	16
Zone 3: Grade 6 or below	18	17	14	20	42	22
Zone 4: Primary leavers	31	42	17	22	8	24
Zone 5: Secondary dropouts	8	11	47	29	4	20
Zone 6: Fading out	5	3	3	12	3	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

(OECD, 2020, p.6)

Here I am going to illustrate concerns over the PISA-D enactment by investigating the arguments made by two experts: Simone Bloem, a former statistician at the OECD's Directorate for Education and Skills, and Oren Pizmony-Levy, Assistant Professor of International and Comparative Education at Teachers College, Columbia University; ILSA is one of his main research interests. In respect to their arguments, I contend that PISA instruments, although modified to be PISA-D, may not suit the Cambodia's context.

Bloem claims that the participation of developing countries in PISA poses challenges to the effective implementation of PISA while Pizmony-Levy believes that developing countries, especially those in Africa that are enacting regional assessments, need not participate in PISA-D. Firstly, there is a lack of funding to cover the participation costs for countries with poor economic prosperity or without external support (Bloem, 2013, 2014, 2015). India's withdrawal from PISA was a wake-up call for the OECD to set three prerequisites for the

participation of developing countries in its assessment: having low income, ILSA experience and aid partner to cover the participation costs (Addey, 2016b). Hence, the need for the OECD to highlight the three main sources of PISA-D finance which need to be contributed by member countries, DPs and private companies (OECD, 2017b).

Secondly, as developing countries have low institutional and technical capacity and resources, they are likely to face difficulties in offering a complete and reliable representation of their schools and students. Also, they have little political will, inadequate human and financial support and low analytical capacity to interpret the PISA data for their nationwide policy benefits (Bloem, 2013, 2014, 2015). To respond to these issues, the OECD requires PISA-D members to conduct a national Capacity Needs Analysis (CNA) as a 'prerequisite to initiate the PISA-D implementation' (Auld, Rappleye, & Morris, 2019, p.208), followed by an implementation plan and eventually a Capacity Building Plan (CBP). This last document is meant to be a key plan for the local government to strengthen its national assessment system (OECD, 2018a). Of all the issues, what seems to be a crucial factor is the local political will, but it can be provoked by the OECD's soft-hard power mechanisms.

Thirdly, PISA's target population in developing countries have different coverage and low enrolment and participation rates, affecting the reliability of equity data for comparison. As a result, the stated level of representation and validity is questionable in both local and international settings (Bloem, 2013, 2014, 2015; Pizmony-Levy, 2016). Pizmony-Levy (2016) indicates that African students have been reported to have poor levels of competency when they reach lower secondary school and disapproves the usefulness of their results on the PISA-D test that requires them to apply knowledge. PISA shock, a term referred to a drop in the PISA ranking, is highly predictable in the global south context and when it happens, it may cause public 'resentment' (Bloem, 2013, p.20) and lower social trust in the local education system, affecting public school funds (Pizmony-Levy, 2016).

Fourthly, Bloem (2013, 2014) stresses that the diversity of linguistic and cultural contexts and heterogeneity in student performance pose a challenge in PISA's measurement. There needs to be clarity in test design to maintain data comparability between the original PISA members and the PISA-D members. This is especially the case where governance, finance and capacity are limited. Cresswell, et al (2015) find that the greatest challenge for testing and translation is to find capable translators in all the member countries. Baird, et al. (2011)

also find that material translation becomes an issue if PISA data is to be used for any cross-country comparisons.

Fifthly, PISA data reliability and policy relevance are adversely affected by the developing countries' low performance. Technically, test reliability gets lower, especially when a majority of test takers hit the bottom of a performance distribution (Bloem, 2013, 2014, 2015). That is, although the participation of developing countries is less than one percent, their too low performance is an outlier, suggesting that PISA's total measurement is distorted. In short, these two aspects affect the representativeness, inclusiveness and explanatory power of PISA and eventually deteriorate the policy value, relevance, and reliability for use in every member country. Also, the credibility of comparison among peer countries is highly questionable.

Lastly, Pizmony-Levy (2016) argues that PISA-D provides limited information regarding system factors such as teacher qualities, pedagogy, and curriculum because of its competency-oriented nature. Consequently, analysts cannot investigate how diverse system factors affect student accomplishment without these factors, and this shortcoming calls into question whether PISA-D could offer added value to inform education policy and planning. He recommends regional assessments as they have manageable level of proximity and adaptability, which are the actual assets that enable regional assessment to grow in tandem with the educational systems they serve throughout time.

3.2. Coloniality of Power

Anibal Quijano identifies 'coloniality of power' as a new burgeoning type of hegemonic power (Quijano, 2000, p.533). That is, the power structure between the IOs and developing nations can be modified and strengthened by the PISA-D programme. Following this argument, this section seeks to understand if the OECD's influence is constitutive of such hegemony in respect to the PISA-D enactment. To do so, the section explores how the OECD's influence is exerted through 'heterarchical governance' of the local education sector (Lewis et al., 2016). This type of governance has been seen in the case of another PISA expansion project, PISA for Schools, which also shares the PISA's scale and metric as PISA-D. My thesis argues that the OECD may also use its influence embedded in heterarchical governance over the PISA-D member countries and that such governance may have an

element of coloniality which the OECD can enact over those aid-dependent nations to achieve its ideological and geopolitical agendas. The exploration into such governance helps me explain how the OECD may use PISA-D to continue the exercise of colonial power over the aid-dependent nations. The colonial power may be exercised in the geopolitics of knowledge where IOs set up knowledge production agendas to decide on the amount of development aid for the global south nations. I begin by explaining how global governance interferes with local governments and how the interference affects the local knowledge production in respect to geopolitics induced by the OECD's assessment technologies: PISA and PISA-D. Toward the end, I am going to discuss what PISA-D is meant to achieve through its requirement of capacity-building exercise and its imposition of policy-borrowing practice in those contexts.

3.2.1. From global governance to local governments

Here I explain how the OECD may become the only 'arbiter' (Meyer & Benavot, 2013, p.9) who can govern the 'means and ends' (Thrupp, 2014) of global education. That is, PISA-D acts as an add-on source of soft power for the OECD to attain hegemony over how education is conducted and what it is aimed to achieve. To illustrate its path to hegemony, it is important to investigate how the OECD exerts its influence over its ILSAs member countries. In the case of PISA-D member countries, the OECD's influence over the local knowledge production can be exploited by the aid conditions of the OECD's strategic partners and other IOs within the OECD's networks – 'in and by heterarchies' (Ball, 2010, p.157). In this sense, the PISA-D programme strengthens and renews the power structure between the IOs, known as donors or DPs in the global south, and those aid-dependent nations. This 'new articulation of power' (Del Monte & Posholi, 2022, p.84) constitutes what Anibal Quijano called 'coloniality of power' (Quijano, 2000, p.533). Due to the nature of the heterarchies, the OECD's path to hegemony can be constantly kept intact as pursuing the OECD's accountability within the networks for any harmful policy advice cannot be done. In other words, there are no legal frameworks to hold the OECD accountable for its policy recommendations (Lubienski, 2016).

Addey (2017) suggests that education under the OECD's governance may be confined to a relatively restricted framework, which does not adequately capture the diversities embedded in the various educational settings. This means that by making data infrastructure more widely available, it could lead to a dominating paradigm that discounts the existing others

(Addey, 2017). In this sense, the OECD's global education governance may produce a new kind of colonialism – neocolonialism (Chitpin & Portelli, 2019) which could be linked to 'global coloniality' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p.181). As PISA-D is constitutive to building such data infrastructure, PISA-D may further contribute to the making of the OECD as a dominating paradigm. Such domination could be achieved through the OECD's power mechanisms vested in and by the 'heterarchical governance' (Lewis et al., 2016) that may have an element of coloniality for the OECD to enact over the aid-dependent governments.

To see how the OECD's global governance affects the national and subnational governments, it is useful to understand the difference and concurrence between government and governance. While *government* (italicised as original) is carried out by 'bureaucratic and hierarchical' means, *governance* (italicised as original) is rather achieved through the 'informal authority' of varied and dynamic networks (Lewis, 2020, p.31). The shift from government to governance can be achieved 'in and by heterarchies' which involve network linkages inside and across new policy actors and are intended to create 'new governing capacity and enhance legitimacy' (Ball, 2010, p.157). Such a shift has allowed for the practice of 'governance by numbers' and involved the local governments in 'network governance' where external actors are viewed not just as producers of products and services but also as crucial policy partners (Liu & Steiner-Khamsi, 2021, p.16). As the leading actor in the global policy community, the OECD has been seen to have substantial influence in such heterarchical governance over its member countries through PISA and its expansion projects. PISA for Schools as an example of a similar PISA expansion project to PISA-D also carries the same scale and metric as PISA. Attracting more than 2200 participating schools, PISA for Schools offers a digital assessment to produce school-level results that can be compared against the national PISA result of their own country and other countries (OECD, n.d.-i). This means the OECD's ILSAs have generated the 'visibility' between the national and subnational school systems (Lewis & Lingard, 2015, p.621).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the 'visibility' (Foucault, 1977, p.187) imposes discipline and accountability onto the two levels of school systems and subject them to the OECD's power whereas the 'invisibility'(Foucault, 1977, p.187) or the 'informal authority' (Lewis, 2020, p.31) of the OECD has been secured as there are no pathways for the member countries and their citizens to hold the OECD accountable in return (Lubienski, 2016). Lewis et al. (2016) argue that PISA for Schools allows the OECD to 'reach into' local school

management and therefore 'open(s) up additional local education policy spaces' to the OECD's governance (Lewis et al., 2016, p.27). Participating school systems are 'wholesaled' best practices from other school systems to be enacted (Liu & Steiner-Khamsi, 2021, p.9). That is, the OECD can directly – potentially bypassing the local governments – hold individual schools and teachers accountable through its policy directives that have been seen to impose marketisation, decentralisation and performativity as part of the neoliberal reform scenario.

In the case of PISA-D, the OECD together with its network of donor IOs[18] led by the OECD's strategic partners uses PISA-D performance as their decision criterion on aid provision to the developing countries. Tied to aid conditions, the global south nations may be placed under the apparatus of 'heterarchical governance' in addition to the OECD's soft and hard power mechanisms (Lewis et al., 2016). The heterarchical governance is so 'flexible' (Lewis, 2020, p.31) that the OECD can enact both vertically and horizontally, which is reflected in the interplay between the local officials and the IOs within these networks and systems – but these local officials may be anchored by the conditions of 'loans and grants' determined by the IOs led by the OECD's strategic partners, IMF and especially the World Bank (Steiner-Khamsi, 2020, p. 244). Therefore, these actors ultimately tend to be subjected to the OECD's influence and power. In other words, PISA-D participation conditioned by the IOs may substantially empower the OECD to be a top-end entity that can decide what and how to assess in the local education system – geopolitics of knowledge.

3.2.2. Geopolitics of knowledge in the coloniality/modernity binomial

This sub-section discusses Walter Mignolo's idea of 'colonial difference' (Del Monte & Posholi, 2022, p.84) which he used to describe the domination of Western knowledge over the local knowledge due to the 'coloniality of power' (Quijano, 2000, p.533) which the OECD may gain through its influence in the heterarchical governance. The domination creates 'epistemic racism' (Del Monte & Posholi, 2022, p.84) but has been made possible through the global south nations' needs for aid to modernise their institutions – education in this respect. It also illustrates other consequences of having the local knowledge production managed or governed by external actors, especially by the OECD.

[18] Also mentioned in the previous chapter: World Bank, IMF, EU, ILO, UN, UNICEF and UNESCO (Grek, 2009; Mahon & McBride, 2014a; Meyer & Zahedi, 2014)

The ‘geopolitics of knowledge’ concerns the knowledge production agenda set out by the ‘hegemonic’ Western world for the IOs such as the OECD to exercise as a justification on the amount of assistance to the ‘fragile states’ (Nay, 2014, p.210) or peripheric nations – developing countries. For example, taking the OECD’s Education at a Glance (EAG) program and the World Bank’s support[19] for Higher Education sectors in Vietnam and Ethiopia as case studies, Shahjahan suggested that the EAG program and the support of these two IOs acted as a channel for them to continue the exercise of power through means of instilling ‘policy by numbers[20]’ (Shahjahan, 2016, p.701) and templates, positioning themselves as the (sole) holder of universal (Western) knowledge and of power to ‘delocalise’ it (Shahjahan, 2016, p.704), and being an economic partner and a funder alike. In this sense, geopolitics of knowledge and the role the IOs play in it in the global south nations deserve a further discussion.

Since the declaration of their independence, the African, Asian and Latin American nations have been working with IOs to rebuild their country by first improving their education system (Dinnen, 2007, p.1) – country’s reconstruction within the logics of modernity. Those IOs have been capable of directing the knowledge production process to meet their objectives and agenda (Littoz-monnet, 2017). According to Mabhena (2018), African intellectuals started condemning the continent for having to depend on Western knowledge and their direction on how the knowledge should be applied in the local context in the 1970s. The African dependency on the West’s control over the local knowledge system in Africa could be described as ‘the colonisation of the mind’ coined by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (Adriansen, 2017) or ‘monocultures of the mind’ (Shahjahan, 2011, p.181). Local scholars are then degenerated from knowledge producers to local informers who collect raw data and information for the Western scholars to create a theory for the local Africans to buy as an end product (Mabhena, 2018). In this sense, the IOs, specifically the OECD, act as a middleman in the trade of knowledge production between the global north and global south nations and PISA-D may be part of the ‘North-South knowledge divide’ (Kaess, 2018, p.349).

It is important to emphasise that ‘coloniality’ and ‘modernity’ are two sides of the same coin (Mignolo, 2007). It begins with ‘coloniality’ as the ‘dark side’ first to prepare a peripheric

[19] Usually in the forms of technical guidance and assistance, policy consultation and recommendations, capacity-building strategies and workshops, and funding and cost-sharing schemes (Shahjahan, 2016)
[20] is referred to policy directive which is based on ILSA performance

nation to realise the other but the bright side of the coin – modernity – is to complete the modernisation process and that the physical colonisation in those Asian and African countries is a (beginning) part of coloniality (Mignolo, 2007, p.39). This supports the decolonial underpinning that says 'coloniality is not over; it is all over' (López-calvo, 2016, p.175). In response to this colonial impact, there may be an answer found in the movements of decolonisation and decoloniality. Based on Del Monte & Posholi (2022), decolonisation is aimed at 'reversing colonialism' and hence intends to completely eliminate the 'official colonialism' (Del Monte & Posholi, 2022, p.79) whereas decoloniality extends beyond the turnaround and abolition of colonial structures and is a 'framework for articulating and challenging the history and current configuration of the modern world, starting, crucially, with the placing of coloniality at the center' (Del Monte & Posholi, 2022, p.80) – the Eurocentric.

Through PISA, the OECD has been able to impose neoliberal policies aimed at directing the education systems in the global north towards KBE. McCowan (2022) identifies neoliberalism, KBE discourse originated from HCT and modernisation theory as the three variants of the liberal capitalist model of development. Using PISA-D to channel its policy directives and procedures to the local knowledge production in the global south nations, the OECD may exploit this development model to convince these countries to redirect their education systems strictly towards the economic purpose by the pretext to modernise or to 'catch up with' the global north countries (McCowan, 2022, p.43).

Related to this, Carl E. Pletsch wrote about the world and classified it as 'The First/Free World, The Second/Ideological World and The Third/Traditional World' (Pletsch, 1981, p.577-578). The First World is defined by science and technology that are ostensibly uninhibited by any 'mentality' whereas the Second World is distinguished by the coexistence of high technology and a constrictive 'mentality' and the Third World is characterised by an assumed lack of technology but with the existing 'nonscientific mentality, religion and culture' (Pletsch, 1981, p.577). What Pletsch means is that science/technology and mentality/ideology are the only two defining factors of a country in his classification. According to him, for the Third World country to be the First World one, the Third World governments and citizens must make sure their country is being built of course by the unavoidable use of science and technology - embedded in the modernisation process, but the science and technology used must not be oriented by any mentality or ideology.

In respect to PISA-D, it is a technological product marketed as a policy tool to (re)build or modernise the local education systems potentially under the influence of the OECD's geopolitical ideology. In other words, the OECD as an influential actor in this globalised world takes the advantage of the SDG4 to mask its intention to influence the local politics of the PISA-D member countries (Addey, 2017). The political interference from an external organisation is exactly how Nkrumah Kwame, the Ghanian leader, has long identified neocolonialism – the last and most perilous phase of imperialism. According to him, the core of neocolonialism is that the state it governs is theoretically independent, but in reality its economy and thus politics are influenced by foreign ideology (Nkrumah, 1965). In this sense, it is important to investigate how ideology and technology tag along the modernisation process in the developing countries' geopolitics of power and knowledge production in this increasingly globalised world.

3.2.3. PISA-D and what it is probably intended to accomplish

This sub-section discusses what PISA-D is meant to achieve in the global south contexts – with Cambodia as a focus. My thesis argues that the PISA-D programme may be intended to enable the OECD to interfere with the local politics of the global south nations through its required capacity-building exercise and the OECD's discourse of policy-borrowing. That is, the OECD requires them to take the PISA-D capacity-building exercise as the only way to identify and measure the local student performance that factors in the attainment of their local goals and international commitments. The OECD also enacts its discourse of policy-borrowing onto those developing countries so that they can be imposed to choose one of the reference societies determined by the main PISA.

In the summary version of the Cambodia's national report, the major goals of the PISA-D programme are to prepare the 15-year-olds for adult lives by assessing their proficiency in mathematics, reading, and science and collect data on the characteristics of students, families, teachers, schools, and communities in order to evaluate the entire education system (MoEYS, 2018b). According to the OECD, PISA-D is also intended to promote the use of PISA in developing countries for evaluating their progress towards targets set locally and those in the post-2015 framework, examining issues that factor in student learning outcomes and building institutional capacity (OECD, 2016).

Firstly, in respect to how PISA-D assists its member countries to achieve local targets, the OECD may exploit the modernisation theory alongside its KBE discourse and neoliberal policies in the liberal capitalist model of development to convince the PISA-D member countries to redirect their education systems strictly towards the economic purpose (McCowan, 2022), as discussed in the previous chapter. That is, such restriction to the economic purpose is alien to the overarching goals of the EFA and the SDG4 that are all about promoting learning access and equity in those developing countries (J. Liu & Steiner-Khamsi, 2021). Secondly, also discussed in the previous chapter, PISA-D introduces five new features aimed to effectively examine the learning factors in developing countries, but the OECD offers these features to entice participation in its ILSAs rather than seek for significant policy value for those developing nations.

Finally, The OECD's intention became clearer when this IO instructed its contractors to create PISA-D in such a way that it could be connected to national tests in developing countries (Addey, 2017), and the connecting task was embedded in the PISA-D implementation plan. Before the PISA-D implementation plan was developed, Cambodia was required to conduct CNA to set up CBP. Both Cambodia's CNA and CBP reports were produced by Fernando Cartwright under the commission of the OECD. According to the CNA, many of the assessment-related capacities in Cambodia did not conform to the PISA's standard but provide a sound base for future growth and that there was widespread interest among the local community of stakeholders in many aspects of PISA-D, especially in building evaluation capability and data utilisation. Cartwright reports a few potential issues that prevent Cambodia from achieving all of the PISA-D objectives: poor management in assessment and in coordination with stakeholders; the Education Quality Assurance Department (EQAD)'s lack of capacity; accountability and independence in its reporting on the state of education; and limited human resources to manage the sustainability of LSAs implementation (Cartwright, 2016b). Thus, the CBP was invested in PISA-D implementation and capacity building to achieve designated goals (Cartwright, 2016a).

Regarding the institutional capacity building, the OECD Secretary General signifies that PISA-D helps build its member countries' capacity to carry out LSAs and use the results to inform their education policy and 'national policy dialogue' ultimately (OECD, 2018, p.2). In this sense, the OECD may be using the PISA-D capacity building exercise and PISA-D results to influence the PISA-D member countries' national policy making that may not be

specified to education. This exercise is essentially affecting the local knowledge production, which may confirm Hughes's argument that a capacity buider – the OECD in this thesis – tends to meddle the internal affairs of post-conflict Cambodia (Hughes, 2011). The outcome of the OECD's capacity building exercise – and the OECD's influence in general over Cambodia – can be projected by Jan B.Y. Berkvens who uses Hofstede's five cultural dimensions to describe the characteristics of this global south nation.

Table 4: Cultural characteristics of Cambodian society on Hofstede's five dimensions

Dimension	Description	Cambodian society
Individualist-collectivist orientation	The units for which members of society take responsibility	Mainly collectivist, but with small 'in-groups'. Suspicion towards outsiders, thus reluctance to share information and work collaboratively together
Power distance	The extent to which less powerful people accept inequality in power as being normal	Large power distance, thus reluctant to speak openly in front of superiors
Uncertainty avoidance	The extent to which people are made nervous by situations they perceive as unstructured, unclear or unpredictable	Strong uncertainty avoidance, reluctance to contribute thoughts to conceptual ideas, tendency to easily comply with 'experts'
Masculinity-femininity	Disposition of social roles of men and women, associated with biological facts between the two sexes, but applying to society as a whole	Mainly feminine with masculine characteristics, strong need for certificates and support from superiors
Long-term-short-term orientation	The focus on future or day-to-day	Strongly short-term, low planning skills, reluctance to reflect and learn from mistakes

(Berkvens, 2012, p.352)

Referring to *Table 4*, Cambodians are 'collectivist' when working with their local peers in a small-scale team. However, they have trust issues towards 'outsiders' and show unwillingness to share information and collaborate with them. The 'power distance' referred in Chapter 3 is rather substantial as Cambodians are not only willing to accept power imbalances in exchange for 'peace and political stability[21]' but also avoid openly speaking in front of superiors. Also, they have a high level of 'uncertainty avoidance' as they dread to make mistakes when facing uncertainty or instability that potentially affect their dignity (i.e. losing face). Cambodians have a strong desire to cooperate with those seen as 'experts' as

[21] Cambodia is a 'clientalist' state (Hughes, 2011, p.1509).

well as a reluctance to contribute during discussions. The majority of society is ‘feminine’ yet there are some strong male tendencies, especially in unanticipated situations. People normally expect a certificate at the completion of a training programme and show solid support towards capacity-building programmes. Cambodians are oriented to short-term thinking as they commonly live and work by the day and oftentimes their planning is restricted by their skills and abilities (Berkvens, 2012, p.352).

In the education sector, poor and/or unexpected intervention outcomes tend to happen if a country's culture is not accounted for. Teachers may feel uncomfortable with the suggested topics and methods of teaching while students who are not well equipped for the society in which they live. For example, when the MoEYS began implementing the EFA and Child Friendly School methods in 2006/2007, Cambodian culture was not taken into account (Berkvens, 2017). Berkvens (2017) finds that certain concepts of the Child Friendly School method, if without modification, do not match the Cambodian cultural context. PISA-D, however, is claimed to enhance PISA’s ‘accessibility and relevance’ by modifying PISA instruments to measure the spectrum of student performance in developing countries; the modification enables the OECD to collect background information to better understand ‘how students learn, teachers teach, and schools operate’ in these settings (OECD, 2018, p.2). In this sense, the PISA-D member nations turn to be ‘the new contexts’ for which the main PISA surveys have to be ‘contextualised’ whereas the nations themselves have to be ‘standardised’ for the PISA-D assessment (Gorur, Sørensen, & Maddox, 2019, p.312). How the standardisation and contextualisation approaches work has been shown in the case of Zambia in the previous chapter.

The OECD Secretary-General states that such modification, or rather standardisation and contextualisation, has also improved the precision and applicability of the PISA instruments for poor-performing OECD countries and that PISA member countries can benefit from the PISA-D programme as it expands the variety in the range of policies, comparisons, and practices (OECD, 2018b). This statement is echoed by the OECD’s Director of Education and Skills that the PISA’s and PISA-D’s goal is to enable countries to ‘engage with global best expertise’ (Addey, 2016a). In other words, the OECD is promoting the discourse of comparative policy-borrowing from the PISA-determined reference societies, which the OECD politically term them as High-Performing Education Systems (HPESs), to the PISA-D member countries. As argued in the previous chapter, the choice of these reference societies

for the PISA-D countries tends to be as political as in the case of PISA – 'externalisation' (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010).

How the OECD interferes with Cambodia's knowledge production can be achieved through its influence over the PISA-D National Centre – EQAD of the MoEYS. This National Centre is headed by the Cambodian NPM[22] who must be appointed based on the OECD's guidelines. 'Under the guidance' of respective PISA Governing Board members, NPMs coordinate all national-level operations specified by the OECD's manual (OECD, 2018d, p.10). Under the management of the OECD's strategic partner – the World Bank, the Secondary Education Improvement Project (SEIP) funds a PISA-D national consultant to provide support to the work of this PISA-D implementing body. Based on the job description, the PISA-D national consultant is to execute activities set forth by the OECD and its contractors (MoEYS, 2017). This clearly means the two leading individuals in Cambodia, NPM and national consultant, are hired to follow the OECD's directives – not their expertise.

3.3. Globalisation and PISA-D

Unlike internationalisation, globalisation bypasses the local governments and affects how they prefer to govern their countries. Respect to education, this section thus explores what globalisation could do to individual nation-states and affect the decisions of the policy makers in those states even after their independence. The interference with the local affairs in these independent nation-states may confirm the shift in the look of colonialism from physical to ideological and geopolitical. In this section, my thesis argues that the OECD as a global actor may attempt to dominate the local knowledge production and homogenise it as far as its ideological and geopolitical agendas are concerned. Such agendas could be found in the OECD's policy directives. In the context of the PISA-D enactment, I foresee that there might be some tension between the OECD's governance mechanism and how a policy in general allows to be enacted. As the OECD's governance may be conducted in new colonial manners, this tension might occur at the beginning of the enactment but tends to lessen.
I name such tension as the coloniality-enactment tension. I begin by explaining how globalisation impacts the work of the local policy makers through the promotion of structural isomorphism and policy convergence. I contend that PISA-D under the OECD contributes to

[22] The Cambodian NPM for both PISA and PISA-D is the Director of EQAD.

the homogenisation of local knowledge production through these two phenomena. I will then attempt to identify what a policy enactment means in the secondary education context to fully understand the degree of the coloniality-enactment tension.

3.3.1. Globalisation, structural isomorphism and policy convergence

Globalisation in postcolonial nations[23] has been a catalyst for education policy process. During the policy process, policy adoption is where policy makers must justify their rationality of their formulated policies, either invented by themselves or borrowed from others. At this stage, especially in the case of borrowing policies from external sources - externalisation (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010), policy makers tend to face what is called the policy 'convergence-divergence dilemma' (Verger, 2014b, p.14) – policy convergence. A study on 116 countries from 1950 to 1990 by Kim et al. (2002) shows that such externalisation provokes political will to adopt a certain model to expand local institutions for them to be viewed as modern – modernisation. For either local politics or institutional functionality, the expansion model has been considered as a global development or isomorphic phenomenon as it has brought identical structural changes – structural isomorphism – in the studied countries (Kim et al., 2002).

I find the distinction between convergence and isomorphism offered by Alexander W. Wiseman most appealing. He refers to policy convergence as policies made in different jurisdictions to reach the same result – end/goal-oriented. In this sense, policy convergence differs from policy isomorphism as the latter refers to policy responses themselves share remarkable commonality among the various settings but may not converge in the end – means/structure-oriented. In the case of PISA, Wiseman (2013) suggests that policy responses to PISA are either induced by the OECD's soft power mechanism or countries are made to respond to the OECD's promotion of evidence-based policy making and that those responses are more likely to be similar than to converge, and specifically within countries, the focus is on legitimising reforms on delegation of power alongside accountability (Wiseman, 2013).

In its attempt to globalise or homogenise the knowledge production in the developing countries, the OECD seems to be adjusting the means to the end. First, the process of the

[23] Referred to the Third World or global south countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Krishna, 2009).

means-end adjustment is rooted in the OECD's three prerequisites[24] of PISA-D participation; the requirement for the developing countries to write up CNA[25] and CBP for PISA-D implementation plan; and a national report. The writing of these plans and the report must be under the guidance of the OECD. The documents share similar structures, formats and even wordings. This shows that the OECD leads in every aspect of the PISA-D enactment – from start to finish.

Second, the 2018 PISA-D results require that the local assessment cultures in the developing nations be altered for LSAs to have an effective influence on the national education policy (Addey et al., 2017). Addey (2017) suggests that PISA-D is the OECD's attempt to promote PISA as a 'standard global metric' to direct education policy regardless of context by aligning as many local assessment systems as possible with its ILSAs (Addey & Gorur, 2020, p.15). She finds that the OECD not only prioritises PISA-D comparability with PISA over its country specificity and policy relevance but also mandates its contractors to build PISA-D in such a way that it may be linked to the national assessments in the developing countries (Addey, 2017). The CBP is meant to be 'institutionalise(d)' (Addey, 2017, p.322) as a key plan for the local governments to strengthen their national assessment system (OECD, 2018a).

Last, the means-end adjustment process is also seen in how the PISA-D validity has been constructed. Employing three sets[26] of theories - Kane's argument-based approach to validity included, Addey et al. (2020, p. 594) investigate into how the OECD uses Michael Kane as a human factor, the PISA-D technical standards and procedures as non-human factors and the ideas of Goffman's 1959 'frontstage' and 'backstage' to assemble and construct the PISA-D validity. For human factors, they find that the validity of PISA-D is 'assembled' through a variety of local occasions, occurrences, and locations where validity claims are exchanged but that the procedure projects 'significant power imbalances' that influence the competence of various actors to support and deny claims of validity.

[24] having low income, ILSA experience and aid partner to cover the participation costs (Addey, 2016b)
[25] Ecuador, Guatemala and Paraguay submitted CNA and CBP in 2015; Cambodia and Honduras in 2016 - Panama CNA 2017, CBP 2018; Senegal CNA 2014, CBP 2015; Zambia CNA 2015, CBP 2016. Bhutan, Cambodia and Zambia report their experience with the 2018 PISA-D test in their English-speaking national reports. Guatemala, Ecuador, Honduras and Panama in Spanish; Senegal in French.
[26] The other two: Callon's (1986) work on Actor-Network Theory concerning 'probematisation, obligatory passage points and mobilisation' and Toulmin's '*The Uses of Argument' (1958)* and later works on cosmopolitanism and diversity *(1972 and 1990)*

The ‘power imbalances’ differentiate who plays the frontstage[27] and backstage[28] roles (Addey et al., 2020, p.594). For non-human factors, Addey and her colleagues investigate different assembly sites and actors, the symmetry between actors and technology, and the technological and the material dimensions of the process. Employing the idea of ‘Enrollment’ by Callon, they find that the conformity criteria and technical meeting routines are the means for the OECD to employ non-human actors to control the functions and actions of human actors. They indicate that participants – PISA-D NPMs specifically – have little chance to express questions[29] regarding validity but in the end submit their approval to all the decisions made in each formal technical meeting and there are cases where actors have to make a trade-off between their validity concerns and technical standardisation requirements (Addey et al., 2020). The power imbalance in the means-end adjustment in the PISA-D enactment may produce (neo)colonialism.

3.3.2. Coloniality and PISA-D enactment

Concerning the OECD’s new ambitions which could be linked to ‘global coloniality’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p.181), this sub-section seeks to understand the policy context in the developing countries. To do so, the sub-section defines the enactment of PISA-D in the context of secondary education and presents a probable tension between the PISA-D enactment and the ‘coloniality of power’ (Quijano, 2000, p.533) which the OECD may be exercising over the PISA-D member countries. I contend that this tension might exist at the start of the enactment, but it tends to fade.

When it comes to defining policy enactment in the secondary school context, I find Stephen J. Ball and his colleagues the most relevant scholars. To them, policy enactment encompasses ‘creative processes of interpretation and recontextualisation – that is, the translation of texts into action and the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practices’ (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, p.3). That means policy enactment – for this thesis – positions the local officials as ‘key actors, rather than merely as subjects’ in the enactment (Braun, Maguire, &

[27] At public functions such as policy meetings and conferences (Addey et al., 2020)
[28] At social gatherings such as coffee breaks or private meetings including phone calls and e-mails (Addey et al., 2020)
[29] Main concerns include the validity and general usage of test items or the ‘appropriateness’ of the materials in contextual questionnaires (Addey et al., 2020)

Ball, 2010, p.549). This definition offers freedom of choice to local actors to interpret and recontexualise policies from a higher level for local use in terms of benefit and relevance.

The definition incorporates and goes beyond the 'rational choice theory and conventional models' (Spillane, 2004, p.6) which Spillaine uses to see how local officials choose policies to enact. Local officials select policies primarily based on their 'interests, agendas and utility maximisation' (Spillane, 2004, p.6). Nevertheless, 'they tend to be hardworking; they do not typically work to undermine policy directives from above'; for example, teachers and administrators usually not only follow 'higher-level policies' but also strive hard to enact them. (Spillane, 2004, p.7). In this sense, it creates a probable tension between the OECD's policy directives and the process of PISA-D enactment in the local school systems in developing countries, as a result of globalisation. That is, while the PISA-D enactment seems to be subjected to the local decision, need and context; the OECD's policy directives, where 'policy message' (Spillane, 2004, p.6) underlies, can potentially impose local policy response towards school accountability, teacher's performativity, and decentralisation – the neoliberal agenda.

Those policy directives from above applied within the apparatus of the heterarchical governance may be the perpetuity of coloniality that allows the OECD to continue such exercise of power through its ILSAs – PISA-D in particular. The OECD's procedures also have been seen to project power imbalance that is embedded in the means-end adjustment and the PISA-D validity assembling processes – as described earlier. When it comes to enacting policies from IOs, they are often contested at the national and local levels (Zajda, 2018). Decomposing how policies are developed, by whom, and in what historical and social contexts may assist in holding both IOs and local governments accountable for claims to distribute resource fairly in promoting access to inclusive and equitable and quality education (McCormick, 2012). In the case that such policies are misleading or causing a great loss, those IOs should also be held accountable for meddling in the local affair. However, as mentioned earlier, the 'invisibility'(Foucault, 1977, p.187) or the 'informal authority' (Lewis, 2020, p.31) of the OECD can prevent itself from being held accountable (Lubienski, 2016).

3.4. Research Questions

As the overarching objective of my PhD thesis is to analyse how and why Cambodia chooses to become involved in PISA-D and what have been the local impacts, the OECD's policy message and the coloniality-enactment tension need a thorough investigation. To see how the coloniality – enactment tension plays out on the ground in Cambodia, I have developed four broad research questions to guide my interviews with the local government officials and concerned individuals. The four questions guide the empirical component of my research and are listed below:

1. What do Cambodian actors understand about why PISA-D was introduced to Cambodia and why the OECD developed PISA-D?
2. What PISA-D is able and not able to measure in the Cambodian context and what do Cambodian actors see as possible alternatives to the policy represented by PISA-D?
3. How do Cambodian actors perceive the OECD's policy directives and procedures and the PISA-D policies being enacted in Cambodia?
4. In colonial sense, is Cambodian education subjected to the OECD's policy directives?

At this point, I think it is important to understand the Cambodian context and its experience of the PISA-D programme. I am going to discuss these two aspects in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE CAMBODIAN CONTEXT AND CAMBODIA'S EXPERIENCE OF PISA-D

This chapter investigates the evolution of the Cambodian education system in relation to significant historical events, culminating in the leadership of Minister Hang Chuon Naron and the incorporation of the PISA-D program into national policy. The primary aim is to elucidate the motivations behind Cambodia's engagement with PISA-D, leveraging insights from secondary sources, including academic literature, policy documents, and media analyses.

The chapter is structured into two sections. Section 4.1 provides a contextual analysis of Cambodia concerning the OECD's prerequisites for member countries, specifically the Capacity-Needs Analysis (CNA), Capacity-Building Plan (CBP), and PISA-D implementation plan. Although Cambodia officially joined the PISA-D initiative in 2016, the groundwork for the CNA and CBP commenced in late 2014 under the consultancy of Fernando Cartwright, engaged by the OECD and the World Bank. This section delineates the historical trajectory of the Cambodian education system and its socio-political context, focusing on the period from the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979 to the initiation of the CNA. It emphasises the evolution of education policy and discourse during this transformative era.

Section 4.2 examines the arrival of the PISA-D program in 2014, coinciding with Minister Hang Chuon Naron's appointment. It analyzes the subsequent changes within the Cambodian educational landscape, informed by the national PISA-D report results released in 2018. Furthermore, this section discusses the policy recommendations specifically devised for Cambodia based on the 2018 PISA-D outcomes and the Minister's receptivity to these findings.

Chankoulika Bo's PhD research, conducted at Flinders University, is particularly pertinent to understanding the formulation of Cambodian education policies and the evolution of policy discourses from 1979 to 2013. In her thesis, Bo (2017) employs Foucauldian discourse analysis to investigate the development of Cambodia's education policies over this period. I argue that the PISA-D program's timing was fortuitous for the current Minister, facilitating the legitimisation of substantial reforms in the wake of the ruling party's significant electoral

decline in 2013. Consequently, Cambodia's participation in PISA-D appears to be predominantly shaped by local political considerations, as explored through the lens of 'externalisation' (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010) discussed in the preceding chapter.

4.1. Cambodia's socio-political context

This section explores Cambodia's journey in managing its education system and establishing its own objectives throughout its early history. During the colonial period (1863-1953), the French introduced their educational model, which, unfortunately, had minimal impact on Cambodia's educational landscape. Following this, under Vietnamese occupation, Cambodia evolved into a highly centralised state, a status that persisted until the 1990s when international involvement began to influence local politics.

The 1991 Peace Accords marked a significant turning point, paving the way for Cambodia's first democratic elections and facilitating its exposure to globalisation. In the early 1990s, UNESCO emerged as a key player in shaping education policy, later succeeded by the World Bank in the late 1990s. The World Bank's influence led to the integration of good governance and decentralisation into Cambodia's governmental framework during the 2000s. Since the mid-2000s, good governance has been a central theme in top-level education policy documents, aimed at transforming Cambodia into a Knowledge-Based Economy (KBE) society, aligning with the economic objective of the OECD's PISA program.

I will begin by examining Cambodia's early history, focusing on the French and Japanese colonisation efforts. Subsequently, I will discuss the nation's descent into its darkest period, a time that necessitated international intervention and introduced Cambodia to globalisation and various political discourses that ultimately influenced its education system.

4.1.1. Cambodia's early history

From the 1st to 6th centuries CE, Cambodia was known as Funan. It was a powerful nation which was not only able to protect its territory but also able to expand it to neighbouring areas to form the Khmer Empire. The expansion resulted in several invasive attacks from those neighbours and ultimately the fall of the Empire. Regardless of the fall, Cambodia in

this early stage was able to manage the education system and determine its own-serving objectives – a religious and moral orientation.

Cambodia's civilisation was largely influenced by India and China for over 2000 years (Overton & Chandler, 2019). The history of Cambodia started in the first century with Funan, a first kingdom in South-Eastern Asia which was the biggest maritime force for six centuries in the region. Funan was succeeded by Chenla, an important early kingdom with maritime strength and prosperity in agriculture from the 6th to 9th centuries. Chenla was then replaced by the Angkor Empire or Khmer Empire where Cambodia dominated the region that was made up of Thailand, Vietnam and Laos today (Overton & Chandler, 2019; Sodhy, 2004). The Khmer Empire lasted from the 9th to the 15th centuries, reaching its peak 'Golden Age' (Sodhy, 2004, p.154) in the 12th century when the vast temple complexes called Angkor Wat and Bayon and the imperial capital Angkor Thom were built (Overton & Chandler, 2019). The reign of the Khmer Empire was a watershed moment in Southeast Asia's cultural, religious, and artistic growth (Szczepanski, 2019). The empire was larger than the Byzantine Empire (Eastern Roman Empire) at its peak (Galloway, 2021) – see Figure 2.

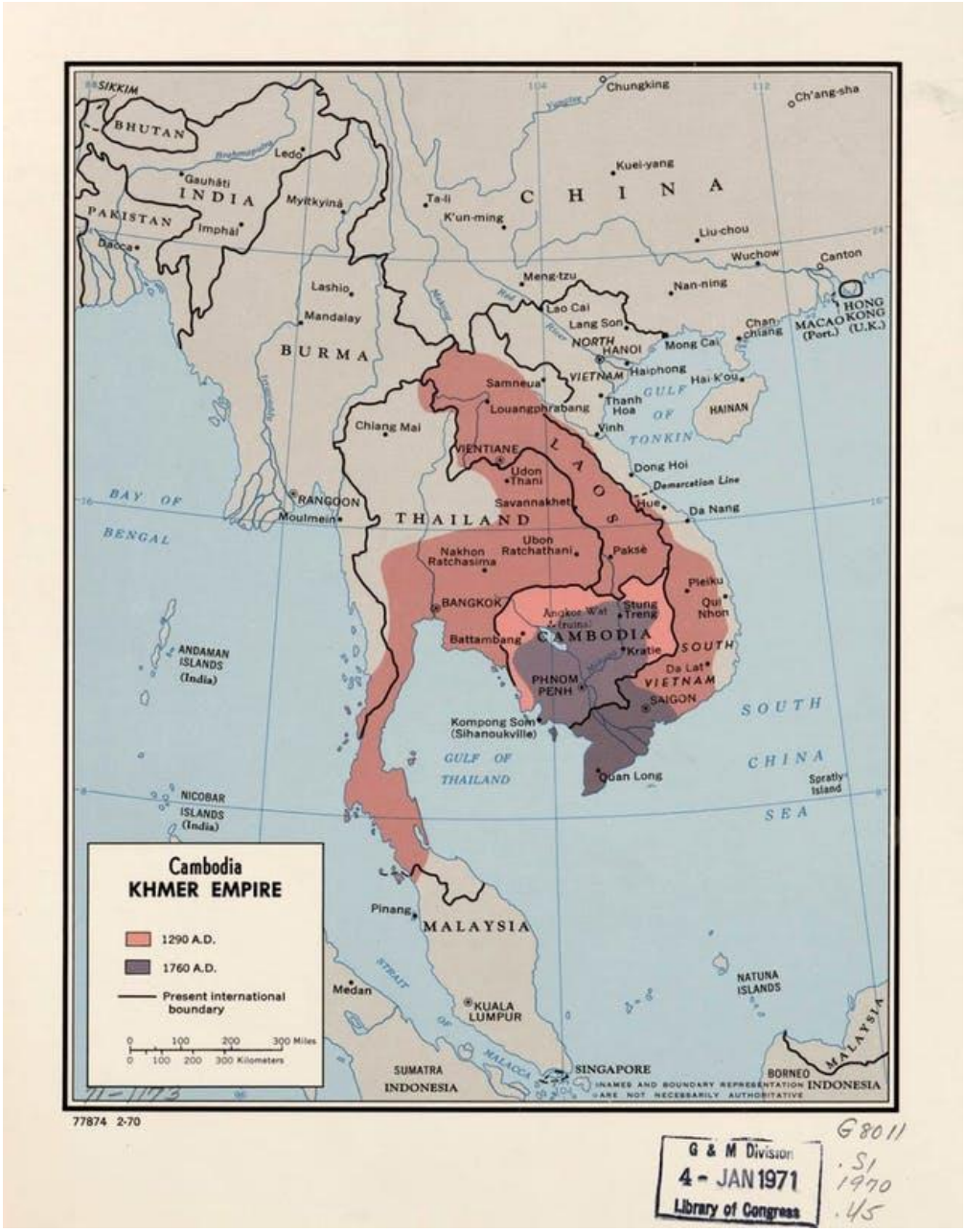
Carter et al. (2019), offer the reasons for the fall of the Khmer Empire. Firstly, after Jayavarman VII, who reigned at the time Angkor Wat was being built (Szczepanski, 2019), no other rulers were able to amount the same quantity of labour and resources. Secondly, the regional religious movements in the 13th–14th century shifted away from Hindu-Brahmanism and towards Theravada Buddhism, which resulted in a decrease in the number of stone inscriptions and religious buildings. Thirdly, the increased marine trade opportunities with China and the avoidance of disputes with neighbouring countries, especially the powerful Kingdom of Ayutthaya[30], drew the Angkorian king further south in the 14th–15th century. Lastly, droughts and monsoons damaged parts of the Angkor's water management system in the 14th–15th centuries, affecting the local people's livelihood (Carter et al., 2019).

In these early times, formal education in Cambodia was conducted by Buddhist monks using their monasteries (or Wat in Khmer) as classrooms where only boys were allowed. For the monks, the primary educational purpose was the teaching of the philosophy and history of Buddhism and the value of acquiring merit (Hays, 2014). The curricula varied from one

[30] Also written as Ayudhya, which was located near Bangkok, Thailand (Carter et al., 2019, p.12227)

monastery to another, but usually included Khmer reading and writing, Buddhist beliefs, propriety laws, basic arithmetic and stressed the value of hard labour as pupils assisted monks in the infrastructure construction and furniture production (Clayton, 1995). Clayton (1995) emphasised that at that time Cambodia's education served the local aims and acted as a religious and moral function. Other than literacy, it enhanced social solidarity beyond its instructional purposes by safeguarding social cohesiveness and tradition preservation.

Figure 2: Angkor/Khmer Empire at its peak



(Galloway, 2021)

4.1.2. French colonisation, Japanese occupation and Cambodian independence

Since the early 17th century, Cambodia has been marked by significant internal strife within the royal family and external invasions from neighboring countries, culminating in French intervention. During this tumultuous period, the French initiated a secular transformation of Cambodian education, aligning it with their colonial objectives. This shift, compounded by the French preference for Vietnamese over Cambodians, fostered local resistance and a growing aspiration for autonomy among the Cambodian populace. Although the French introduced a new educational model, its effectiveness in enhancing Cambodia's educational landscape was minimal.

In the post-Angkor period, Cambodia experienced a decline in territorial influence and was plagued by civil wars and succession disputes within the royal family. These internal conflicts were exacerbated by external threats from Thailand and Vietnam. Consequently, under King Norodom, the grandfather of King Norodom Sihanouk, Cambodia opted for French protection in 1863, transitioning to a French colony from 1887 to 1953 to safeguard itself from these aggressors. Clayton (1995) notes that King Norodom faced increasing challenges in curtailing French interference in Cambodian affairs. In education, for example, the French prioritised sending Vietnamese students to France for advanced studies, resulting in a disparity that favored Vietnamese graduates in Indochinese civil service examinations, thereby entrenching their dominance within the colonial administration in Cambodia. The French also promoted the immigration of Vietnamese settlers and colonial officials, perceiving them as more industrious and manageable compared to Cambodians (Clayton, 1995).

Clayton (1995) further argues that the French did not offer a viable alternative to the traditional Wat-based education system in Cambodia. Instead, they established a parallel system of French schools, ultimately assuming control over the entire educational framework and steering it towards their colonial objectives. However, their efforts attracted only a small fraction of the student population due to imposed restrictions and local resistance. The French deliberately limited educational opportunities for Cambodians to stifle the emergence of potential intellectual leaders who might challenge colonial rule. These restrictions served as a mechanism for the French to solidify their colonial dominance. The local resistance can be attributed to two main factors: Cambodians' aversion to Vietnamese immigrants and the French's alteration of local educational goals to align with their interests (Clayton, 1995).

Although the French established a few Franco-Cambodian schools and colleges in Phnom Penh and select provinces, their commitment to genuinely improving the Cambodian educational system was widely regarded as inadequate (Ayres, 2000a; Hays, 2014). A notable social paradox emerged from the legacy of French colonisation in Cambodia, particularly in education. On one hand, the French introduced 'European visions of modernity' by establishing 'Western-oriented institutions' (Ayres, 2000b, p.457) and 'Western-style' secular education (Hays, 2014, p.1). On the other hand, these developments were largely confined to the capital, leaving the majority of the country neglected (Ayres, 2000a). This pattern indicates that the influence of the Global North on Cambodia's educational system was primarily concentrated in urban areas, highlighting significant disparities in development.

In 1941, during the Japanese occupation of Cambodia, the French reinstated Norodom Sihanouk as monarch (Sodhy, 2004). Raffin (2012) describes how this period further deteriorated French control in Indochina, facing dual challenges from Japanese occupation and the territorial ambitions of Thailand. In response, the French initiated a comprehensive Cambodian youth movement known as Yuvan Kampucherath, under King Sihanouk's leadership. This movement engaged youth in social activities, enabling Sihanouk to consolidate his power within the Royal Khmer Socialist Youth (RKSY) by 1957 and to enhance his political influence through the Sangkum Reastr Niyum, fostering national unity among Cambodians, particularly the youth (Raffin, 2012).

Sihanouk was selected for leadership due to his perceived pliability and willingness to cooperate with French interests in countering the Japanese and maintaining control over Indochinese resources (Chandler, 1991, p.15). The Japanese, focused on broader territorial conquests, allowed the French to reassert their administrative authority (Raffin, 2012). In efforts to modernise Cambodia, the French enacted laws in 1943 and 1944 to romanise the Khmer script and transition the Cambodian calendar from a Buddhist to a Gregorian system. However, Sihanouk annulled these laws, recognising their potential to undermine local customs and cultural heritage (Chandler, 1991). In 1946, the French re-established their protectorate, prompting armed resistance from Communist rebels against colonial rule (BBC News, 2018). This prolonged colonial dominance ultimately ended when King Sihanouk played a pivotal role in the Geneva Accords, leading to Cambodia's independence from French rule on November 9, 1954.

4.1.3. Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese occupation

The trajectory of Cambodia's political landscape is marked by its independence from French colonial rule in 1953, which heralded the rise of Norodom Sihanouk, often regarded as the Father of National Independence, to power in 1955. During his office, he aimed to prioritise domestic development over the cross-border affairs. After 15 years of such development, Cambodia faced political instability and became a total fragile state that required international intervention again. Due to the geopolitics embedded in the Vietnam War, Cambodia saw the fall of Sihanouk's government in 1970 and was handed to the Khmer Rouge, leading to the massacre of Cambodian residents. Without assistance from the Western world, Cambodia later fell into the Vietnamese occupation in which the existing privatisation scheme in education from Sihanouk's administration was prohibited.

The genocidal crime against humanity committed by the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia could be traced back to the Vietnam War, which was officially fought between North Vietnam and South Vietnam from late 1955 to early 1975. The Soviet Union, China and other communist allies supported North Vietnam whereas the anti-communist allies led by the United Stated backed South Vietnam. During the Vietnam War, the Khmer Rouge led by Pol Pot gained in number and power under the sponsorship of North Vietnam and the Communist Party of China and was able to control more than half of Cambodia in the early 1950s (Longley, 2020). With their increasing influence, they opposed Norodom Sihanouk, who abdicated to actively engage in Cambodian politics in 1955 (Sodhy, 2004). Sihanouk as Cambodian Prime Minister implemented his movement Sangkum Reastr Nyum where policies of neutrality and nationalism were adopted to avoid become embroiled in the geopolitics. That is, Sihanouk welcomed international aid from any countries, chiefly the United States, the Soviet Union and China, to reconstruct Cambodia. Tan (2007) indicates that the Sangkum marked the peak of Cambodian education system due to the King premier's determination to build several schools throughout the entire country; as a result, the literacy rates started to soar up.

Hays (2014) shows that Cambodia in 1962 had 195 Chinese schools, 40 Khmer schools, 15 Vietnamese schools and 14 French schools and that several high schools, most notably the Lycée Descartes in Phnom Penh, provided private secondary education. All the Vietnamese

schools and several Chinese schools in Phnom Penh (Hays, 2014) were closed down when Sihanouk was deposed by his supporter General Lon Non in 1970 (BBC News, 2018). The Communist Party of China instructed the Khmer Rouge to shift from its opposition in the 1950s to supporting Sihanouk (Longley, 2020). Under Lon Nol, Cambodia became Khmer Republic and the hatred of this new leader towards communism brought him support from the United States during the Vietnam war. However, his US-backed government was conquered by Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge communist troops in April 1975, renaming Cambodia as Democratic Kampuchea and launched a ruthless purge of all opponents (Longley, 2020).

Under the Khmer Rouge rule from 1975 to 1978, Pol Pot eradicated the monarchy and called it 'year zero' in Cambodia (Dy & Ninomiya, 2003, p.6). About one third of its total population[31] died as a result of overwork, massacres, famine, and disease (Sodhy, 2004). The French education model ended as all schools were closed; teachers and intellectuals were executed (C. Tan, 2007); the general population was badly treated, and children were implanted with the Khmer Rouge doctrines (Hays, 2014). Concerning those doctrines, Longley (2020) suggests that Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge comrades were educated in the dictatorial teachings of the 1950s French Communist Party and Mao Zedong's communist ideals; as in practice, Cambodia under this Marxist and xenophobic regime based its support on rural peasants and brainwashed the urban working class. Both Pol Pot and Lon Nol made the Vietnamese, perceived as condescending and dominant, the primary target of the regimes' radical form of nationalism (Longley, 2020). This hatred against Vietnamese may be linked to how the French uplifted them but degenerated Cambodians during the colonial period.

Vietnamese troops started to invade Cambodia in late 1978 and took control of the capital city in early 1979, marking the fall of the bloodshed regime. The Vietnamese invasion resulted in the formation of a new government, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), led by Heng Samrin in 1981 (Longley, 2020). This new government was 'installed by the Vietnamese' (Ayres, 2000a, p.147) and was not acknowledged by the international community (BBC News, 2018). Under the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP[32]), the PRK allowed the Vietnamese troops to remain in Cambodia until 1989. The decade-long presence of the Vietnamese troops allowed for the 'Vietnamese occupation' in

[31] Seven millions (Sodhy, 2004; C. Tan, 2007)
[32] Led by Pen Sovan in 1981, Chan Sy from 1982 to 1984 and Hun Sen from 1985 to 1993. The party was renamed as Cambodian People's Party in 1991 to sound less communist (Bo, 2017).

Cambodia (Sodhy, 2004, p.155). Cambodian education right after the Khmer Rouge regime was then seen to steadily evolve in situations where human and material capitals were severely lacking; the country's reconstruction had to begin from point zero again (Hays, 2014; MoEYS, 2007). Ayres (2000a) argues that it was the previous regimes that left the PRK with two key issues: unprecedentedly poor education and being internationally isolated. Only at this point can I consider Cambodia as a 'fragile state(s)' (Dinnen, 2007, p.1) because it experienced conflicts and fell into a situation that required international assistance to reconstruct the country – nation/state-building. The earlier years of Pol Pot's year zero also needed such assistance but survival and liberation were utmost.

Cambodia under Heng Samrin's government aspired to be a socialist state and refocused its economy on the survival and welfare of the population and its education towards 'national reconstruction and defense' (Bo, 2017, p.143), but the country was unable to get access to international lenders while its money was no use (Chuon Naron Hang, 2018). The inaccessibility to foreign loans may have resulted from the conflict in Cambodia during the Cold War time. Based on Bo (2017), Cambodia was made to be a venue for a geopolitical tug of war between two factions. One consisted of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) between the Khmer Rouge and a royalist party - the United National Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Co-operative Cambodia (FUNCIPEC), China, the Association of South-East Asian nations (ASEAN), and the United States. The other comprised of the PRK, Vietnam, and the Soviet bloc. Without aid from the Western countries amidst the political and economic predicaments, the PRK sought assistance from Vietnam and the Soviet bloc to rebuild devastated Cambodia (Bo, 2017).

Bo (2017) shows that the national reconstruction was meant to be achieved through education towards socialism whereas in response to the national defense, KPRP as the ruling party was created to use this socialist aspiration to resist the American imperialism and French colonialism. This party held total power over the state including education policies that had to be made based on the state's central planning, the politics of the ruling party and the socialist direction of the state. These socialist policies were formulated and implemented in the top-down manner without regard for people' rights and public consultation by the local actors such as the 'Ministry of Education, the Cambodia People's Revolutionary Council, the Council of Ministers and the KPRP' (Bo, 2017, p.148). However, while each and every ministry was assigned with Vietnamese 'advisors' who could 'dictate' on all 'administrative,

political and economic decisions' (Bo, 2017, p.151), the Ministry of Education's governance in particular resembled Vietnamese governance in many ways – extremely centralised. The government was modelled after the 'democratic centralism' concept, which was one of the foundations of communist governance brought from Vietnam and the Soviet Union (Bo, 2017, p.151). That is, the ruling party under the Vietnamese advisory gained entire control over all the three levels of government and governance: national, sub-nation and local. In other words, there were no practices of power delegation – decentralisation – in all sectors including education.

Under the 'hegemony[33]' (Bo, 2017, p.177) of Vietnam, Cambodia then implemented collectivist type of economy known as planning economy which allowed families in the same village to form groups (krom samaki) to bring together agricultural products, mainly rice, for familial consumption whereas the state was entitled to own factories, banking, land, and industrial crop farms (Ledgerwood, 2002). Ledgerwood (2002) indicates that by the mid-1980s those villagers returned to farming on their own lands as the PRK administration also reinstated money and markets whereas small businesses started to reopen across the country. The reopening was meant to transfer Cambodia to 'free market economy' (Bo, 2017, p.145). In 1989 because locally the planning economy had been unable to promote economic growth and externally due to the fall of communism in the Soviet Union (Ledgerwood, 2002), the economic aid provision from the Soviet Union and Vietnam was affected. This new economic practice permitted private property ownership, the privatisation of public firms, and the decrease of governmental subsidies – placing the state under four branches of economy: 'state, family, collective and private' (Bo, 2017, p.145). However, while the political and economic changes were made for the implementation of this new economy, the state's communist ideology embedded in the 'political, bureaucratic, and administrative' institutions remained unchanged (Bo, 2017, p.181). That is, a decade after the Khmer Rouge regime ended, Cambodia moved back to privatisation but allowed land ownership for family-based farming activities (Ledgerwood, 2002). Hays (2014) notes that prior to the communist takeover, privatisation in education was seen for a small segment of Cambodia's urban population – the Sangkum administration.

[33] Exerted by 'military and territorial expansion' (Bo, 2017, p.177)

At this stage, Cambodia was meant to be a socialist state where collectivist policies were enacted. Privatisation was seen to emerge but not in the education system yet. The state was led by a highly centralised government under the influence of communism through economic aid from Vietnam and the Soviet Union until the collapse of communism and pressure from the international communities. During this period of centralisation, education policy discourses were directed under the Vietnamese hegemony and dictatorship towards national reconstruction after the devastation done in the Khmer Rouge regime and national defense against the American imperialism and French colonisation. In other words, Cambodia at this stage became a puppet state of its neighbouring country – Vietnam.

4.1.4. Cambodia's elections in the 1990s and Globalisation

In the 1990s there were efforts by the international community in bringing political stability to Cambodia through two national elections and the contribution of IOs to Cambodia's education system between and after these two historic elections. Exposed to globalisation since the 1993 national election, Cambodia received more IOs as new policy actors in its national reconstruction. In education, UNESCO was a leading actor in the early 1990s and the World Bank took over in the late 1990s, causing a shift in the Cambodian education from pursuing EFA to preparing for the KBE discourse promoted by the OECD's PISA programme.

From 1989 to 1993, Cambodia was renamed as the State of Cambodia (SoC). Under Hun Sen's leadership, the SoC was determined to attract international investments by beginning to abandon socialism (BBC News, 2018). Bo (2017) suggests that the SoC shifted to be more reliant on IOs and Western practices to overhaul its education system. Since education was a crucial nation/state-building tool (Dinnen, 2007), the IOs first started to use 'education-for-development narrative on EFA' (Bo, 2017, p.181) to raise their significance and relevance in Cambodian education policy making. For example, as the leading actor in Cambodian education reform towards its EFA framework to reduce poverty globally, UNESCO gained its importance in the Cambodian government's long-term programmes to universalise 'Basic Education' through increased financing in the early 1990s (Dy & Ninomiya, 2003, p.2).

However, the IOs' assistance ostensibly aimed at nation-building were primarily focused on state-building (Dinnen, 2007). That is, their assistance was not meant to build Cambodia's 'identity, values and goals'(Dinnen, 2007, p.3) but rather dominate – 'have even more say or

influence in' (Bo, 2017, p.48) – the local education policy making. Probably because of such domination from these new policy actors, Bo (2017) indicates that the EFA framework was integrated into the education policy. The integration or adoption of discourses such as the EFA framework from global actors showed not just the need for aid but also legitimacy on the international stage (McCormick, 2012). Also due to the domination, there was some delegation of authorities from the national government to the sub-national and school levels, but the education policy processes also remained unaffected – top-down and centralised (Bo, 2017). On this note, Dinnen (2007) argues that nation-building cannot be achieved in top-down administrations; instead, citizens must actively participate in setting up a shared political agenda. In other words, nation-building requires citizens' active participation and shared vision – the two conditions for building a democratic society by, of and for the people on the majority basis.

Duggan (1997) reveals that the education and health sectors in Cambodia received substantial international aid through 'extensive programming activity' and approximately US$70 million was devoted to 'retraining and capacity building' projects in the education sector in the early 1990s (Duggan, 1997, p.1). Dy & Ninomiya (2003) find that the UNESCO's financing scheme for Cambodia contributed to reinforcing the local schools' statistical system, enhancing working linkages and staff competency, construction of educational data systems, and the introduction of nine-year compulsory education in the mid-1990s. However, Cambodia required extra resources and determination to make possible the achievement of EFA. The EFA was far from achievement due to the challenges caused by a lack of access to high-quality education, geographical differences, and Cambodians' extreme poverty. Overall primary education was of poor quality, particularly in rural and isolated locations, which accounted for roughly 80% of the students.

Bo (2017) indicates that Cambodian politics began a new phase in the early 1990s when the Cold War ended with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 – the same year the Vietnamese forces were withdrawn from Cambodia under the international pressure. The SoC under Hun Sen's government encountered frequent attacks from CGDK, which was formed by the Khmer Rouge of Democratic Kampuchea led by Pol Pot, FUNCINPEC led by Norodom Ranariddh and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) led by Son Sann (Bo, 2017). These four factions were brought to a table in the Paris International Peace Conference on 23 October 1991 to end the existing civil war. From the conference, the Paris Peace

Accords were signed, and it was agreed that the establishment of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was necessary to promote peace in this war-torn nation (S. Chea, 2013).

Under UNTAC, Cambodia held a national election in 1993 from which a new constitution was created and the monarchy under Norodom Sihanouk was restored – back to Kingdom of Cambodia. The election result first declared Norodom Sihanouk's son, Prince Norodom Ranariddh doubled as the president of FUNCINPEC, the winner. However, the result was criticised for some voting irregularities by Hun Sen who then made a demand either go for a re-election in several provinces or install him as Deputy Prime Minister. Hun Sen's demand resulted in a coalition government led by Norodom Ranariddh as First Prime Minister and Hun Sen as Second Prime Minister. The KPNLF's successor, the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party led by Son Sann came third.

Since the aftermath of the 1993 election, Cambodia has been exposed to globalisation as several IOs started to get involved in its nation/state-building process. These IOs besides UNESCO have been perceived as new actors in Cambodia's education policy making. According to Bo (2017), those new actors namely the World Bank, IMF, ADB and UNICEF are orchestrated by the United States and can exercise their influence on Cambodia through 'financial and technical aid' (Bo, 2017, p.48). Among these IOs, the two main strategic partners of the OECD, the IMF and World Bank, have been most active in setting up conditions with aid-dependent countries like Cambodia in the 'loans and grants' (Steiner-Khamsi, 2020, p. 244) provision. The concerns of other but 'less financially powerful' donors and civil society organisations were neglected in Cambodia's policy substance and development (McCormick, 2012, p.40).

From 1993 to 2000, Cambodia (was) transformed to be a 'neoliberal governmentality' (Bo, 2017, p.192), adopting democratic capitalism. In the coalition government, officials in all ministries continued to revere Hun Sen's officials from the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) who were secretaries of state rather than FUNCIPEC ministers. The coalition's inequity, the friction between Hun Sen and Prince Ranariddh, which had progressively developed since the 1993 election dispute, erupted in a confrontation between Hun Sen's soldiers and Norodom Ranariddh's royalist troops on 5th-6th July 1997 (Bo, 2017). Hun Sen's army triumphed in the bloodshed battle, which the then United Nations Special Representative on Human Rights in

Cambodia, Thomas Hammarberg, reported it as a coup (Adams, 2007), forcing Ranariddh and his colleagues to flee out of the country. Hun Sen staged this coup against Ranariddh and accused him of illicit import of weapons and having covert talks with the Khmer Rouge as an act to put the national security in jeopardy (BBC News, 2018; Sodhy, 2004).

Because of the political instability, Cambodia faced several consequences. For example, Cambodia's membership was rejected in the ASEAN; bilateral aid programmes were put on hold the month after the coup by the IMF and the World Bank; the seat at the United Nations was not offered to Cambodia; tourism decreased substantially, and new investment came to a standstill (Ledgerwood, 2002). Ledgerwood (2002) indicates that in the year following the coup, the major priority of both Western countries and ASEAN was to guarantee that the national election was going to be held on time in 1998. Due to the Japanese diplomatic negotiation, Ranariddh was convicted of forming armed forces against the government and cooperating with the Khmer Rouge but was quickly pardoned by his father with Hun Sen's agreement. This pardon paved the way for his return to vote in the 1998 election where Hun Sen's CPP won but not enough seats to establish a government on its own; thus, CPP had to set up a coalition with FUNCINPEC again on the conditions that CPP held control of key ministries like as finance, defence, interior, and information. This shows that education was not the ruling party's priority. The CPP's victory was regarded as the only option to keep the country stable (Ledgerwood, 2002).

As the political stability improved, the international pressure on Cambodia started to rise. Hun Sen's CPP as the ruling party thus started to embrace the combination of 'democratic paradigm and capitalism' over its socialist practices to survive and preserve power in Cambodia – legitimacy on the international stage. That is, Cambodian education was redirected towards equipping the citizens with knowledge and skills for a democratic and market-oriented society through 'education democratisation' (Bo, 2017, p.199) and 'individualisation of education' (Bo, 2017, p.200). Bo (2017) seems to imply that this redirection may have been determined and defined by the two giant IOs – the OECD and the World Bank the around the time PISA was created. Cambodia's education then began its route to becoming a 'knowledge society' (Bo, 2017, p.208) or 'knowledge economy' (Bo, 2017, p.209) – the KBE discourse.

The redirection complicated the local education policy making procedures in an 'ambiguous' (Bo, 2017, p.194) relationship between the local and the new policy actors – the IOs. However, Bo (2017) argues that the state in the late 1990s remained the most influential actor and was able to restrict the involvement of the new actors in the policy making process by invoking the 'state sovereignty, historical instability and division and cultural context – hierarchy and patronage' (Bo, 2017, p.195) to claim the ownership of power on the development of the local education system. She stresses that the invocation, especially the hierarchical and patronage system which had been embedded in Cambodian culture and government, posed a challenge to the 'democratised structure of education policy making' (Bo, 2017, p.195) or 'education democratisation' (Bo, 2017, p.199) – not to mention that the education policy making process at the time was disjointed, uncoordinated and overlapped by a number of ministries until early 1996 when the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (hereafter MoEYS) was officially established with defined roles and duties.

Since the establishment of MoEYS, three major reforms were made: (1) school curriculum was expanded from 10 years to 11 years and currently to 12 years; (2) the national curriculum policy for 1996-2000 was constructed using curriculums from Sihanouk's administration, the PRK's 1980 and 1986 curriculums, and curriculum policies from developing and developed nations throughout the world; and (3) decentralisation policy was enacted through a school-cluster system, which was piloted in 1992 and expanded to all provinces in 1995 (Bo, 2017). The school-cluster system was made up of five to six geographically close schools, one of which was a core school, and the others were satellite schools. Bo (2017) indicates that the school-cluster system served as a tool for coordinating central government assistance, improving school management, managing constrained school resources, building local staff capability, and improving teaching and learning and that MoEYS provided funding for school development directly to schools via this system.

From the second and third major reforms, the influence of the IOs on Cambodian education policy making was getting stronger as compared to their immediate arrival. For the second reform, the MoEYS started to look out for best practices in school curriculum reform from external sources – including developed countries that are assumably the OECD's PISA members. It is likely that those best practices such as 'good governance' (Bo, 2017, p.222) from the external sources may have been facilitated by the IOs. The significance of the IOs became more obvious in the third reform that introduced the idea of decentralisation, which

may have been on the IOs' agenda to reduce the centralised, hierarchical and patronage systems embedded in the Cambodia's Vietnamese hegemony, culture and history. Bo (2017) reinforces that the IOs, especially the OECD's strategic partners – the World Bank and IMF, began to promote the discourses of 'good governance' (Bo, 2017, p.221) and 'decentralisation' (Bo, 2017, p.222) in the late 1990s to improve the efficiency of their aid provisions and spread the notions to education sector to promote marketisation and accountability.

4.1.5. From good governance to the OECD's KBE discourse

This sub-section illustrates further how good governance and decentralisation were integrated into the Cambodia's government in the 2000s. Good governance appeared in the top-level education policy documents in the mid-2000s and since then has been meant to aid in transforming Cambodia into a 'knowledge-based society' (MoEYS, 2004, p.12). By the end of this section, three probable rationales of Cambodia's PISA-D participation are explored.

From 2000 to 2013, Cambodia became 'emerging governmentality' or 'governmentality-in-the-making' where education policy and discourse were progressing towards national development under the existing neoliberal regime (Bo, 2017, p.213). She uses the two notions from Fimyar (2018) and Tikly (2003). Fimyar (2008) defines 'emerging governmentality' as 'the form of political rationality (in the aftermath of political and social change), in which the discursive space has acquired liberal connotations, while the practices and legacies of the previous regime persist both at the governmental and individual levels (Fimyar, 2008, p.573). In the case of post-communist Ukraine[34], Fimyar (2008) finds that the lack of a strong institutionalised civil society and abuses of the rule of law eroded the state's structure, contributing to the government's rising acceptance of Western political and educational discourses.

Having a 'weak state's structure' (Fimyar, 2008, p.571) is a typical characteristic of developing countries after internal conflicts that may be caused by civil wars and colonisation, making aid-dependent/developing countries like Ukraine and Cambodia a similar case. This similarity is getting stronger when considering Fimyar's finding that post-communist 'practices' and institutional 'cultures' have remained almost intact since the Soviet era, resulting in a larger divergence between policy announcements and practical

[34] Also known as Soviet Ukraine and was a constituent republic of the Soviet Union until 1991.

changes (Fimyar, 2008, p.572). Likewise, Cambodian scholars such as Sen (2019) and Bo (2017) also see a coexistence between the acceptance of the neoliberal discourses from the Western world through aid conditions set by the IOs into the Cambodia' national reconstruction process and the existing socialist and communist rationalities of government from the Soviet Union.

Tikly (2003) argues that 'governmentality-in-the-making comprises of complex and sometimes contradictory elements that provide both continuity and discontinuity on what went before' (Tikly, 2003, p.166). That is, the confrontation between the external discourses and the local practice, culture and rationality of government creates 'ambivalence' and 'uncertainty' (Fimyar, 2008, p.571) – a crossroad where the local government has to decide on the continuity and discontinuity over what suits the local political, economic, cultural and historical contexts. This crossroad represents the coloniality-enactment tension entangled with the geopolitics of power relations which may be linked to the logics of global 'coloniality of power' (Mignolo, 2005, p.111) and the 'geopolitics of knowledge' (Mignolo, 2002, p.63) that can operate under the OECD's influence in the 'heterarchical governance' (Lewis et al., 2016).

For emerging governmentality like Cambodia, Fimyar identifies the contestation of power relations between the global actors and the local government as 'the gap between the new emerging discourses and old persistent practices' (Fimyar, 2008, p.572). Sen (2019) applies Fimyar's identification in Cambodian context and argues that the old persistent practices incapacitate Cambodian higher education institutions from contributing to the country's capacity building and economic growth (Sen, 2019) – the IOs-oriented capitalistic ambition. This finding stretches as far as the period right after the first national election in 1993 when Cambodia was not completely out of its conflicts. That is when Cambodia was a centralised government and the IOs focused only on primary education through the integration of the EFA framework. Post-conflict Cambodia should start after the second national election (cf. Sen, 2019) when the IOs intended to tackle the Cambodian centralised government in the earlier time periods.

The decision on which practices to continue or discontinue at such a crossroad is reflected in the policy making process and Bo (2017) argues that 'policy is a mode of government by distance by which the populations are managed, controlled and disciplined' (Bo, 2017,

p.214). She uses Thiem's 'new bottle, old wine' (Bo, 2017, p.214; Thiem, 2015, p.89) analogy to consider the 'new bottle' as the policy from external governance and the 'old wine' as the population contained inside the bottle. Thiem (2015) refers the analogy to the 'departure' (Thiem, 2015, p.80) which post-socialist countries like Cambodia such as Vietnam and China took in moving beyond neoliberalism, following those critiques reflected in post- or anti-neoliberalism. Otherwise, taking the analogy, the content inside the bottle must bear the same shape as the bottle. That is, the domination of the IOs on the local policy making process was getting more obvious at this stage.

For example, the 2001 Law on Commune Administration was meant to reshuffle the commune-level[35] leadership vested under the PRK regime to promote democracy – the IOs' discourse. The law enabled Cambodia to hold the first multiparty commune election in February 2002, which was viewed as a 'cornerstone of democratic consolidation' in the country, particularly by the international communities because its result was meant to restructure the local government in Cambodia (Slocomb, 2004, p.447) in respect to good governance and decentralisation. Two years after the commune election, good governance and decentralisation were integrated in the Rectangular Strategy Phase I of the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC). This strategy regarded good governance as the 'cornerstone' of this top-level national policy framework (RGC, 2004, p.6). The RGC was committed to achieving good governance through eliminating corruption and reforms in the legal system, arm forces and civil services by means of decentralisation and de-concentration (RGC, 2004).

In the mid-2000s, good governance and KBE spread to the Cambodian education system and started to appear in the official top-level education policy documents, such as the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2004-2008 – the second ESP of five so far. The strategic plan underscores the significance of cultivating a robust human resource base by broadening and enhancing educational opportunities. This approach aligns with the World Bank's discourses on good governance and KBE, which were prominent in development discussions at the time.

[35] Khum/Sangkat (commune) as the fourth level, Srok/Khan (district) as the third and Khet/Krong (province/city) as the second level of national government – two levels of elections: communal and national.

The ESP 2004-2008 reflects Cambodia's commitment to transforming its education system to more effectively address both national and global development objectives, with a particular emphasis on improving equity, quality, and financial management within the education sector (MoEYS, 2004). This ESP was meant to enhance the quality of education services through improved governance, accountability, and teacher training. Individual teacher's and school's transparency and accountability was met by monitoring and reporting at all the government levels, especially on financial management, suggesting that good governance has been a core part of neoliberalism to integrate Cambodia into the global economy (Bo, 2017), the OECD-promoted economic discourse – KBE. The previous chapters propose that the OECD used this economic discourse to interfere with the local politics of the PISA member countries and that the OECD may continue using this discourse in the PISA-D programme to meddle in the developing countries' politics and beyond. This proposition leads to a discussion in section 4.2.

4.2. Cambodia's experience of PISA-D

This section investigates what has been written about the PISA-D programme in Cambodia. It discusses how PISA-D arrived in Cambodia; what then happened to its education system; the policy value of PISA-D results; PISA-D policy recommendations; and the Cambodia's policy response along with the advantages of participating in the 2023 PISA. My thesis argues that (1) PISA-D's entry in Cambodia is a result of the heterarchical governance that allows the OECD to extend into the education systems of the global south nations as far as globalisation permits; (2) the Cambodian Education Minister has made two changes that may not have a point of return but represent the starting point for additional alterations to Cambodia's education system in accordance with the OECD's policy directives; (3) Cambodia's low performance carries little policy value for local use; (4) PISA-D recommendations are not new but fail to find specific programmes to improve Cambodia's education; and (5) Cambodia's education system has started showing conformity to the OECD's isomorphism and convergence.

4.2.1. The arrival of PISA-D in Cambodia

While Cambodia's membership in PISA-D was officially announced in 2016, this section investigates how the PISA-D programme was introduced to Cambodia in 2014, coinciding with the appointment of the current Education Minister, Hang Chuon Naron. I contend that the arrival of PISA-D in Cambodia is a product of the heterarchical governance that enables

the OECD to ‘reach into’ (Lewis et al., 2016, p.27) the education systems of the developing countries as far as globalisation entices.

Cambodia’s MoEYS plays a critical role in shaping students to be good citizens with knowledge, skills, and ethics, as well as the ability to live amicably with others, in order to positively contribute to Cambodia's transition to a KBE society (Bo, 2017). The current Education Minister Hang Chuon Naron was appointed in 2014. The appointment of this ‘technocratic’ Minister was a clear indication of the Cambodian government’s focus on education reform (Hickey & Hossain, 2019, p.8). By the end of 2014, the writing of Cambodia’s capacity-needs analysis for the PISA-D programme had been prearranged[36] by the OECD and the World Bank. Before Hang’s appointment, Cambodia administered two national examinations at the end of grades 9 and 12. The results projected that there was growing interest of secondary education students in mathematics and science (Barron, 2014) but the level of student performance in the domains remained uncertain (MoEYS, n.d.).

In 2016, EQAD[37] carried out a grade 6 national standardised exam in the face of resource and human capital constraints. The exam measured students’ abilities in reading and writing of Khmer (the local language) and mathematics. Drawing on a sample of 5939 from 210 schools, the results were generally lower than the basic proficiency level and projected substantial differences between urban and rural students’ achievements (MoEYS, 2016a), which hindered not only students’ development but also the nation’s economic growth (Heng, Sar, & Khou, 2017). Heng et al. (2017) indicate that Cambodia intended to use the exam results for education policy reform, but their reliability was an issue. Thus, Cambodia was looking for options to better its design, implementation, and effectiveness for policy value (Heng et al., 2017). In May 2016, Cambodia then became an official member of the PISA-D programme.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Camilla Addey is a prominent leader of most studies on ILSA participation. She and her team find that the global south nations participate in ILSAs for different reasons from the global north counterparts (Addey & Sellar, 2018). As

[36] The Cambodia’s capacity-needs analysis had been written by Fernando Cartwright, a consultant recruited by the OECD and the World Bank.
[37] A key department within MoEYS assigned to implement grade 3,6 and 8 national standardised tests since 2007 (Heng et al., 2017). It was proposed to be National Centre of PISA-D implementation and two leaders from this department were assigned to be National Project Managers (Cartwright, 2016b, 2016a).

discussed above, foreign aid may stand as the difference between these two parts of the world. One empirical study from them concludes that the ILSA participation – regardless of their economic status – is initiated domestically than a 'donor-driven decision imposed on governments' (Addey & Sellar, 2015, p.208). This generalisation is partly true as PISA-D participation can be enticed by the funding rationales and PISA-D participation benefits, discussed in the previous chapter. However, it can also be coerced as in the case of Cambodia. As far as the heterarchical governance is concerned, developing countries are likely to be forced to participate in ILSAs. For instance, Cambodia's participation in PISA-D may have been a donor-driven case by three IOs. According to Auld et al (2019), Cambodia was not interested but was imposed by the OECD with assistance from the World Bank and UNESCO to participate in PISA-D. The World Bank's assistance in this matter confirms that this IO has been most active in getting developing countries to take up ILSAs (Addey & Sellar, 2015) and that the OECD and the World Bank are strategic partners (Auld et al., 2019; Shahjahan, 2016; Steiner-Khamsi, 2020). This means the heterarchical governance enabled the OECD to get them – Cambodia in this case – onboard.

The 'PISA-D Project Manager' Michael Ward explains that the most compelling reason behind the PISA-D participation is the countries' wish to compare their systems on a global scale and that such wish is demand-driven from the participating countries (Auld et al., 2019, p.198). After sitting the PISA-D test in 2018, Cambodia developed a national report jointly written by the OECD, highlighting a few reasons to justify its PISA-D participation. Besides the wish to compare, PISA-D came in time for its local education reform as its test instruments promote assessment data and offered evidence for its schools and that PISA-D results could act as a reflection of its effort in attaining its SDGs and 2030 and 2050 visions (MoEYS, 2018a). However, Auld et al. (2019) found that there was no mentioning of Cambodia's intention to use international benchmarking or ILSA participation in the ESP 2009-2013. Through their investigation beyond public documents, Auld et al. (2019) found that the PISA-D arrival in Cambodia 'by-passed' (Auld, Rappleye, & Morris, 2019, p.210) the local government, the major education funding body, the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG), and the Cambodian Minister's initiatives on national assessments. This confirms the Scriven's meta evaluation conducted by Fernadez-Cano (2016) who claims that PISA is a 'political imposition' that by-passes the public consultation (Fernandez-Cano, 2016, p.3).

The majority of donor IOs as members in ESWG, most prominently UNESCO and UNICEF, resisted the enactment of PISA-D in Cambodia. Auld et al. (2019) report that UNICEF saw little use to introduce international benchmarking to Cambodia and recommended Cambodia to strengthen its adherence to the regional UNICEF-led assessment, the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metric (SEA-PLM[38]), which had been officially approved by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO). Based on UNICEF, the net enrolment rates in primary school were over 90% and tended to shrink to 20%–30% by the start of upper secondary. That is, PISA-D was going to cover only about a fourth of the age group, but SEA-PLM was able to cover almost the entire group. The resistance became stronger when UNESCO in the capacity as Head of ESWG earned enough support to consider PISA-D participation as a divided decision of ESWG. At this point, the World Bank took a direct step to convince the Minister of the PISA-D participation benefits and to put aside the Minister's focus on improving the national assessments (Auld et al., 2019).

Eventually, Cambodia's participation in PISA-D was 'pushed through' and the project was launched in May 2016 (Auld, Rappleye, & Morris, 2019, p.210). Obviously, the pushing through was not done directly by the OECD but by its strategic partner – the World Bank, together with the UNESCO's unexpected turnaround. Auld et al (2019) explain the UNESCO's sudden change as to 'satisfy the international community's desire for universal targets' (Auld, Rappleye, & Morris, 2019, p.210). This explanation may suggest that the OECD's power in the heterarchical governance is hard to resist – not even UNESCO, the leading IO in charge of the SDG4 attainment. This finding is supported by Addey et al. (2020), mentioned in the previous chapter, that the intent of PISA-D was resisted and had to go through both formal and informal negotiations over this 'assessment validity as a process of assemblage' (Addey, Maddox, & Zumbo, 2020, p.593) in which democratic rules and local key actors were ignored.

[38] The assessment is operated under the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) Secretariat and UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO). It was officially launched in 2014. Six countries such as Cambodia, Lao, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Vietnam participated in the first assessment round in 2019. The methodology of the 2019 assessment was crafted to allow the participating countries to report their performance against two indicators of SDG4: SDG4.1.1a and SDG4.1.1b. The result was released in December 2020.

4.2.2. Developing countries' rationales of ILSA participation and PISA-D participation benefits

Using Cambodia as an example, this sub-section presents how the OECD's ILSAs in general reach into local school systems and emphasises on the major rationale that attracts the global south nations to participate in ILSAs. It also discusses the PISA-D participation benefits claimed by the OECD and what concerned scholars anticipate the developing countries may and may not expect to get from their ILSA participation. I contend that PISA-D data is not representative of the local contexts and carries similar policy value to the local and regional assessments but the developing countries' participation in the PISA-D programme targets funding from the concerned IOs.

Steiner-Khamsi (2020) suggests that in development studies, developing countries conform to submitting their national progress in various yearly reports and publications to IOs and that the undisputed power of PISA as a worldwide evaluative means for national education reforms has been widely questioned in those studies. Such conformation has 'become the norm, and not the exception' (Steiner-Khamsi, 2020, p.244). Based on the feedback from 37 delegates from OECD and partner countries, Breakspear (2012) investigates the normative influence of PISA by analysing how national policy actors utilise PISA in national policies and practises to evaluate and enhance the local education system. He discovers that 'assessment and accountability' is the policy area that receives the most influence from PISA (Breakspear, 2012, p.16). This confirms the extent of the 'disciplinary power' (Foucault, 1977, p.187) of PISA onto the national policy making in the global north nations.

For the global south nations, their participation in PISA-D is crucial for obtaining aid for their educational needs. They are 'under the gun to establish some kind of accountability of their educational systems' (Kamens, 2013, p.120). This accountability pressure is part the OECD's strategy to make school transparent as discussed part of the 'disciplinary power' (Foucault, 1977, p.187) of PISA in the previous chapter that suggests being transparent means submission of power. Wiseman (2013) suggests that this accountability pressure requires them to respond to the OECD's ILSAs by either the OECD's power mechanisms or the OECD's promotion of evidence-based policy making and that those responses are more likely to be isomorphic than convergent. He emphasises that the focus is on accountability that tags along reform legitimisation and power delegation – decentralisation – within the member countries (Wiseman, 2013). In other words, the delegation of power goes down from national

and provincial to class level and ultimately to teachers who will then face the 'terrors of performativity' (Ball, 2003, p.216) in the neoliberal reform embedded in the OECD's policy directives. This performativity measure has been regarded as deprofessionalising teachers, dominating their cognitive powers in the classroom, and justifying teacher retention (Meng, 2009; Perryman & Calvert, 2020).

Steiner-Khamsi, Appleton, & Vellani (2018) discuss the three typical narratives offered by ILSAs – PISA included. Those narratives claim that (1) the public school system needs reform, (2) there is no link between education funding and educational outcomes, and that (3) 'school accountability, teacher performance, and decentralisation' are the most effective reform policies for improving educational quality (Steiner-Khamsi, Appleton, & Vellani, 2018, p.1). As I understand it, these three narratives are presented in a logic that takes school and test accountability as a requirement for immediate reforms that must be informed by external actors. Liu & Steiner-Khamsi (2021) find that correlating school/test accountability with the first narrative is an emerging rationality that explains how the OECD creates a demand for its ILSAs participation (J. Liu & Steiner-Khamsi, 2021). As the OECD uses its ILSAs to promote evidence-based policy, Wiseman (2010) indicates that one of the aims of such evidence-based policy making is to heighten the administrator's accountability that needs to be evaluated for funding purposes (Wiseman, 2010). This supports the findings of (Kijima, 2010) and (Lockheed, 2013) that the participation of developing countries in ILSAs targets foreign funding for their educational needs.

In the global south contexts, Lockheed highlights that the chief participation rationale is to use their ILSA results as evidence to secure foreign aid and its effectiveness (Lockheed, 2013). Kijima finds that ILSA results are used, especially by the countries whose national assessment mechanisms are weak, to attract aid from the international communities for their education needs (Kijima, 2010). Kijima's finding may best describe one of Senegal's rationales. This African country has two objectives behind its participation in PISA-D. One, the country needs external data for a proper assessment of the effectiveness of its own educational system on top of the national and regional assessment. The other, it looks to benefit from the expertise of PISA to strengthen the capacities of national experts and stakeholders to conduct LSAs (UNESCO, 2018).

In the case of Cambodia, the PISA-D results show consistency with the local curriculum-based student assessments (MoEYS, 2018a). In Ecuador, the PISA-D results were referred as a means to legitimise its national assessment instruments because both assessments exhibited similar learning outcomes (Addey & Sellar, 2018). These two country cases suggest that the local assessment systems in the PISA-D member countries can capture the same learning performance of their students as PISA-D. In the case of Zambia, PISA-D results had consistency with the regional assessment, Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) results (Ministry of General Education, n.d.). This means their PISA-D participation – low performance among the developing countries is 'anticipated' (MoEYS, 2018a, p.130) – may not seek (policy) value added but may target foreign aid, considering Lockheed and Kijima's findings in common.

Kijima (2010) finds out that on average, nations that join in ILSAs receive 37% more foreign aid for education than those that do not. This foreign aid could come in the forms of scholarships, technical assistance and/or finance for PISA-D enactment. Firstly, for scholarships, the OECD oversees scholarship aid, as targeted in SDG4b[39], for developing countries (UNESCO, 2019b). Secondly, technical assistance is seen in the case of a few countries the OECD claimed to have formed a partnership with (OECD, 2018e, 2018b). For example, policy makers in the four Latin American countries have been reported to accept PISA-D and the use of its data for their local education systems (Scholer & Oviedo, 2019). In Paraguay where education data is informed by two curriculum-based assessments at national and regional levels, competency-based PISA-D offers this Latin American country with an innovative approach to conduct standardised assessments and consider what to assess (Addey & Sellar, 2018). In Bhutan, the Education Minister reported that Bhutan was keen on using an external assessment to reflect the local education quality (Delma, 2019).

Lastly, finance for PISA-D enactment is provided to Cambodia. In its national report, Cambodia participated in PISA-D because it came in time for its local education reform as its test instruments promote assessment data and offer evidence for its schools and that PISA-D results can act as a reflection of its effort in attaining its SDGs and 2030 and 2050 visions[40]

[39] Target 4.b: By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries.

[40] Cambodia is envisioned to become an upper-middle income and high-income country in 2030 and 2050.

(MoEYS, 2018a). However, ESWG as the leading group of education donors opposed to the PISA-D enactment in Cambodia and rejected the PISA-D funding request for which they would have financed US$57 million through the EFA-Fast Track Initiative Catalytic Fund (Auld et al., 2019, p.207). Otherwise, the 'alternative funding' sources come from the World Bank's SEIP which allocates a huge amount of finance to cover Cambodia's PISA and PISA-D participation and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), one of the Cambodia's DPs that is not a member of ESWG (Auld et al., 2019, p.208). As mentioned earlier, PISA-D project cost is funded by three sources: each member country, DPs including Korea and the World Bank and private companies (OECD, 2017b). In Cambodia's case, the two DPs should not have been referred to as secondary sources of funding after the local donors – ESWG. On this note, it also begs a question on Cambodia's contribution to the project cost.

On top the foreign aid rationales, developing countries may be attracted by the PISA-D participation benefits. According to the OECD's 2018 report, PISA-D members gain several benefits from the three stages of PISA-D enactment. In the implementation stage, PISA-D members will possess a capacity-building plan that can be used by the local government to reinforce their national assessment. This CBP comes after the member countries have had CNA and the project implementation plan. These three documents must be developed under the OECD's guided instruction. In the reporting stage, the OECD together with its contractors provide the countries with insights to improve their capacity for data analysis, interpretation of PISA results, report writing, and the creation of tailored communication products to help spread PISA results and policy messages. The results of PISA-D will be disclosed in national reports created in partnership with the OECD.

The last stage introduces a new component offered by the PISA-D programme which is a dissemination plan of PISA-D national reports and results for public discussion and policy implication (OECD, 2018a). Lockheed (2013), who was commissioned by the World Bank to investigate why countries participated in PISA, goes in line with these benefits. She finds that PISA-D participation directly enhances the national assessment system through trainings and experiences that happen during the ILSA implementation and adds that such participation indirectly influences curriculum and teaching practice norms, resulting in curricular reform and promotion of teacher professionalism (Lockheed, 2013). These benefits are also similar

to the findings of Addey and her team – the seven broad rationales mentioned in the previous chapter (Addey et al., 2017).

For Cambodia, PISA-D will benefit the local education system and the government in preparing Cambodian youths after graduating from school; determining which areas of priorities in schooling that need immediate reform; assessing the school and learning environment in comparison to the other PISA-D member nations; equipping Cambodia with an international student assessment system for the global education framework; identifying essential means to enhance human resources in conformity with the government's Rectangular Strategy Phase 4 and the 2030 and 2050 visions; strengthening the national student assessment system by using PISA-D approaches and experiences, preparing for the main PISA in 2022; enhancing curriculum, instructional approaches, and learning outcomes in Cambodia; and gaining experience in how schools can be effectively managed in order to promote student achievement and respond to the increasing demand for 'knowledge in the regional and global market economy' – KBE (MoEYS, 2018b, p.2). Verger et al. (2016) suggest that these attractive PISA-D participation benefits collectively promote and strengthen the OECD's authority over the PISA-D countries (Verger, Fontdevila, & Zancajo, 2016). Such benefits appear to be technical prerequisites for the PISA-D enactment, but they are also political in that they attempt to radically change how countries learn about and improve their education systems (Addey & Gorur, 2020) – in line with the earlier argument of Hughes (2011).

4.2.3. What has happened to Cambodia's education system?

This section explores what has happened to the local education system since PISA-D arrived in Cambodia. It discusses two drastic changes in the history of the five top education policy documents known as ESPs. While the first three ESPs were produced under the previous Ministers, this section emphasises on the fourth and fifth ESPs which have been led by the current Minister. Under this Minister, Cambodia has shifted its policy priorities to be 'consistent with SDG4' (MoYES, 2016, p. 5) and has framed its education goals towards KBE (MoEYS, 2019a).

So far, the MoEYS has implemented five ESPs. According to Sem & Hem (2016), the first ESP from 2000 to 2005 focuses on primary school enrolment by beginning to cancel enrolment payments, giving school funding through a system that offered special support

to rural schools in disadvantaged regions, and building primary schools throughout the country. Secondly, the ESP 2006-2010 moves the focus to enhancing secondary school education by constructing lower secondary schools in all communes and secondary schools in all districts, as well as providing scholarships to underprivileged students to enable them to complete grade 9. Thirdly, the ESP 2009-2013 prioritises internal efficiency by lowering repetition and dropout rates and building institutions for decentralisation. Fourthly, the ESP 2014-2018 under Hang Chuon Naron emphasises on equity and educational quality, effective management of MoEYS employees and education's response to economic demands (Sem & Hem, 2016).

As discussed in the previous chapter, Cambodia's education ministry as a member of the PISA-D programme is to ensure the transformation to KBE. At the very beginning of his term, the Minister made two fundamental changes to the Cambodian education system. I contend that these two changes may not have a point of return but are the starters for further modification to Cambodia's education system under the OECD's policy directives. First, Hang argues the need for reform to Cambodian education to boost the nation's economic development (VOA, 2015). His argument may have stemmed from the OECD's 2010 report *The High Cost of Low Educational Performance* written by Hanushek Eric Alan and Woessmann Ludger (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010). These two economists corelate the achievement score on the OECD's ILSAs such as PISA with a country's economic growth. Such corelation has been re-emphasised in another OECD's report *How to Build a 21st-Century School System* by the OECD's Director for Education and Skills (Schleicher, 2018). These two reports are meant to convince the PISA member countries to direct their education systems towards the KBE discourse. As discussed in the previous chapters, such correlation refers to HCT promoted by the OECD and the World Bank that has been heavily criticised in the previous chapters.

Second, Hang shifts the education focus from input-based to outcome-based. While the earlier ESPs are concentrated on inputs, ESP 2014–2018 – the fourth ESP– focuses on education outcomes. One of the priorities this ESP proposes is reform in national and in-class assessments for PISA participation (MoEYS, 2014, p.15). This transition is aligned

with the rise of ILSAs[41] – PISA included (Kitaura, Edwards, Chhinh, & Williams, 2016, p.31). However, for developing countries, such a transition from policies that are dependent on teachers and textbooks or 'input-based' (Mbiti, 2016, p.111) to policies that are geared towards learning outcomes, 'Outcomes-Based Education (OBE)' (Steiner-Khamsi, 2006, p.665) poses a significant challenge in respect to the political economy of education service provision (Mbiti, 2016) and the requirement to get foreign financing (Steiner-Khamsi, 2006). This means the local government must come up with policies to redistribute the local resources to achieve a certain ILSA performance required in order to receive foreign funding. As far as Kijima (2010)'s finding concerned, the shift falls in a chicken-and-egg scenario where ILSA performance can be achieved first, or the local education system must be improved through foreign aid first to achieve the required performance.

The fifth ESP from 2019 to 2023 directs Cambodian education towards the achievement of SDG4 and its 2030 and 2050 visions. According to the plan, the MoEYS continues to close skills gaps by working with key stakeholders to increase the supply of skills training in priority sectors, as well as by introducing digital education in response to policy and the direction of Cambodia's digital economy – also known as KBE, the economic discourse promoted by the OECD. This fifth ESP shows Cambodia's commitment in response to the modification made in the mid-term review of the fourth ESP. Such review had never been practiced until six months after the Cambodia's PISA-D official membership. The review modifies the three top policy priorities[42] in the previous ESPs (MoEYS, 2010, 2014) to only two policies[43] in the post-review ESPs (MoEYS, 2016b, 2019a) in order to be 'consistent with SDG4' (MoYES, 2016, p. 5). The review also suggests decentralising the national grade 9 examination to the provincial and municipal level and proposes a number of aspects for reform, one of which is to measure students' learning outcome through PISA-D participation (MoEYS, 2016b). From the interview with the Minister, Barron (2014) reports that the Minister decided to shift the arrangement of grade 9

[41] Cambodia also participates in the Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC) and Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) (Ho, 2020)

[42] Ensuring equal access to education services, improving educational service quality and efficiency, and fostering institutional and capacity development for educational personnel in preparation for decentralisation (MoEYS, 2010, 2014)

[43] Ensure that students have access to 'inclusive and equitable quality education' and encourage them to take up 'life-long learning' and ensure that education officials have competent 'leadership and management' capacities at all levels (MoEYS, 2016b, p.5; 2019, p.1).

examination to individual schools' responsibility for cost reduction – saving around 50% of the grade 9 examination and that the amount saved is used as payment for those teachers who invigilate the grade 12 examination (Barron, 2014).

Considering transparency issues, this cost reduction in grade 9 examinations to top up the grade 12 examination invigilators' income is highly questionable. Either the examination is held at the individual school level or at the national level, the total number of exam takers is the same. The major expense is hourly payment for the examination invigilators unless such payment is compromised by some probable irregularities during the examination at the school level. Most common irregularities are leakages of examination content and invigilators' permission granted to examination takers to cheat in exchange for pocket money – corruption. Such corruption-related issues were tackled seriously for the first time in the national grade 12 examination in 2014 as part of the robust reform under Hang's leadership. This means MoEYS allows loopholes in grade 9 examinations to reduce cost – compensated by corruption – to increase the income of grade 12 examination invigilators. Otherwise, this grade 9 examination decentralisation may have been rooted in the OECD's intention to alter as many local assessment systems as possible so that the policy effects of its ILSAs on the entire education system will be boosted (Addey et al., 2017). Such decentralisation is one of the 'neoliberal drivers' (Rowe, 2019, p. 273) for education reform to promote delegation of power that comes along accountability pressure created in the isomorphic response to PISA (Wiseman, 2013). This could mean MoEYS is facing financial constraints to enhance the examinations at the two levels and therefore may consider PISA-D participation as a pathway to get more foreign aid for local educational needs.

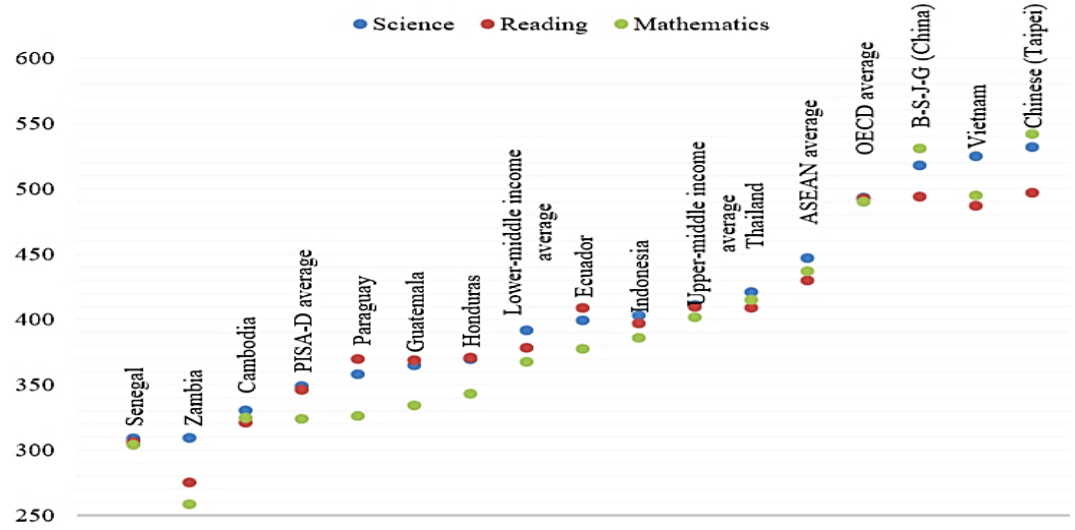
4.2.4. What PISA-D results tell us about Cambodia

This section highlights the 2018 PISA-D results from Cambodia's national reports as a focus. As the performance of the PISA-D member countries have been 'anticipated' (MoEYS, 2018a, p.130) to be low, I contend that Cambodia's PISA-D results carries little policy value for local use but Cambodia's PISA-D participation is rather to attract foreign aid.

In the global south contexts, PISA-D assesses students in 7th grade or above who are between the ages of fifteen and three months and sixteen and two months at the time of the assessment. In other words, it assesses students in both lower and upper secondary schools as long as they are within the PISA-D age range (MoEYS, 2018a). PISA-D claims to assess

beyond these students' abilities to reproduce their knowledge by evaluating if students have mastered their understanding of processes, concepts, and functionality in order to work in various situations (OECD, 2018e). The PISA-D test results in 2018 show that all the participating countries scored well below the international standard – lower than the OECD average – see Figure 3.

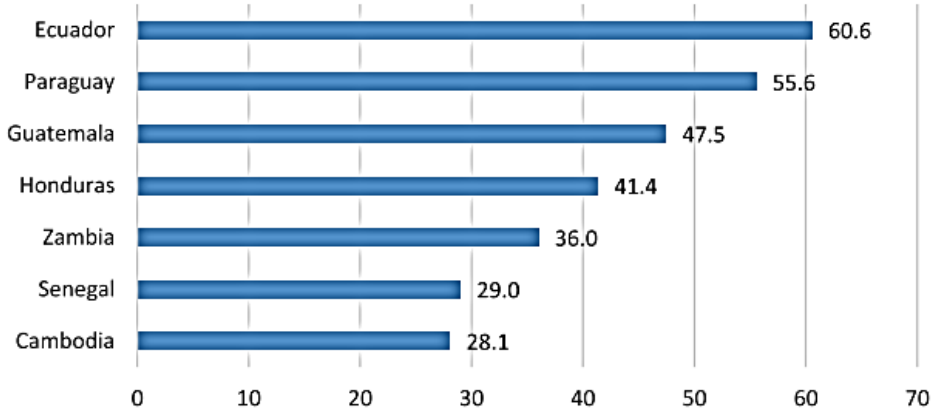
Figure 3: PISA-D countries' performance vs a few PISA countries' performance in Science, Reading and Mathematics



(MoEYS, 2018a)

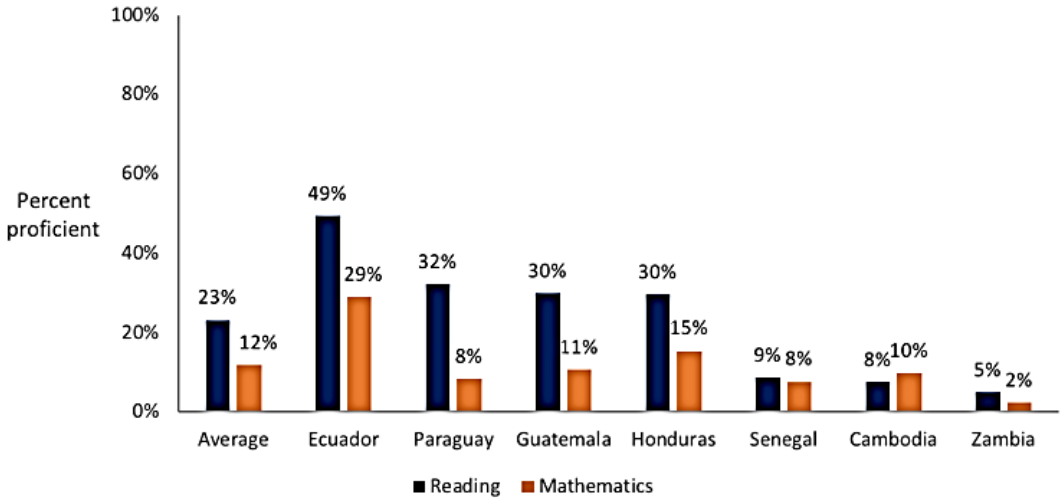
Based on Figure 4, the four Latin American countries had the largest proportion of 15-year-old children studying in grades 7 to 12 (MoEYS, 2018b). These four countries performed better in reading and mathematics than the others (Kaffenberger, 2019; OECD, 2018b) – see Figure 5. However, the results reveal that schools in these four Latin American nations faced three main challenges (1) high rates of absenteeism, (2) lack of family support, and (3) shortage of learning/teaching resources (Palomino, 2019; Scholer & Oviedo, 2019). Most reports on PISA-D results have little information on Panama, a PISA member country, because it participated only in the out-of-school assessment of PISA-D. Bhutan is a similar case. Its late registration probably prevented this country from conducting the pilot test (Delma, 2019).

Figure 4: Percentage of students aged 15 at grade 7 or above



(MoEYS, 2018b)

Figure 5: PISA-D countries' performance in reading and mathematics



(Kaffenberger, 2019)

Also, the PISA-D results show a huge gap in performance between PISA countries and PISA-D countries. Their performances are projected on a scale of six proficiency levels. Based on Table 5, PISA and PISA-D scales are the same, except that PISA scale does not include Level 1c in theory. In practice, items at Level 1c were not even included in the PISA-D test (MoEYS, 2018a). The PISA-D results show that those 15-year-olds from the PISA countries which were able to reach a minimum level of proficiency in reading and mathematics (at least level 2 on PISA-(D) scale) ranged from around ninety five percent in the four Chinese provinces to around five percent in the PISA-D countries namely Senegal, Zambia and Cambodia (OECD, 2019a) - the lowest performers in the three domains. Cambodia's PISA-D results were publicly disseminated on December 12, 2018 (FN Media, 2018) and show that

education in Cambodia is comparable to that of Senegal and Zambia, where teachers' salary are low and most young people are not in school (MoEYS, 2018a).

Pertaining to its failure to achieve the minimum proficiency levels, Senegal's results were reported to be significantly affected by two key issues (1) learning and teaching materials and (2) teacher's qualification (UNESCO, 2018). Only 36% of the Zambian fifteen-year-old populations had finished their seventh grade. In its national report, Zambia revealed two factors behind its low educational attainment: (1) only 43% of Zambian students were eligible for the test. Those fifteen-year-olds who sat the test were reported of having limited abilities while most of them were out of school; and (2) grade repetition rate was extremely high, especially with boys and urban pupils performed better than their rural peers. The results had consistency with the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) results, confirming that Zambian students had low learning (Ministry of General Education, n.d.).

Table 5: PISA-D proficiency levels

Domains/Levels	1c	1b	1a	2	3	4	5	6
Reading	189	262	335	407	480	553	626	698
Maths	236	295	358	420	482	545	607	669
Science	186	260	335	410	484	559	633	708

Tabulated by the researcher from the Cambodia's national report (MoEYS, 2018a).

For Cambodia, there are two versions of its national reports on PISA-D results: full and summary. In both versions, competency-based PISA-D test measures how well Cambodian youths have gained 'key knowledge and skills' (MoEYS, 2018b, p.1, 2018a, p.2) that are required for full participation in modern societies – the KBE discourse – near the conclusion of their basic education. That is, PISA-D test is not based on the curriculum of any member countries and employs grade 10[44] as the modal grade for determining whether the students' academic performance matches this age-based standard (MoEYS, 2018b). In December 2017, there were 5162 Cambodian students aged 15 (grades 7 to 12) and 4263 teachers from 170 schools throughout the 25 capital/provinces that took part in the PISA-D survey. The students

[44] Cambodian students start their first grade the age of 6. Without late enrolment and drop out, they will be in grade 10 at the age of 15 – the PISA-D target.

had to take a 2-hour cognitive exam before filling out a contextual questionnaire on their demographics, teaching and learning, well-being, and attitude towards school. School principals and teachers were also asked to complete a questionnaire on their respective school and community settings (MoEYS, 2018b).

Based on the full national report, the Cambodia's PISA-D results reveal several areas of concern. Only 8% of students achieved minimum proficiency in reading, and 10% in mathematics, indicating significant challenges in foundational skills. Gender disparities are evident, with girls outperforming boys in reading by 17 points, while performance in mathematics is similar across genders. Urban students significantly outperform their rural counterparts in reading, with a 42-point difference. Although 96% of students feel safe at school, only 70% feel secure on their way home, raising safety concerns. Attendance issues are prevalent, with 50% of students arriving late and 7.5% missing over three months of school due to health or responsibilities. Parental involvement is limited, as only 43% of students regularly discuss their academic progress with their families. Additionally, disadvantaged schools often lack experienced teachers, impacting educational quality. Despite these challenges, most students report high levels of life satisfaction and a sense of belonging at school, though health issues remain a concern, particularly among disadvantaged groups. Overall, these findings underscore the need for substantial improvements in educational quality, resource allocation, and student support systems in Cambodia (MoEYS, 2018a).

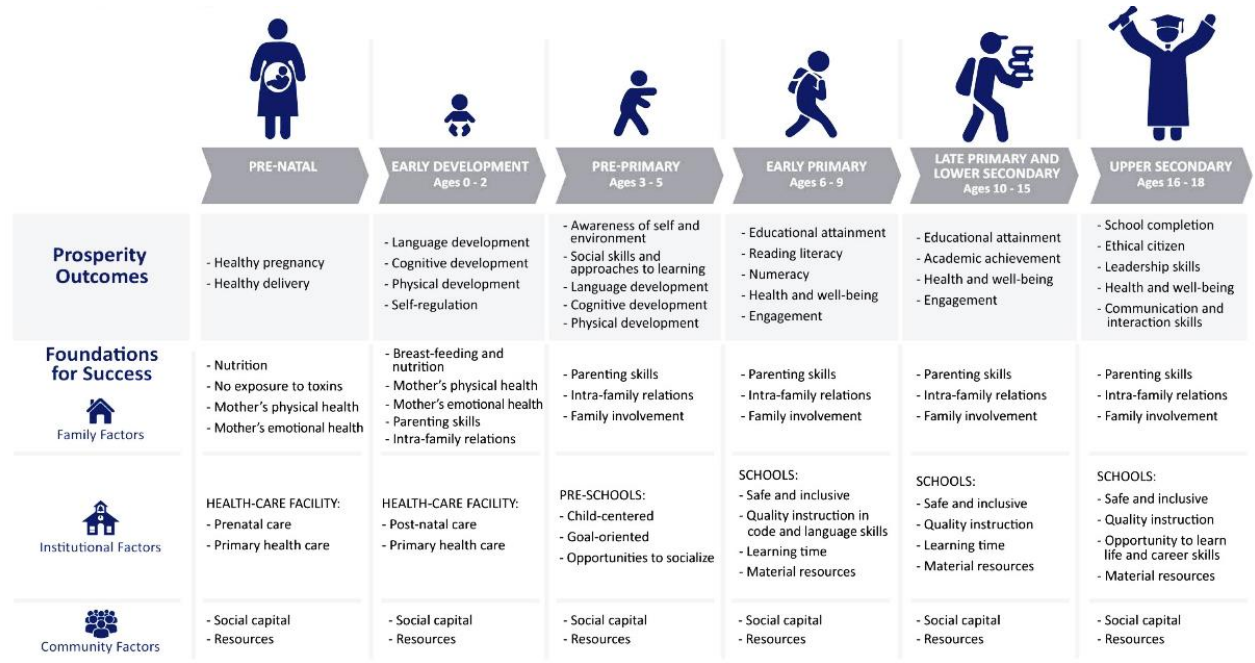
PISA-D employs the Education Prosperity model, created by J. Douglas Willms[45], as an overall analytical framework. This model identifies six initial stages of one's development from prenatal through adolescence stage. For each stage, there are expected outcomes known as 'Prosperity Outcomes' and a collection of familial, institutional, and communal elements known as 'Foundations for Success' that affect the targeted outcomes (Willms, 2019, p.10) – see Figure 5. The PISA-D targeted age of 15 falls into the fifth stage of the model. That is, PISA-D targets four outputs such as educational attainment, academic performance, health and well-being and attitudes towards school and learning. As shown in Figure 7, these outputs will be driven by five inputs such as inclusive environments, quality instruction,

[45] President of The Learning Bar Inc., one of the OECD's international contractors

learning time, material resources, and family and community support. The member countries' national report is structured in accordance with this model (MoEYS, 2018b).

I am going to present the Cambodia's PISA-D results by exploring the four outputs and the five inputs based on the two versions of the Cambodia's national reports. Firstly, regarding education attainment as the first output, the PISA-D results show that around 40% of Cambodian 15-year-olds were still in grades 7, 8, or 9 at the age of 15 and those in grades 7–12 account for 28.1% of the entire population of 15-year-olds at the time of testing – see Figure 4. That is, nearly 72% of Cambodian youths have either dropped out or postponed their education (MoEYS, 2018b, 2018a). The Cambodia's eligibility account is too low, compared to the OECD's average of 89% and the PISA-D's average of 42.6% (MoEYS, 2018a), to yield a meaningful representation of the Cambodia's result on this ILSA.

Figure 6: The six development stages and factors in the Educational Prosperity Model

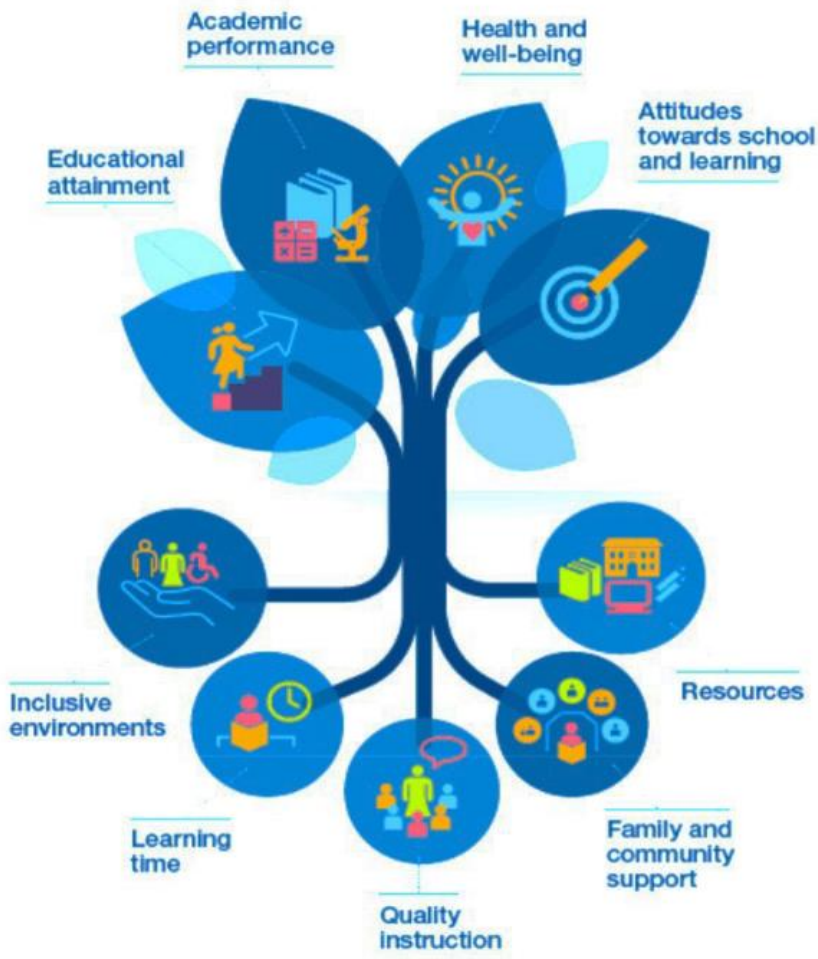


(Willms, 2019, p.10)

Secondly in respect to academic performance, the reports indicate that Cambodian 15-year-olds outscored those in Senegal and Zambia in the three domains and their score in mathematics was equivalent to that of other PISA-D nations; however, they performed much worse in reading and science than students from the other PISA-D member nations and ASEAN countries that are also PISA members, including Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, and

Singapore. Referring to Table 5, a score of 407 or above indicates that the students have a minimum proficiency level (level 2), which corresponds to the SDG4 targeted competency level. Students in PISA-D member countries scored 346 in reading and 349 in science on average while their peers in ASEAN countries scored 430 in reading and 447 in science and those in the OECD countries scored around 490 in the three domains. For Cambodia, there is more work to do as over 90% of its 15-year-olds failed to achieve the minimum proficiency level, compared to the member countries of PISA-D (72%), ASEAN (43%), and the OECD (21%) (MoEYS, 2018b, 2018a).

Figure 7: PISA-D analytical framework



(MoEYS, 2018b, p.3; 2018a, p.10)

Thirdly concerning health and well-being, 64% of Cambodian 15-year-olds said they were pleased with their lives and health. In terms of disability, around 10% of students said they were frequently unwell to the point where they couldn't play, work, or attend to school. Cambodia had the lowest self-rated health among 15-year-old students across all PISA-D

nations. This poor grade might reflect the fact that students in Cambodia may have had special health issues during their studies that were undisclosed to school (MoEYS, 2018a). For example, at least once a month, 34% of students said they were hungry because they didn't have enough food. Girls more often than boys, reported feeling sad or depressed at least once a week (MoEYS, 2018b, 2018a). 36% of Cambodian students said they were frequently worried when a teacher asks them a question, and 61% said a lot of things disturbed them. Similarly, 37% of students said they felt lonely at least once a week or more. Anxiety and depression impaired one-third of Cambodian 15-year-olds' well-being, particularly among girls (MoEYS, 2018a).

Fourthly related to the last output – attitudes towards school and learning, most Cambodian students reported favourable attitudes on school and what they had learnt. 97.5 percent of students say that working hard in school is essential, and 97.9% believe that education has taught them skills that they can apply in the workplace. Students in Cambodia hold similar favourable attitudes about the value of education and learning in developing their confidence in making decisions, having a decent career, getting into a reputable institution, and achieving good grades. Only 18% of Cambodia students had unfavourable views on average, which is close to the average among PISA-D nations. Zambia (32%) and Senegal (21%) revealed to have the highest kids with unfavourable attitudes about school and learning among PISA-D nations (MoEYS, 2018a).

The first input discussed in the two versions of the national report is ‘resources invested in education’ (MoEYS, 2018a, p.68; 2018b, p.8) – resources in Figure 7. Based on the PISA-D data, education receives 2.7% of GDP, accounting for 18.3% of government spending in Cambodia. 25% of students attend schools with more than 33 students per teacher. Compared to ‘advantaged schools’, ‘disadvantaged schools’ have fewer and less qualified teachers (MoEYS, 2018a, p.68). Teachers at rural, underprivileged, and public schools are often fewer and less qualified than those in urban, privileged, and private schools. School facilities in rural, poor, and public schools are often in worse shape than in urban, privileged, and private schools. In comparison to urban, advantaged, and private schools, rural, disadvantaged, and public schools have less teaching materials. There is a scarcity of professional development opportunities for teachers. Around 27% of teachers said they had completed post-secondary education. One-third of them had attended seminars or workshops on teaching methods while just 12% had visited other schools to learn about teaching and learning facilities (MoEYS,

2018a). Secondly, the reports discuss another input named as ‘(the) school and community environment(s)’ (MoEYS, 2018b, p.9, 2018a, p.89), which covers inclusive environments, learning time, quality instruction, and the wider learning environment that includes families and communities. These make up the other four inputs in Figure 6.

In respect to inclusive environments, 94% of the surveyed students believed they belonged in school while 11% reported feeling lonely. 96% reported feeling secure at school, but only 70% reported feeling safe on their trip home while over a third of girls said they felt dangerous while traveling to and from school. Theft and physical assault including sexual harassment were found to be the most common risks to students' safety at school. 63% attended schools where the principals approved that teachers were supposed to teach the curriculum to students who lacked basic reading and numeracy skills. 84% attended schools where the principals reported that teachers were able to teach classes with students of varying levels of abilities. However, one-third of them attended schools where principals stated that grade repetition was required for students, and 34% attended schools where repeated students were not ready for the next grade. Also, some school principals expressed views that ran counter to the goal of promoting inclusive education. 72% reported that their school principals believed that students with disabilities should be taught in special schools whereas 93.2% said their principals viewed that more special classes were needed for students who were falling behind. 36% attended schools that provided remedial programmes to aid students who were struggling with fundamental reading abilities (MoEYS, 2018a).

Pertaining to learning time, the overall planned teaching/learning time for students up to the age of 14 in Cambodia is 6,650 hours, with an average of 7,677 hours of primary and secondary education teaching across OECD nations. Even though Cambodia's total planned teaching/learning time is substantially less than that of other PISA-D nations, it is equivalent to that of top-performing PISA countries like Japan, Korea, Macao (China), and Singapore, indicating that quality learning time, not quantity, is a deciding factor. A lack of discipline in the classroom affects the quality and quantity of instruction, however only 12% of students in Cambodia say that they did not begin working for a long time after the session began. 7.5% reported missing school for more than three months in a row due to health issues either of their own or of family members and domestic chores. In general, 26% reported their class(es) being cancelled. In the two weeks leading up to the PISA-D test, 59% said their class(es) were also cancelled and 50% had been late for school at least once whereas 61% attended

schools where more than one fifth of them reported that a teacher did not show up for class. Students who lived more than 30 minutes away from school were 1.2 times more likely to be late for class and about 12% of Cambodian students were in this predicament. Skipping a full day of school was more prevalent in disadvantaged and rural schools whereas students at advantaged and urban schools were more likely to skip classes. Students in public schools were more likely to skip an entire day of school and certain subjects than students in private schools (MoEYS, 2018a).

As for quality instruction, the most prevalent disciplinary issue in Cambodian classrooms is noise and chaos. While just around a quarter of students identified this problem, the lack of a disciplinary atmosphere suggests inadequate classroom management and school administration in general. In every or most classes, 17% reported about noise and disorder; consequently, the teacher had to wait until it quieted down while 13% reported that they could not focus properly. 82% said their teacher explained the lesson's goal at the start while 83% said the teacher went over what they had learned in prior sessions. 90 % said their teacher gave examples of excellent work and demonstrated how to solve math problems during class. 86% and 83% of students said their teacher routinely discussed math concepts in class and interacted with students about their work. 77 % said the teacher summarised what they had done at the end of the class while 80% said the teacher even assigned homework to help them practise further. 97% said their teachers encouraged them to perform their best work and they expected them to complete their homework on time. 95% said they got along well with most of their teachers, 87% said their teachers are concerned about their well-being, and 85% said they could obtain extra support if they needed it (MoEYS, 2018a).

Finally concerning the wider learning environment that involves familial and communal support, 56% said that their parents or other family members spent time having the main meal with them and 37% indicated that their parents found time to converse with them several times a week. Only 43% talked to their parents about how well they were performing in school on a frequent basis while 81% said their parents routinely encouraged them to earn good grades and 73% said their parents talked to them about their future education. 71% of school principals reported the contribution of parents and community in maintaining school grounds and fences. About half of them reported community participation in maintaining school facilities such as classroom, school construction and repairing furniture and equipment. The community’s involvement in organising sport activities or school trips

appeared to be less common. Integrating parents and the community in school and learning activities is difficult in Cambodia, particularly in rural regions where the general populace is still unskilled or domestic workers (MoEYS, 2018a).

4.2.5. PISA-D policy recommendations

This section explores the policy recommendations made specific for Cambodia based on its performance on the PISA-D test. The recommendations are set out in the Cambodia's national reports. I contend that the recommendations offered are not new to the Cambodian Minister and that they are made so general and superficial in nature that they fail to specify how to achieve each point of recommendations in the Cambodian context.

In the national reports' foreword section signed off by the Cambodian Minister, the MoEYS expresses its willingness – or rather a solemn promise of conformity– to take actions for successful interventions in accordance with the PISA-D's findings, messages, and policy recommendations. The actions and interventions to be taken, hence, respond to the logics of the inputs/outputs proposed in the Education Prosperity Model (MoEYS, 2018b, 2018a). The PISA-D results suggest that by implementing the following five actions and interventions, Cambodia would be able to achieve PISA proficiency level 2, which is the baseline competency level and SDG4 target (MoEYS, 2018b). As argued in the previous chapter, such equalisation and quantification might indicate that those developing nations are focusing on PISA level 2 performance rather than the larger aim of SDG4.

Firstly, Cambodian education system must tackle grade repetition as both PISA-D and the national assessments in grades 3, 6 and 8 find that grade repetition is linked to low academic performance. It is explained that grade repetition is not only ineffective, but it may also be damaging to students' learning. It represents the fact that students are falling behind or are underprepared academically for the following grade. PISA 2015 data suggests that grade repeaters are more likely to have unfavourable attitudes and behaviours towards school and to drop out, and that any short-term benefits of grade repetition tend to fade with time. Grade repetition is costly since it causes students to spend an additional year of education and delays their entry into the labour market and it serves to exacerbate educational inequalities. Grade repetition often leads to a rise in class size, which has an unfavourable influence on the quality of teaching and learning. Economically wise, grade repetition has a detrimental impact on the internal efficiency of the utilisation of educational resources from an economic

standpoint. Annual global GDP would grow by 0.37% if resources spent on repeating a grade were instead invested on enrolling new students in school without decreasing the quality of education.

Secondly, Cambodia must provide quality learning time by strengthening school discipline on attendance, making learning a serious objective, reenforcing in-class assessments and expanding learning chances at school and at home. For school discipline, it is crucial that Cambodia develop a solid school management system that allows school principals and teachers to keep a closer eye on student attendance. In respect to how learning is perceived, previous PISA findings have repeatedly demonstrated that making learning a serious objective in school may substitute for passive teaching methodologies and learners' social disadvantages. In-class assessments are important not just for tracking progress but also for determining 'what and how students learn' (MoEYS, 2018a, p.138) to improve their proficiency level. An alternate method is to increase the number of learning tasks and align them with the PISA-D competency skills.

Thirdly, Cambodian school standards must be raised through transforming the classroom into a learning environment, offering decision making power to individual schools and allowing schools to learn from other schools. Cambodia can promote school environment via its Child Friendly Schools (hereafter CFS) and New Generation School (hereafter NGS) initiatives that are intended to boost teaching environment, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education and self-directed learning. Despite their differences in methodology, these two models share the goal of developing a school standard for 21st-century teaching and learning. To get schools independent, a strong accountability structure is required. The present SEIP's Leadership Upgrading Program (LUP) to promote School-Based Management (SBM) is a necessary measure to help school principals create management and self-assessment systems. However, at the subnational level, a robust monitoring and mentoring structure is required. Schools can learn from other schools as it is argued that when successful practises are distributed, disparities in school academic profiles can be minimised. The SBM, in this case, can add value to schools by establishing capability and assuring on-time implementation through mentoring assistance from 30 national core trainers and technical advisers.

Fourthly, Cambodia needs more effort in basic education to improve universal basic skills. To do this, it is necessary to invest in literacy and numeracy development by increasing teaching hours and extending school days to create more learning opportunities for low graders. While the current Cambodian Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematic Assessment (EGMA) can serve as starting points, they must be implemented in the entire system with clear and committed goals that must be benchmarked. The ministry also must concentrate on implementing a concept- or competency-based teaching and learning mode into the textbook, as well as connecting it with in-classroom assessments. This mode will certainly better prepare Cambodian students for 2023 PISA.

Lastly, Cambodia needs to develop the competency-based curriculum in teacher education to increase the quality of instruction which is to stress on the development of students' knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. From PISA data, competent teachers can mitigate the consequences of school's deficits and investing in them has substantial impact on student achievement in top-performing nations. Although Cambodian teachers are required to have at least a bachelor's degree to teach at the K-12 level, more work is required to meet the needs for qualified teachers. While the 2015 Teacher Policy Action Plan establishes a series of targets to improve teacher education and sets out what to include for teacher training, only few institutes now provide such level of training, resulting in a supply-demand disparity. Furthermore, teacher education and training should be aligned with what it takes to teach universal basic skills rather than knowledge in contents and pedagogies (MoEYS, 2018a).

4.2.6. Cambodia's policy response to PISA-D results and 2023 PISA benefits

This section follows the commitment – or rather the solemn promise made in the earlier section – of the Cambodian Minister to respond to the PISA-D results. I contend that it seems obvious that the Minister takes actions and interventions based on the PISA-D's findings, messages, and recommendations – willingness to conform to structural isomorphism and ultimately policy convergence.

On the same day when Cambodia's PISA-D results were officially announced, the Education Minister conducted a presentation on education reform as policy response to the PISA-D results. The response has three areas of priorities: mid-level education policy reform, teacher education reform and school reform. The first area covers the construction of referral

textbooks, promoting teacher and school principal standards and preparation of national trainers to enrich teaching methods. The second area explores teacher qualification, teaching methods in a new context, teaching skills and soft skills. The third area delves into school management, teaching test methods at target schools, New Generation School operation and teaching and learning materials (Hang, 2018).

To achieve the first area of priority, the Minister proposed four strategies and ten actions and interventions. Strategy one rearranges the education financial management by strengthening accountability and financial autonomy, auditing education budget, and linking the budge to education policy making. Strategy two restructures the general management and administration by ensuring the involvement of community in school management, implementing SBM projects, and targeting the ESPs towards achieving the SDG goals. Strategy three provokes education reform by assessing student's achievement on a regular basis, improving teaching methods and distributing improved textbooks. Strategy four reshuffles personnel management by training teachers especially on enriching their teaching methods, enhancing teacher's qualification and conducting teacher's performance appraisal.

The ten actions and interventions included (1) more investment in increasing student's universal basic skills; (2) implementation of a new curriculum from kindergarten to secondary education, with a focus on project-based learning, STEM subjects, the use of information technology and experimental equipment in teaching science in the secondary education; (3) tackling late enrolment issues through the expansion of early childhood education programs and services, the enrolment campaign in all primary schools and the implementation of SBM operated under a school board to increase the participation of communities and local authorities; (4) reducing dropout rate through the provision of extra assistance from parents and communities to help raise the low-achieving students' learning while strengthening the teaching quality at all levels especially in the New Generation Schools and Child-Friendly Schools, student counselling service and assistant teacher to help those low-achieving students, school scholarship to poor students, building more schools to be close to students and reduction of chance to migrate; (5) reducing repetition rate through the provision of extra exercises assisted by peers and teacher to students with low learning abilities and disabilities and improved schools' standard and discipline to ensure the quality of school hours; (6) promoting reading abilities through the production of additional reading materials, arrangements to train teachers on new contextual teaching methods and expansion

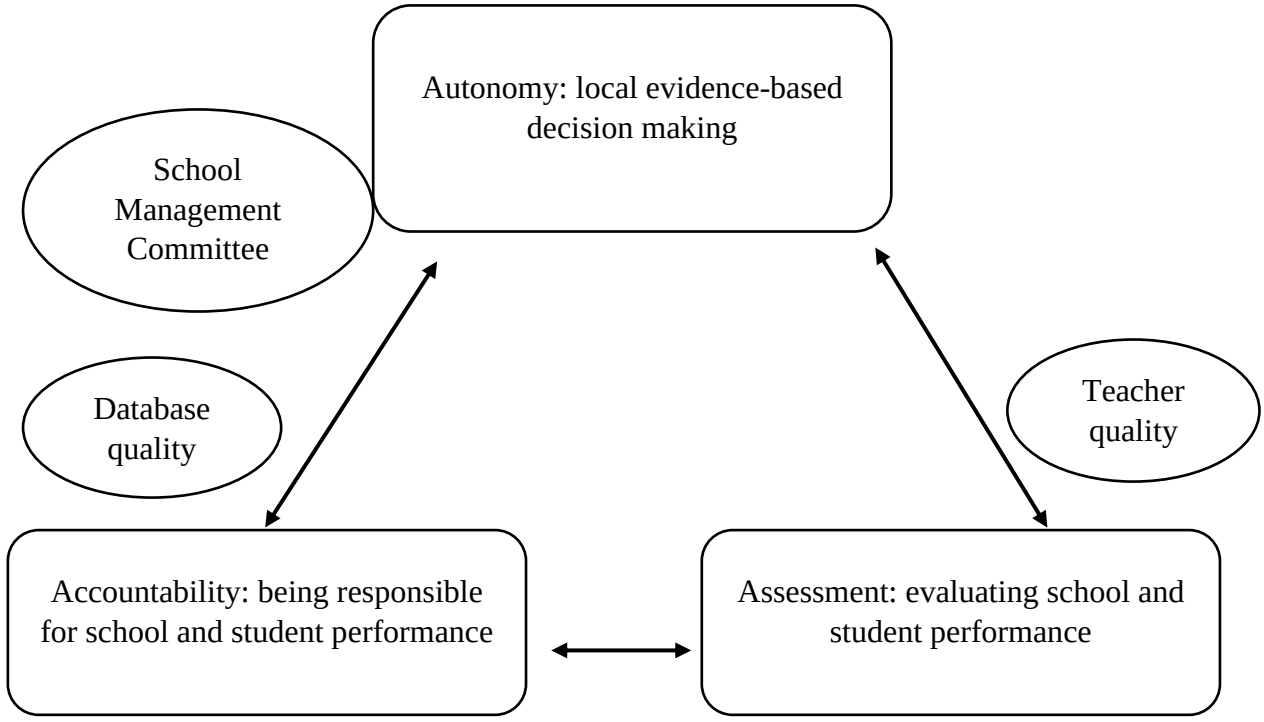
of reading space and means to encourage reading more widely and effectively; (7) promoting science teaching abilities through the provision of teacher trainings to enable them to teach up-to-date science textbooks, with an emphasis on STEM teaching methods that encourage concept-based, inquiry-based and inductive learning approaches; (8) promoting mathematics teaching abilities through the development of teaching methods in line with the evolution of science, provision of teacher trainings to enable them to teach up-to-date mathematics textbooks, with an emphasis on STEM teaching methods that encourage concept-based, inquiry-based and inductive learning approaches; (9) reducing the student achievement gap between urban and rural areas through the allocation of resources, budget and priorities to rural schools, redeployment of teachers and implementation of SBM in those rural schools; and (10) reducing the student achievement gap between public and private schools through the implementation of SBM, requirement of full-time education for schools of priorities, improved school's standard and discipline and regular student assessments.

To achieve the second area of priority, the Minister recommended maximising teacher training for those teachers in charge of kindergarten through secondary education. For the kindergarten level, it is crucial to increase the number of trainings of kindergarten teachers and support the training of kindergarten teachers in the community. For the primary education level, there is a need to review and evaluate teacher training programs. It is important that teacher's trainings integrate teaching methods for first reading, first maths, reading methods in both classroom and in library. At the secondary education level, teacher training programs should integrate various teaching methods such as critical thinking, active learning, project-based learning, brain-based Learning. Also, they should be trained to exploit the use of information technology in learning and teaching, experimental equipment in teaching science and strengthen STEM teaching.

To achieve the third area of priority, the Minister feels the need to strengthen the implementation of SBM by '3As closed loop system' (Hang, 2018, p.25) – see Figure 8 and create a culture of using test results to help students learn – see Figure 9. According to him, SBM assists Cambodian schools in two main respects: enhancing school standards and promoting teaching quality. For school standards, it is important to monitor the performance of schools that have problems or are in poor conditions, to facilitate the allocation of resources such as the deployment of teachers and budget allocation and to help schools self-assess and learn from other schools within their network. Strengthen teaching quality can be

done by strengthening teacher qualifications and implementing teacher training programs based on ‘concept- and competency-based curriculum’(Hang, 2018, p.26) in teacher education and the implementation of teaching methods. Inductive teaching to motivate students to learn on their own and to think critically. Teacher’s quality is a key factor that can motivate students in Cambodia to have high ability, knowledge, skills and attitudes that can meet the needs of the national, regional, and international labour market.

Figure 8: 3As Closed Loop System



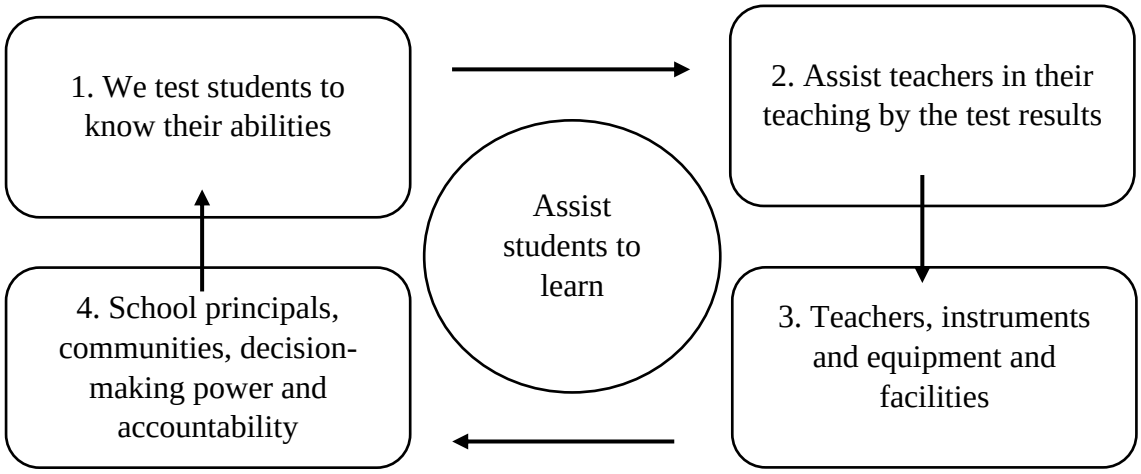
(Hang, 2018, p.25)

Despite their low performance, the PISA-D member countries might not have experienced PISA shock as their performance may have been ‘anticipated’ (MoEYS, 2018a, p.130). PISA shock has been seen to provoke negative reactions in some countries where PISA results have been overlooked and not to be analysed for local use (Bloem, 2013). For example, in the case of disappointing PISA performance, the Indian government ignored the result and used language unfamiliarity and relevancy issues as the withdrawal rationality (The Tribune, 2016) instead of confronting the OECD or even seeking the OECD’s explanation for its educational improvement. In the case of PISA-D performance, the Bhutan’s national report rejects the interpretation of the results over its population as the sample ‘was not designed’ to represent the country (BESEA, 2019, p.3). This incident could be a consequence of this country’s failure to conduct the pilot test. This Kingdom, registered late in 2017, was reported to have

higher average of correct answers than all PISA-D countries in the three domains but decided not to participate in the 2023 PISA test cycle (Delma, 2019). These two cases confirm an increasingly popular rationale of non-participation that says inferior performance leads to a withdrawal (Addey, 2015).

According to the PISA 2023 list of participating countries, only four of the nine developing countries will be joining the 2023 PISA test cycle. These four countries are Cambodia, Guatemala, Panama, and Paraguay (OECD, n.d.-g). The withdrawal of the five developing countries may have a few stories to explore but certainly their inferior performance on PISA-D predicts another poor or even worse performance on the main PISA, considering PISA is a more difficult test. Cambodia as one of the lowest performers is going to participate the 2023 PISA test cycle. Care et al. (2020) explain that Cambodia participates in PISA to attain comparative data from 2018 to 2023 that will reflect the impact of the current education programmes (Care, Ung, Sar, & Khou, 2020). As officially explained in its national report, Cambodia requires innovation in its education system, but it may welcome PISA-D data only if it aligns with the two existing pilot programmes, NGSs and STEM, at class and school levels (MoEYS, 2018). As reported by Care et al (2020), the Education Minister responded to the PISA-D results by saying, *'I don't care what the results are; I just want to know what they are so that we know what to do about it.'*

Figure 9: Creating a culture of helping students through tests



(Hang, 2018, p.27)

In 2018, the Minister wrote a book called '*Education Reform in Cambodia Towards a Knowledge-Based Society and Shared Prosperity'.* In his book, he praised 'PISA also brings

about a culture of transparency, sharing and determination.' (Hang, 2018, p.337). Hence, he encourages using results from standardised national assessment or PISA to evaluate Cambodian students' academic performance. He mentions PISA because he trusts that PISA is critical for precisely identifying Cambodian students' skills in comparison to an international standard and that such competency comparisons will help Cambodia's education system to establish its 'self- dependence' (Hang, 2018, p.421) ahead of neighbouring nations. Also, PISA data will serve as the foundation for effective reform in higher education (Hang, 2018). During his presentation in London on September 25, 2019, the Cambodian PISA-D NPM showed his optimism towards the PISA programme and stated that the PISA-D program has offered Cambodia with 'confidence' to join the upcoming 2023 PISA test and that the Cambodia's Ministry of Economy and Finance will have reserved the budget for the purpose (Chinna, 2019, p.9).

FN Media, a leading online media outlet and pro-government in nature, is the only media platform that reported the PISA-D results. In the article, FN Media expresses Cambodia's willingness to join the upcoming 2023 PISA test. The article reveals five participation benefits when Cambodia sits the main PISA test. Those five benefits include placing Cambodia in the global education framework by equipping this country with an internationally-recognised student assessment system, assisting Cambodia to identify crucial factors in human resource development in line with the Royal Government's Rectangular Strategy Phase 4 and its 2030 and 2050 visions, capacitating Cambodia to strengthen its national student assessment system, filling the deficits in Cambodian school curriculum, teaching methods and student evaluations, and offering Cambodia varied experiences in effective school management so that Cambodian students are expected to achieve better academic outcomes while also responding to the changing requirements of the regional and global market economy – the KBE discourse (FN Media, 2018).

4.3. UNESCO, OECD and World Bank

In this section, I will explore the influence of three key IOs on education policy making in Cambodia: UNESCO, the World Bank and the OECD. In the early 1990s, UNESCO played a pivotal role in promoting initiatives like EFA, striving to enhance access to education across the country. However, by the late 1990s, the World Bank began to take precedence, shifting the focus from EFA to the KBE discourse, heavily influenced by the OECD's PISA

programme. This transition marked a move away from UNESCO's inclusive ideals toward a more economically driven agenda.

Initially, both the OECD and the World Bank paid little attention to education. The OECD focused primarily on economic cooperation until the 1950s, and its Education Division was only established in 2000. This shift reflected a concern for education's economic and social roles, emphasising market-oriented outcomes. Similarly, the World Bank, initially uninvolved in education, began engaging through loans and grants tied to economic interests and political conditions. This approach exemplifies how external agendas can overshadow local educational needs, often marginalising UNESCO's broader goals of inclusivity and human rights in favour of a narrow economic framework (X. Liu, 2022).

The OECD and the World Bank approach global governance in similar ways, particularly in terms of education and economic development. Both IOs are committed to improving educational achievements as a method of boosting economic growth and decreasing poverty. They prioritise data-driven approaches and evidence-based practices, and they frequently use metrics and assessments to analyse the performance of schools. Their mutual commitment in human capital development establishes education as a crucial factor in achieving economic stability and competitiveness in a globalised world (Francesco & Guaschino, 2020).

In this context, UNESCO plays a distinctive yet complementary role. While the OECD and the World Bank often prioritise economic and efficiency metrics, UNESCO emphasises the broader humanistic and cultural dimensions of education. UNESCO advocates for education as a fundamental human right, focusing on inclusivity and equity. This perspective encourages a more holistic understanding of educational success, which can sometimes contrast with the more utilitarian approaches of the OECD and the World Bank. However, UNESCO's ideals can also be overshadowed by the dominant narratives pushed by these IOs, particularly when funding and policy directives are influenced by economic imperatives (Elfert & Ydesen, 2023; X. Liu, 2022).

Despite these commonalities, the influence of the OECD and the World Bank can have negative impacts on local policy making processes. Their data-driven priorities and standardised assessments can pressure local governments to conform to externally defined success metrics, which may not reflect the unique needs and contexts of their educational

systems. This often results in a narrow focus on quantifiable outcomes, sidelining important qualitative aspects of education, such as creativity, critical thinking, and social cohesion (X. Liu, 2022). The emphasis on standardised metrics and economic returns by the OECD and the World Bank can negatively impact local policy making processes. When countries feel pressured to conform to external benchmarks, they may prioritise short-term gains over long-term educational goals. This can lead to the implementation of policies that favour measurable outcomes, such as increased test scores, at the expense of fostering critical thinking, creativity, and social-emotional learning. Additionally, the conditionality associated with financial support from the World Bank can limit local governments' ability to tailor educational reforms to their unique contexts (Elfert & Ydesen, 2023). As a result, local actors may find their voices marginalised, leading to policies that do not adequately address community needs or cultural values. This dynamic can exacerbate inequalities and hinder efforts to create inclusive and contextually relevant educational systems.

4.4. Returning to the Research Questions

I would like to conclude what I have learnt from these secondary sources in response to my four research questions. This will in turn inform the questions I have to raise with my interviewees to draw a more complete picture of PISA-D enactment in Cambodia.

Regarding the first research question: *What do Cambodian actors understand about why PISA-D was introduced to Cambodia and why the OECD developed PISA-D?*, on the face of it, the PISA-D programme seems to have been introduced to Cambodia because Cambodia was having reliability issues with its national standardised examinations and expected PISA-D to offer more accurate data for education policy making; the country desired to assess its education system globally; and it is not clear whether Cambodia’s PISA-D participation was a donor-driven or own demand-driven decision. Also, the OECD developed PISA-D in order to measure the 15-year-olds' ability in mathematics, reading, and science and to gather information on the characteristics of students, families, teachers, schools, and communities for assessing the effectiveness of the overall educational system; encourage the use of PISA in developing nations for monitoring progress towards national and post-2015 development goals by building the local capacity in investigating the relevant factors that affect student learning results; and improve the precision and applicability of the PISA instruments for low-performing OECD countries. However, non-Cambodian academics have proved that the

PISA-D programme went past the local government, the principal education financing body and the Cambodian Minister's national assessment activities. Hence, in relation to the first research question, I would like to ask further questions of interviewees as below:

1.1. How did PISA-D arrive in Cambodia? What or who made the programme happen?
1.2. Why do you think Cambodia decided to get involved in PISA-D? What were the reasons of the Cambodian government to introduce PISA-D? What are the pros and cons of Cambodia's participation in PISA-D and PISA?
1.3. Is Cambodia's PISA-D participation a criterion of aid provision for the local educational needs? Why or why not?
1.4. How can PISA-D supplement the local assessment? How does PISA-D complement in monitoring Cambodian education? How does PISA-D assist in monitoring, evaluating and reforming education policy in Cambodia?
1.5. Why did the education Minister reject PISA-D in the first place? Couldn't Cambodia have rejected the PISA-D enactment? Why or why not?

Turning to the second research question: *What PISA-D is able and not able to measure in the Cambodian context and what do Cambodian actors see as possible alternatives to policy represented by PISA-D?,* due to the above-mentioned challenges the developing countries face in drawing benefits and values from PISA-D, it has been argued as unnecessary for developing nations to take part in PISA-D, especially those that are implementing regional assessments. I have learnt from Camilla Addey's studies that non-participation happens when a country does not aim to compare its education system with others from a political standpoint. In an economic sense, because ILSA participation is resource intensive, a country may prefer to invest on its own assessment. In technical respect, a nation withdraws from ILSA membership due to poor institutional capacity. Some ILSA aspects are not acceptable or relevant to a country's culture and context. However, participation in ILSA can be obligated by a country's economic condition and IOs membership. As Cambodia has become a PISA-D member, its test design should ensure that the relevancy of the test items and the translation of those items in the Cambodian context should be achieved in a way that allows Cambodian students with vast performance differences to have intended understanding towards the questions raised in the test. I ask further questions as below to my interviewees to seek their understanding of what PISA-D can offer to Cambodia and their proposed alternatives to PISA-D policy values.

2.1. Does PISA-D introduce a meaningful assessment? Why or why not? Could you offer your analysis on what PISA-D can and cannot measure?
2.2. How relevant are the PISA-D tests to the local context of Cambodia? (If not, how then can local knowledge be preserved and valued?) How does PISA-D accurately measure Cambodian students' abilities? How effectively are PISA-D test items translated into Khmer?
2.3. How does PISA-D help local policy makers in crafting their policies?
2.4. How do you use PISA-D results as opposed to the national examination results?
2.5. Are there any better or alternatives? Why or why not?

In relation to the third research question: *How do Cambodian actors perceive the OECD's policy directives and procedures and the PISA-D policies being enacted in Cambodia?,* I have learnt that channelling its policy directives and procedures to impact on the local knowledge production in the global south nations through the PISA-D programme, the OECD may use the liberal capitalist development model to persuade these countries to redirect their education systems solely towards economic purposes under the guise of modernisation. Such economic purposes tend to enforce marketisation, decentralisation and performativity which require schools and teachers to operate under the regimes of transparency and accountability. As I have been arguing all along, when employed in the 'heterarchical governance' (Lewis et al., 2016), the OECD's policy directives may constitute the perpetuation of coloniality, allowing the OECD to extend such exercise of power through the PISA-D programme. I have also come to realise that developing nations such as Cambodia are likely to face challenges in drawing an accurate and comprehensive picture of their schools and students due to their limited institutional and technological resources and capabilities. They lack the political will, financial resources, and analytical strength to analyse the PISA-D results for the benefit of national policy; and PISA-D's target population also has varying coverage and low enrolment and participation rates, which affects the comparability of equity statistics. As a result, the claimed degree of representation and validity lacks credibility in both local and international contexts.

As PISA-D is meant to prepare the developing countries for their participation in the main PISA, the low performance of developing nations on PISA-D would have a negative impact on PISA data dependability and policy relevance. Technically, test reliability decreases, particularly when the bulk of test takers fall around the bottom of a performance distribution.

Because of its competency-based structure adopted from PISA, PISA-D gives minimal information about system elements such as teacher qualities, pedagogy, and curriculum. As a result, analysts cannot explore how a range of factors impact student achievement in the absence of these system elements, a limitation which puts into question whether PISA-D can bring value to education policy and planning. PISA's assessment is complicated by the diversity of language and cultural backgrounds, as well as the heterogeneity of student performance. PISA-D as its offshoot is likely to encounter similar issues. However, through the PISA-D programme, the Cambodian Minister has made two major changes in the education system. First, Hang claims that Cambodian education must be reformed to accelerate the country's economic growth. This education-economic growth association is based on the OECD and World Bank's HCT. Second, Hang transforms the focus of education from input-based to outcome-based, as witnessed in the ESP 2014-2018 – the first ESP written under his leadership. Reform of national and in-class assessments for PISA participation is one of the priorities proposed by this ESP. As the transition presents a substantial issue in terms of the political economy of education service provision and the need for foreign finance, I would like to seek further insights from locals on the following questions:

3.1. What do you think about the OECD's approach in relation to education in Cambodia? What do you think of the OECD's policy process? What is the OECD's aim in the process?
3.2. After PISA-D arrived, what happened to the MoEYS, policy makers, schoolteachers, and students?
3.3. How does involvement in PISA-D affect the education policy making in Cambodia? Does PISA-D impose reforms in Cambodian education system? Why or why not? 'PISA brings about a culture of transparency, sharing and determination.' (Hang, 2018, p.337). What do you think about this idea?
3.4. How is privacy maintained in PISA-D data collection, dissemination and reporting? What do you think about the privacy of PISA-D data in relations to schools, teachers and students?
3.5. As policy makers, are you looking at experiences in other countries? What have you learnt from them? Have there been any partnerships developed for these purposes?

For the last research question: *In colonial sense, is Cambodian education subjected to the OECD's policy directives?* I have come to realise that education under the OECD's

governance may be constrained to a very narrow framework that does not sufficiently represent the diversity contained in diverse educational contexts. Making data infrastructure more freely available, the OECD tends to become a dominant paradigm that rejects the existing others. In this sense, the OECD's global education governance may result in a new type of colonialism that could be related to 'global coloniality' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p.181). PISA-D may lead to the OECD being a dominant paradigm because it is a component of establishing such data infrastructure. Such dominance may well be achieved through the OECD's power mechanisms and through 'heterarchical governance' (Lewis et al., 2016), which my thesis argues may have a colonial aspect for the OECD to impose over aid-dependent countries. To guarantee data comparability between the original PISA members and the PISA-D members, the test design must be clear. In the design, the issues of emphasis between standardisation and contextualisation arise. For instance, to achieve the PISA standard, Zambia's settings have been recontextualised. Because Cambodia's settings are like Zambia's, I am concerned that Cambodia may have also been recontextualised through the OECD's policy directives as much as Zambia. With this in mind, I am going to raise the following questions with my interviewees:

4.1. What do you think about the OECD and its general role in international education policy? Is Cambodian education subjected to the OECD's directives? If the direction is wrong, how do you hold the OECD accountable?
4.2. Which IO or donor is the most influential in Cambodia's education policy making? Why do you think the World Bank and UNESCO helped the OECD to get Cambodia into the PISA-D programme? Who do you think leads the PISA-D enactment in Cambodia?
4.3. How is multilateral aid related to policy making? In any stage of your policy making, have you consulted with the OECD? If positive, how much freedom is there to negotiate the dos and don'ts in local education policy making?
4.4. How does the OECD deal with the local issues (i.e., cultural and contextual irrelevances) that are hard to standardise? How do you negotiate testing items with the international contractors? How do you communicate information from the NPM meetings and trainings to your colleagues and others in Cambodia? How do the PISA-D tests affect curriculum, teaching approaches and other assessments? How do you negotiate testing items with EQAD, the PISA-D national centre?
4.5. How does PISA-D build capacity for LSAs? Do you think the PISA-D programme promotes accountability in Cambodia's education? If not, why not? If yes, what/who is made

accountable? What do you think is the OECD's interest in the PISA-D enactment in Cambodia? What is it aiming to achieve ultimately?

CHAPTER 5
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes how the research with relevant individuals and organisations was conducted for this study. There are two main sections: 5.1 data collection and 5.2 analytical approaches. The empirical research also builds on the analysis represented in previous chapters which was based on academic, policy and media publications. The empirical research started where secondary sources ended and there was the need for interviews with research participants to learn more.

According to Braun & Clarke (2006), qualitative research requires a series of connected research questions that are under the umbrella of one overarching objective that acts as a project driver. In other words, while qualitative studies use research questions as a guide and questions can be improvised during the research, the answers to those questions arising would also inform the overarching research question (V. Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this study, the overarching objective, as discussed in previous chapters, is to analyse how and why Cambodia chose to become involved in PISA-D and what have been the local impacts. This overarching objective serves as a guide for my research to investigate the effectiveness of the PISA-D programme and its policy impacts in Cambodia. It maintains the research focus on the local context where education policy could be affected by the outcome of such a large-scale assessment. To achieve this overarching objective, I seek to answer various questions stemming from the four main research questions, presented in the previous chapter, by interviewing the most relevant individuals – mostly local. The four broad research questions allowed me to think of questions for the interview stage.

I held a total of ten interviews between February and June 2022. I had to conduct the semi-structured interviews on Zoom due to the COVID-19 border restrictions between New Zealand and Cambodia. The interviews were conducted in Khmer, except for those with representatives from the OECD and UNESCO. The interviews varied widely in length, depending on the information and insight provided by the interviewees. All interviews were then transcribed, and a few interviews were chosen for focused transcription for further analysis. Focused transcription is an approach in which researchers try to understand 'not what was meant by what was said, but *how* (as original) it was said' (Gibson, 2010, p.298). In this exercise, researchers may not try to understand '*every* (as original) nuance and feature of

speech' (Gibson, 2010, p.299). Instead, they can choose discourses that are relevant to their research objectives (Gibson, 2010; Hammersley, 2012). Regarding who should do the transcription, Hammersley (2012) suggests hiring a trained transcriber to produce a first draft with the researcher double checking the transcriptions. In my case, I hired a few students who had experience to produce a first draft transcription of Khmer-speaking interviews. With the draft of each interview, I listened to the interview repeatedly to make changes necessary in the transcriptions. I did the translation from those Khmer-speaking interviews to English myself. For English-speaking interviews, I did the transcription myself.

For my analyses, I employ some elements of the TA by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (V. Braun & Clarke, 2006) which has clearly identified phases and steps that are handy for any researchers regardless of experience or discipline; and the CDA by Norman Fairclough (Fairclough, 1995) because it focuses on power asymmetry. That is, the CDA allows me to analyse the power relation between the OECD and Cambodia using the PISA-D programme as a case study.

5.1. Data collection

This section presents the methods of data collection. For this research, I employ some elements of document analysis and conduct semi-structured interviews to collect the concerned actors' perspectives towards the subject matter. Using those elements of document analysis as the secondary data and semi-structured interviews as primary data collection means, this sociological study is intended to collect data in forms of perspectives, understanding, and policy options the identified participants have in respect to the PISA-D enactment and the possibility of the OECD using it to continue the articulation of the 'coloniality of power' (Quijano, 2000, p.533) as opposed to the independence of Cambodian education system.

5.1.1. Document analysis

This sub-section presents document analysis as the first approach used in this study. It enabled me to do an in-depth analysis on the documents I find most relevant to the PISA-D enactment.

This research is a qualitative study that allows the knowledge acquisition of the subject matter through texts (Schutt & Chambliss, 2012) by performing text or document analysis. Document analysis is chosen to be the first method of this study as it allows me to conduct an extensive analysis on texts or documents, which are the most common form of qualitative data in social science (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2014). Bowen (2009) suggests that document analysis can serve a wide range of research purposes and that it is a flexible method that could be employed either by itself or with another method. Document analysis is a rigorous and systematic procedure to analyse, review or evaluate various forms of written materials such as printed and electronic documents. During this analysis, I extensively documents around the PISA-D programme and its publications, especially those about Cambodia.

The study forms its base through a variety of documents such as Cambodian ESPs, the OECD's CNA for Cambodia, journal articles, reports and descriptive statistics that are available for public, academic and future research use. These secondary sources also include 'book chapters, research articles, dissertations, literature reviews, and webpages' to name a few (Gross, 2018, p.546). These sources from concerned institutions, well-known authors and academics have informed me well about the development of PISA and the controversies in the use of it as indication of local educational system quality in the member countries. The sources collectively project various concerns over the PISA offshoot – PISA-D. Chiefly, those concerns revolve around the probability that PISA-D will face the PISA controversies in respects to issues of externalisation, standardisation, neoliberal reform imposition and the OECD's global education governance that could be linked to 'global coloniality' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p.181).

I use two computer-assisted methods in my text analysis (Wutich et al., 2015) or document analysis (Guest et al., 2014): word-based and the key-word-in-context (KWIC) searches. Word-based search ensures efficiency and reliability, especially when working on a large number of 'text files and tally key words' (Guest et al., 2014, p.10). Key words will be identified when I consider three factors: words/phrases repetition, comparison, or configuration of words with other the words in the text, and their synonyms and locations in the text (Guest et al., 2014). This word-based technique allows a researcher to understand how the authors 'think and feel' by counting the words they use but it is tedious work if performed manually (Wutich et al., 2015, p.512). The other computer-assisted method is

KWIC, which has been known for centuries for its production of 'concordances of literary works' (Wutich et al., 2015, p.512). By means of KWIC that also brings along with sentence- or paragraph- contexts, a researcher can reveal hidden cultural assumptions (Wutich et al., 2015).

Guest et al., (2014) conclude that just by using the word search technique, a researcher can discover themes in texts. However, the technique is meant to complement other analyses – I will discuss them in the next section. In addition, so few distinctions have been found between rigorous paper-based analyses and those performed with computer-assisted programs (Wutich et al., 2015). According to Gibson (2010), computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) is a highly valuable tool that is developed to help with data analysis, such as TA. There are three main benefits of using CAQDAS such as NVivo in the analysis. It ensures clear record keeping, allows 'micro-level decisions', and saves energy and time (Wutich et al., 2015, p.511). Wutich et al. (2015) refer the micro-level decisions to those that may relate to how codebooks should be built, why combination or separation of two themes must be done, and how the researcher's 'understanding' of a certain model comes into picture during analysis. However, Gibson (2010) warns researchers of two main concerns. One, those CAQDAS software programs are just a tool to promote researchers' effectiveness in their data organisation and only researchers can analyse the data collected. The other, not all CAQDAS programs are relevant to all analytic framework and analytic strategy and context matter.

Otherwise, skimming, reading, and interpreting become the three key activities to conduct document analysis and researchers are highly recommended to set criteria for choosing documents for their analysis. Some criteria should be related to the objective, context in which the writing happens and the target audience of the documents (Bowen, 2009). For my document analysis, I used both the techniques: the computer-assisted methods (Guest et al., 2014) and the three key activities (Bowen, 2009). For the former, I use a few key search words and phrases in order of frequency: PISA, PISA for Development or PISA-D, development theories and coloniality. My KWIC searches include the OECD and education governance; the OECD's ILSAs and datafication; and the global north vs the global south nations. For the latter, my criteria of searches revolved around the OECD's ILSAs and modernisation; the OECD and (de)coloniality; the OECD education governance and the global south nations; and PISA-D in Cambodia.

According to Bowen (2009), researchers usually read some previous literature to shape their study angle and tend to integrate those ideas into their writing. However, they do not as they are usually mentioned in prior study reviews in the list of analysed documents. In my case, I started from scratch with no prior reading or understanding of the OECD's (education) work, the issues and opportunities offered by its ILSAs and the OECD's power mechanisms over its member countries. In my original proposal for this PhD study, I meant to investigate the relevance, effectiveness and importance of the local large-scale assessment[46] in Cambodia and the polices and measures that MoEYS under the current Minister Hang Chuon Naron took to enhance its quality – probably to regain public trust and for policy making after the ruling party had lost a number of seats in the 2013 national election. In one of our meetings, my chief supervisor mentioned PISA as an International Large-Scale Assessment (ILSA) that mattered in most developed countries. I considered this ILSA, however, was far from my reach. Hence, I became interested in PISA-D as this ILSA has developing countries as members. My country was one of the members, so I thought my contextual background and cultural understanding of Cambodia where I was born and raised would make me an ideal researcher to investigate the subject matter more efficiently.

While the 'linguistic tradition' sees texts are an 'object of analysis itself', the 'sociological tradition' considers texts as 'a window into human experience' (Wutich et al., 2015, p.498) or 'a proxy for experience' (Guest et al., 2014, p.9). For this research, it is crucial for me to conduct the document analysis to inform myself of the critical issues around the topic before I can interview those identified study as participants. Based on Bowen (2009), the document analysis informs this qualitative research by offering the contextual setting in which study participants function; pinpointing the potential questions to ask and situations to observe; being sources of data, information, and insights to broaden my limited knowledge; providing development paths when comparing/contrasting; and validating findings from other studies. Considering these potential applications, the document analysis assisted me to be on the right path to answering to the research's overarching objective – the project driver. As a relatively costless method to collect empirical data, document analysis is seen as a 'nonreactive and unobtrusive' (Bowen, 2009, p.38) process into which data from primary sources such as interviews and observation should be integrated to promote reliability and avoid partiality.

[46] Known as Baccalaureate II exam or high school exit exam in Cambodia

That is, it prepares me well to conduct the interviews so that I can efficiently digest and analyse the local vernacular responses from Cambodia.

5.1.2. Semi-structured interviews

This sub-section presents my understanding of how semi-structured interviews can be used and carried out. In this study the interviews were meant to collect the study participants' responses, perceptions and observations over the impacts of the PISA-D enactment in their local context.

According to Braun et al. (2014), qualitative research is meant to collect participants' experiences and perceptions 'in their own words' (Braun, Clarke, & Rance, 2014, p.1) and the most frequently-used technique to assemble their 'words as data' (Braun et al., 2014, p.2) for a systematic analysis is by means of qualitative interviews, where the researcher has a choice between planned/structured and unplanned/unstructured interview modes (V. Braun et al., 2014) or semi-structured mode that comes in between. While planned/structured interviews are conducted based on a list of prepared questions, unplanned/unstructured interviews tend to follow the flow of information given by the participants. To take the advantages of both interview modes, this study uses a semi-structured interview which allows me to not only raise important questions based on my understanding from the variety of relevant publications but also to be informed of what happens on the ground that those publications have failed to capture. In this sense, I consider semi-structured interviews as the most effective way to hear the local vernacular responses from Cambodia.

The semi-structured format uses a mixed method between respondent and informant interviews (Atkins & Wallace, 2015), on a one-to-one basis in a person-centred interview (Levy & Hollan, 2015) and conducted online via a video-conferencing application named as Zoom (Nehls, Smith, & Schneider, 2015). Each interview was recorded with the participant's consent and transcribed for the participants to review and to aid the analysis. According to Atkins & Wallace (2015), a respondent interview gives complete control to the interviewer who has set the agenda on what to discuss and devised a set of questions for the interviewee to respond. This type of interview is structured with rigid approach and readily made questions to be adhered to, suggesting that the researcher will be collecting information only within his limit of knowledge. On the contrary, an informant interview is seen as an unstructured interview and gives room to the interviewee to discuss issues, provide insightful

inputs and express perceptions that are useful and relevant to the research questions, but the researcher has no knowledge of, especially during setting up his research questions. Either of the two types of interviews are useful but the respondent interview eases the analysis and comparison of data as questions and answers are in the same patterns even in a series of interview whereas answers to the informant interview may scatter, adding difficulties to the analysis due to poor data organisation (Atkins & Wallace, 2015).

Based on Levy & Hollan (2014), the first question should be in the informant type as it allows the interviewee to inform me of some necessary contextual issues such as culture, beliefs and practice and followed by the respondent interview which investigates what the interviewee thinks of the subject matter. Levy & Hollan (2014, p. 5) also found that one-on-one interviews usually oscillates between respondent and informant modes and that the switch back and forth reveals 'spaces, conflicts, coherences, and transformations' among the agenda items discussed. According to Louw et al. (2011) and DeJonckheere & Vaughn (2019), semi-structured interviews are an effective method to explore cognitive research topics as they allow researchers to glean an immense number of responses from participants. Specifically, DeJonckheere & Vaughn (2019) reveal that semi-structured interviews are effective to collect open-ended qualitative data, to tap onto interviewee's perceptions and beliefs and to dig into personal issues.

Interviews, occasionally used as a primary research method, are frequently used in almost all types of qualitative research (Forsey, 2012; Louw, Todd, & Jimakorn, 2018). Video-conferencing platforms such as Skype and Zoom make online and face-to-face interviews no differences (Nehls et al., 2015). Investigating into the Psychobiological Model, Social Presence Theory and Theory of Electronic Propinquity, Nehls et al. (2015) confirm that video-conferencing is a workable data collection technique for qualitative research and its advantages outnumber its disadvantages – see in Table 6. Concerning how a video-conferencing interview should be conducted, Nehls et al. (2015) list five issues: (1) recruitment as it is crucial to inform participants of the online mode of interview so that they are expected to handle with some basic requirements and get ready with equipment that are necessary for the online interview, (2) some necessary technical preparations such as installing and testing the software and maintaining a professional look for researchers, (3) building a rapport with participants upon their impressions and trust, (4) during the interview, eye contact has to be maintained and (5) while video conferencing platforms allow both audio

and video recording, researchers should a separate audio recorder for unfocused transcription (Gibson, 2010) or notes for indexical transcription (Gibson, 2010) to record the interview as backup (Nehls et al., 2015).

Table 6: Advantages and disadvantages of video-conferencing interviews

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Online video-conferencing overcomes geographical barriers. • Participants tend to feel more comfortable when they participate online at a location of their choice, typically from their home or office. • Just like face-to-face interviews, online video-conferencing can also pick up on non-verbal, sensory, and emotional cues interviews. • Quality of responses is equally the same between online and face-to-face interviews. • Apparently, richest data are obtained from online interviews. • Online interviews offer low cost and convenience • Arranging times for online interviews among multiple individuals is easily made.	• Video-conference interviews require a substantial technology - not just a basic computer and internet connection • Video-conferencing interviews can be done when the parties involved have several things in place such as new computers to run the software, high-speed internet connection, webcams and microphone. • Participant access may be limited due to these technological requirements. • Some studies such as ethnographic research can't take video-conferencing interviews to collect data.

Summarised by the researcher from (Nehls, Smith, & Schneider, 2015, p.146-147)

As listening is a necessary skill for an interview (Forsey, 2012), an active form of listening will be used as a main technique in the interviews. Given (2012, p. 2) defines active listening as attentive act of listening to 'accurately hear and interpret' the interviewee's verbal and nonverbal responses. From their study, Louw et al. (2011, p. 81) discovered that active listening works hand in hand with in-depth semi-structured interviews and that active

listening can be performed successfully by (1) clearly signalling the interviewer's intention and (2) seeking mutual understanding through 'co-construction of meaning'. There are seven commonly used techniques in active listening: 'opening, inserting, probing, paraphrasing, evaluating, clarifying, and repeating' (Louw et al., 2018, p.77). Of all the techniques, paraphrasing is a core one as the speaker gets to hear what he has said in a different version and may like to make changes to ensure his intended meaning. 'Verbal active listening' techniques suggested by Given (2012, p. 2) bear some commonality with the above-mentioned techniques proposed by Louw et al. (2011). However, Given (2012, p. 2) considers the use of silence as a special strategy in active listening that, if integrated cautiously, it projects not only the interviewer's peace and serenity but also his 'respect, empathy and interest' towards the interviewee. On the other hand, 'nonverbal active listening' techniques create and sustain rapport and help maintain the interviewer's focus. These techniques include keeping looking at the face, turning the interviewer's body toward the interviewee, and constantly looking attentive 'with an open posture' and remaining calm (Given, 2012, p.2).

5.1.3. Choosing potential interviewees

This sub-section explains the rationale behind the adjustments to data collection plans and the selection of countries and participants, considering colonial differences, time constraints, and COVID-19 restrictions. It also outlines how participants were approached and offers potential explanations for their responses or lack thereof.

As the sample universe for this study includes the nine PISA-D member countries, I initially planned to focus my PhD project on the vernacular responses of local government officials managing PISA-D, policy makers, and teacher unions in three of these developing countries: Bhutan, Cambodia, and Guatemala. To implement this plan, I intended to compile a list of suitable participants from the websites of the OECD, local education ministries, and teacher unions. I aimed to invite nine participants – three from each selected country – for interviews via email. The interviews were to be conducted in a semi-structured format using a video conferencing platform, allowing me to avoid travel and physical contact due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

The selection of countries was achieved by means of stratified sampling with one inclusion criterion which was that countries with different colonial histories were selected for the study.

In this sense, the three countries were chosen from the sample universe of the nine PISA-D member countries because they had colonial experiences with the British, the French and the Spanish respectively. In other words, this inclusion criterion was meant to make this research a cross-cultural qualitative study with heterogenous sampling. The cross-cultural nature of this study was expected to allow me to select participants from different countries for comparison and contrast (Robinson, 2014). In this plan, my supervisors recommended approaching Cambodia, my home country, as a starting point before spreading outwards to those participants in the other two countries. The selection of participants from Cambodia was done by means of purposive sampling as I had already set the three above-mentioned roles or positions as the selection criteria. I then started sending out the invite e-mails to the identified participants, but I never received any responses. I used my personal means of contact to get one of the participants in my project, but this effort left me with no response, either.

Focusing on Cambodia also facilitated my research because it offered the most English-language materials compared to the other two countries. These resources, along with those written in Khmer, helped me develop a comprehensive understanding of my project's subject matter. My familiarity with the Cambodian context would add value to the study; however, it was essential to conduct empirical research to grasp the realities on the ground and analyse the coloniality-enactment tension effectively. To achieve this, I recognised the importance of incorporating local voices, perceptions, and responses alongside secondary sources. Although a few key actors did not respond or changed their minds, I successfully identified and engaged ten actors to participate in my study.

5.1.4. Carrying out the interviews

In a broad sense, the interviews went well because I had prepared all the relevant questions for those interviewees. The questions had to be different from one interviewee to another due to their different relations to the PISA-D programme. I was very grateful for their efforts in answering those questions through Zoom under the COVID-19 restrictions. Prior to the interview, I had informed every interviewee that only voice recording was necessary, but a few interviewees were willing to carry on with their video function on. To stick to the study requirement, I had to advise them to turn off their video and proceed our discussion with audio recording only.

As the nature of the tensions in the enactment of PISA-D was a complex issue, I was determined to conduct the Zoom interviews with the identified individuals to broaden my understanding. On March 10, 2022, I e-mailed an OECD's representative for a Zoom interview. The representative quickly agreed to participate in the 90-minute interview as requested and proposed March 18, 2022 as the interview date. However, the representative asked their subordinate to arrange the interview for us. The subordinate thus sent me a Zoom invite, seemingly suggesting to me that they both would join the interview with the inviter as the host. Technically speaking in this case, the Zoom participants could not record the interview session unless allowed by the host. To secure the requirement for me to record and the confidentiality of the interview, I insisted that I had to be the host and the interview would be one-on-one between the representative and myself. The interview went well except that the interviewee seemed to avoid further questions before the interview was meant to end.

Gaining access to participants was challenging since I had to contact them at a distance, via social media, email or through videoconference, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, I conducted ten interviews, tailoring the questions to each participant's specific responsibilities and their relevance to the PISA-D programme. This approach allowed for a more nuanced exploration of the topics at hand. However, several interviewees expressed that the sessions were time-consuming and frustrating due to the number of questions posed. Some participants noted that certain prepared questions appeared similar, despite being designed to elicit diverse perspectives on various ideas, angles, and stakeholders involved in the programme. Following the interviews, I reached out to all participants to obtain their signatures as a form of agreement on the transcripts I had prepared. Ultimately, only seven participants consented to sign. Notably, one interviewee requested modifications to their transcript, citing concerns regarding potential repercussions stemming from their responses.

Of the three participants who did not sign the transcripts, two ceased communication after the interview. The third participant maintained contact but declined to sign, believing that their signature on the initial consent form sufficed as proof of agreement. Additionally, I continued to engage with several participants via Telegram to address any clarifications or modifications that might be necessary regarding their responses. This experience underscores the complexities involved in qualitative research, particularly in managing participant expectations and ensuring the integrity of the data collected.

5.1.5. Participant anonymity

To ensure participant safety, pseudonyms (Participant A, B, C, etc.) are used, and their positions and level of involvement in the PISA-D implementation in Cambodia will not be disclosed. This measure is crucial due to the sensitive nature of the topics and the potential risks participants may face, particularly in the context of the power distance as described in Hofstede's cultural dimensions. The complete interviews will not be included in the research appendix. Instead, I will provide summaries for each participant. This approach helps maintain confidentiality and reduces the risk of exposing participants to any potential harm. In analysing the data, I will remove any details that could reveal participants' identities. These will be excluded from the analyses. When necessary, I will apply an additional layer of reporting to participants' statements. This involves deleting, paraphrasing or generalising some specific aspects of the responses to further protect their identities while maintaining the integrity of the data. The research adheres to ethical standards, prioritising confidentiality and participant safety. By implementing these measures, I aim to conduct a study that respects the rights and well-being of all involved.

5.2. Forms of analysis

I intend to employ some elements of two analytical approaches: Braun & Clarke's TA and Fairclough's CDA. All interviews are transcribed as textual data to aid the former analysis. A few interview transcripts are selected for the latter analysis, based on their substance, nuance and relevance to the study. Both TA and discourse analysis are effective means to analyse qualitative interview data (Braun, Clarke, & Rance, 2014). This section also describes various approaches to TA and concludes with Clarke & Braun's approach as a best fit form of TA for this study objective. Using the PISA-D enactment in Cambodia as a basis, I employed some elements of Fairclough's CDA specifically for the purpose to analyse the power relations between the OECD and this global south nation.

5.2.1. Braun & Clarke's TA

As this research employs some elements of Braun & Clarke's approach to TA, this sub-section is devoted to the description of the approach and presents how Braun and Clarke differentiates it from the other similar analytical approaches to TA. The differences among them are illustrated in the answer sheet available on the University of Auckland's website (V.

Braun & Clarke, 2019). For this sub-section, I am going to summarise their illustration and explain why Braun & Clarke's approach to TA fits well in this research.

There are three approaches to TA: reflexive thematic analysis by Clarke & Braun (2006), code reliability by Boyatzis (1998) and Guest et al. (2014) and codebook used in approaches such as matrix analysis, framework analysis and template analysis. Firstly, TA has long been used interchangeably with (qualitative) content analysis and these terms have been viewed as analogous qualitative data analysis approaches. (Qualitative) content analysis and TA can be the same or distinctly different depending on how researchers use them. They both are seen as methods instead of a complete set of methodology. However, (qualitative) content analysis shares several features with the other two approaches: code reliability and codebook approaches, and its theoretical/epistemological foundations are not sufficiently examined. Thus, researchers have considered content analysis as an 'atheoretical' method (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.14).

After I have conducted my document analysis, I choose TA over content analysis because the former enables me to recognise patterns within the collected data that creates themes to serve as the categories for analysis while the latter allows for only organising those data, despite being based on the research question (Bowen, 2009). While content analysis has become less common, more systematic qualitative approaches such as grounded theory and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (hereafter IPA) have been developed in the last few decades. The term TA is now being considered as a separate analytical method being most frequently used while the popularity of coding reliability approach is also arising (V. Braun & Clarke, 2019).

TA is a method of encoding qualitative data and is compatible with most qualitative methods (Boyatzis, 1998). Based on Guest et al. (2014), it is a methodological framework that shares characteristics of four other approaches such as grounded theory, phenomenology, positivism and interpretivism. What TA and a grounded theory have in common is their 'systematic yet flexible and inductive' (Guest et al., 2014, p.11) approach to support claims with data. In that, their analytic processes are almost the same except that grounded theory is nonmathematical and will ultimately produce theoretical models or a testable theory (Wutich, Ryan, & Bernard, 2015) while TA incorporates quantitative techniques and creates an output that may or may not be a theoretical model (Guest et al., 2014).

Clarke & Braun (2019) identified two types of grounded theories: full grounded theory which allows researchers to employ its full range of procedures to produce a theory grounded in the dataset and grounded theory-lite which enables researchers to use grounded theory techniques to develop categories and understand the relationship among those categories. Clarke & Braun's approach to TA is akin to the second type of grounded theory as this most used type of grounded theory is not meant to develop any one certain theory. Besides theory development, grounded theory tends to use picture- or word-based models to project their results, which is not what Clarke & Braun see in their thematic maps. While TA is only the only method with flexibility, both types of grounded theory are a complete methodology with all 'inbuilt' ontological and epistemological stances, theoretical framework, research questions, sampling and data collection plan; however, from a contextualist perspective, grounded theory-lite and TA may produce a comparable result (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.12).

Both phenomenology and TA employ storytelling as a tool to dig out the participants' perspectives and experiences for the object of the study. However, the participants' stories from a phenomenological approach are seen to lack evidence as they tend to be 'evocative' or 'emotional' whereas stories in TA are converted by its 'analytic devices' into narratives with data and numerical supports (Guest et al., 2014, p.12). TA shares more characteristics of positivism than those of interpretivism. While an interpretivist approach, originated from a hermeneutic tradition, it is aimed at analysing discourses for deeper meanings and 'multiple realities' that are usually in more religious texts than in non-religious ones; a positivist approach requires constant focus on identifying a certain structure within the data by following a range of 'systematic analytic procedures' (Guest et al., 2014, p.13). Data analysis performed in interpretivist ways are usually less structured and free of quantification while positivist researchers use both numerical and non-numerical data in their analysis. Both thematic and positivist analyses are concerned with reducing texts into codes. By examining the relationship among the codes, a researcher can form broader concepts known as themes (Guest et al., 2014).

TA and IPA often have a highly comparable end result, but they have different procedures. While IPA is a complete and readily-made methodology that includes ontological and epistemological stances, theoretical frameworks, research questions, sampling and data collection plans; TA is just a method with flexibility to be used in a considerable number of research types, regardless of their ontology and epistemology, theory, sampling and data

collection plan. Although both TA and IPA encompass code and theme, the former focuses only on seeking patterns in its participants' response while the latter considers both each participant's idiographic characteristics and their meaning. While TA performs each analytic stage such as coding and developing themes from codes across the entire dataset, IPA researchers code their first data item then proceed to identifying themes for it and theme development in IPA has two levels producing two different types of themes: 'emergent' themes are usually spotted in interview transcript and written down on a left margin of the transcript and 'superordinate' themes are developed from the other themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.10). Once code and themes have been assigned to each data item, IPA researchers will then develop superordinate themes with the entire dataset.

Pertaining to theme development, Clarke & Braun (2019) argue that the other two approaches, code reliability and codebook, problematically consider themes as 'domain summaries' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.3). In fact, themes refer to patterns extracted from the collected data constituting a 'central concept' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.3) whereas domain summaries, as its name suggests, sums up participants' response(s) to a certain question or topic. As identified by Clarke & Braun (2019), one of the issues to cause the confusion is related to how researchers name their themes in a way that the name does not capture the depth of the theme. Clarke & Braun (2019) place the codebook approaches in between the code reliability approach and their approach to TA. The matrix analysis, framework analysis and template analysis and code reliability have two practices in common: having a structured codebook and considering themes as analytic inputs and confusing themes as domain summaries. The use of a codebook in these two groups of approaches only shares a qualitative philosophy with Clarke & Braun's approach. Only the code reliability approach emphasises on ensuring the accuracy and reliability of coding.

Secondly, code reliability, one of the approaches used in TA by Boyatzis (1998) and Guest et al. (2014), is a measurement performed by multiple independent coders and after a codebook has been developed. The measurement is meant to seek agreement among the coders by means of Cohen's Kappa to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the coding process; however, there has not been one precise way to code data, so the accuracy from this code reliability remain questionable as it is just a different approach. The use of inter-rater reliability score projects a positivist/realist assumption that each data item has its reality that can be 'accurately captured' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.4). Clarke & Braun's approach to

coding is comparable to the early coding phrase in grounded theory where coding is perceived as an active and reflective activity that must carry the researcher's impression. One argument is that the codebook developed by this code reliability approach oftentimes produces 'superficial codes' due to issues in communicating agreement among those coders and that the above-mentioned positivist/realist assumption restricts 'the claimed theoretical flexibility' of TA (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.5). Another argument they make as a distinction between code reliability and their approach in TA is how themes are developed from codes. Under the code reliability framework, codes are seen as analytic inputs in search of evidence for themes and are frequently confused for domain summaries of what the study participants respond to a certain topic whereas their approach conceptualises codes as analytic outputs or 'building blocks for themes' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.5) which are directly resulted from patterns of meaning under a 'central organising concept' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.4).

The last argument is that the code reliability promotes a mixed method collaboration between qualitative/interpretivist and quantitative/positivist binomials. On this note, Clarke & Braun (2019), seeing their approach completely nonmathematical even in report writing, posit that the possibility of the collaboration must depend on how a qualitative project is specified. They argue that code reliability proponents define qualitative research as merely techniques and tools and their TA does not connect the two philosophies but instead only pull together a quantitative paradigm and qualitative techniques Clarke & Braun (2019). While seeing mixed methods as a formal yet young and growing approach, Guest et al. (2014) agree that not every qualitative research topic fits in mixed paradigms. However, they indicate that mixed methods would raise validity, explanatory power, and more thorough picture of a research topic if carefully integrated. In respect to this controversy, Abusabha & Woelfel (2003) consider mixed methods as 'two opposites that make a perfect match' (Abusabha & Woelfel, 2003, p.566) and showcase three reasons to use the mixed: data have both a subjective and an objective component, different methods enable researchers to corroborate results and mixed methods balance out their respective flaws as while quantitative research faces issues with validity, qualitative research is criticised for its 'generality and repeatability' (Abusabha & Woelfel, 2003, p.569).

Thirdly, the last approach used in TA is thematic coding – the codebook approach, which has relatively the same techniques to extract themes from data as grounded theory. Thematic coding had been commonly used before TA procedures were generally known. However, the

former still have its popularity among some qualitative researchers such as Graham R. Gibbs, Uwe Flick and Carol Rivas. Gibbs's thematic coding focuses on creating 'a framework of thematic ideas about data'. His distinction between data-driven codes and concept-driven codes fall in the semantic/inductive and latent/deductive coding in TA. Thus, his thematic coding approach bears several similarities with Clarke & Braun's approach to TA. The other similarity is that Gibbs's approach also allows flexibility of choices between the approaches during the entire of research. For example, he cautions researchers not to be rigid on their initial codes. However, Gibbs's approach in thematic coding is in favour of using coding memos. Although originated in grounded theory, Gibbs's coding process emphasises on ensuring the systematic consistency as much as the coding reliability and codebook approaches to TA (V. Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Flick's approach to thematic coding is a mixed method of inductive and deductive approaches that emphasises on developing 'an overall theory or thematic structure' through multiple case analyses. In his approach, data collection and analysis of each case are performed at the same time. Using open and selective coding in grounded theory, Flick is able to extract thematic structures of 'thematic domains and categories' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.7) from those cases. By constantly comparing and assessing the thematic structures, Flick can ultimately develop an overall theory or thematic structure. In short, Flick's approach is very much the same to the framework and matrix analyses suggested by the use of codebook in a way that some focus is made before the analysis and the thematic structure promotes 'an emphasis on cases and themes' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.7).

Rivas's approach is another blended approach as he employs some initial stages originated from grounded theory. Those stages involve memos, comparisons of analyses and 'some' simultaneous data collection and analysis. His approach is similar to TA as they both allow flexibility in between inductive and deductive coding. Clarke & Braun (2019) firmly believe that TA should be of 'purity of method' and deserves to be titled as a separate 'approach in its own right' and agree to a proceduralist's argument that requires 'one true way of applying a method' to a certain extent (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.7). However, a qualitative research study that avoids 'interpretation, theory and reflexivity' suggested by proceduralism will end up being limited, positivism-oriented and 'lacking dept of engagement, thoughtfulness and creativity' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.7).

Overall, I choose Clarke & Braun's approach to TA for the research because it is strictly nonmathematical and has been commonly employed for qualitative research. It is popular because of is its flexibility to be used within diverse frameworks and to answer various research questions in various settings. Regarding coding, Guest et al. (2014, p.28) warn researchers of the 'Lumper-Splitter issue' which has been a common mistake during the coding process performed by multiple coders as they have different concepts on what to code. A splitter is referred to as a researcher who codes every textual detail and ends up with too many codes to create a codebook whereas a lumper may have so few codes identified from a large amount of data sources. Braun & Clarke's approach to TA does not require multiple coders. Instead, it has a clearly defined set of procedures for a sole researcher like myself – either novice or experienced – to follow. As the nature of this research project has been defined as inductive or data-driven, this research is going to benefit from the choice between semantic and latent codes, especially in the coding and theme development across the entire qualitative interview dataset suggested by Clarke & Braun.

Once the interviews had been completed, they were transcribed by three experienced transcribers[47] as first drafts. I then double checked the drafts and made changes where necessary before sending the interview transcripts to the respective participants for their checking and sign off to agree that the transcripts provide an accurate record of what has been discussed in the Zoom interviews. The length of the interviews varied from thirty minutes to three hours, depending on the amount of insight and information the participants were able to offer. The transcription cost was covered by the University's budget for PhD project expense of NZD 3000; however, the budget is not enough for translating them to English. Hence, I had to do the translation myself.

The transcripts become textual data for the TA which I draw on the earlier work of Boyatzis (1998). TA could be used beyond code and theme developments. It can be used to serve a variety of purposes such as a way of seeing, a way of making sense out of seemingly unrelated materials, a way of analysing qualitative information, a way of systematically observing a person, an interaction, a group, a situation, an organisation, or a culture, and a way of converting qualitative information into quantitative data (Boyatzis, 1998). However, the main analysis of each interview transcript follows Clarke & Braun's six phases as shown

[47] All are graduate students: one of them is in education field; the other two in media sector.

in Table 8. Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 82) consider TA as one of qualitative methods that is used to identify ‘patterned meaning’ or to determine themes across a dataset from various sources: online, printed, electronic and/or broadcast sources ranging from secondary sources such as books and journal articles to primary data such as interviews.

Table 8: Stages to code and theme developments (V. Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Clarke & Braun’s TA
Phase I: Familiarising with the data 1. Transcribing data 2. (Re-) reading the data 3. Writing down initial ideas
Phase II: Initial coding 1. Identifying interesting features of the data 2. Collating data relevant to each code
Phase III: Generating initial themes 1. Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts 2. Generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis
Phase IV: Revising themes 1. Checking themes 2. Generating a thematic ‘map’
Phase V: Defining and naming themes 1. Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme 2. Generating definitions and names for each theme
Phase VI: Writing up 1. Final analysis 2. Producing a scholarly report

This study takes an inductive approach in which coding and theme development are identified within the data collected. In other words, this approach allows the collected data to

generate themes instead of the other way around (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To enable myself to follow the six phases of Braun & Clarke's approach to TA, it is important for me to understand some key terms defined by Boyatzis (1998), Guest et al. (2014) and Braun & Clarke (2006). Firstly, a code is a 'pithy label' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.2) captured in the data in relation to the research question(s). There are two types of codes: semantic codes which capture the superficial meaning of the data and latent codes which capture the assumptions that produce the superficial meaning or interpret the data by means of theories or concepts. Codes can be seen as building bricks that need to be put together to form themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019) whereas Guest et el. (2014) project codes as a 'textual description of the semantic boundaries of a theme or a component of a theme'(Guest et al., 2014, p.50). Both Boyatzis (1998) and Guest et al. (2014) define a codebook as a structured and integrated compilation of codes that describes the relationships among the codes.

Secondly, Guest et al. (2014, p. 50) define themes as a 'unit of meaning that is observed (noticed) in the data' whereas an 'overarching theme' is essentially an idea that serves as a framework for the development of other themes whereas a theme itself is a repeating pattern seen throughout a dataset that is concentrated around a 'central organising concept' and is used to explain the various aspects of that single concept (Braun et al., 2014, p.13). Also sharing this single concept, a subtheme lying beneath a theme carries different features; subthemes are needed when there are remarkable features worth further investigation (V. Braun et al., 2014). Based on Boyatzis (1998), a theme is a pattern in the data that characterises and organises the available observations and analyses parts of the event. A theme can be discovered at two levels: apparent as being immediately visible in the data and latent as hidden in the data and underlying the event. Themes can be produced inductively from raw data or deductively from theory or previous study (Boyatzis, 1998).

Thirdly, Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 79) considers TA just as a method for qualitative researchers only use for 'identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data'. Guest et al. (2014, p. 50) define data as a 'textual representation of a conversation, observation or interaction'. Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 79) categorise data into four types: 'data corpus' refers to all data collected; 'data set' is selected from the corpus for a particular analysis; 'data item' refers to piece of data combined to make data set or corpus and 'data extract' refers to an 'individual coded chunk of data' that is identified within and extracted

from a data item. Data set can be selected in two different ways: by categories of participants for a particular analysis or by a specific analytic appeal to explain the topic of interest.

5.2.2. Norman Fairclough's CDA

This sub-section presents some elements I borrow from Norman Fairclough's CDA as a further analysis on the selected interview transcripts to examine the power relation between the OECD and Cambodia. The selection is based on the qualities of the transcripts in terms of their substance, nuance and relevance to the study.

Just like a quantitative analysis, qualitative interview data requires systematic analysis that has the same objective to see the key features of or trends in the collected data. The two most common approaches to qualitative data analysis involve identifying repeating features or patterns in the dataset just like most approaches to TA do and studying how and why the participants say what they say in their context like what a narrative or a discourse analysis is meant to do (Braun, Clarke, & Rance, 2014). When it comes to discourse analysis, there are two tenets of scholarship. Blommaert (2005) and Gee (2004) cited in (Rogers, 2011, p.2) draw a difference between them. One, there is a wide range of theories and methods associated with critical enquiry into language use and practises, which is referred to as critical discourse analysis (cda, lower case). This tenet of scholars[48], Michel Foucault included, sees language as a social practise and that not all social practises are established and considered equally, making any analyses on language critical. Such analyses hence could be referred to as *critical approaches to discourse analysis* (italic as original). The other, CDA (in all capital letters) is a term used by some academics to describe their approach. This is the variety most strongly associated with Norman Fairclough and those[49] who work in his tradition.

Since the former serves as a framework for the latter (Fairclough, 1992; Given, 2013), both tenets have a common ground, which targets the political domain by investigating how power is manifested through language use in social practice. The former approach is distinguished not only by its emphasis on the meaning of a given discourse but also by its emphasis on power relationships that are expressed through language and behaviour as well as the relationship between language and power. This type of analysis arises from Foucault's genealogical work, in which power is related to the creation of discourse within various

[48] American linguists such as James Paul Gee (Given, 2013; Rogers, 2011b)
[49] European linguists such as Ruth Wodak and Teun van Dijk (Given, 2013)

historical times. The latter approach is a social scientific approach to examine language use and its contribution to the establishment and development of social practices (Farrelly, 2020). Such an approach allows for analyses over the relationships among 'discourse, ideology, and power' (Given, 2013, p.146).

Regarding the former approach, PISA under the OECD has been a project to produce neoliberal subjects – as in the process of 'subjectivation' (Cisney & Morar, 2015, p.3; Santana, 2018, p.229). Foucault draws out three forms of power: discipline, sovereignty and biopolitics from what Michell Dean considers as 'neoliberal desubjectification' (Dean, 2020, p.7). As mentioned in the previous chapter, PISA has the disciplinary power generated by means of its examination and treatment. The other form is 'biopower' which is the 'sovereign's right over life' that goes beyond deciding which life to make, take or die to stripping away wealth, labour, and commodity (Taylor, 2011, p.41). Biopower in this sense leads to the discussion on biopolitics. Foucault (2005) cited in (Santana, 2018, p.227) finds that racism is inextricably linked to the emergence of biopolitics when investigating how it operates and how it lays the groundwork for a new 'art of government'. That is, using biopolitics as a lens, I can examine the techniques and mechanisms the sovereignty uses to 'take hold of human life' (Taylor, 2011, p.41) in respect to knowledge, power, and subjectivation processes.

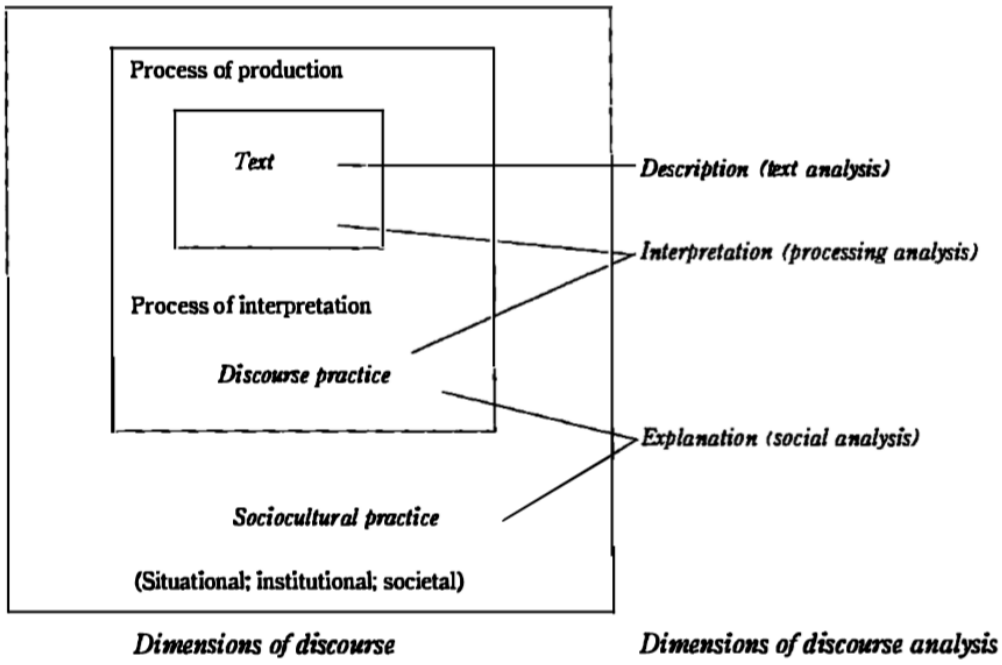
Concerning the latter approach, the OECD using PISA is on the way to be an 'arbiter of global education governance' by playing a role as a 'diagnostician, judge, and policy advisor to the world's school systems' (Meyer & Benavot, 2013, p.9). This role must be examined in respect to what Fairclough refers to as the 'common-sense assumptions' which underlie the linguistic communications between the OECD and Cambodia but one of the parties may be unconsciously aware of (Fairclough, 1989, p.2). To illustrate, Fairclough (1989) offers a doctor-patient consultation session as an example of how power is exercised through such assumptions, in which the doctor is assumed to have the capacity to define how the patient's health issues should be addressed and dominate the consultation and treatment process. In this case, the patient – representing Cambodia in this research – is seen to accept the 'authority and hierarchy as normal' (Fairclough, 1989, p.2). He explains this case:

> *'Such assumptions are ideologies (italic as original). Ideologies are closely linked to power, because the nature of the ideological assumptions embedded in particular conventions, and so the nature of those conventions themselves, depends on the power relations which underlie the conventions; and because they are a means of legitimising existing social*

> *relations and differences of power, simply through the recurrence of ordinary, familiar ways of behaving which take these relations and power differences for granted' (Fairclough, 1989, p.2).*

For this research, I prefer the latter approach, Norman Fairclough's CDA model (Fairclough, 1995) shown in Figure 10, because of two reasons. One, Fairclough offers a richer social analysis as his CDA must be conducted 'textually (and therefore linguistically)' while Foucault's approach is 'more abstract' (Fairclough, 1992, p.37). As this research is informed by textual data from both primary and secondary sources, this text based CDA enables me to examine the power imbalance represented via discourse and practise in the collection of textual data between the OECD and Cambodia. The other reason is that Fairclough has been raising relevant issues in social transformation in respect to globalisation, neoliberalism, and KBE that are the focal dimensions of this research. These dimensions are referred to in his latter publications such as Discourse and Social Change (1992), Language and Globalisation (2006) and Discourse and Contemporary Social Change (2007) (Rogers, 2011b, p.12).

Figure 10: Norman Fairclough's model of three-dimensional method of CDA



(Fairclough, 1995, p.98)

As shown in Figure 10, Fairclough's CDA consists of three levels or dimensions to allow for the *description, interpretation, and explanation (italic as original)* of the selected interview transcripts of this research in respect to their social practice under the mediation of the discursive practice that concerns how these transcripts are produced and interpreted in a

certain discursive order. In other words, the transcripts must be described; their relationship with the '(productive and interpretive) discursive processes' must be interpreted; and the relationship between these processes and the 'sociocultural practice' must be explained (Fairclough, 1995, p.97). That is, to conduct this CDA, I must investigate in what context (historical, political, and sociocultural) these transcripts are produced; why they are produced in a certain pattern and repetition; what may be the underlying factors (values, effects, assumptions, norms, beliefs, rules, and regulations) they most concern.

Hence, it is crucial for me to understand a few terms used in his tradition. The first and second levels concern three terms: language, text, and discourse. 'Language' appears to repeat itself, with elements of language appearing in texts produced at numerous times and in a variety of contexts. A 'text' is the language produced during finite and one-of-a-kind social events. A text is created in a specific context, whether spoken or written. Discourse refers to the language patterns and conventions associated with a social practise (Farrelly, 2020, p.4). For the third level, practices are formed across the whole of social life as they are 'habitualised ways, tied to times and places, in which people apply resources (material or symbolic) to act together in the world' (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.21). Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999) suggest that understanding and concentrating on practices are helpful in this analysis as practices serve as a link between a society's complex systems and their processes and its residents' daily lives. On this note, Farrelly (2020) indicates that such concentration allows me to understand the circumstances for the emergence of social problems which may be continuously caused by the habits of certain social practices. 'Constructions of practices from particular perspectives (and in that sense 'one-sided') which 'iron out' the contradictions, dilemmas, and antagonisms of practices in ways which accord with the interests and projects of domination' (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.26) become ideologies that are seen to be constructed during the interpretation stage in Figure 10.

By means of focused transcription, the selected interviews become texts for me to examine the language and discourse the study participants have used in the interviews. Textual analysis informed me of 'identification, representation, and ways of acting and interacting' (Farrelly, 2020, p.5-9). Regarding identification, texts help me figure out the number of individuals who produce and revise their tone and content. I can get to know personal identities through personal pronouns I, my and me used to reflect the text producer's perspectives towards my topic. I can also determine social identifies through a certain

language feature that is influenced by the text producers' social status. Fairclough (2003) cited in (Farrelly, 2020, p.6) proposes four aspects to analyse when I aim to determine my study participants identities. These four aspects include 'phonological features (the sounds or accent of a spoken text), vocabulary and metaphor, commitments in modality and evaluation, and pronouns.

Next, concerning representation, Fairclough (2003) cited in (Farrelly, 2020, p.7) suggests analysing representation in respect to 'exclusion or inclusion, social action, social actors and time and space'. Having contextual understanding in place and by cross-checking with other texts, I can weed out what is included and what is not in justifying my research. To analyse for social action, Theo Van Leeuwen (1995) cited in (Farrelly, 2020, p.7) recommends asking a list of questions to examine the nature of the action being discussed. Those questions concern whether the action is material or semiotic; activated or deactivated; transactive and instrumental; agentalised or deagentalised and abstracted or generalised. To analyse for social actors, Theo Van Leeuwen (1996) cited in (Farrelly, 2020, p.8) recommends I explore answers to these questions whether the target individual is 'active or passive'; 'personal or impersonal'; 'named or classified'; 'specific or generic'; and 'functional or identifiable'. Time and space can be represented in a variety of ways, including vocabulary of space (nouns referring to places or types of places), vocabulary of time (nouns referring to time or period, adverbs of time), and grammar of time (verb tenses).

Based on Farrelly (2020), CDA considers texts as ways of acting and interacting because texts are produced in a certain type or genre that requires the producers to organise their ideas or arguments in a way that respects the coherence and cohesion rules. That is, to analyse the acting and interacting, I can investigate the text structure and the semantic connection among its clauses. Some texts come with certain sections and organisations that conform to the requirements of a certain discipline, which is straightforward to identify. Clauses can be connected to one another using conjunctions such as because, and, but, so, if yet …etc. These conjunctions carry functions that allow me to understand their juxtaposition.

Employing Fairclough's CDA, I am able to delve further into the depth of the discourse and language taking place in local contexts and to find out whether there is information in the discourse and language that responds to my project's overarching objective. This text-based CDA is meant to offer me a further and closer examination of the discourse and language that

has not become evident during the document and thematic analysis. That is, it focuses on the power imbalance manifested in the forms of manipulation, exploitation and structural disparity that may reproduce social inequality. The power imbalance has been seen within the focal areas of politics, media, and education which the PISA programme has been influencing. In this sense, the reproduction of social inequality hence assists me to understand how PISA-D as the offshoot of PISA may contribute to 'global coloniality' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p.181).

If PISA-D can fix its education system – making it a healthy system as illustrated in the case of the doctor-patient consultation, Cambodia may place itself under the OECD's authority and subject itself to the OECD's ideology, but this global south nation is likely to be unaware of or willing to accept the power imbalance. CDA acknowledges that discourses and ideologies have a significant impact on the creation and perpetuation of power imbalance and its consequences that may constitute 'global coloniality' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p.181). The chosen Fairclough's CDA does not simply offer solutions to these issues caused by such power imbalance, but it is a social scientific approach to recognising causes and context of social problems (Farrelly, 2020). That is, CDA and other forms of critical social science are not meant to offer alternatives to the power imbalance. It aids those involved in such a social practise to seek the changes they desire by 'clarifying obstacles to change and possibilities for change' (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.35).

5.2.3. My understanding of the relationship between the concepts and analyses

Here, I would like to outline my understanding of the key concepts used in this research. Firstly, heterarchical governance describes the non-hierarchical, networked relationships among global institutions like the OECD and the World Bank. In this model, power is shared across multiple nodes instead of being centralised in one authority. This decentralised approach promotes collaborative decision-making and can lead to a fairer distribution of resources and influence among the involved parties. However, it also brings up concerns regarding accountability and the effectiveness of governance in relation to the PISA-D enactment in Cambodia.

Secondly, policy enactment examines the complex processes involved in putting policies into practice. It looks at both how policies are developed and the various factors influencing their implementation, including political, social, and economic contexts. Understanding this

process requires analysing the roles of different actors, the challenges they encounter, and the strategies they use to ensure that policies meet their intended goals. This field of study is essential for evaluating the actual effects of policies on Cambodia and its education system.

Lastly, coloniality of power explores how colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary power structures and social hierarchies. It analyses the ongoing influence of historical colonial relationships on current global dynamics, particularly focusing on how these legacies affect the formation and dissemination of knowledge. This aspect examines the geopolitics of knowledge, investigating how power relations determine whose knowledge is valued and whose voices are marginalised. By doing so, it highlights the need for a more inclusive and equitable approach to knowledge production and sharing, recognising the diverse contributions of different cultures and communities. Collectively, these frameworks offer a thorough perspective for examining the intricacies of global governance, the execution of policies, and the enduring impact of colonial histories on Cambodia.

These concepts serve as the theoretical foundation, guiding the two chosen analyses. Because TA allows for the identification of recurring patterns and themes within the data which may be linked to the concepts, these concepts provide insights into how these power dynamics manifest in practice. CDA focuses on the language and rhetoric used in the data, uncovering how these power structures are reinforced or challenged through discourse. By examining the discourse, I will be able to understand how the coloniality-enactment tension unfolds on the ground. Together, these methods provide a comprehensive understanding of how power operates within global governance and policy frameworks, illuminating the intricate relationships between theoretical concepts and their practical applications. The findings from both analyses are interrelated, with thematic patterns informing the discourse analysis and vice versa, leading to a deeper, more nuanced exploration of the power dynamics at play.

Once the interviews are completed, the next step is to analyse and discuss the vernacular responses to the research questions. Through the lens of Braun & Clarke's TA, I have identified eight key themes as follow:

1. Drivers and motivations for Cambodia's PISA-D participation
2. Perceived benefits and challenges of PISA-D involvment
3. Alignment and tensions between PISA-D and local assessments
4. Implications of PISA-D on Cambodia's education system and policy
5. Capacity Building and Educational Reform through PISA-D
6. Contextual and Cultural Relevance of PISA-D in Cambodia
7. Financial and Resource Considerations for PISA-D Implementation
8. Stakeholder Dynamics and International Collaboration in PISA-D

I am going to address all of these themes in my analytical chapters 6 and 7, aligning them with the four main research questions. Given a large volume of responses, I will correspond them to the first two research questions in Chapter 6 and the remaining two in the following chapter. To deepen the analysis in these chapters, I will incorporate elements of Norman Fairclough's CDA to examine selected interview transcripts, aiming to gain a comprehensive understanding of the PISA-D enactment in Cambodia. The use of CDA will be guided by the complexity and clarity of the interviewees' responses. Additionally, relevant points from earlier chapters will be revisited as needed to support the discussion.

CHAPTER 6

PISA-D ENACTMENT AND ALTERNATIVES FOR CAMBODIA

6.1. What do Cambodian actors understand about why PISA-D was introduced to Cambodia and why the OECD developed PISA-D?

To address the questions, I am going to explore the arrival of PISA-D in Cambodia and local perceptions of the OECD's intentions behind the program. I find that Cambodia's participation in PISA-D was driven by pressure from concerned IOs and was based on a naive decision, as Cambodian actors had no previous knowledge of the PISA and PISA-D programs, nor of the OECD's work in education. Yet they characterised the OECD as an economic organisation. The PISA-D programme was implemented by the Ministry's assessment unit, EQAD, with continuous support and guidance from the World Bank. The Cambodian actors, especially the Minister, viewed participation in PISA-D and PISA as

essential for local education reform, valuing their results as evidence-based for local education policy making.

6.1.1. EQAD and the World Bank, the OECD's approach, and Cambodian actors' motivation

First, I am going to start with the assessment work of the Cambodia's EQAD within MoEYS under the advice and sponsorship of the OECD's strategic partner, the World Bank. Then, I will examine the various accounts of how PISA-D came to be enacted in Cambodia. Last, I will present the local perspectives on the key individuals or factors that contributed to the introduction of the PISA-D program in the country

EQAD is the PISA(-D) National Centre under the World Bank. It is the MoEYS's leading department in charge of all forms of assessments and has specific assignments in connection with the OECD's strategic partner – the World Bank. Looking at EQAD allows me to discuss why and how the World Bank prepared and pushed Cambodia into the OECD's PISA-D programme and may, as my thesis argues, continue employing its financial power over aid-dependent Cambodia to administer the 2023 PISA and the next cycles. There are many accounts given by my study participants regarding the PISA-D program's arrival in Cambodia. According to Participant H, how the PISA-D programme came to be enacted in Cambodia could be traced back to the early 2000s when the World Bank started to introduce this Southeast Asian nation to learning assessments.

> *Actually, the World Bank had investment plans or loans for our government, so in order to see the impact, they had to see through assessment. Based on what I know, it was the World Bank who introduced learning assessment in the early 2000s. At that time, student assessments for grades 3, 6 and 8 started. Participant H*

The World Bank's introduction to learning assessments happened around the time when the World Bank spread its discourses of good governance and KBE to Cambodia's education system mid-2000s, mentioned in Chapter 4. Participant B also confirmed that it was one of the World Bank's initiatives – the Education Quality Improvement Project (EQIP), which was used in Cambodia from 1998 to 2003 to strengthen the national assessments. From the EQIP report, Cambodia learned several crucial lessons that had shaped its educational strategies. The report placed the importance of reliable data for informed decision-making, highlighting the need for effective data collection and analysis. The report saw continuous professional development for teachers emerged as essential, with focused training leading to improved teaching practices. It further mentioned engaging parents and communities as a way to foster accountability and support for educational initiatives. The report also

underscored the necessity of tailored interventions to meet local contexts and specific needs. Finally, the report recommended robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks as crucial for tracking progress and adapting strategies (The World Bank, 2004). However, Participant B argued that the World Bank offered to assist with small-scale issues only.

> *That project has been going on till present and will be going for five years from now, but the name keeps changing. During the implementation of EQIP, they helped Cambodia's assessment in small things. They started helping hard in 2005 in the CESSP. Due to the success of EQIP, budget was given for another five years to implement the CESSP project. In this project, they strengthened the assessment very hard from 2005 to 2010. Participant B*

Participant B stressed that the project was renamed the Cambodia Education Sector Support Program (CESSP) two years later when the World Bank started to substantially assist in strengthening the local assessments. The CESSP report highlighted Cambodia's educational challenges, such as poverty, gender disparities, and inefficiencies. The report found that although enrolment targets for primary and lower secondary education were not fully met, the project achieved notable improvements in lower secondary enrolment and surpassed objectives for financial aid to disadvantaged students. Upon presenting the increase in the number of trained teachers, enhancing educational quality, the report also identified a few challenges related to implementation delays and ongoing quality issues (The World Bank, 2012). Participant B pointed out that Cambodia gained limited insight from this World Bank's program.

> *This first is capacity building. Although we have an assessment system in hand, Cambodia has learnt little from the implementation of the CESSP project. Participant B*

Participant B's quote stresses that the core problem is ineffective capacity building, which means the project failed to substantially improve Cambodia's ability to use or enhance its assessment system. The CESSP report also acknowledges capacity building in Cambodia's education sector as vital for improving assessment practices and overall educational quality. The report then directs recent initiatives to focus on training teachers and administrators to implement effective assessment strategies and develop standardised testing (The World Bank, 2012).

Because the results of the assessments managed by EQAD under this World Bank's projects showed Cambodia's low performance, the then Ministers[50] decided not to release the results

[50] I failed to seek clarification on which Minister was referred to but it could be either Pheng Kol (2003-2008) or Sothy Im (2008-2013). The current Minister took office from 2013 to present. These three Ministers were from the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) – the current ruling party.

and kept them for internal use. Participant B remarked that the decision was ‘political’ in nature and it was made for fear of shame and blame for such poor performance.

> *Honestly speaking, it was a political issue that the results of the test that EQAD conducted with the World Bank five years ago were not published and were instead placed in a table drawer for internal use only. This was political–related to the politics in which the decision was made by the leader at that time. But it was fortunate also in the political sense that, during these last mandates with the (current) Minister, the EQAD team thought and decided a certain thing, and he also thought the same way. Participant B*

In the quote, Participant B referred the former Minister’s decision not to release the World Bank-sponsored assessment result as ‘political’. This explanation highlights the influence of political considerations on the actions and decisions of EQAD under the World Bank’s advice over the handling of assessment results. The decision to withhold publication of the results suggests that political factors, rather than purely educational or technical ones, played a significant role. The use of the word ‘political’ underscores the idea that the actions taken were driven by the prevailing political context rather than by objective or transparent considerations. Furthermore, the statement reflects the alignment between EQAD's views and those of the current Minister, which is framed as a fortunate occurrence. This alignment suggests a more favourable political environment for EQAD's work, potentially leading to greater support or agreement on key decisions. It also emphasises the importance of political dynamics in shaping the outcomes of educational assessments and the dissemination of their results.

Participant A claimed that there had not been any detailed research before about the issues facing Cambodian students, rather most students' results had been disguised. This was because each school hid such data and they even altered the data when their actual learning was low because they were concerned that their schools' reputations would be impacted, which had been a problem that prompted a lot of criticism from the parties involved, which are UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank. As a result, Participants A and C claimed that there was external pressure from IOs to find out where Cambodian students were globally in terms of academic standards.

> *Students’ results have been hidden – hidden – as each school hides data, based on my direct work experience. They were worried that their schools would have a bad image, so their (actual) learning was low but they changed the data. That was the issue which brought a significant amount of critique from those concerned parties. Hence, I say there was also external push to get to know where our students were. International organisations also wanted to know. Participant A*

The repeated mention of results being 'hidden' in Participant A's quote underscores the deliberate nature of this concealment. It indicates a broader issue within the educational system where schools, fearing a 'bad image,' manipulate or obscure data to present a more favourable picture of student performance. The concern about altered data reflects a systemic problem where the integrity of educational assessments is compromised, leading to significant critique from stakeholders.

> *There is a direct push from the partners. The partners want to have a specific evaluation of academic results, wants to have an accountability system in the school, so that there is more support from other DPs. Participant C*

The mention of 'external push' in Participant C's quote implies pressure from outside entities to reveal the status of student learning. IOs such as the World Bank often invested in education through funding or collaboration, have a vested interest in understanding the real outcomes of their involvement, which adds another layer of complexity to the political dynamics at play. Although its assessment was never used for reference in the subsequent Cambodian ESPs, the World Bank has been the leading IO in assisting the development of Cambodia's education system. This IO has built its creditability in assessments through its publications and expertise.

> *If we take a look into the World Bank's background – if we look into what is called the World Bank Institute, we will see that there are a number of experts in assessments who have written very good books about assessments. Their books were about national assessments for individual countries to implement. I think that the World Bank had expertise in assessment in their vein so once they heard about assessment, they were delighted. That is, the World Bank encouraged (pushed) assessments. Participant B*

From Participant B's quote, the World Bank's push for Cambodia to join the PISA-D assessment can be problematic, particularly as this requirement was tied to loan conditions. While this IO possessed expertise in educational assessments, linking participation to financial assistance can be seen as coercive. Participant J asserted that when collaborating with MoEYS, the World Bank always ensured sustainability in three main components: human resource, institution, and finance.

> *Within the framework of most projects, we see that when some partners, when the project is over, that means everything is over. It does not guarantee sustainability, but we see in the current context that both the work and the collaboration between the World Bank and the Ministry of Education, especially ensures sustainability. What does it require to ensure sustainability? First, sustainability of human resources. That is after the implementation of a certain project, we build human resources. This is the first point. The second is institutional sustainability, which is the sustainability of our organisation. Is it sustainable when the project is completed? So in all this work, we make sustainable human resources, organisations and institutions, and ultimately ensure financial sustainability. So finance has to be in place for operation; (we) cannot guarantee sustainability if there is no finance as the project is over, then everything is over. Thus, we see that the framework for working*

> *with partners, especially the World Bank, we have built human resources and continued the so-called guaranteeing sustainability. Take for an example of the EQAD, which is in charge of PISA. That is the initiative of the World Bank that in the future, Cambodia will have to enter the PISA level and start from? Starting from national assessments, starting from grades 3, 6, 9, 11, etc. Participant J*

Participant J's claim helps justify the establishment of EQAD in 2010 right after the CESSP project under the initiative of the World Bank as a leading unit to further examine the existing student assessments.

> *Obviously, in our work, we focus on the results. If we talk about the background, the World Bank has been helping EQAD for a long time, since the preparation of the national assessments – the tie has been firmed up to the present day, it has been helping for a long time. Just in the international context, we do not yet have. Participant C*

Participant C further confirmed that the World Bank had a long-term budget line and had been assisting EQAD all along and their relationship had been firm up to date. Participant H suggested that EQAD under the current Minister's leadership had two important assignments: learning outcome and school inspection. Thus, the creation of EQAD is the World Bank's achievement and a significant step to introducing the OECD's ILSA to Cambodia. On this point, Participant J agreed that the national assessments were the starting point of the World Bank's education work with the Ministry and that EQAD would play a crucial role in ensuring that Cambodia would conform with the OECD guidelines when participating in the main PISA. Participant B corroborated that the World Bank's project kept changing names but has been continuing to the present day. During the PISA-D administration, EQAD acted as the National Centre under the management of the NPM doubled as the EQAD head.

Participant H stated that, under the EQAD's management, the national assessments for grades 3, 6, and 8, together with grade 11 as requested by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), had been put in place up to the present day. These four national assessments were part of Cambodia's desire to build a national assessment system, which includes national assessments, regional assessment SEA-PLM and international assessment PISA, according to Participant H. Hence, Participant C observed that Cambodia had been attending several international programs on system-level assessment capacity building in the region, known as the Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific (NEQMAP), which is based in Bangkok under the UNESCO's sponsorship. Participant C believed that it was Cambodia's frequent participation in these meetings that brought Cambodia's interest in assessments to the OECD and they started to initiate PISA-D. Hence, the Cambodian actors decided to get involved.

There are two main versions of how my participants described the OECD approaching Cambodia to participate in its PISA-D programme. In the first account, some participants[51] recall that for the PISA-D programme to work, the OECD was looking for member countries from all regions. Participant I had received a couple of phone calls from the OECD to support the process. This participant suggested that the OECD was using its networks to get new members to join its ILSAs but at that time getting the non-member countries of PISA in Southeast Asia to join PISA-D was unlikely. As Participant B explained, this was because those countries had a range of economic and political issues and their assessment systems were probably not ready or capable. Hence, the OECD worked to get Cambodia's participation through the World Bank as it met the two criteria, one being a middle-income developing country and the other having a capable assessment system.

> *The OECD thought that participating in PISA-D was possible only if the country was (one of) developing countries, first. Second, the country had an assessment system ready – being ready as in terms of human resources, technical resources and systems of the Ministry. When it came time to talk, Cambodia had all of these. And they asked us if we were willing to participate and we were. We saw many countries that volunteered to participate: a state in India (could be Punjab I can't remember) and Laos, a country in our Southeast Asia……Some countries were withdrawing due to various issues such as economic problems. This economic problem was a big one, but another problem was due to political problems due to their country leaders who expected disgrace because of too low results. Participant B*

From Participant B's quote, economic difficulties are cited as a major factor, indicating that financial constraints made it challenging for these countries to continue participating in the program. However, beyond economic issues, political concerns also played a significant role. The 'political problems' mentioned refer to the fear among some national leaders that poor performance on these assessments would reflect badly on their countries, potentially leading to national embarrassment or criticism, generally known as PISA shock that comes after PISA examination result which requires the OECD's policy directives as treatment – the PISA's disciplinary power.

The evaluation of Cambodia as having a ready and capable assessment system was conducted by Fernando Cartwright, who produced two reports. These two reports presented a number of challenges that would potentially incapacitate Cambodia from enacting PISA-D and benefitting from it. First, Fernando Cartwright's CNA report identified key issues in implementing the PISA-D programme. While Cambodia had foundational capacities for large-scale assessments, they fell short of the technical requirements for PISA. Limited

[51] C, F and I

cooperation among stakeholders hampered effectiveness, and the responsible government department lacked necessary transparency and autonomy, which affected monitoring. Human resource development was ad hoc and insufficiently supported by the government. Successful PISA-D implementation required stronger stakeholder commitment, improved data utilisation – especially concerning out-of-school 15-year-olds – and a structured framework for CNA. Adequate resource allocation was also crucial for sustainable assessment systems, highlighting the complexities Cambodia faced in enhancing its educational assessment frameworks (Cartwright, 2016b).

Second, Fernando Cartwright's CBP report identified several key issues in benefiting from the PISA-D programme. There were notable capacity gaps in Cambodia concerning the development and execution of assessments, especially in adapting cognitive instruments and contextual questionnaires. Disagreements among stakeholders regarding the prioritisation of PISA-D impeded effective implementation. Additionally, resource constraints at the EQAD posed challenges, particularly due to inadequate facilities for data processing and training. Successful collaboration between EQAD and other institutions was crucial, along with the necessity for consistent financial support, as the requirement for front-loaded funding complicated budget management. Although access to education had improved, concerns about educational quality called for continuous monitoring. Lastly, it was vital to ensure that data from PISA-D was used effectively to guide policy decisions and educational reforms, alongside ongoing training to embed psychometric techniques within staff competencies. Participant I pointed out that Fernando Cartwright was hired under the scheme of the OECD and World Bank's partnership.

> *I think the World Bank and OECD - They were working together. And they brought a consultant and the consultant was working in Cambodia on his own. And this consultant was somebody from OECD. He was paid to come to do this by the World Bank-funded project, as I understand. One of the reasons PISA-D came to Cambodia, if I remember correctly, it was that PISA-D was a pilot. OECD was doing like PISA or PISA for developing countries and they needed, they needed us within countries from all regions of the world, and they were, they head up with many countries in Asia and they basically didn't move forward and then I think they comment that Cambodia to participate in this through the World Bank. Participant I*

According to Participant I's quote, the partnership between the OECD and the World Bank in Cambodia raises significant concerns about the effectiveness and intentions underlying their collaboration. While both IOs ostensibly aim to enhance educational assessments through initiatives like PISA-D, their reliance on an OECD consultant funded by the World Bank

reflects a troubling top-down approach. Also from the quote, the OECD's comment may be viewed as a continuation of the request that Participant G observed during an ASEAN meeting, which advocated for Cambodia's participation in PISA-D.

> *Regarding the arrival of PISA-D, all I know is that H.E. Minister went to attend a meeting within the ASEAN framework and there was a request that Cambodia participate in PISA-D and he agreed because PISA-D will help determine the strategic direction for education reform. Therefore, he agreed to accept and assign the task to EQAD to lead this work in the framework of education. Participant G*

From Participant G's quote, the Minister's agreement to participate in PISA-D appears to be quite ad hoc, stemming from an ASEAN meeting rather than a well-considered, strategic decision. While the Minister recognised that PISA-D could potentially guide Cambodia's education reform, the lack of a thorough evaluation of its implications raises concerns. This reactive approach suggests that the decision was made without adequate consultation or preparation, potentially overlooking critical local contexts and needs. By assigning the task to EQAD to lead the initiative, there is a risk that the implementation may lack the necessary alignment with Cambodia's specific educational challenges, ultimately undermining the effectiveness of the reform efforts. Both Participants C and I explained that the OECD was pushing very hard to get member countries from Asia Pacific and Southeast Asia.

> *Because PISA started in 2000, PISA test questions or results reflect mostly middle-income countries and high-income countries, and the first targets are the OECD countries that are members of the OECD. So the evaluation of the global education system did not yet cover developing countries, and that was why the OECD created this initiative. They had meetings, they formed boards related to PISA-D, advisory boards as various committees to mobilise developing countries to participate. Participant C*

Participant C's quote highlights the limitations of the PISA assessments, which have predominantly captured the educational performance of wealthier nations. This focus on OECD countries has created a significant gap in understanding global education, particularly in developing regions. By establishing the PISA-D programme, the OECD recognises the need for a more inclusive approach that accounts for the unique challenges and contexts of developing countries. Participant I mentioned that the World Bank was assisting the OECD during this process.

> *I don't know, but I can't say much about the relationship. But at least at that time, the OECD was really pushing hard because they needed a participating country from Asia Pacific, Southeast Asia. OECD is an economic cooperation organisation and World Bank, of course. There's a bunch of quite a few experts who believe in assessment so OECD had the PISA too and they're working on development, making it more - spread it a standard across the world and since most of the countries couldn't meet those requirements so they went they created this like PISA instrument, PISA for development through the cooperation between OECD and Bank. Participant I*

Participant I's quote places emphasis on the strategic partnership between the OECD and the World Bank. Other participants[52] also pointed out that the World Bank was assisting the OECD in this work because these two organisations had similar economic-oriented nature and the World Bank experts also had strong interest in assessments.

> *I think that these two, in fact I have not done any research, but through my observation, their strategic outcomes are similar, so they may have so much of alliance and more. And seriously speaking, that is them (the World Bank) who started the PISA-D discourse and made it well-known in Cambodia… The World Bank was heaviest because it is the exact economic-oriented. Participant A*

Participant A's quote indicates that the OECD and the World Bank share similar strategic goals, indicating a potential alliance. The World Bank is credited with initiating the PISA-D discourse in Cambodia, highlighting its influential role in promoting educational assessments. The emphasis on the World Bank's economic focus underscores its significant impact on shaping educational policies and frameworks in developing countries. Participant I's statement also helped verify that the World Bank's assistance in this respect revealed that this IO had been the most active in urging developing nations to implement ILSAs (Addey & Sellar, 2015) – also claimed by Participant F. Alongside this argument, Participant B confirmed that it was also the World Bank that played the leading role in propelling Cambodia into the OECD's PISA-D.

> *We had many to help us, but the government at that time did not plan, so the government's money was zero for the PISA-D programme. But the biggest helper at that time was the World Bank, because it actually was the World Bank that pushed the assessment very hard. Participant B*

Participant B's quote highlights a lack of governmental investment in the PISA-D program, indicating that the government was unprepared or unwilling to allocate funds. In contrast, the World Bank emerged as a crucial supporter, actively promoting and driving the assessment initiative by providing loans. This reliance on the World Bank underscores its pivotal role in shaping educational policies and programs, especially in contexts where local government support is lacking. In Participant B's language, the term 'biggest' referred to the amount of aid the World Bank was able to offer to Cambodia for its PISA-D participation while the phrase 'push very hard' indicates that the World Bank is not just a passive supporter but actively advocates for and emphasises the importance of the assessment, suggesting a strong commitment from the World Bank to ensure the programme moves forward, despite the lack of government involvement. It also signifies the amount of the World Bank's financial power

[52] A, B, C, H and I

over Cambodia's decisions in taking up PISA-D to monitor Cambodian education system. As our interview was carried out in Khmer, the phrase 'push very hard' could be translated as an act of imposition.

Participant C stated that the World Bank may also be assisting the OECD on technical levels to achieve their intended result.

> *In that, the World Bank also sees that in the international context, only PISA is an important test in the international arena, and I think the OECD and the World Bank have a close relationship in policy making or the evaluation of an education system. The World Bank has prepared a lot of books related to the evaluation of an education system, so there could be a relationship through the technical level as well as the focus on the results as important, I think that is one point that makes the World Bank think PISA is important and the OECD is an important partner. Participant C*

Participant C also stresses on the close relationship between the OECD and the World Bank in shaping educational policies. Their collaboration prioritises standardised measures over more nuanced approaches to education, which may not adequately address diverse educational needs globally. I am going to further elaborate the partnership between the World Bank and the OECD in the next Chapter.

In the second account, the explanation offered by Participant C earlier corroborates with Participant B's explanation that the OECD approached the EQAD head during a coffee and tea break when they were attending meetings overseas, especially in Europe, France…etc. Participant B could not recall which one of these meetings it was that the OECD representative and the EQAD head met but guessed that it would have been during the ones to which major assessment experts, including those from the OECD's PISA programme, were invited. Based on Participant B, these meetings could be either the UNESCO-organised meeting in Paris or the one organised by the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) where the EQAD head was invited to discuss Cambodia's participation in a regional assessment, currently known as SEA-PLM.

Participant B asserted that the OECD representatives had planned in advance to approach the EQAD head to discuss how Cambodia was likely to meet the two PISA-D participation criteria. However, the OECD's representative remembers meeting the Cambodian representative in a UNESCO-organised meeting, where this Cambodian representative approached the OECD's representative and expressed interest in joining PISA-D. According to Participant F, that was where Cambodia's participation process and all began. However,

Participant B identified the OECD as the organiser and creator of the program, noting that Cambodia's participation in PISA-D was initiated by the OECD. This actor highlighted that the EQAD team had no prior knowledge of the PISA and PISA-D programs.

After those long overseas meetings, the EQAD head was required to report to the Minister of Education and, based on Participant B, there were a number of subsequent meetings within the Ministry where the EQAD head presented what PISA-D was, who would pay and who would assist. This was in order that the Minister could make decisions on participation. Using the case of SEA-PLM, Participant A could imagine that those meetings would have set up a steering committee led by the Minister and all the relevant Department heads, especially the technical and leading ones, for the PISA-D programme.

Participant B confirmed that the EQAD head requested the Minister to set up an assessment committee to cover the PISA-D work and that the Minister would convene urgent meetings with this committee upon the EQAD head's call. At Cambodia's side, it all started with the reporting presentation and on-going explanation of the EQAD head – as the focal point in this sense – in one of those meetings. It was of uncertainty of when the OECD decided to take Cambodia onboard as the conversations between the OECD representatives and the EQAD head continued to happen through e-mail correspondence in addition to a few times of their face-to-face discussions in the OECD-organised meetings. That is, the OECD representatives, particularly Michael Ward, kept sending all the details about the PISA-D programme to the EQAD head to persuade Cambodia to join.

At some point, the OECD started to send an expert team to conduct what Participant B described as 'situation analysis or capacity needs assessment'. This was purely the OECD's initiative as the EQAD team had no knowledge of the team coming down to Cambodia. However, this initiative was taken as the OECD's requirement since Participant B had seen the team doing the same things in other member countries. Participant B remembered that the team conducted the situation analysis by 'interviewing' all the senior and specialised officials and reported what they found to the OECD. To my understanding, this expert team may have been led by Fernando Cartwright.

> *First the OECD contacted the EQAD head and then they formed a team or activity to send an expert team to carry out a study, called situation analysis or capacity needs assessment, so they sent an expert team to meet with senior officials of the Ministry of Education. Expertise here refers to officers in the Department of Secondary Education, officers in the*

> *Department of Program Development, officials in the Department of Teacher Training, etc. They met all of them and when they came, they interviewed and reported to the OECD – requiring effort in convening the local officials and explaining them. The OECD set up an event in which they conducted the situation analysis. Participant B.*

From Participant B's quote, the OECD's engagement with EQAD raises concerns about a top-down approach to educational assessment that overlooks local contexts. While forming a specialised team suggests expertise, it also implies a lack of trust in existing local capabilities. The reliance on interviews with senior officials from various departments leads to a narrow perspective, neglecting the voices of teachers and communities directly impacted by educational policies. Furthermore, the logistical challenges of convening local officials highlight potential barriers to genuine collaboration, suggesting that the process becomes more about compliance than meaningful dialogue. This situation analysis risks being a superficial exercise rather than a substantive tool for real change in the education sector.

Based on Participant A, in order to get Cambodia into their PISA-D programme, the OECD deployed certain discourses – the PISA narratives (Steiner-Khamsi, Appleton, & Vellani, 2018) – to disparage Cambodian national assessments as substandard, inferior, and not global. Cambodian actors had to resort to these discourses as the knowledge power of Cambodia is inferior to theirs, to start. Second, the OECD has ties to other influential IOs and is well-versed in everything as seen the OECD's governance 'in and by heterarchies' (Ball, 2010, p.157) as mentioned in Chapter 3. Third, Cambodia itself was in need of 'technical power'. On this point Participant C emphasised that, Cambodia still had a lot to learn from the OECD in terms of technicality, which would be done through the CBP.

> *… so this whole cycle, the OECD teaches developing countries to do this international assessment, including the analysis and all. As in the case… I understand that in terms of the technical level, the process of preparing the policy is clear, which means that there is a way to triangulate a lot of data or a lot of implementation process to ensure quality because the OECD or experts do not always come down, but they have their strategies to check the quality at each stage and also has external firms to support them. So I think in terms of technical level, we can say (we) still have to learn a lot more from them in the process. Participant C*

The term 'teach(es)' in this quote shows significant power dynamics and implications for agency. It suggests a hierarchical relationship where the OECD, as an authoritative IO, possesses knowledge that developing countries lack, positioning them as passive recipients rather than active participants in their collaboration. This one-way transfer of knowledge raises concerns about the standardisation of assessments that may not suit diverse local contexts, potentially marginalising indigenous expertise. Furthermore, the framing of teaching reflects broader trends of globalisation and neoliberalism, where Western

educational models are often prioritised, risking cultural imperialism and undermining local practices – see the case of Zambia in Chapter 3 (Gorur et al., 2019).

Participant C's quote also places a great amount of reliance on external firms for quality assurance and highlights a need for more genuine collaboration and capacity-building at the local level. However, the OECD's approach to quality assurance in this case could project troubling aspects of its operational practices. While the OECD claims to have structured strategies for evaluating quality, the fact that experts do not always engage directly raises serious concerns about accountability and transparency. Also, relying on external firms for support not only undermines the OECD's authority but also raise questions regarding the objectivity of these assessments. Regarding the technical support, Participant C's quote presents a crucial gap in the capabilities of the Cambodian assessment team compared to international standards set by the OECD's PISA-D CBP.

By emphasising the need for further learning, it suggests not only a recognition of existing shortcomings but also a hierarchy in knowledge where external frameworks are positioned as benchmarks for improvement. This dynamic underscores the challenges faced by the Cambodian team, as they navigate the implications of such critiques while striving for development. Furthermore, the reliance on OECD standards raises questions about the adaptability of these frameworks to local contexts, pointing to a broader conversation about the relevance and applicability of international assessments in diverse educational settings.

Also in terms of technical capacity, Participant F indicated that the Minister needed the OECD's assistance in explaining why Cambodia's system produced outcomes that were so far below the OECD average in the PISA-D assessment so that the Minister would be able to explain in turn to the Cambodian people to understand this predicament.

> *Cambodia's results are very low - some of the lowest results we've ever seen in PISA. And so it was very important that the Minister is able to explain these results. Why is it that Cambodia's system is producing results that are way, way below the OECD average? So the OECD's representative was helping to explain this situation. Participant F*

From Participant F's quote, Cambodia's PISA results performed serious educational failures, with results being among the lowest ever recorded. The need for the Minister to explain these dismal results points to the enactment of a troubling form of accountability into the system. The results suggested that local capacities were insufficient, raising concerns about the

effectiveness of Cambodia's educational policies. This constructed situation that required substantial reforms, as poor performance undermined the country's educational integrity and future prospects.

Regarding the key individuals or factors that contributed to the introduction of the PISA-D program, Participant F claimed that there were four 'push' factors. The first factor lay in the Minister's interest in correlating enhancing the performance of Cambodia's educational system with benchmarking it internationally to its national development plan for attracting investment. This goes in line with Participant B's claim that PISA-D had increased Cambodia's global visibility. Also mentioned in Chapter 2, such 'visibility' (Foucault, 1977, p.187) as in making Cambodian education system transparent on the international stage would give PISA(-D) the possibility to enact a form of 'disciplinary power' that operates through examination and treatment (Foucault, 1977, p.187).

Participant F further explained that the Minister made such a correlation based on his observation of other countries that had been successful in attracting investors to build factories as they knew the workforces in those countries were trained, skilled and literate. Participant F indicated that this first factor was strengthened by the ASEAN secretariat's goal of getting all of its member countries to participate in PISA which this participant considered the second factor. Participant F further explained that this goal could be similar to the regional collaborative framework adopted by the European Union, in which PISA had been used as a benchmark for their education planning for the last 10 years. Because the World Bank had been assisting a number of its 'client countries' to take up PISA – the World Bank's active role, the World Bank's available loan for Cambodia came as the third factor.

> *The Bank in many, many countries is helping their client countries to do PISA. It has this very regular every three years kind of read-out on how the system is performing. So the World Bank was there and was able to give support to the ministry to enable it to come in. So that was the third driver. Participant F*

Last, the fourth factor was that Cambodia as an Asian country met the OECD's geographical requirement as there had already been countries from Latin America and Africa. Participant F's quote on the third factor raises significant concerns about the implications of such support. While it may seem beneficial on the surface, this involvement suggests a troubling trend of external entities imposing standardised assessments on diverse educational contexts. This approach can undermine local educational priorities and autonomy, as countries may

feel pressured to conform to international benchmarks rather than addressing their unique challenges. Furthermore, the heavy reliance on the Bank for guidance can indicate a lack of capacity within these nations to develop their own assessment frameworks, reflecting systemic weaknesses. Ultimately, this dependency may perpetuate a cycle of low educational quality, as countries focus more on meeting external standards than on fostering genuine improvement tailored to their needs.

To illustrate the other accounts, I divide the participants into three groups according to their relevance to the PISA-D enactment in Cambodia. Based on their level of involvement in the PISA-D enactment, I place four participants[53] in the first group. They believed that it was the Minister's acceptance, decision and initiative to bring the PISA-D programme into Cambodia. The second group comprises of three participants[54]. Participant A considered that it was Cambodia's role to request PISA-D participation due to the Minister's and the EQAD's curiosity about assessments, with this request also influenced by profound external influences.

Participant A explained that the Minister, as an economist who weighed up between profit and loss, must have seen the value of this ILSA and that Cambodia as an aid-dependent nation was then required to show its students' performance level, as mentioned earlier. Also in this group, Participant D regarded the OECD, the World Bank and the Ministry as the three main actors although hinting that there may be some support and pressure from DPs. Another participant in this group, Participant I, placed the World Bank's push and its interest and fund to support before Cambodia's choice of participation.

The third group includes Participant B and C. Participant B asserted that the World Bank was pushing Cambodia very hard to take up assessments but confirms that no DPs pressured Cambodia to join the PISA-D programme. Participant C referred the different perspectives offered by my study participants as no precise information and raises three main aspects that factored in. According to Participant C, the political support from the Minister must have come first, considering the fact that the previous assessments had been a quiet thing so far. This political support could be achieved due to the Minister's determination to find out the existing 'diseases' in the Cambodian education system. The Minister's determination was

[53] E, G, H, and J
[54] A, D and I

linked to the second aspect as having enhanced the technical capacities of the Ministry by bringing in Cambodian young talents and experts who had decent understanding of research and assessment. Lastly, Participant C pointed to the direct pressure from DPs, most prominently the World Bank, over Cambodia to come up with a certain assessment of the students' learning outcomes and to promote school accountability.

However, echoing Participant B's view that the OECD was the creator of the PISA-D program, Participant C suggested it was politically accurate to say that the OECD likely 'lobbied' Cambodia to join. The OECD's capability to lobby as used by Participant C here resembles to its success in convincing UNESCO to use PISA-D as 'a major source of data' (OECD, 2018c, p.2) to monitor the developing countries' achievement of SDG4 – mentioned in Chapter 3. Also, Participant I compared this lobbying approach as when one is 'buying a product which is perceived as really good' where the decision to buy was influenced by advertisements and salespeople's positive comments. In this analogy, Participant I made it clear that 'they cannot force you to accept it, but they can convince you'. On this note, Participant H also agreed that the Minister bought in the OECD's advertisement strategy.

Participant A's consideration and explanation above go in line with the first of the four push factors described by Participant F in respect to the Cambodia's participation as being the Ministry's 'ambition' and the Minister's 'personal interest'. Participant F stated that the current Cambodian Ministry of Education even made PISA participation as a stated objective in the ESPs. This statement contrasts with Auld et al (2019)'s findings mentioned in Chapter 4 that Cambodia's ESP 2009-2013 did not mention the desire of Cambodia to employ international benchmarking nor its participation in ILSA. ESP 2009-2013 was the third ESP and it had been written under the previous Minister. In this case, Participant F must have referred to the fourth plan[55]: ESP 2014-2018 which suggests reforming national and in-class assessments for PISA participation as one of its top objectives under the current Minister's leadership.

On this point, it is important to note that the writing up of this fourth ESP happened in the same year Fernando Cartwright was in Cambodia to generate CNA and CBP reports for Cambodia's PISA-D implementation plan. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this consultant

[55] It was produced in 2014.

identified a set of issues that could prevent Cambodia from implementing PISA-D. Seeing those issues, he may have offered some insight for the completion of the fourth ESP. According to the CNA, many of the assessment-related capacities in Cambodia did not conform to the PISA's standard but provided a sound base for future growth (Cartwright, 2016b). To fit in the OECD's narrative discourses (Steiner-Khamsi, Appleton, & Vellani, 2018), he could have made recommendations to put Cambodia through the OECD's CBP for the PISA-D enactment.

Concerning the third factor, Participant F considered the World Bank aid-dependent nations as 'client countries'. The consideration reinforces the argument made in Chapter 3 that Cambodia is a 'clientalist' state (Hughes, 2011, p.1509) where the 'power distance' is rather substantial as Cambodians are not only willing to accept power imbalances in exchange for 'peace and political stability' but also avoid openly speaking in front of superiors (Berkvens, 2012, p.352). On this point, Participant F's such reference also reflects the relationship between the World Bank and those nations as essentially business- or economic-oriented in nature, to which the local education system is directed. The use of such term seems to contribute to the assertion cited in Chapter 2 that the OECD and the World Bank pursue 'converging agendas' (Auld, Rappleye, & Morris, 2019, p.203) in which the OECD seeks to enhance its education governance and the World Bank looks to revive its KBE model which the OECD has been promoting. However, Participant F explained that the World Bank was willing to assist Cambodia in this matter because the World Bank was looking for ways to determine the effectiveness of its loans in improving the education quality in this nation.

Based on Participant F's description, there was a big launch event of the PISA-D programme in Phnom Penh in 2016 and the event was attended by relevant stakeholders and presided by Minister Naron, Michael Ward and the president of the Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE). After the launch, there were several huge meetings where the OECD representatives did presentations about the PISA-D programme to the local policy makers, donors, NGOs, civil societies, headteachers and teachers. A year later, Cambodia hosted an international meeting where all the PISA-D member countries were invited to a two-week series of trainings and workshops in Siem Reap province. The OECD representatives and Ministry's team visited several schools explaining what PISA-D was and what was expected to happen to more than 300 head teachers and teachers. Then, Cambodia started to implement the PISA-D programme with Korea as a learning peer country.

6.1.2. Why the OECD designed PISA-D, Cambodia's PISA-D benefits and costs

I will present the interviewees' understanding of the aims of PISA-D and the rationale behind Cambodia's involvement in this ILSA. This involves examining the benefits and costs of the PISA-D program to gain insight into the reasons behind the OECD's creation of PISA-D. I find that The OECD aimed to steer Cambodian education policy towards an economic orientation. There was a recognition of the gap in in-depth research on the OECD's ILSA programs and its broader scope of work in education and that the participants showed a keen interest in learning from my research findings. In the current context, Cambodian actors perceived PISA-D primarily as a technical tool focused on capacity building. Observing Cambodia did not seem to utilise the PISA-D results meaningfully or as evidence-based insights for local education policy making, some actors sought justification for the PISA-D implementation costs relative to the policy insights it could offer.

The OECD created PISA-D to enhance the relevance and accessibility of PISA assessments for low- and middle-income countries. This programme aimed to include the learning outcomes of students not enrolled in school, enabling informed policy interventions. It was meant to support institutional capacity building, helping countries analyse data, interpret results, and design evidence-based education policies. PISA-D was designed to reflect the diverse social and economic contexts of participating countries, with a particular focus on disadvantaged populations. Additionally, it was designed to assist countries in monitoring progress toward national and international educational targets, including the UN Sustainable Development Goal for education (SDG 4), while providing a more granular assessment of student performance that would inform effective policy making (Schleicher, 2020).

As Cambodia aims to become a high middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050, human resource development is crucial. To meet these goals, reforming the education system from primary to secondary levels is essential to cultivate a skilled workforce that can support the nation's ambitious economic vision – stated by Participant C.

> *Looking at the current trend, Cambodia has a vision of 2030-2050 – we will become a high middle-income country and a high-income country in 2050. In the fourth phase of the Rectangular Strategy, the human factor is important. It means that human resources, yes, human resources are very important. Up to this point, whether (you) want it or not, people must speak honestly, it means that if (you) want growth, economic growth requires people development. To develop people is done at higher education. However, higher education has many challenges because the percentage of students enrolled between the ages of 18 and 22 is now only 16% to 17%, compared to students in the right age for or are learning in higher education. In this sense, from analysis, they see that in order to achieve this work, it*

> *requires support from the lower levels, which means that from primary to secondary school, therefore, the leaders intend to reform the education system towards human resource development. Participant C*

There was consistent support for PISA funding, which reflected alignment with OECD goals and emphasised the importance of developing human capital.

> *Of course! This is also the vision of a senior official of the Ministry of Economy, because during every budget negotiation, when we say that Cambodia is ready to join PISA, His Excellency Vongsey Vissoth, Secretary of State in charge of the national budget, always supports – even without a cut. When we need budget in a certain amount, he does not cut it. I believe he has the same vision and ideas as the OECD. He is an economist, but why does he support PISA? Maybe he understands, as I said earlier, that education is what creates human resources. And human resources which the current language refers to human capital, not just resources but human capital is what drives economic growth. Participant B*

From the quotes of Participants B and C, when it came to why the OECD designed PISA-D it seemed the OECD was interested in directing Cambodian education policy towards an economic orientation. Participant B's quote emphasises the critical role of education in developing human capital, which was framed essential for driving economic growth. It suggests that education is not merely about creating a pool of human resources but is crucial for building human capital – skilled, knowledgeable individuals who contribute significantly to economic advancement. The shift in language from 'human resources' to 'human capital' reflects the effectiveness of the OECD's governance in directing the local education system towards its economic discourse.

Participant A maintained that education was typically tied to politics, hence their politics for Southeast Asia was to enhance Western power. On this point, Participant H thought that the OECD, together with the assessment experts, conducted the PISA-D programme to better understand the differences in the learning outcomes in developed and developing nations and that as they investigate the trend to see how the student's capacity, thinking, and learning in Europe, America, and Asia look like, there may be some high-level politics regionally and globally. Participant H explained that it related to global capitalism when discussing the economic growth prediction that the economy would move from Europe to Asia and in order to make a comparison, they look at the skills, capacities, and intelligence of students in these continents.

Participant A had observed that any entity, especially one with knowledge and financial power, tends to want to exert influence over others, particularly those in Southeast Asia. They therefore have a particular interest in Cambodia because Southeast Asia has come to be seen

by the outsiders as a strategic location. In this sense, Participant A stated that such knowledge and financial power would enable the OECD to influence the politics not only in Cambodia but also the entire region as the OECD has recently produced a great deal of research, educational discourses, and other resources to influence a wide range of countries.

> *Any country, especially those that have power in terms of knowledge and money, usually wants to influence the countries, especially in Southeast Asia. So they have a certain interest because we are a country in Southeast Asia and a number of foreign countries have started labelling Southeast Asia as a strategic point. Hence, I believe that they want to expand their power rather than ideas, OECD. In terms of money power, they do not have but in terms of idea power in Southeast Asia, they do have interest. Participant A*

From Participant A's quote, the discourse on the OECD's interest in Southeast Asia highlights the region's strategic importance in global geopolitical dynamics. By framing Southeast Asia as a 'strategic point,' it underscores the notion that foreign powers, particularly the OECD, aim to expand their influence, primarily through ideological means rather than financial investment. The distinction between 'money power' and 'idea power' suggests that while the OECD may lack significant economic clout, it wields substantial soft power, shaping perceptions and narratives within the region. This characterisation raises critical questions about who benefits from such influence and how it impacts local actors, ultimately reflecting the complexities of power relations in international contexts and emphasising Southeast Asia's role in global affairs.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, PISA-D aims to enhance and differentiate PISA data gathering methodologies in order to produce findings that more accurately inform evidence-based decision making in developing countries (Ward, 2018). This statement is reiterated by Participant F in the case of Cambodia. In their language, Participant F emphasised that 'the power of PISA' lied in the mixture of the assessment data and students' background information.

> *We could see round about 2009 we could see this huge difference in performance between OECD countries and the middle income countries that were coming in and we could see that an instrument that was really designed for the higher performing countries was not giving enough information - relevant information about performance at the lower levels, so that's why we brought PISA for Development because we wanted to develop the instrument so that we could cover those lower levels of performance in more detail. So that was our rationale to make PISA data more relevant to what are effectively low performing countries and then with you know the power of PISA is combining the assessment data with background information on the student so that we can identify the factors that are influencing students' performance. Participant F*

The notion 'power' used by Participant F in this respect signifies that PISA-D is able to direct and influence the technicality of how Cambodia, particularly EQAD, conducts assessments. I

mentioned in Chapter 2 that in countries where the local assessment culture is absent or weak, PISA can supplement such technical capacity (Addey & Sellar, 2015). In Cambodia's case, Participant A as earlier considers it as 'technical power' that the locals were not aware of and posed a challenge to a developing country with little resources like Cambodia to prove its citizens and the OECD itself that PISA-D could not achieve what it claimed to:

> *It is us who need to find, I call this seemingly as technical power. We do not have evidence-based to show them that it is not what it is. Participant A*

In Participant A's quote, the term 'seemingly' introduces skepticism about the legitimacy of the authority being challenged, suggesting that what appears powerful may not be effective. The mention of Cambodia lacking evidence to convince the OECD about the capabilities of PISA-D underscores a significant power imbalance, as the OECD represents a dominant force in educational assessment. This lack of evidence positions Cambodia at a disadvantage, illustrating how knowledge production is intertwined with authority. Overall, the statement reflects a desire for recognition and validation while critiquing existing power structures, highlighting the importance of evidence and knowledge in the ongoing struggle for legitimacy and influence in international educational discourse.

> *He really wanted us to participate because he is a researcher and he is an economist, he likes to do everything on an evidence-based basis. So for anything related to important evidence-based matters, he is very supportive. Participant B*

The Minister's strong emphasis on evidence-based matters could stifle creativity and flexibility, potentially hindering the development of well-rounded solutions that address complex issues beyond just data-driven metrics.

Investigating the OECD's and the World Bank's power, Shahjahan's article points out that the political and economic structures of countries like Vietnam and Ethiopia are shaped by their subordinate positions within a 'capitalist world system', which features an unequal global classification of labour (Shahjahan, 2016, p.704). This positioning limits their ability to assert discursive authority in global conversations about education. Consequently, the geopolitical context in which these countries operate often constrains their capacity to develop and promote localised knowledge frameworks, leading them to adopt externally imposed templates that may not fully address their unique challenges and needs.

Discussing such power, Participant A showed their appreciation of this PhD project that investigates the PISA-D enactment in Cambodia. This appreciation should justify Participant

A's willingness to answer the interview questions openly to benefit this project and their expectation to learn from it when finished.

> *In the international relation, especially the relation between a state and DPs as such, it has strong power relationships. They have power over us that we are not conscious of. If we want to bargain anything, it is impossible. There is a struggle in that, except that we can say or show them that PISA-D is not good and we have our evidence from our nation to challenge them, it might be doable. Currently, we even do not have anyone to study in dept about it. I believe that your research will have an impact. Participant A*

Participant A's quotes reflect a critical perspective on the PISA-D assessment, expressing skepticism about its effectiveness and highlighting the need for localised evidence to challenge its validity. It suggests a significant gap in expertise and research capacity, pointing out that there are currently no individuals available to study the issue in depth. This lack of resources underscores broader challenges in educational policy discussions, where local stakeholders may struggle to engage critically with international assessments. However, there is a sense of optimism regarding ongoing research, as the speaker believes that it could provide the necessary evidence to effectively contest PISA-D. Ultimately, this conveys a call to action for researchers to delve into the topic, emphasising the vital role of research in shaping educational discourse and reform. The anticipation to learn from this project was expressed by other participants, one of whom was Participant B.

> *I hope that you share your report or thesis when you finish your study for me to learn because it is related to my work. Participant B*

Participant B's quote reveals a clear interest in my PhD findings, specifically regarding the PISA-D programme in Cambodia, suggesting that this participant recognises the relevance of this research to their own work. Their hope to learn from this research indicates a desire to fill a knowledge gap, particularly since they may be unaware of the PISA-D programme's specifics.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, 'monitoring and evaluating education policy' followed by 'review and reform curriculum and education policy' are the two most common aims of LSAs participation (Ho, 2020, p.20). However, in the case of Cambodia, all of my interviewees refer to the distinctive feature of the PISA-D assessment as a global standard that allows Cambodia to compare its performance at the international level. The Cambodia's need for international comparison is used to justify the argument raised by five participants[56]

[56] A, B, C, G and J

that Cambodia cannot operate alone in this globalised world. Five other participants[57] believe that the PISA-D participation would assist in benchmarking the Cambodian national assessments. Participant F considered the opportunity for Cambodia to benchmark internationally for the first time in Cambodia's history as the greatest advantage.

While seeing PISA-D as an assessment that allows Cambodia to know where it is on the international stage is the most common rationale, the OECD is intending to place Cambodia under its 'disciplinary power' (Foucault, 1977, p.187) and subject this nation to the consequences of 'externalisation' (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010) and 'standardisation' (Gorur et al., 2019) through the PISA-D programme. Placing Cambodia on the international stage in this sense may be equivalent to one of the three benefits described by Participant B that PISA-D has increased Cambodia's global visibility. Such visibility mentioned in Chapter 2 as in making Cambodian education system transparent on the international stage gives PISA the 'disciplinary power' through examination and treatment (Foucault, 1977, p.187).

The former secretary-general of the OECD asserts that discipline by subjecting its member school systems to external examination that provides findings that are visible and available to the public has a substantial influence on transparency in schools (Gurría, 2007). In this sense, PISA is able to hold schools accountable to the public, funding agencies for education, and ultimately the OECD. When the Cambodian education system is held accountable, the power that is used to control it will continue to exist as long as it is exposed. By being always visible or under examination, the disciplined education system's obedience is upheld. I am going to illustrate how the World Bank acting for the OECD is implementing the SBM programme as an immediate response to the PISA-D results to promote transparency and accountability in Cambodian schools in the next Chapter.

Addey (2017) suggests that PISA-D is the OECD's attempt to promote PISA as a 'standard global metric' (Addey & Gorur, 2020, p.15) to direct education policy regardless of context by aligning as many local assessment systems as possible with its ILSAs. This statement is raised by four participants[58] in the case of Cambodia. One of the participants, Participant D,

[57] A, B, C, D and F
[58] B, D, E and I

was confused that PISA-D was the only assessment that measured Cambodia's SDGs achievement. However, as mentioned earlier, PISA-D is just 'a major source of data' to track how well developing nations are meeting SDG 4 (OECD, 2018c, p.2). In other words, there are other 'official means of verification on SDG4' than PISA-D (Auld et al., 2019, p.208). As my thesis argues in Chapter 3, because the OECD equalises the SDG4 goals which are intended for developing nations to attain to the PISA goals which are intended for developed nations, those developing nations are apparently attempting to achieve PISA level 2 performance rather than the broader target, SDG4.

Participant C understood that the OECD's interest was to build the local capacity in the member countries up to participate in PISA and that by participating in PISA, the countries were going to manage their education systems in response to the global trend which requires 15-year-olds to have the 21st century skills. Three participants[59] thought that the OECD's main interest in the PISA-D enactment in Cambodia was to make its assessments known to the world as the participation increases. In this sense, Participant D thought that the OECD was trying to get more countries to take PISA as a benchmark while Participant G considered PISA-D as the OECD's further understanding of Cambodia's educational system. Participant B further stated that the more participation, the more ideas from various sources for the OECD to compile as best practices but that the OECD's ultimate goal was to promote economic growth, starting from a country to the entire world.

Referring to Chapter 2, seeking (best) practices from the OECD in this case represents the discourse of 'externalisation' (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010) which governments, politicians, and policy makers around the globe have used alongside the other idea of 'projection' in a variety of ways to legitimise or delegitimise their national education reform agenda (Lingard & Sellar, 2019). When asked what the OECD's interest in the PISA-D enactment, Participant E, referred to the OECD's capabilities to achieve standardisation and believed that this IO would succeed in directing its member education systems to a common goal, which Participant B approved to be national economic growth. Their common goal in this sense is the same thing to the 'converging agendas' (Auld, Rappleye, & Morris, 2019, p.203) mentioned earlier while how the OECD was attempting to achieve standardisation was seen the case of Zambia in Chapter 3 (Gorur et al., 2019).

[59] B, C and I

When it came to benefits of PISA-D, the interviews suggested PISA-D's CBP was the most beneficial feature of the PISA-D programme. From the interviews, I further found that the OECD under the premise of strengthening the national assessment system plans to instil PISA methodology in EQAD through its CBP and that this instillation is a form of this IO's strategy to interfere with the local knowledge production.

Argued in Chapter 3, the CBP is essentially affecting the local knowledge production which enable the OECD as the capacity builder to meddle the internal affairs of post-conflict Cambodia (Hughes, 2011). As for national use, the PISA-D assessment is expected to identify the 'weaknesses' versus 'strength' and 'disease' versus 'health' of the Cambodia's education system so that the relevant stakeholders will be able to take actions and make interventive policies. However, six interviewees[60] believed that the most crucial factor was the CBP that PISA-D would provide to the EQAD team to manage LSAs and strengthen the national assessments and examinations. As illustrated in Chapter 4, Cambodians normally expect a certificate at the completion of a training programme and show solid support towards capacity-building programmes (Berkvens, 2012). PISA-D built capacity for Cambodian national assessments through the CBP in which the Cambodian team 'learnt by doing them directly' and through four assessment aspects: the creation of test items, the determination of competence levels, the analysis of data, and the organisation of expert teams (Chinna, 2019, p.8). According to three of my participants[61]; the CBP involved a number of activities[62] such as sampling, item development, questionnaire development, data collection, data entry, data analysis, and report writing.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the World Bank and the OECD hired Fernando Cartwright to conduct CNA and CBP for the PISA-D implementation plan in late 2014. As developed in Chapter 3, the OECD intended to use CBP to 'institutionalise' (Addey, 2017, p.322) PISA methodology in EQAD to strengthen the national assessment system (OECD, 2018a). Cartwright identified a few potential issues that prevented Cambodia from achieving all of the PISA-D objectives. Those issues were found directly in the EQAD's lack of capacity;

[60] B, C, D, F, H and I
[61] B, D, and I
[62] Westat, cApStAn, ETS, the Learning Bar, OECD and KICE were in charge of different activities (Chinna, 2019)

accountability and independence in its reporting on the state of education; and limited human resources to manage the sustainability of LSAs implementation (Cartwright, 2016b). This identification opens up Cambodia to a new set of dynamics that enable the OECD and the World Bank to keep watch over the development of Cambodian education system.

The new set of dynamics lies in the OECD's narrative discourses. In Chapter 4, I presented Steiner-Khamsi, Appleton, & Vellani (2018) discussion on the three typical narratives offered by ILSAs – PISA included. Those narratives claim that (1) the public school system is in need of reform, (2) there is no link between education funding and educational outcomes, and that (3) 'school accountability, teacher performance, and decentralisation' are the most effective reform policies for improving educational quality (Steiner-Khamsi, Appleton, & Vellani, 2018, p.1). These discourses are mentioned by a few participants. Regarding the first claim, Participant A indicated that the World Bank had evaluated the Cambodia education system as dysfunctional, which required immediate reform. The other participant, Participant C, stressed on the OECD's discourse that Cambodia could not just allocate finance and expect its students' learning outcome to increase. The World Bank uses these narrative discourses to rationalise the urgent need to implement its project – SBM in order to promote accountability, teacher performance and decentralisation in Cambodian schools. I am going to illustrate this project in the next chapter.

The OECD's discourses collectively claim that the existing local assessment approach and quality are poor due to lack of accountability and independence, requiring external assistance in building up the EQAD's capacity. Upon accepting the OECD's CBP, this unit in charge of all assessment work in Cambodia is being made accountable not only to the local government but also to its sponsoring IOs: the World Bank and the OECD. Mentioned in Chapter 2, the OECD claims that its ILSAs can offer member countries with evidence for policy and LSA capacity building (Addey et al., 2017). In the case of Cambodia, these two features are very much appealing to the Minister's work approach and the EQAD's development. The PISA-D's CBP even comes before the general education improvement.

> *I think it is more that they want us to build capacity. Build capacity in order for us to join PISA as well as to improve our education system to respond to the global trend. The global trend is about what skills do 15-year-old students need? What are they required to know? And what can they do? I think capacity is first and giving us the opportunity (a little reluctant) to improve the education system comes as second. Participant C*

Part of the CBP, the World Bank offered to hire a national consultant who had a PhD degree in assessment to assist the work of EQAD. As in Chapter 3, this consultant was recruited on the ground that they were willing to follow the OECD's instructions. This consultant was the leading writer of the Cambodia's national reports[63].

> *Lead analysts from the other eight countries participating in PISA for Development were gathered and trained in a large room at the OECD in Paris for approximately six months. During this period, all of the OECD's PISA analysts were brought in for training and capacity building, focusing on data analysis. A template for national reports was developed with them. They collaborated over several months–April, May, June, July, August, and September–to produce their national reports, which were then taken back to their respective countries. Cambodian team returned to Phnom Penh with the report and worked with the heads of departments in the Ministry of Education to finalise it. Participant F*

> *In Cambodia, it is observed that girls significantly outperform boys in reading, while no differences are noted between boys and girls in mathematics or science. These findings in Cambodia's results prompted collaboration with the Cambodian team in Phnom Penh to identify effective interventions, based on OECD evidence and research, that have been implemented in other countries. This information was subsequently made available to the team. Participant F*

In their language, Participant F mentioned that the OECD 'trained' all the 'lead analysts' from all the PISA-D member countries to produce national reports by following the OECD's prefabricated templates and practices as part of the CBP. In other words, writing up the national reports involved some main components such as data analysis, policy implication and recommendation; which all the lead analysts from all the PISA-D member countries were required to learn from the OECD's CBP materials. In the case of Cambodia, the lead analyst was the PISA-D national consultant who was mandated under the World Bank's terms of employment to 'finalise' in Participant F's language the national report with all the MoEYS's heads of departments – EQAD was the leading. In this sense, the finalising task was essentially matching the given data along with some narratives and templates to enable those lead analysts to write up their national reports respectively. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the main PISA has been so influential in determining educational policy substantially because it can be tied to so many different narratives (Waldow, 2020b).

Participants B and C referred to one of the OECD's most common discourses that human resource is crucial to economic growth. While Participant B even replaced an old term 'human resource' by the OECD-introduced notion 'human capital' as the sole driving force for national economic growth, Participant C adhered to the former term and explained that human resource was to be developed in higher education but that Cambodia's higher

[63] There are two versions of Cambodia's national reports: detailed and summarised.

education received little enrolment, 16%-17% only. Hence, the Minister was aimed to start his reform with the primary education level in order to enhance human development from there upwards. Participants C and D agreed that there seemed to be no other assessments than PISA-D to assess Cambodia's performance towards achieving SDG4. Since SDG4[64] focuses on education quality, Participant D argued that there had not been any global, real instrument to measure students' learning performance but those big tests of the OECD's ILSAs and that the World Bank, more or less, pushed Cambodia into the PISA-D programme as this nation had been measuring its students' performance through home-grown assessments. Three interviewees[65] confirmed that the World Bank has been pressuring Cambodia to prioritise education and assess it by means of PISA-D in order to see where Cambodia is on the international stage and to determine the profile of Cambodian human resource against its 2030 and 2050 visions.

Most of my interviewees associate priorities on education and learning assessment to promote human resource with references to the Cambodian government's rectangular strategy phase IV, its 2030 and 2050 visions and achievement of SDG4. While Participant G saw PISA-D as an advantage and opportunity for Cambodia to make educational reform, Participants C and H affirmed that learning assessment has been the key to achieving the Minister's proposed reform in Cambodia's education. The Minister's proposed reform revolved around five priorities: teacher training, textbook development, curriculum improvement, school inspection and learning assessment. Regarding curriculum, Participant F asserted that Cambodia intended to move toward competency-based for both national assessments and examinations and that joining PISA-D would offer Cambodia 'a very strong understanding' of how to achieve this transition. Similarly, Participant C took Cambodia's PISA-D participation as a trick to get all of the MoEYS's departments and stakeholders to believe more strongly that Cambodia students can perform up to a certain level. However, Participant A argued that Cambodia's PISA-D participation could be a good thing on the surface but a critical examination into it would reveal that it was more meant just to show off to the world that Cambodia was also conducting an international assessment PISA-D and had produced the results. Participant A connected this act of showing off to Cambodia's attempts to attract outsiders such as DPs, which is similar to Participant F's first driver.

[64] SDG4 reads 'Ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.'
[65] H, I and J

I now turn to the PISA-D implementation funding and costs. I find that there are different accounts and perspectives on how much the programme has cost this global south nation. Participant B stated that because the Cambodian government did not plan to join the PISA-D programme, no budget was allocated for the purpose, thus requiring financial assistance from DPs. However, Participant F indicated that the GPE grant of $20 million to Cambodia caused no harmony among the donors and that UNICEF and UNESCO leading ESWG in Cambodia would not allow any portion of the grant to fund the PISA-D programme but rather use all of it to finance their projects and that their objection caused issues in financing the PISA-D programme. Shown in Chapter 4, ESWG under UNESCO and UNICEF opposed the implementation of PISA-D in Cambodia and rejected the financing request for this programme, which they would have funded with US$57 million through the EFA-Fast Track Initiative Catalytic Fund (Auld et al., 2019, p.207).

However, Participant B stated that there were numerous alternative sources of assistance, most remarkably from the World Bank, as the largest sponsor. The second source of assistance came from Korea, as the Cambodia's peer learning country. Their assistance covered the travel and accommodation expenses of the EQAD team participating oversea seminars. Sometimes Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) also chipped in upon the EQAD's request. Participant B asserted that when the Cambodian team had budgetary problems, they talked to the OECD and that the OECD did not provide fund, but the OECD had the power to negotiate with other partners to help them get things done from start to finish. Participant B confirmed that Cambodia's affordability was the only issue but that the OECD was able to secure the support of DPs, particularly the World Bank. Mentioned in Chapter 4, a substantial amount of funding came from the World Bank's SEIP, contributed by KOICA, a non-member to ESWG (Auld et al., 2019).

Regarding the favour, Participant I thought that there was a small portion of finance from the OECD's technical assistance but that the World Bank had to cover the rest of the costs. Participant C explained that the World Bank offered financial assistance to cover various operational costs to the PISA-D enactment in Cambodia because at the PISA-D arrival, the World Bank was developing SEIP, in which SBM would be implemented, to enhance accountability triggered by students' learning outcome in Cambodian schools. On this subject, Participant I argued that the PISA-D programme induced huge yet unaccounted costs

to Cambodia, expressed in the waste of resources and times for the government officials, teachers, and students who got involved and that the finance should have been invested in teacher trainings for better teaching methods. Participant I even raised a question why Cambodia decided to participate in the incomplete version of the PISA-D programme. In other words, Participant I considered the programme resource and time consuming but Cambodia where its out-of-school population was a critical issue did not opt to implement the out-of-school assessment of this programme.

When asked about the implementation cost, half of my study participants[66] stated that they did not have any knowledge of it but they all believe that it was costly to a developing country like Cambodia and expressed the amount in several USD millions. Participant C took the total implementation cost or any of it as classified information. Both Participants C and E indicated that there was support which doubled as a favour from the OECD, this allowed Cambodia not to pay for the registration or membership fees while the other countries had to. Participant E explained through a Telegram chat that the exemption was made for Cambodia because this country was a developing nation with willingness to participate. Similarly, Participant C thought that the OECD offered the favour to Cambodia as encouragement to participate and that without the support, the PISA-D implementation would have faced difficulties due to lack of financial support from the Cambodian government. Regarding the amount in the case of Bhutan's late registration in early 2017, the OECD consented to a participation fee of €50,000; otherwise, this Kingdom would have paid €600,000 in 2015 instead (Delma, 2019). As Cambodia registered or became a member in 2016, this nation would have paid the amount between these two figures if the payment had been required.

Participant D believed that PISA-D participation could provide some benefits, but also incurred significant implementation costs in addition to the membership fee. The implementation costs were divided into international costs and in-country costs. Participant F indicated that the international costs for Cambodia were low and that this country did not have to pay for them as they were 'subsidised' by DPs. However, the EQAD's summary tables of costs show that the international costs and the in-country costs for Cambodia share similar percentages, amounting to about USD$ 1.5 million in total – *see Tables 9 and 10*. Participant D inquired whether the Cambodia's costs are commensurate with the policy value

[66] C, D, E, G and I

offered by the PISA-D programme. In other words, if it has a positive impact, are the benefits significant enough to justify the investment in this ILSA?

Table 9: 3-year in-country costs expressed in USD

Comp No.	Sub Comp.	DESCRIPTION	3 YEARS TOTAL	2015	2016	2017	TOTAL
1		National Consultant for National Center	90,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	**90,000**
2		PISA Capacity Building	251,568	110,863	110,863	29,842	**251,568**
3		Define and describe target population	6,897	6,897	-	-	**6,897**
4		Provide input and guidance to the OECD	2,734	2,734	-	-	**2,734**
5		**Preparing and Conducting PISA Test**					
	5.1	Translate all assessment materials	28,000	28,000	-	-	**28,000**
	5.2	Implement the field trial	24,284	-	24,284	-	**24,284**
	5.3	Provide feedback on field trial analysis report	9,000	-	9,000	-	**9,000**
	5.4	Main Test implementation	155,518	-	-	155,518	**155,518**
		Sub Total for Preparing and Conducting PISA Test	216,802	28,000	33,284	155,518	**216,802**
6		Prepare jointly with the OECD analysis of the PISA data	4,208	-	-	4,208	**4,208**
7		PISA Test Result Dissemination	63,759	-	-	63,759	**63,759**
8		Vehicle and Equipment	72,700	72,700	-	-	**72,700**
9		Office Operation	32,160	10,720	10,720	10,720	**32,160**
10		Vehicle Operation	25,590	8,530	8,530	8,530	**25,590**
GRAND TOTAL			766,418	270,444	193,397	302,577	**766,418**

Participant D had observed that Cambodia did not appear to use the data and information meaningfully and continued raising questions along the line of Cambodia's participation in the 2022 PISA within the logics of investment and return. During the presentation in London, the Cambodian PISA-D NPM confirmed that the MEF would fully cover the budget for 2022 PISA and strongly believed that the experiences gained from the PISA-D programme would give Cambodia adequate 'confidence' and 'better prepare' this country to administer PISA 2022 and that the PISA programme would act as a crucial benchmark for Cambodia in assessing the success of the country's ongoing educational reforms (Chinna, 2019, p.9). Participant F indicated that the Cambodian government had paid the international cost of €210,000 for its participation in the 2022 PISA, although unsure whether they paid that from their own budget or any budget supplemented with the World Bank's loan or not. Through Telegram, Participant B told me that Cambodia is participating in the 2023 PISA in order to

identify which aspects of education reform require further improvement. Explained in Chapter 4, the Cambodia's participation in the main PISA this first time is to obtain comparative data from 2018 to 2023 that will indicate the effectiveness of the country's present education reform initiatives (Care et al., 2020).

Table 10: 3-year international costs expressed in USD

Comp No.	Sub Comp.	DESCRIPTION	TOTAL	2015	2016	2017	3 YEARS TOTAL
1		A-Technical Development, Implemention, Analysis and Reporting					
		Steering Group					
	1.1	Expert papers	48,360	16,120	16,120	16,120	**48,360**
	1.2	Travel(partial)	5,200	5,200			**5,200**
	1.3	International conferences	7,800	7,800			**7,800**
	1.4	Technical workshop	10,400	5,200	5,200		**10,400**
		Sub Total	71,760	34,320	21,320	16,120	**71,760**
2		**International Development, field trials,local assessment adminstration and related services**					
		International and national contractors					
	2.1	contextual questionares and method for out of school youth	143,000	71,500	71,500		**143,000**
	2.2	Cognictive instruments review and design	31,200	15,600	15,600		**31,200**
	2.3	Translators and Adaptations	19,500	9,750	9,750		**19,500**
	2.4	In-country administration QA	104,000	52,000	52,000		**104,000**
	2.5	Coding,data management and scaling	20,800	10,400	10,400		**20,800**
		Sub Total	318,500	159,250	159,250		**318,500**
3		**Technical oversight, coordination, analsysis and reporting**					
	3.1	OECD Head of Division/PISA, Analysis and Project Support	194349	64,783.00	64,783.00	64,783.00	**194,349**
	3.2	Analysis outputs and reports	19,500	6,500	6,500	6,500	**19,500**
	3.3	Country visits and meeting	8,320	2,773.33	2,773.33	2,773.33	**8,320**
	3.4	Technical workshops	2,080	693.33	693.33	693.33	**2,080**
	3.5	International conferences	25,482	8,494	8,494	8,494	**25,482**
		Sub Total	249,731	83,244	83,244	83,244	**249,731**
4		**Engagement for peer to peer learning and contribution to UN-led post 2015 process**					
		OECD Staff	66,179	22,059.70	22,059.70	22,059.70	**66,179**
		Sub Total	66,179	22,060	22,060	22,060	**66,179**
		TOTAL	706,170.10	298,873	285,873	121,423	**706,170**
						7.3% Overhead	**51,550**
						Total 3 years	**757,721**

For the main PISA test, Participant A argued that its findings and results were likely to offer a one-size-fits-all policy and that for this reason Cambodia should not implement it for two main reasons. Firstly, because a large number of Cambodian schools were in abject poverty, it raised questions on how such a test could be used to assess these schools and how policy makers could even plan interventions based on its findings to help them. Experiencing with PISA-D, Participant A warned that Cambodia's education policy made based on the prospective PISA recommendations may target wealthy schools and exclude those poverty-stricken ones. Along this line of argument, Participant A recommended that decisions and interventions be made based on the characteristics of individual schools. In addition to their financial status, Cambodian schools tended to have orientations such as towards being environment-friendly, Buddhist or agricultural – to name a few.

Secondly, under the leadership of the Minister, the high school exit exams had been strict in recent years, resulting in a low passing rate of around 30%. Based on Participant A, the items in these exams were rote learning-oriented, not critical thinking or thinking-focused, and did not require as much analytical thinking as PISA expected. Seeing PISA as a foreign, high achievement level, Participant A was certain that Cambodian students, especially those from normal schools, would not be able to take it.

6.2. What PISA-D is able and not able to measure in the Cambodian context and what do Cambodian actors see as possible alternatives to policy represented by PISA-D?

Considering the cost-benefit analysis, I now turn to provide the locals' perspectives on what PISA-D can and cannot assess in the Cambodian context before offering their proposals of potential alternatives to the PISA-D policy. I find that the PISA-D testing content was not adequately contextualised and translated into Cambodian. Therefore, they were generally different from what Cambodian students had been taught and failed to address the objectives of the curriculum framework in Cambodia. As a result, its national assessments would serve Cambodia better by incorporating some PISA-(D) standards and making them routine exams for schools rather than entirely utilising infrequent standardised assessments that contain items from outside sources that tend to be irrelevant to the local context in Cambodia.

6.2.1. What PISA-D is able and not able to measure in the Cambodian context

This subsection collects the interviewee's understanding and experience about what PISA-D could and could not measure Cambodian students' abilities. I find that PISA-D test items were not properly adapted and translated to Cambodian context and language. Hence, in general, they were different from what Cambodian students had been taught and did not respond to the aim of Cambodian curriculum framework.

In the PISA-D technical report, there were loopholes in the translation and verification of test items that undermined the validity and reliability of the PISA-D results. First, cultural misalignment may occur where test items might not resonate with students' experiences, leading to confusion. Linguistic variability posed risks of misinterpretation due to regional dialects. Inadequate contextualisation compromised relevance, while insufficient training for translators could result in poor-quality translations that missed local nuances. Over-reliance on English and French source versions risked imposing foreign standards that did not align

with local practices. Lack of local stakeholder involvement meant valuable insights were overlooked. Finally, inconsistent guidelines and weak feedback mechanisms hindered the identification and correction of issues, potentially resulting in assessments that did not accurately measure student performance. Addressing these loopholes was crucial for ensuring relevant and effective assessments in diverse educational settings (OECD, 2018c).

Already mentioned in Chapter 3, PISA-D is intended to enhance and differentiate the PISA data-collection techniques in order to produce results that more precisely guide evidence-based policy decisions in developing nations (OECD, n.d.-h; Ward, 2018). This statement is resounded by the OECD's representative in the case of Cambodia that PISA-D was 'totally relevant' for the Cambodian context because the OECD collaborated with a group of Cambodian national experts who revised and reviewed all of the items for a field trial. Before the field trial, the national teams were given a supply of items to adapt to the local culture and context. The OECD then studied the item behaviours by observing how the field trial students responded to the items. As a result, any items that were not suitable or that students could not understand were removed and were not used in the main survey. These processes seem to provide Participant F with the confidence to assert its absolute relevance.

In the first place, Participant B claimed that PISA-D accurately represented Cambodian students' abilities because this ILSA was relevant to the Cambodian context due to the fact its methods from sampling to in-class testing and to data entry and analysis were of high and rigorous techniques and that the assessment was based on a variety of real-life situations.

> *(PISA-D) was relevant to almost everything – almost anything because it was about activities that were related to daily life but it was relevant, at a certain degree, to the area where the students lived. Like the example I raised about the exchange rate. Such exchange rate was highly relevant to students in the city because sometimes their parents asked them to do the exchange for them or run this business for example. So it was relevant but to those students in the rural areas who even did not have money for the exchange, it was not relevant. Participant B*

Raising examples of test items that did not reflect the local context reminded Participant C of a question about an oil leak in the sea and its effects on the ecology.

> *I remember a question related to oil spill in the sea, what impacts on the environment and all. So students in some countries, such as in Africa…. raise that their country does not have the sea (scoff), how do the students understand (scoff and chuckle)? There may be such a bias. Participant C*

Participant E, raising an example of a test question about snowfall where the lives of people in cold regions were discussed, contended that not all questions were relevant to a hot country like Cambodia.

> *I say it is not all. Not all are relevant questions. For example, in the question about snowfall, talk about the lives of people in colder regions – polar areas. And our country has never had snow and all. Some questions cannot reflect and respond to what we have. Participant E*

From the above quotes of Participant B, C and E, PISA-D seems to emphasise the relevance of contextual learning, yet its approach raises significant concerns. While it seeks to connect assessments to real-life situations, such as exchange rates, the reality is that this relevance is inconsistently applied. For urban students, these topics may seem pertinent due to their direct involvement in financial activities, but for rural students, who often lack access to such concepts, the content becomes irrelevant and disengaging. This disparity reveals a troubling oversight in PISA-D's commitment to equity; the initiative fails to adequately address the diverse backgrounds and circumstances of all students. By prioritising certain contexts over others, PISA-D risks alienating significant portions of the student population in a poverty-stricken country like Cambodia, undermining its goal of fostering a truly inclusive educational experience. Rather than effectively assessing knowledge application, PISA-D's selective relevance may perpetuate existing inequalities in education.

Already mentioned in 3, PISA-D provides limited information regarding system factors such as teacher qualities, pedagogy and curriculum because of its competency-oriented nature (Pizmony-Levy, 2016). In Cambodia, the curriculum framework aims to produce citizens with 'full potential' (MoEYS, 2015, p.2). That is, as part of their contribution to the country's growth and integration into the region and the rest of the world, Cambodian citizens are meant to be physically healthy, knowledgeable, and possessing love for their country and other people. Regarding this aim, Participant A begged a question if the PISA-D test result was going to place Cambodia's local policies on track to achieving these goals upon understanding that this ILSA was more focused on some technical knowledge and hard skills within the restricted domains. Participant A argued that it could not accurately measure Cambodian students' behaviours, which were referred to as a set of attitudes in the framework necessary for the lower secondary students. Seeing PISA-D as a competency-based assessment, Participant A referred competency in Cambodian context to as the

‘expected learning outcomes’ which included the three main components: knowledge, skills and attitude in the curriculum framework (MoEYS, 2015, p.12).

> *Our national development vision is to become an upper-middle income country in 2030 and a developed country in 2050. To achieve these, we have issued policies in our curriculum that expect our students to have the 21st century skills: ability to love family, nation and society and so on – you can refer to our curriculum framework. And we want our students to have competencies to compete with others – that is all. All of these give me a reflection of whether when we do PISA test, are we going to achieve all these? Participant A*

Participant A’s quote underscores a notable misalignment between Cambodia's national curriculum framework and the goals of the PISA-D initiative. While Cambodia aims to become an upper-middle-income country by 2030 and a developed country by 2050, its educational policies emphasise not only knowledge and skills but also the cultivation of values such as love for family, nation, and society. This holistic approach prioritises character development alongside academic achievement. In contrast, PISA-D focuses on assessing quantifiable skills, which may overlook the cultural and moral values crucial to Cambodian society. Consequently, this disconnect could hinder students' educational experiences, as they are evaluated on skills that do not fully reflect the values expected by their culture. Addressing this misalignment is essential for creating a more integrated educational framework that honours both the development of practical skills and the foundational attitudes necessary for national progress.

From Chapter 4, both the OECD and the World Bank prioritise educational achievement as a means to drive economic growth and reduce poverty, using data-driven methods and standardised metrics for assessment (Francesco & Guaschino, 2020). This approach often sidelines local educational needs and values, favoring quantifiable outcomes over qualitative aspects of education (X. Liu, 2022). With respect to the Cambodian curriculum, Participant C clarified that PISA-D seemed to expect very similar learning outcomes, but when it comes to the test questions, they were very different and at higher level than what had been taught and learned in Cambodian classrooms because the local learning style was heavily reliant on long-established textbooks. Participant C pointed out that the difference was that Cambodian textbooks did not promote reading, lacked diversity, questions and assessment methods; and that this difference could be a considerable justification over why Cambodian students scored poorly.

> *When it comes to skills, so-called learning outcomes, expected outcomes are profoundly related to our curriculum, but when it comes to the test questions, they are far from what is being learnt and taught in our classrooms because the way we learn is dependent on the*

> *textbooks that have been prepared for a long time. So our textbook does not promote reading, it is not diverse, the assessment is not diverse, only a few questions – that is it. So there may be differences on this point, and that is the main factor that makes our students score low. Participant C*

Participant C's quote expresses strong disapproval of PISA-D's inability to effectively assess Cambodian students, highlighting a significant disconnect between the expected outcomes and the realities of classroom learning. Outdated textbooks that lack diversity and fail to promote essential reading skills severely limit students' preparedness for these assessments. While the curriculum may align with PISA-D goals, the narrow scope of assessment – relying on a limited set of questions – does not accurately reflect the breadth of knowledge and skills students acquire. This situation underscores a systemic failure, where educational authorities have not adapted to the unique needs of Cambodian learners, ultimately resulting in low scores that do not represent students' true capabilities.

Participant C continued that the urgent need for reform in curriculum and assessment practices is evident, as the current framework fails to support and accurately evaluate the potential of Cambodian students through the PISA-D assessment.

> *But if we translate positively, it means that it shows us that we need to do something to change the textbook, the assessment method or the teaching method of the teachers in the classroom. I have stated from the beginning that changing the school culture and assessment method by the classroom is an important point. In terms of learning outcomes, there is some intertwining, but in terms of practice, the test questions are far apart. Participant C*

The emphasis in Participant C's quote on changing Cambodian school culture raises concerns about meddling in the local education system. While fostering a positive environment is important, imposing external cultural shifts risks undermining the unique context of Cambodian education. This approach can be seen as an attempt to override established practices and values without fully understanding the local needs and challenges. Such meddling not only distracts from essential reforms in textbooks, assessment methods, and teaching strategies but also threatens to alienate educators and students who are deeply rooted in their own cultural framework. Without a genuine and respectful engagement with the local system, well-intentioned efforts at cultural change may lead to further disconnect and disillusionment within the educational community.

Illustrated in Chapter 3, the diversity of linguistic and cultural contexts and heterogeneity in student performance pose a challenge in PISA's measurement (Bloem, 2013, 2014). In the case of Cambodia, Participant A also believed that some concepts seemed to bear some

relevance to some of the local learning aspects but that they were less relevant in terms of actual implementation, coupled with the fact that Cambodian culture and social aspects differed from those of other countries. In this sense, Participant A contended that the test was 'imposed', and was just taken it although it would fail to solicit Cambodia's feedback on how to fit in this country. Hence, it was clear that such a 'one-fit-all' assessment could not address the issues in the Cambodian situation.

Both Participants A and B believed that PISA-D could not measure what is 'invisible or cannot be seen'. While Participant A raised the understanding of Dharma and natural development promoted in Buddhism as an example of what Participant A regarded as invisible skills that would assist Cambodian students in their learning, Participant B referred what cannot be seen to as an entire curriculum. In this regard, Participant B explained that Cambodian students at the age of 15-year-olds had a huge variety of abilities and were in different grades, which would be measured more accurately by the local curriculum-based assessments. In this sense, Participant B believed that aged-base PISA-D assessment would not be a good fit for Cambodian students' learning reality and that it was tricky to identify how PISA-D would affect the Cambodia's curriculum.

However, Participant B stated that PISA-D could assess students' performance, achievement level, and factors influencing their learning such as living standards, family, society, and teachers. Participant C agreed that because PISA-D could measure a variety of these factors, its results would provide valuable information about a country's educational system. Participant E also generalised that PISA-D was able to measure a wide range of factors because the questions it contained did not focus on a single perspective and attempt to analyse it holistically and that the PISA-D questions were rather comprehensive in all areas, allowing one to draw broad conclusions. Participant H also expected that the PISA-D report would offer a baseline on the students' learning outcomes as well as the contextual information that can be used to reform Cambodia' education system.

Participant H thought that due to the poor level of education in Cambodian primary schools, which also was projected in the regional assessment known as SEA-PLM, conducting the PISA-D test for 15-year-olds at higher grades did not accurately reflect Cambodia's current situation. Claiming to have investigated the items during the PISA-D test in Cambodia, Participant E argued that the PISA-D test could offer about 30% of accuracy. With such

understanding, Participant E made two main arguments: (1) the content and knowledge the students had learnt from school and the questions asked in the test did not match; and (2) the students tended to misunderstand what was asked in the questions due to poor translation to Khmer. Participant E's first argument seems to back up Participant C's earlier clarification and be echoed by Participant A's claim that the Cambodian results were very low, which could prove how poorly this ILSA fit Cambodian context.

Even if there were cases in which some phrases in the test items were 'a little biased', Participant C believed that the effectiveness of translation was 'acceptable' since significant adaptation was allowed and that the students generally were able to understand the original content of the test questions but that for reading passages, they could not finish because they were poor readers and unable to understand. Regarding translation, Participant C remembered that there were numerous verifiers at various stages. To begin, a translation company was hired. Second, verifiers were required to confirm, and prior to having verifiers, expert reviews had to be competed. During these stages, confidentiality was monitored as filming and paper recordings were strictly prohibited due to OECD principles.

A similar explanation by Participant B that the translation phase involved three to four parties. First and second persons translated one same document; these two translators never knew each other and were not supposed to discuss their works. The two versions of the translated documents were then taken to a third person for verification. This third person double-checked the translations and decided which one would be better or to combine bits and pieces from the two versions into a new one of best quality. In addition to the work, cApStAn was the one to finally check the translation's quality and conduct adaptation. To check, they hired an expert (or experts) who knew Khmer to assist during the processes but Participant B indicated that the EQAD team began the adaptation process first because only the local team were familiar with the local context. They first adapted (the test items) to the local context before passing them to cApStAn to see if they deviated from the original content. In case of deviation, they convened a meeting, in which the cApStAn experts made comments or asked clarifying questions. If the meanings remained the same after listening to the EQAD team's explanation, they accepted and they would continue to question if the meanings got too far away from what they wanted. On this point, Participant C asserted that the EQAD team was not allowed to 'adjust' the items to the Cambodian context.

Participant F considered that PISA-D was able to measure competencies. For example, Participant F clarified that competencies in math began with the abilities to add two very simple numbers together - with basic number identification and that PISA-D was designed to assess competency in real-life situations as every item was grounded in reality. Assume you were in a café, reading the menu. What is the cheapest item available? However, Participant F asserted that PISA-D could not assess a level lower than 1C and that the instruments were developed by a group of over 200 experts in the three domains from all over the world. Participant F explained that at a level below 1C, it would rather be a matter of checking whether the student can read the test questions and that competencies below level 1C in reading would be about really basic literacy and questions could be: 'Do you know what this letter is?' 'Do you recognise this letter?'. Collaborating with those experts, the OECD was interested in finding out how low a student's performance could be and still be reflected on the PISA scale. Participant F further explained that at level 1, the test questions would be about measuring reading ability rather than science knowledge. In this sense, what science cannot measure is below level 1B.

Presented in Chapter 3, PISA's target population in developing countries have different coverage and low enrolment and participation rates, affecting the reliability of equity data for comparison. As a result, the stated level of representation and validity is questionable in both local and international settings (Bloem, 2013, 2014, 2015; Pizmony-Levy, 2016). In the case of Cambodia, when asked what PISA-D could not measure, both Participants D and I referred to Cambodia's opting out of the out-of-school assessment, resulting in a great loss of data on poverty-stricken low-performance students. Quoting UNICEF, Cambodian net enrolment rates in primary school were over 90%, but dropped to 20%-30% by the start of upper secondary. That is, the PISA-D incomplete assessment covered only about a fourth of the age group. In fact, only 28.1% of the entire 15-year-old population was tested at the time. In other words, nearly 72% of Cambodian youth have dropped out or postponed their education (MoEYS, 2018b, 2018a).

Mentioned in Chapter 2, a datafication technology as PISA-D is culturally embedded; therefore, should be subjected to local interpretation. In the case of Cambodia, both Participants A and C asserted that the PISA-D test items were just translated – not created or written by the Cambodia's side. While Participant B and Participant C stated that the EQAD team was allowed to change only foreign names (of persons and places) to Cambodian ones

during the translation and adaptation processes, Participant A argued that the Cambodia's side did not have any rights to make change on any test items. Regarding proposing changes in the test items, Participant C explained that at different progress levels, the EQAD team constantly consulted with them, but when it came to test questions, the local team were unable to do so because it was a universal assessment that had to be administered in all the member countries. In this connection, Participant D argued that the contexts were very different because PISA-D member countries came from Africa and Latin America rather than Cambodia's neighbouring countries. Participant H also explained that the PISA-D test items were still international, which failed to accommodate Cambodian context regardless of the adaptation effort.

Participant C indicated that as PISA-D was not a performance-based assessment, the only thing PISA-D could not assess is the student's ability to communicate and perform practical tasks and that while PISA-D seemed to focus on internal knowledge and skills, it failed to measure the skills necessary to the market of the present time and in the future. Those skills include presentation, problem-solving, project and plan preparation…etc. Participant C explained that PISA-(D) was not designed for any performance-oriented purpose yet probably because there were so many countries, so if it did, the assessment would be largely subjective. Participant C also made clear that while PISA-D incorporated financial literacy, collaborative learning and some other 21st century skills, PISA-D seemed to overly rely on self-reporting methods by allowing the students to tick a questionnaire instead of employing questions that would respond to a performance-based assessment.

6.2.2. Proposed alternatives to PISA-D

This subsection compiles what my study participants think could be alternatives to the policy value offered by PISA-D. They commonly seem to suggest that Cambodia had better enhance its national assessments by employing some of the PISA-(D) standards and making them regular tests for schools rather than administering infrequent standardised assessments that include items from external sources that may not be of local relevance to Cambodia's context.

Auld et al. (2019) argue that foreign funders led by the World Bank also had PISA-D enacted in the other aid dependent nations – the World Bank's active role. Withdrawal from such a programme will be 'politically problematic' as PISA-D is linked to an international target –

SDG4 – and aid provision (Auld, Xiaomin, & Morris, 2020, p.20). In the case of Cambodia, Participant F asserted that there would not be any better assessment than PISA-D as Cambodia desired to compare its educational system to that of other countries, which necessitated the use of ILSAs. In this sense, Participant F suggested that SEA-PLM should not be a choice and that Cambodia could have used TIMMS or PIRLS but they cannot provide as precise information as PISA-D because they are curriculum-based and did not customise their tools for low- and middle-income countries only after the PISA-D enactment in Cambodia.

However, considering PISA-D as a non-exclusive assessment but part of Cambodia's assessment system, Participant G believed that no alternatives were better than others but all would contribute to Cambodian education system to a certain extent but the question Participant G raised concerns Cambodia's capacities in making the best use of all the data offered by those alternatives. While Participant H believed that knowledge should not remain local and any students were supposed to possess 'must-know', 'should-know' and 'nice-to-know' knowledge which were under the coverage of PISA-(D) and SEA-PLM. On this subject, Participant A recommended that Cambodian policy makers devise alternative strategies to the PISA-D items and findings imposed from above.

Already mentioned in Chapter 3, developing countries, especially those in Africa that are enacting regional assessments, need not participate in PISA-D (Pizmony-Levy, 2016). Understanding that the approach and coverage of PISA-D and regional assessment SEA-PLM are comparable, and that both take into consideration the factors at home and school that contribute to a student's learning result, Participant H believed that national assessments would be the best alternative to PISA-D as they would offer more accurate and have more direct linkages to the Cambodian context. Regarding local context, Participant E even preferred a curriculum-based assessment that would be set separately to respond to different areas or the needs of each individual area, rather than being used as a common standard across a country. On this subject, Participant I argued that Cambodia needed not participate in external assessments and the country had already known in which subjects its students were failing based on the high school exit exam results under the leadership of the current Minister. However, Participant B explained that while exams were meant to benefit individual students in terms of having adequate qualifications to go to a higher level or grade, assessments would represent and benefit the entire country. In this sense, Participant B

claimed that the Ministry could not analyse national exam results for major policies since they serve a different function than assessment.

Participant C explained that this ILSA offered a framework for measuring students' abilities while Cambodia had no such framework for its high school exit exam and that the questions in this exam may range from easy to difficult, but there were no multi-technical questions that can assess students' abilities at all levels. Participant C also believed that PISA-D reflected a great deal on Cambodian students' ability and their learning outcomes, considering their findings. While Cambodian national assessments show that around half of the students perform below the basic level, PISA-D project the majority of them scoring below the second level, which is the PISA-D' basic level. Participant C explained that these findings made sense because the PISA-D levels were higher and Cambodian students are unfamiliar with the exam items.

> *… because the PISA-D levels are higher and our students are not very familiar with the test items, most students score below the second level, which is the basic level of PISA-D. Participant C*

Participant C's quote suggests that the PISA-D test is set at a higher difficulty level than what the students are accustomed to. As a result, many students struggle with the test questions, leading to scores that fall below the second level, which represents the basic proficiency level in the PISA-D framework. Essentially, the unfamiliarity with the test format and content contributes to lower performance among the students.

Participant I verified that the national assessments in grades 3, 6, 8 and 11 operated under EQAD should be reliable as they were the fruit of collaborative work of various experts from the major IOs such as UNESCO Institute for Statistics, UNESCO, the World Bank, Swedish SIDA and ADB. However, these national assessments generally have been believed to lack reliability and quality, which seems to be one of the main reasons why Cambodia has to look for a more credible assessment in order to inform its education policy (Heng et al., 2017). With the EQAD's experience in conducting the national assessments, Participant A thought that Cambodia could design its own tests and that with the help of local experts, Cambodia would be able to improve the accuracy of the local assessments.

Participant C asserted that Cambodia was not able to create test items and for PISA-D and PISA, Cambodia just replicated and translated the exam questions known as sample items

from these ILSAs and administers them to its students. However, considering the increasing number of young experts, Participant I also agreed that Cambodia had adequate capacity to strengthen the local assessments through international best practices but must consider starting with the grade 3 as the lowest basic education for its spill-over effects onto the next grades. Regarding best practices, Participant B stated that EQAD was planning to improve the sampling framework, data collection methods and test item quality of the national assessments based on PISA-D. In this respect, both Participants F and H believed that all of the capacity established in EQAD from the PISA-D enactment experience would spill over into the Cambodian national assessments. Looking at the countries that do not participate PISA-(D), Participant C also proposed that a good option was to use a variety of test questions to improve the national assessments, and that this option would be very affordable as it was less costly, considering the costs Cambodia was and will be supposed to pay for its participation in PISA-(D). However, between the national and international assessments, Participant I advised that Cambodia had better invest in homegrown assessments but that it truly was Cambodia's place to decide what the country actually needed.

Participant B adhered to the national assessments and considered the regional assessment, SEA-PLM, as the alternative to PISA-D on the international stage. However, there is no clear-cut choice among the three levels of assessments: national, regional and international since these assessments are designed with different capabilities, scopes and targets. Participant D preferred SEA-PLM, in which six South East Asian nations, including Cambodia, participated in 2019 because it is the regional assessment whose member countries' contexts appear to be substantially similar to Cambodia's. Participant D further asserted that based on the current situation, Cambodia only needs to choose one, rather than joining two. That is, the grade 5 assessment of SEA-PLM is more appropriate for Cambodia because a great number of Cambodian students drop out before the age of 15, PISA-(D)-targeted age.

Participant I understood that it took huge investment in terms of time and resource for Cambodia to enhance the national assessments and that the alternative was joining an international instrument which capacity-building comes along. In view of this, Participant I considered Cambodia's heavy dependence on external funding as a grave issue that would compromise how local education policy was made. Based on Participant A, when a policy did not gain DPs' support, its implementation would face difficulties since Cambodia's budget

appeared little, especially under COVID, when the national budget for education was being slashed by up to 50%. As a result, over the most recent time, any policy implementation had been heavily reliant on the DPs' funding. In this regard, Participant C stated that Cambodia was a country that had received aid from all parties, thus there were no distinct orientations.

> *Whether (we) want it or not, we have to do it, and the word criteria for aid can also be the criteria of donors – DPs. Talking about it, our country is an aid-recipient country, so sometimes we receive aid from all parties, so sometimes we do not have a specific orientation. So things can be donor-driven through some activities, because if we continue donor-driven work, we will not be able to develop human resources. Participant C*

In Participant C's quote, the lack of 'specific orientation' in Cambodia's development efforts can largely be attributed to the local actors' unawareness of concerned IOs operating within a framework of heterarchical governance. The OECD and the World Bank so far have articulated a clear vision for steering Cambodian education towards KBE. Their focus on improving educational outcomes aligns with broader economic goals, yet this clarity contrasts sharply with the contributions of other IOs. As a result, the absence of a cohesive direction leads to overlapping projects and a disjointed approach to aid delivery. To address this issue, there needs to be greater awareness and collaboration among these DPs, ensuring that their efforts align with Cambodia's national priorities and foster sustainable human resource development, rather than perpetuating a cycle of dependency.

Participant A argued that the PISA-D results had detected general issues in Cambodia's education system. Although PISA-D in some way alerted policy makers and curriculum designers to the fact that the students from Cambodia still lacked fundamental skills, it did not provide policy directives as in pointing to specific programmes for development. While these general issues found may cause ambiguity to Cambodia's effort in identifying the *what's* to reform as raised by Participant B, the *how's* to reform may be the next level of the challenge. As in Participant A's example, the teaching approach needed to be changed to a concept-based or inquiry-based teaching style.

> *The PISA(-D) result showed broad issues. Our result was lower than other countries, their average. But it did not tell us what to do. For example, teaching method needed to be modified – in such one word. Change teaching method to a concept-based or inquiry-based approach. That was it but a question raised how to get it done, PISA did not specify, but it in some way informed policy makers and curriculum developers of the fact that our students who did PISA were still limited…. just to let us know what we have to do if we want to achieve a certain level in the globe by showing us broad findings, but for further details, it requires the actions of the policy maker, the curriculum developers, the teacher and the others to do further research to be integrated into a detailed intervention. Participant A*

Participant A's quote suggests that the PISA-D results for Cambodia reveal broad educational challenges but fall short of providing specific programs for improvement. While it is evident that Cambodian students scored lower than their peers in other countries, the findings merely highlight the need for changes, such as modifying teaching methods to be more concept-based or inquiry-driven. However, the report does not offer actionable steps or a clear framework for implementing these changes. This lack of specificity raises critical questions among educators and policy makers about how to effectively translate these broad insights into concrete strategies that can enhance student learning outcomes. Without detailed guidance, the risk remains that these findings will be acknowledged but not translated into meaningful action.

Furthermore, Cambodia's interpretation of the PISA-D results underscores a significant gap in integrating these broad insights into national policy making. Local actors often find themselves at a loss, as the generalised findings do not provide the clarity needed to inform specific educational interventions. This situation necessitates repeated requests for assistance from PISA-D operators to help demystify the results for the Cambodian population. The inability to effectively utilise the data hampers the potential for informed decision-making, as educators and policy makers struggle to understand how to implement the changes necessary for improvement. Without targeted support and further research, the PISA-D findings risk remaining abstract concepts rather than actionable strategies, limiting their impact on the educational landscape in Cambodia.

Participant C and Participant H considered PISA-D as more transparent and accurate. Participant D also agreed that the national assessment data had been hidden from public while PISA-D offered open data for further research and action. On the transparency of the PISA-D results, Participant C indicated that when the classroom tests results showed low performance, PISA-D would show low performance too and vice versa.

> *I support in the way that it provides transparency, in other words, it reflects a system so practically and in-depth, meaning that it is the health of an entire education system. Thus, transparency is essential. This does not mean that the national assessments are not, but just because PISA has a level, we can say, details of a whole system. The national assessments are about the whole system too, but it's just that it is still at a certain level where we need further development – this is an important point. Participant C*

Referring to the arguments made by Participants C, D and H, there is a troubling aspect of transparency in education systems, particularly in the context of the PISA-D program. While

PISA-D promotes transparency, it imposes (global) visibility which induces accountability. Consequently, it risks imposing strict adherence to OECD standards on countries like Cambodia, potentially leading to a new form of colonialism. This external pressure for compliance can stifle local contexts and priorities, reducing the complex realities of Cambodia's education system to mere data points for international scrutiny. Instead of fostering genuine improvement, this kind of accountability may serve to reinforce power dynamics, where local needs are overshadowed by the demands of foreign entities. The emphasis on transparency, then, becomes disapproving when it transforms into an instrument of control, limiting Cambodia's autonomy and agency in shaping its educational landscape. Thus, what is presented as a pathway to accountability can instead perpetuate inequalities and undermine the very purpose of fostering a healthy, responsive education system.

Participant A believed that Cambodia would be better off with 'a middle way' that had to be tailored to Cambodia's needs with a common benchmarking framework proposed by the OECD and Cambodia. That is, since PISA-D contained some certain benchmarked items and assessment framework that appeared to reflect Cambodian context, three participants[67] believed that investigating into them may be useful for Cambodia to improve the local assessments but that the improvement must fit in Cambodia's context. Participant A suggested that instead of focusing on the periodic standardised test, Cambodia should rather focus on regular tests such as tests on lessons, monthly tests, and semester tests, which offer faster results for practical and reflective interventions.

> *I believe that it needs reviewing and takes a middle way, instead. If I have to choose one, I can't take the national assessment result because I have seen that the national results have been of leniency. It means it is too loose as they have no thinking involved and without learning much just listening to videos and TV, (the students) also can do – I want to say that. So taking the national assessment results, I cannot do that but whether I should take the standardised test from them, I am not in favour either. I want to have a middle way that is designed for Cambodia with the benchmark from them and us. Participant A*

From the quote, Participant A's critique of educational assessments in Cambodia highlights the limitations of both national assessments, which is characterised as overly lenient and devoid of critical thinking, and standardised tests like PISA-D, which may not adequately reflect the local context. On this note, Participant A's advocate for a 'middle way' that combines elements from both approaches, creating a customised assessment designed specifically for Cambodia. This proposed solution emphasises the importance of relevant

[67] A, B and C

benchmarks, allowing for meaningful evaluation while respecting the unique educational landscape. This proposition underscores the need for local actors in shaping educational policies and assessments, rather than adopting foreign models uncritically.

In conclusion, this Chapter provides a detailed analysis of the introduction of the PISA-D program in Cambodia, highlighting the interplay between IOs like the World Bank and the OECD and local governance. It underscores the World Bank's crucial role in providing financial support and expertise, which has propelled Cambodia towards participation in international assessments namely PISA-D and PISA later, with the OECD and World Bank collaborating closely to facilitate this engagement. However, concerns about local capacity building persist, revealing a dependency on external entities for educational reform. Political dynamics also play a significant role, as fears of negative perceptions regarding educational outcomes have led to a lack of transparency and accountability. The involvement of these concerned IOs in Cambodia’s education policy making is set to influence the OECD's capacity-building exercises, which may overshadow local knowledge production. Ultimately, while the collaboration offers potential benefits, it is essential to tailor approaches to Cambodia's unique context, ensuring the integration of local expertise. For sustainable improvements in educational quality, there is a pressing need for genuine local engagement and investment in capacity building to make the reforms effective and enduring.

CHAPTER 7
THE OECD'S POLICY DIRECTIVES AND CAMBODIA'S SUBJECTION TO THEM

7.1. How do Cambodian actors perceive the OECD's policy directives and procedures and the PISA-D policies being enacted in Cambodia?

Most interviewees recognised the OECD's policy directives as significant impact on Cambodia's education system. They outlined three phases of the impact within the education reform trajectory: the Minister's policy response, the implementation of SBM, and a teacher training initiative. Since the third phase was still nascent and not widely covered in interviews, this section focuses on the first two phases. The first subsection examines the Minister's response to the OECD's directives from the PISA-D program, while the second explores the SBM programme implemented as an immediate response to the PISA-D results, highlighting local perceptions of these policies. I find that the World Bank used PISA-D findings to justify its SBM initiative, aiming to enhance accountability and transparency in Cambodian schools. The MoEYS and MEF leaders were influenced by the World Bank's and OECD's link between human resources and economic growth. The OECD aimed to use PISA-D to exert 'disciplinary power' (Foucault, 1977) over the Cambodian population and impose its policy directives through externalisation (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010) and standardisation (Gorur et al., 2019).

7.1.1. Minister's policy response

This subsection examines the impact of PISA-D findings on Cambodian education policy, primarily drawing from insights provided by Participant A. It reveals that the Minister was the most active supporter of the PISA-D program, while policy makers began to investigate its policy value. However, there appeared to be no significant impacts on students. On the other hand, some school principals and teachers became more aware of their responsibilities as outlined in the Minister's policy document responding to the PISA-D results.

Without the PISA-D results, Cambodian actors seemed to have known where the performance would be, claimed by a few participants.

> *...we are sure when we do the test that we are definitely weak. For that, we knew in advance, didn't we? We could have a hypothesis and for that we could already know for sure which level we would fall into. If one says it fits us, it a bit far as we already know our education system is very much low. Participant A*

From Participant A's quote, Cambodia's educational system is plagued by significant shortcomings, and the country is all too aware of its failures. There is a prevailing belief that Cambodian students will inevitably perform poorly on this assessment, leading to disappointing and predictable results that mirror the inadequacies of the current educational framework. While some might argue that the PISA-D test is suitable for evaluating Cambodia's education, this viewpoint fails to acknowledge the profound issues that stand in the way of its progress. Ultimately, this acknowledgment of weaknesses underscores the dire need for reform and investment.

In Chapter 4, the Cambodian Education Minister presented a dismissive attitude toward the PISA-D results. However, he acknowledged the need to know the results so that he could determine the actions to take.

> *I don't care what the results are; I just want to know what they are so that we know what to do about it. The Education Minister (Care et al., 2020).*

However, both Participants B and F claimed that before the Cambodia's results came out the way the Education Minister had already predicted what the results would be.

> *….a country protested to the OECD (to explain) why its performance was such very low. This country did not want its results to be published and even threaten to withdraw from PISA due to the low result. As the opposite, the Cambodian Minister said he had already known the results on where Cambodia was. So it wasn't a PISA shock to Cambodia but what was important for Cambodia was what to do to get rid of such shock in the future. Participant B*

In Participant B's quote, the contrasting responses of two countries to their PISA results illustrates differing attitudes towards educational assessment and accountability. One country reacted defensively, protesting its low performance and seeking to suppress the publication of results, fearing negative implications for its national image. In stark contrast, Cambodia's Minister acknowledged the disappointing results but emphasised a proactive approach focused on identifying strategies for improvement. This acceptance of reality allows for constructive dialogue and a commitment to reform, highlighting the importance of transparency and accountability in fostering a culture of continuous growth. Ultimately, while one country risks stagnation by avoiding accountability, Cambodia's willingness to confront its challenges positions it for educational advancements in the future.

Their claim corroborates with the Cambodia's national report that the Cambodian PISA-D results align with local curriculum-based student assessments as were 'anticipated' – mentioned in Chapter 4 (MoEYS, 2018a, p.130).

In Chapter 4, As the OECD uses its ILSAs to promote evidence-based policy, Wiseman (2010) indicates that one of the aims of such evidence-based policy making is to heighten the administrator's accountability that needs to be evaluated for funding purposes (Wiseman, 2010). This supports the findings of (Kijima, 2010) and (Lockheed, 2013) that the participation of developing countries in ILSAs targets foreign funding for their educational needs rather than seeks policy value.

Participant B mentioned that the Minister as the political actor and the EQAD head as the technician in charge would share the common understanding that the results should be released, regardless of how low, so that the 'culture of transparency, sharing and determination' (Hang, 2018, p.337) would be endorsed in order to avoid the probable PISA shock. Participants A and C agreed with the Minister that, for *transparency*, Cambodia should not be ashamed of the assessment results once they were revealed for school administrators would not know where they were without the findings and results being made public, and that those DPs who wanted to assist them would not know the where's and the how's in terms of interventions to improve the outcome. Participant B emphasised transparency in all of the OECD's technical procedures in conducting the PISA-D test. For *sharing*, Participants B and C referred to this as part of *transparency* in the sense that Cambodia was willing to be open about any flaws with its educational system and to exchange them with the other member countries in the hope of looking for best practices, again a case of 'externalisation' (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010). Both of them also interpreted *determination* as Cambodia's effort to get rid of these flaws.

In Chapter 3 I presented how developing countries were considered to have inadequate human, financial support and low analytical capacity to interpret the PISA data for their nationwide policy benefits (Bloem, 2013, 2014, 2015). In Cambodia, while Participant A considered PISA-D as new and had not witnessed any of its integration into the national Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework, Participant C believed that the PISA-D findings played a crucial role in the development of M&E in Cambodian education system as they could indicate the effectiveness of its education policies and whether or not they had hit

the set targets. The M&E framework emphasises the crucial role of youth in national development, recognising their unique characteristics as a vital human resource. This policy aims to develop youth to have a complete personality in terms of body, intellect, spirit, morals, values, and skills, fostering them into good citizens in society. This policy places Cambodian youth in the digital context of global growth in the 21st century and the Industrial Revolution 4.0 which require not only quality and equitable education and vocational training but also encouragement in developing essential soft skills such as initiative, invention, innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit (NYDC, 2022).

The PISA-D programme could pose challenges for this M&E policy, potentially complicating efforts to improve the educational system. While it provides data on student performance in reading, mathematics, and science, the reliance on this ILSA may lead to an overemphasis on standardised testing, detracting from holistic educational approaches that foster creativity and critical thinking. This focus could hinder the development of essential soft skills, such as initiative and innovation, which are crucial for the 21st-century workforce. Noticing little use of the PISA-D results, Participant A believed that it somewhat assisted, but only insofar as benchmarking, in that Cambodia was beginning to examine and adjust its policies and learned what to do. However, up until this point, neither the curriculum nor the teaching techniques had been reviewed in Cambodia. Based on Participants A and D, Cambodia now had the PISA-D results and findings in its hands, yet nothing was happening. That is, local policy makers or pertinent stakeholders had not yet been critical about it or performed a critical review of the current policies.

Currently at the ministry level, the Minister himself had begun to value PISA-D and been completely supportive of it while he was preparing Cambodia for the 2023 PISA; however, the Departments and other concerned stakeholders within the ministry had not been impacted and had not witnessed anything remarkable, based on Participant A's observation. At the policy level, Cambodian policy makers had begun to investigate it especially for planning their interventions and policies. They believed that it could assist them in their long-term policy decisions. That is, they needed to investigate it because they wanted to know how and what kind of policies were put in place in countries where their students performed well on PISA-D so that they could learn from them. This is 'externalisation' (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010). Policy makers were also looking ahead for benchmarking purposes from the PISA-D assessment itself. Participant I also agreed that the most crucial contribution from

the PISA-D programme made to Cambodia were the baseline study and the benchmarking possibility for future use, followed by the promotion of prospective partnership and funding to improve the local education system – the involvement of DPs and privatisation.

At this stage, both Participants A and I suggested that students had no ideas and there was not much impact on teachers either. Participant E confirmed that there had not been any changes in teaching, learning and managing at the school level since the results came out. Concerning the PISA-D impact, Participant G referred to the MoEYS's launch of two programmes in primary education: Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) and Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA). EGMA and EGRA are separate but complementary assessments used for the 'All Children Reading – Cambodia' program, implemented in four provinces[68] by the USAID and MoEYS. Barometer data for ACR–Cambodia was collected in 2018, 2019, and 2021. This provided a comprehensive overview of the program's impact on students in grades 1 and 2. These assessments evaluated foundational literacy and numeracy skills among young students.

In the 2020 midterm report, EGRA included subtasks such as consonant and vowel identification, reading fluency, and comprehension. The report showed that reading fluency showed modest gains, with students increasing their words read per minute. Similarly, EGMA focused on early numeracy, measuring competencies like number identification and basic operations. While specific EGMA results were not detailed in the report, the assessment aimed to track improvements in foundational math skills (King & Pressley, 2020). In this sense, Participant G contended that these programmes would have a positive impact on secondary education because if the primary education foundation was weak, the secondary level would be weak as well. However, Participant A mentioned that due to some project-based assistance, some school principals had been influenced to a certain extent. Participant A observed that the ADB's and the World Bank's recent projects and the intervention programmes from Participant A's Department were focused on improving the PISA test results.

The Minister had expressed satisfaction with the PISA-D findings and results as Participant A had observed him just going about telling the concerned stakeholders that Cambodia joined

[68] Battambang, Siam Reap, Kompong Thom and Kampot

the international competition, did everything necessary to improve the situation, and cited the interventionist policies in response to the results. However, Participant A seemed to be certain that the Minister's suggested policy response to the PISA-D findings was not going to guarantee that Cambodian students would pass the upcoming PISA test with greater performance. Participant A explained that the response as it was currently given on the presentation slides – the Minister's policy response presentation in Chapter 4 – raised the issue of how it would actually be put into implementation. Against this background, Participant A believed that it necessitated additional work, including consultation and beyond.

Participant A's warning towards the implementation of the Minister's policy response concerned the involvement of DPs, privatisation, PISA test-orientation, competition and accountability in the Cambodian schools of different financial contexts and orientations – mentioned in the previous chapter. Participant A explained that the upper secondary education in Cambodia had divided schools into four types: New Generation Schools (NGS), resource schools, SBM schools, normal schools. Introduced in 2015, the NGS reform offered an alternative school governance within the public education system. Adopting the NGS programme was intended to change schools into '*autonomous public schools*, which received high investment linked to new standards of accountability and governance as well as professional standards for 21st Century learning' (MoEYS, 2019, p1).

Based on Chea & Chen (2021), NGS in Cambodia was comparable to Charter School in the US and as this model presents an entirely new approach of teaching, learning, and management, the curriculum used was up-to-date and creative, with an emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM), Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and 21st century skills (V. Chea & Chen, 2021). Participant A indicated that resource schools were similar to NGS as they were also focused on STEM education and that ADB had provided a building with teacher's offices, conference rooms, and laboratories, together with fund for facility maintenance. ADB also offered STEM trainings to school principals and teachers and scholarships and stipends to teachers who worked in remote areas, as well as scholarships to female STEM students. The ADB's next project was called Step Up, in which STEM, digital education, and technology were the main topics to achieve a higher performance of these resource schools on PISA.

While normal schools were not under any project's assistance and did not have any particular models in their operation, a hundred SBM schools were sponsored by the World Bank's Secondary Education Improvement Project (hereafter SEIP), a five-year project commencing in 2017. SEIP aims to enhance access to high quality of lower secondary education in Cambodia. This is supported by a proposed credit of approximately US$40 million from the World Bank. The SEIP project appraisal document identifies that Cambodia faced challenges such as high dropout rates and a lack of qualified teachers, with over 60% of children in the relevant age group out of school. The document stated that SEIP aimed to increase learning outcomes and completion rates, ultimately contributing to the Cambodian government's goal of becoming a middle-income country by 2030 (The World Bank, 2017).

The SEIP project was currently extending to General Education Improvement Project (hereafter GEIP) to cover more than a thousand schools, from kindergarten to upper secondary schools. The extension was approved in January 2021 under the World Bank's loan of USD 60 million and the GPE grant of US$9.25 million to achieve the Cambodia's transformation to be a KBE as enshrined in the ESP 2019-2023 (The World Bank, 2022). Based on the project information document, the project aimed to address significant challenges within the Cambodian education sector, including low learning outcomes and inequitable access, particularly for marginalised groups. This GEIP project document reinforced SBM as the World Bank's key component to improve governance, training teachers to enhance instructional quality, and developing equitable learning environments. The document detailed that SBM was designed to enhance the governance and effectiveness of schools by empowering local stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and community members, to have a greater role in decision-making. By decentralising authority, SBM aimed to promote accountability among school leaders and staff, ensuring their responsibilities for educational outcomes and resource management (The World Bank, 2020).

Regarding the extension from SEIP to GEIP, Participant H explained that the Minister must had been informed by research on the growth of children's intellect during their first 1000 days. The research suggested that if they developed well, it would also increase the PISA results. Hence, the Minister turned his attention to kindergarten enrolment. Participant A made clear that SBM schools placed emphasis on parental and community involvement in the students' learning outcome. That is, for transparency purposes, they presented their students' results to the local community and parents to promote their participation and accountability.

To ensure efficient operations, these schools had the capacity to raise a sizable sum of money, mobilise neighbourhood resources and encourage parental involvement to fortify the SBM committee and increase school accountability. Participant A stressed that these SBM schools used PISA-D and later PISA to design their tests.

Illustrated in Chapter 3, Wiseman (2013) suggests that policy responses to PISA were more likely to be in the form of structural isomorphism than policy convergence, with the focus was on legitimising reforms on delegation of power alongside accountability – the main forces[69] of neoliberalism mentioned in Chapter 2. Also shown in Chapter 3, McCowan (2022) identifies neoliberalism, KBE discourse originated from the HCT and modernisation theory as the three variants of liberal capitalist model of development. Using PISA-D to channel its policy directives and procedures to the local knowledge production in the global south nations, the OECD may exploit this development model to convince these countries to redirect their education systems strictly towards the economic purpose by the pretext to modernise or to 'catch up with' the global north countries (McCowan, 2022, p.43). African, Asian and Latin American nations had been working with IOs to rebuild their country by first modernising their education system since independence (Dinnen, 2007, p.1). Those IOs had been capable of directing the knowledge production process to meet their objectives and agenda (Littoz-monnet, 2017). In Cambodia, teachers' unions critically condemned such IOs' capabilities and thus had been excluded from the local policy making process. That is, MoEYS had never consulted with any teachers' unions for education policy, based on Participant A.

> *Never. We do not engage them, frankly speaking. This is frank that we never engage them at all. I think that teachers' unions were also important but (we) had never engaged them. Because if we engage …. I do not need to elaborate much as we know our country's context – political context in our country (giggle along this statement) – because it is impossible. Participant A*

In the quote, the term 'never' is used repeatedly to highlight a resolute reluctance to engage, projecting authority and enhancing a hierarchical relationship with the teachers' unions. Although the unions are described as 'important,' the refusal to work with them demonstrates an awareness of their power and a purposeful distancing from them. With a laugh and a reference to the 'political context,' Participant A infuses irony by implying that the political environment as an obstacle to engagement. This interaction shows how discourse in political

[69] marketisation, competition and decentralisation (Rowe, 2019,p. 273) - market/marketisation, management/managerialism, and performance/performativity (Ball, 2003, 2016)

and educational environments both shapes and reflects power relations. It is hoped that eventually MoEYS will show willingness to work with the teachers' unions.

Seeing the Minister as an economist who had always given a great deal of consideration to weighing out between profit and loss and between efficacy and efficiency for the Cambodian education system, Participant A contended that because economic leadership and educational leadership were two distinct things, placing an excessive emphasis on loss and profit in education did not seem to be a smart idea. Participant A believed that the education leadership had better not focus too much on pursuing such economic goals and components; otherwise, they tended to transform education into business, which would then remove the general qualities of humanity from the education system. These economic goals and components had been brought along by large DPs since 2000, when they first began providing significant educational support to Cambodia and began bringing in numerous economic concepts.

According to Participant A, education policy in aid-dependent Cambodia must, to some extent, be in line with the DPs' 'agenda'. While Participant A considered the World Bank as a profoundly economic-oriented DP, Participant B agreed that this DP would not assist Cambodia if this nation was not prepared to align to their policies. From this perspective, Participant A recommended that Cambodia as heavily dependent on aid must figure out how to align its educational goals with the concerned DPs' agenda probably by looking for alternatives in order to avoid making their education systems overtly economic.

Participant A believed it was necessary to administer the PISA-D test only for the purpose to determine which aspects were acceptable and appropriate for the Cambodian context, in which a review of curriculum, assessment, and teaching methods was a priority. This review was necessary because these three aspects had been incoherent and inconsistent since before the PISA-D programme. However, the review was not intended for Cambodia to completely conform to PISA, but rather for Cambodia to learn from it by identifying what would fit in the local context and assisting Cambodia to achieve its designated goals.

Participant A explained that making reform work and 'imposing' reform were not the same thing and the requirement to use PISA-D findings had obviously been an 'act of imposition' as reflected in the fact that the leader was currently using it as a very strong base. That is, all

interventions, at any cost, were aimed at improving Cambodian students' PISA performance. Participant A indicated that reform that would produce results should not be 'imposed' from either the top or the bottom but required all concerned parties from top to bottom to collaborate and share a single vision, but that, for the time being, the top was moving forwards while the bottom was not. Participant A argued that if Cambodia continued to allow PISA to be implemented as it was, it was not going to really change teachers' 'mindset'.

Participant C suggested that Cambodia weigh its two alternatives. The first was the top-down strategy, in which the ministry must provide a clear direction, and the second was to strengthen the concerned schools. While the top-down strategy was referred to the Minister's policy response to PISA-D, the second strategy went in line with the World Bank's rationality to implement its SBM as a bottom-up approach. The World Bank's rationality was convincing to Participant C as this actor had observed that the capabilities of school principals and teachers were still quite constrained, regardless of the curriculum, books, teaching techniques, or evaluation systems. Both Participants B and C explained that the Minister's policy response, as a top-down approach, was no longer to PISA-D but PISA and that its current and main objectives were to improve student learning outcome and to ensure teachers to provide effective instruction so that the PISA scores can be expected to increase, but effective teachers do not happen without training or refinement as in the third phase of the education reform. Participant B argued that the policy response was where it all begins and that it requires four actors: MoEYS, policy makers, teachers and students to achieve higher PISA performance. In this sense, these two alternatives were meant to be a double-strategy in which both strategies were articulated towards the same aim – higher performance on PISA.

7.1.2. The School-Based Management (SBM) implementation

This subsection explores the concept of SBM in relation to the PISA-D enactment in Cambodia. Participant J provided the most detailed insights into SBM's implementation in Cambodian schools. It would seem that the World Bank utilised the ILSAs common narratives to justify the urgent need for SBM which was aimed to enhance accountability, teacher performance, and decentralisation within the education system and that the World Bank had been successful in integrating SBM as a key policy response to the PISA-D results and that SBM marked an initial step to incorporating neoliberalism in the Cambodian education system.

Mentioned in Chapter 4, on the same day that Cambodia's PISA-D results were publicly announced, the Cambodian Minister of Education delivered a presentation outlining education reforms as a response to these results. The response had three areas of priorities: mid-level education policy reform, teacher education reform and school reform. The third area delves into school management, teaching test methods at target schools, New Generation School operation and teaching and learning materials (Hang, 2018). To achieve the third area of priority, the Minister was to apply the '3As closed loop system' as the pillars of the SBM implementation (Hang, 2018, p.25).

In *Guiding Principles for Implementing School-based Management Programs,* SBM has many different definitions and names because it has been adapted in both developed and developing nations. This document refers SBM to the decentralisation of power from the central government to the school level by enabling local stakeholders who are more knowledgeable about local educational systems than national policy makers a voice and decision-making authority (World Bank Group, 2007). The SBM programme may stem from the IOs' efforts in promoting the discourses of 'good governance' (Bo, 2017, p.221) and 'decentralisation' (Bo, 2017, p.222) seen in the late 1990's. These efforts aimed to enhance the efficiency of their aid distribution and subsequently promoted marketisation and accountability in the education sector. The logics of SBM to increase autonomy, delegate responsibility, promote responsiveness to local needs with the aim of enhance students' performance goes in line with the educational trend that happened in all the OECD member countries using PISA results as a yardstick (World Bank Group, 2007).

100 target schools and about 300 non-target schools were placed under the SBM's reform programme as part of the World Bank's SEIP from 2018 to 2022 (Piseth, 2022). Based on Participant A, the World Bank had suggested the current Cambodian education system as 'broken'. This probably well explained the World Bank's rationality to introduce the SBM programme.

> *Regarding the controversy, it is even us as policy makers having controversy with the World Bank and the World Bank has controversy with the other DPs. We are in the middle – I want to say that – and we want to do anything for the system and so do the other DPs but for the World Bank, they say that the system is one that has been broken, how can it be done through the system? Participant A*

Participant A's quote highlights a complex situation involving significant disagreements among key actors, including policy makers, the World Bank, and other DPs. The quote also

expresses a sense of being caught in the middle of ongoing controversies, emphasising that while all parties aim to improve the system, their perspectives clash. Notably, the World Bank has characterised the Cambodian education system as 'broken,' a term derived from one of the ILSAs most common narratives. This critique raises concerns about how effective change can be achieved within such a flawed framework. This dynamic underscores the challenges of collaboration in the face of differing viewpoints, illustrating the need for a unified approach to drive meaningful reform in Cambodian education.

In response to Participant A, Participant J rationalised that SBM would encourage active participation from all stakeholders, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability in schools. This shift emphasises the need to move beyond traditional methods; simply repeating old practices will lead to the same outcomes. Instead, embracing new strategies and perspectives is essential for meaningful improvement in education, ultimately enhancing student learning and overall school performance.

> *... it is about participating to do old works in new approaches. So if we do the same old things over and over again, the result will be the same. Participant J*

Participant J stated that SBM was a relatively old management scheme that used old actions to manage new approaches and these new approaches consisted of a few crucial principles that had been successful in many other nations. One of the principles was the requirement for the Cambodian schools to shift from the existing long route system to a new short route system.

> *Cambodia's lengthy communication routes hindered timely responses to urgent school needs. To address this, a 'short route system' has been implemented, promoting direct collaboration between schools and communities, guided by the '3As Closed Loop System' principles for efficient support. Participant J*

Participant J argued the urgent need for the 'short route system' using policies that were top down would not be successful if the policy makers at the centre were, in many cases, unaware of what was going on at the school level. In this sense, Participant J took pride in claiming that SBM employed a bottom-up strategy in which the success stories from all schools were compiled into a policy and they were shared as best practices among schools.

In Participant J's quotes above, SBM in Cambodia could face significant challenges rooted in the country's historical reliance on lengthy communication routes that have long hindered timely responses to urgent educational needs. While the introduction of a 'short route system'

aims to foster direct engagement, the ingrained practices of slow communication continue to obstruct progress. In this sense, SBM allowed the World Bank – an influential strategic partner of the OECD – to penetrate the management of individual Cambodian schools, raising concerns about external influence overshadowing their specific local needs and priorities. The OECD needs to be aware of the specific needs of individual schools.

Given Participant A's earlier description of Cambodia's educational landscape, which features four distinct types of schools with differing levels of attention and resources, the SBM implementation may further exacerbate existing inequalities. Explained in Chapter 3, Lewis et al. (2016) argue that PISA for Schools allows the OECD to 'reach into' local school management and therefore 'open(s) up additional local education policy spaces' to the OECD's governance (Lewis et al., 2016, p.27). The OECD can potentially bypass local governments and hold individual schools and teachers accountable through its policy directives that had been seen to impose marketisation, decentralisation and performativity as part of the neoliberal reform scenario.

Participant J signified that the SBM implementation faced five reactions at the school level in the beginning. They started to refuse, claiming that it would be too difficult and time consuming. Then, they began to object, claiming that it was impossible to do so. Despite the refusal and objections, the SBM team would not back down, claiming that everything was for the benefit of Cambodian society. SBM actions were seen to be competition to the local schools. SBM actions made it more difficult for community participation, community fundraising for schools, and school environmental improvement.

Participant J appeared to present three perspectives regarding the origin and application of SBM. First Participant J described it as an established system, distinguishing it from the earlier version primarily by the introduction of new approaches.

> *SBM came to Cambodia, it is not a new thing, it is an old thing – we work on old activities but in new approaches. But there are also important points that are new ideas that are successful in many countries that we are adopting. Participant J*

Participant J's quote implies that SBM represents a fusion of traditional and contemporary practices. It suggests that SBM has a longstanding presence in Cambodia and is not merely a new phenomenon. Rather, it indicates that while the activities linked to SBM are rooted in

established traditions, they are being revitalised by incorporating successful practices from other countries

Second the application of the 3As Close Loop System as the SBM's key element requires modification to fit in the Cambodian context.

> *This 3As Closed Loop System is not only implemented in the context of Cambodia, for developed countries, they use the terms 'school autonomous and accountability'. So the system is already used successfully in some developed countries… In developed countries, first offer autonomy, then give them accountability…and finally conduct assessment. But the context of Cambodia is different – we cannot offer autonomy first. We need to start with assessment first – assess them. After assessment, they see the problems happening in the school, then they can make decisions on what to do next. It means empowering decision-making, power over resource management, and power to participate. After seeing that we have empowered them,… we must link to accountability. So even in the same 3As Closed Loop System theory but for different contexts we also use (it) differently. Participant J*

From Participant J's quote, the 3As Closed Loop System, while presented as a comprehensive approach, can largely be a copycat model derived from practices in developed countries. This derived model may stand a high chance of failing to account for the unique challenges faced in different educational contexts. While developed nations successfully implement this system by starting with autonomy, followed by accountability and assessments, this borrowed framework lacks relevance in Cambodia. This approach is misguided; beginning with assessment – PISA-D – may not address the real issues faced by schools. Without a foundation of autonomy, local actors may struggle to make informed decisions about resource management and participation. Introducing accountability after empowerment can be ineffective if the initial assessment does not accurately reflect the challenges.

Third Participant J, however, categorically denied that SBM was a copycat from any developed countries or the World Bank but rather it was a partnership between MoEYS and the World Bank.

> *It is a sit-down discussion, not a copy from the World Bank, because the World Bank is also Cambodian, and those who work with us were Cambodians, not foreigners. As partners, it is a partnership between the state and DPs – must sit down and talk, the World Bank cannot bring that and require that the Ministry must implement. Participant J*

From Participant J's quote, even though some World Bank representatives may be Cambodian, they may be significantly influenced by the World Bank's economic ideology. This influence can create a disconnect between their understanding of local needs and the realities of Cambodia. Furthermore, these representatives might not be aware of the strategic

partnership between the World Bank and the OECD, nor how this relationship shapes their operations, particularly in the education sector. As a result, the policies they promote may reflect the priorities of these IOs rather than the genuine needs of Cambodian communities. This lack of awareness can lead to the implementation of strategies that do not align with local contexts, undermining the potential for effective collaboration. Thus, the intended partnership between the state and DPs may become compromised, as these representatives may inadvertently push agendas that prioritise the interests of these IOs over the actual needs of Cambodia's education system.

Participant J remained uncritical of the World Bank's intention in launching SBM, which apparently was the immediate responding programme to the PISA-D results released by the OECD. The application of SBM served two specific objectives, which were the same objectives of the Minister's policy response to PISA-(D), and one goal. That is, improving the students' learning outcomes and enhancing both teachers' and school principals' qualifications in the global context had to be achieved to turn Cambodia to be a developed country as projected in its 2050 vision. To achieve these objectives and goal, three parties were assigned with different roles: MoEYS as the implementer, the World Bank as the loan provider, and MEF as the organiser.

Pertaining to Participant A's description of the four distinct types of Cambodian schools, the ideal and the reality of SBM in Cambodian schools highlights significant challenges. Ideally, Particiapant J stated that, regardless of the school's context and orientation, SBM envisioned a collaborative effort among school principals, teachers, students, and the community, where their active participation and accountability would drive successful implementation and adherence to the SBM's nine universal standards. However, the reality was starkly different: many Cambodian schools struggled with extreme poverty, which would severely limit resources and opportunities for meaningful engagement. Additionally, the diverse orientations of these schools – ranging from environmental sustainability to agricultural focus and Buddhist values – added complication to the application of a standardised framework.

Based on Participant J's description of the nine standards, the first standard addressed school policies. What, for instance, did the school desire in terms of enrolment, repetition, and the learning objectives for each subject? While the second standard encouraged parental participation in the community school's management, the third standard focused on

establishing standards for teachers' qualifications and curriculum for learning and teaching. The fourth standard concerned student peer assistance in matters related to contributing factors to their learning whereas the fifth standard discussed human resource matters. The sixth standard required effectiveness in management and leadership. Materials for teaching and learning were the topic of the seventh standard, considering that the shortage of necessary supplies and tools obstructs standardisation. While the eighth standard examined whether facilities, such as classrooms, libraries, and learning settings, meet all of the requirements, the budget was addressed in the last standard. With this last standard in mind, Participant J stated that the decentralisation through SBM would allow schools to make own decisions on how to use the funding to increase students' learning outcomes as the first priority.

Concerning the impacts of the SBM implementation, Participant J explained that Cambodia had upgraded the qualifications of teachers, managers, and school principals at both the sub-national and national levels to ensure that the system works. The impact evaluation discovered some differences in teachers' and school principals' attitudes, as well as students' learning outcomes, before and after the SBM implementation. Prior to SBM, schools had a high dropout rate, and students could sometimes not read or do math. Students' performance results were now higher than grades D and E. When the first standard was met through the SBM programme, some schools had no or few dropouts and almost no repetition. In terms of the ninth standard, their income-generating programme had the potential to earn more budget in secondary education.

Participant J considered that until 2050, Cambodia did not have sufficient time to achieve its vision. In this sense, the SBM programme needed more push and expansion of its scope. Based on Participant J, the expansion was intended to shift SBM to School Community Strategy (SCS) and the need to shift was justified by two explanations: (secondary) school success was not interpreted as the MoEYS's success and school competition results in an increase in the demand of and for teachers, students and buildings, which could potentially lower the effectiveness and quality of the SBM programme. Based on Participant J, while SBM under SEIP focused only on secondary school framework, SCS under GEIP was designed to assist in every aspect in the four sub-sectors, including kindergarten, primary education, secondary education and higher education. Participant J suggested that success in any one of the sub-sectors would not produce adequate human resources as planned in the

Royal Government of Cambodia's Rectangular Strategy. Hence, these four sub-sectors had to be covered and consistent as a production line under GEIP. The current scope was employing the 3As Closed Loop until 2026 and the expanded scope was going to include three more components such as attention to teachers, attention to early childhood education and value.

7.1.3. The OECD, the World Bank, and the local ownership

This subsection examines Shahjahan's studies on Ethiopia and Vietnam to analyse how the OECD's PISA-D and the World Bank's SBM programmes have influenced Cambodian education policy, particularly regarding local ownership. As shown in the previous chapter, these programmes reflect the ongoing neoliberalisation of education in Cambodia, similar to Vietnam and Ethiopia, where the World Bank's frameworks create an illusion of local ownership, as governments adopt templates that may not suit their unique needs. Similarly, Cambodian policy makers face challenges from imposed standards, leading to confusion within the education system. The experiences of Vietnam and Ethiopia highlight the need for genuine local engagement and the importance of indigenous knowledge in educational reforms in Cambodia.

Shahjahan (2016) critically examines the term 'expert' within the context of the OECD and World Bank, highlighting how these entities position themselves as authoritative sources of knowledge in higher education policy in Ethiopia and Vietnam. He argues that this so-called expertise is not neutral; it is embedded in specific geopolitical and historical contexts that often reflect Western values, marginalising local knowledge systems. Shahjahan emphasises that the standardisation and 'one-size-fits-all' solutions promoted by these IOs can undermine local decision-making and contribute to neocolonial dependencies (Shahjahan, 2016, p.695).

In Shahjahan's article, the cases of Vietnam and Ethiopia illustrate how the World Bank collaborates with governments to foster consensus around higher education policy directions while simultaneously promoting a sense of 'local ownership' over its policy templates – being 'transformed into' the national reforms (Shahjahan, 2016, p.704). In both countries, the World Bank engages with local actors to adapt its frameworks to align with national priorities and contexts, thereby creating an illusion of ownership. This strategy not only facilitates the implementation of the World Bank's initiatives but also helps to legitimise its influence in shaping educational policies in these two nations. By framing its templates as locally owned solutions, the World Bank seeks to mitigate resistance and enhance acceptance among local

actors. However, this approach raises questions about the true autonomy of these nations in the decision-making process and whether the adopted policies genuinely reflect local needs or merely replicate the World Bank's standardised models.

In Shahjahan's article, the World Bank was invited to offer its expertise in managing the higher education policy directions by the two countries. The collaboration can be seen as a form of policy consultation that appears beneficial. However, when viewed through a decolonial lens, several critical questions arise. Firstly, the question of the 'knowing subject' challenges who holds the authority and knowledge in the policy making process (Shahjahan, 2016, p.704). It prompts us to consider whose perspectives and experiences are prioritised in shaping education policies. Secondly, it raises concerns about the type of knowledge being produced: Is it genuinely reflective of local contexts and needs, or is it primarily derived from a Western epistemological framework that may not align with local realities?

Moreover, Shahjahan (2016) interrogates who benefits from these policies. Are they truly advantageous to local communities and educational institutions, or do they serve the interests of external stakeholders, such as the World Bank and its global partners? Finally, his inquiry into which global and local institutions and experts are involved in supporting this knowledge production reveals the networks of influence at play. This exploration underscores the importance of critically assessing the dynamics of power, knowledge, and representation in education policy making, emphasising the need for a more inclusive and equitable approach that genuinely values local knowledge systems.

In the case of Cambodia, Participant A indicated that the OECD was a multinational organisation even though it did not give out aid directly. It had impacts on the nations that had been assisting Cambodia, as well as IOs such as the World Bank, UN, UNESCO, and UNICEF. On this point, Participant B agreed that the OECD was not a financial IO but it had power over Cambodia's DPs.

> *When we had a budget problem, they talked to the OECD. The OECD had no money, but the OECD had the power to negotiate, it negotiated with other partners and helped us get things done until the end. Participant B*

The phrase 'power to negotiate' in Participant B's quote refers to the ability of the OECD to engage in discussions and foster agreements with other IOs, despite not having direct financial resources. This power stems from the OECD's influence, relationships, and

expertise, allowing it to facilitate collaborations and secure support for the Cambodian PISA-D enactment. Essentially, the OECD leveraged its connections and negotiating skills to help Cambodia overcome its budget challenges and achieve its goals.

The OECD's financial partner is the World Bank. On this note, Participant A reminded that UNICEF and UNESCO used to have huge influence on Cambodia but that during the last three to four mandates of the current Minister, the World Bank had gained enormous authority and even chosen not to communicate with the concerned government units and other DPs that had different approaches and agenda. To illustrate the World Bank's power, Participant A raised the cases of making teachers' career path and SBM policies because these two policies had significantly caused a division at the ministerial level and a confusion at the school level. With the World Bank's lobby team not discussing with the concerned government officials, recent policies had to come in two versions.

> *Up to this point, there were two versions of all policies – I want to say that. For example, we are now making SBM policy, they also do their SBM (policy). Hence, the system broke up. When doing teacher's career path (policy) – we already had done and all, they did not accept ours and they did their own (with emphasis of frustration). So the system broke up and schools started to be confused and asked which one to follow? When we invited them to talk and they said no theirs had to be followed regardless of no one buying in. Only they and the leaders bought in - the only few leaders bought in. Other than that, no one bought in, so it was really really hard in this political sense. Participant A*

Participant A's quote highlights a significant power struggle between their team and the World Bank over educational policy development. Despite their efforts to create a comprehensive School-Based Management (SBM) policy, the World Bank's insistence on implementing its own version created a divide that left schools confused about which direction to follow. This conflict was exacerbated by the World Bank's refusal to consider the input of other stakeholders, resulting in a situation where only a select few leaders supported their approach. The struggle for authority over policy decisions not only fractured the system but also revealed the political complexities at play, as many educators felt sidelined and unsupported in the face of competing agendas. Ultimately, this power struggle hindered effective collaboration and undermined the goal of cohesive educational reform.

One of the major points of contention between them was the test-based education reform. Due to the World Bank's financial power, its promotion of the SBM implementation had caused serious ambiguity in setting direction for the Cambodian education system. Other DPs

opposed it and claimed that the World Bank had no rights to 'impose' it on the ministry but insisted that the ministry provide instructions on what to do.

Participant A mentioned that the World Bank's team insisted their policies to be followed even if only those and the very few leaders bought in while the rest were not on board, making it extremely difficult politically. Because their advocacy was strong, as were their communication skills with the Minister, the local actors had to give in by slowing down and looking for alternatives. As a result, the Minister decided to put first the World Bank's policy although both versions were signed and approved. Regarding the SBM implementation, Participant A was not sure if the Minister was under pressure but it was obvious that he needed to appease the World Bank in many ways and that the concerned local actors could be in trouble if they continued to resist. Although these policy documents were still in effect today, it had been challenging for the Ministry-based policy makers and the World Bank team to implement them because of the excessive disagreement. In the past two years, there had been several instances where the 'power struggle' had intensified, which pushed a few members of the local policy making team to a thought of resigning.

This 'power struggle' situation could be interpreted as a form of coercion or intimidation, where the local policy makers felt that their resistance was futile or that it came with significant personal or professional risks. The thought of resigning could be seen as an expression of their dissatisfaction or as a way to avoid compromising their principles. This scenario highlights the challenges and potential conflicts that arise when local policy makers are faced with external pressures that may not align with their own goals, values, or the needs of their community. Moreover, it raises questions about the autonomy and sovereignty of local policy making processes when global institutions like the World Bank are involved. It suggests that the influence of such powerful external actors can undermine local decision-making and potentially lead to the marginalisation of dissenting voices within the policy making team.

Participant A stressed that while the ideal of the SBM implementation was designed to decentralise, the World Bank had been implementing SBM quite obtrusively on school administrators by 'imposing' the nine standards on them. Participant A agreed that the nine standards were desirable and that they had better be applied to the entire system of 13000 schools in Cambodia. However, the application seemed to be impossible in terms of

achievement and sustainability, considering that the World Bank's lobby team consisted of only a few members going around schools and the imposition had grown beyond a negotiable boundary between the set standards and the reality of the schools. In this sense, Participant A asserted that there were three main differing aspects in the approaches between the local policy makers and the World Bank.

While the local policy makers preferred inspirational approaches as those used in the educational programs in Singapore and Japan, sustainability as in long-term vision, and a single model for the entire education systems; the World Bank tended to employ imposition, fast but short-lived outcome and a project-based model for a small number of schools. If any SBM schools disregarded their imposition, they would stop assisting. While Participant A was inspired by those educational programs of Singapore, Participant C had investigated the country's capacity to avoid copying and translating PISA items by writing and developing different content in one or two chapters of their textbooks along with questions that were similar to PISA test items.

When asked how the SBM implementation under the World Bank's project was relevant to the PISA-D programme under the OECD, Participant J referred to the Cambodia's lookout to know where it intended to go in terms of education policy directives, a look at the student's PISA level was required. Preparing for the PISA level was important, according to both the World Bank and MoEYS. Participant J was certain that PISA-(D) belonged to the OECD, but it was a global issue that developed countries required the PISA-level assessment test to measure each country's performance level. As a result, the Cambodian framework could not stand alone and remain local, but rather be aware of its regional and global performance. As a result, EQAD was established to ensure that the work of this PISA was in line with what the OECD required – also mentioned in the previous chapter. This concerned the 'heterarchical governance' (Lewis et al., 2016), which had been mentioned all along in this paper. I am going to illustrate such governance as in the partnership between the OECD and the World Bank in the other section of this chapter.

Because the PISA-D test was not created by the local teachers and system but rather it was a test that contained imposed items from other nations, Participant A contemplated it as actually a 'hostage' situation for Cambodian teachers and students.

> *Another thing is we take the test for hostage purpose. Sometimes I think it is instead a hostage – a hostage for our teachers and students because the test was not designed by our own teachers and system. Instead, it was a test that had imposed items from foreign countries. We did not have rights to make change on any items. We just translated it, so it is asked how do we reflect the local context, the local school? Participant A*

Participant A's quote critiques the imposition of the PISA-D assessment, portraying it as a 'hostage' situation for teachers and students who are unfairly blamed for low performance on a test not designed by local educators. This metaphor highlights the power dynamics at play, emphasising that the assessment reflects foreign standards rather than local educational contexts. The text questions the validity of the test by pointing out that local educators had no say in its design, merely translating items without adapting them to the specific needs of their schools. As a result, teachers and students appear as scapegoats, which can lead to demotivation and feelings of injustice. Ultimately, the analysis calls for a more inclusive approach to educational assessment that considers local realities, empowering educators and ensuring that evaluations are relevant and equitable.

Participant A's contemplation was based on two facts: PISA-D had become a main source to inform teachers of where their students were and its findings had been integrated into some recent policies, portraying students' outcomes as a big component. Participant A raised two policies as examples. First, the recent ADB's project proposed standardisation tests as a part of Cambodia's new policy on teachers' career paths. In this policy, the local policy makers and a few IOs, especially UNICEF, called upon school principals and teachers to ensure that their students perform well on international standardised tests by setting the weight of such performance to only around 20% while a few DPs, especially the World Bank, raised the bar up to around 80% on the PISA test. On this matter, Participant A argued that the setting was unfair to those teachers who taught at normal schools where it was unlikely that their students were able to achieve the target. As a result, these teachers were automatically excluded from the benefit scheme encouraged in the policy and, in the same sense, those teachers at more resourceful and wealthier schools would be better off.

In the second example, Participant A associated the SBM implementation as the result of the PISA-D enactment in Cambodia. Participant A described that under the World Bank's SEIP and GEIP, the SBM schools were required to assess students right at the beginning of school year and that the assessment, designed by EQAD upon the World Bank's request, was a separate test but carried the PISA-D style and components. One of the components in the two

SBM projects, or roughly 80% or 85% of them, was the students' learning outcome to be measured by international standardised tests, referring to PISA-D and later PISA. In this sense, Participant A argued that Cambodia considered results as the only factor in achieving success while in fact there were other components. Participant A explained that because each student had unique features, it did not provide enough evidence to prove that education was improving just because students were doing well in their studies or had passing rates of up to 80%.

Understanding that assessing students' performance was a key component of educational transparency and accountability, Participant A argued that the heavy setting of 80% would place grave responsibility for school principals and teachers and begged for a justification on how they alone should be held accountable for upholding this standard. While the other interviewees considered school transparency and accountability a local issue, Participant A agreed that Cambodia's PISA-(D) participation would allow its schools to be accountable and transparent but implied that Cambodia would be exposed to the OECD's power. Alternatively, Participant A argued that school accountability and transparency did not have to be achieved through the OECD's ILSA programmes. Instead, there were several approaches that could be taken.

While considering PISA-(D) as just one component, Participant A asserted that it appeared impossible to impose school accountability and transparency when it should be built from the inside - the inside of those in the education system. That is, they had to have a sense of accountability and transparency in the name of educators, and these educators had to understand and know why. However, Participant C stressed that assessment, homework or exam played a crucial role in pressing Cambodian students to read and study and that assessment or exam had been the common practice since Sangkum Reastr Niym era. Participant C argued that without exams, Cambodian students would not read or try to study, so Participant C preferred Cambodian students to adopt the learning culture rooted in East Asian countries such as Korea, China, Japan, Vietnam and Taiwan. In this sense, Participant C supported the necessary implementation of the SBM project, using PISA as the assessment, to change the culture of learning and teaching at the school level. PISA(-D) would introduce a form of 'disciplinary power' through examination and treatment (Foucault, 1977, p.187) that would have strategic effects at the individual student level.

Since this assessment administration was only project-based, there had not been anything significant to the entire system yet. However, Participant J stressed that Cambodia had so far developed an SBM policy as well as some supporting documents, such as the teacher's career path, to aid in the successful implementation of the SBM programme and that for these two mandates, as well as in the Royal Government of Cambodia's Rectangular Strategy, there had been support to expand the SBM programme implementation. Hence, due to the implementation results, the SBM programme was no longer contained inside the project's framework; instead, it had been published in the MoEYS's reform initiatives and implemented as a policy. That is, it had become a nationwide programme to be implemented in all sub-sectors, involving all education stakeholders. To involve the stakeholders, Cambodia would prepare and implement a PIP system, which stands for Public Investment Program, so that all DPs in all disciplines would be able to pool their resources to respond to the Royal Government of Cambodia's policy.

Shahjahan's article also responds to why governments are often so receptive to global templates provided by the World Bank for education reform. It explores the various political, economic, historical, and cultural factors that enable these templates to gain traction in different countries. Firstly, the World Bank's 'symbolic power' is a significant factor (Shahjahan, 2016, p.704). Its geopolitical influence and the authority it holds in global policy discussions make it a formidable player in shaping education reforms. Despite countries like Vietnam and Ethiopia possessing their own resources and potential for enacting policy changes, the invitation for the World Bank participation suggests a reliance on external validation or expertise, highlighting a complex dynamic where local agency is overshadowed by the allure of globalised solutions. Secondly, many countries are driven to adopt these templates as a means of asserting their agency and achieving a sense of belonging in the global knowledge economy – KBE. Governments may perceive the World Bank's templates as pathways to enhance their educational systems and economic competitiveness, especially as the global focus on tertiary education grows.

7.2. In colonial sense, was Cambodian education subjected to the OECD's policy directives?

This section is divided into two complementary subsections for a comprehensive overview. The first examines how the OECD and World Bank's partnership played a role in the

development of the Cambodian education system, which is crucial for understanding whether the system was subjected to the OECD policy directives in the second subsection. I find that the OECD and the World Bank collaborated to advance their 'converging agendas' (Auld, Rappleye, & Morris, 2019, p.203). This partnership allowed the OECD to introduce neoliberal policies into Cambodia's education system utilising the World Bank's financial resources. Additionally, the Cambodian education system began to adopt OECD's procedures and ultimately be subjected to this IO's directives. This adoption has been seen to start with the OECD's manual and the World Bank's sponsorship of the PISA-D NPM – who also headed EQAD – and the PISA-D national consultant. The local perspectives, especially of these two key individuals, towards the OECD as 'experts' (Berkvens, 2012, p.352) to enhance Cambodia's LSA capacity alongside the economic background and orientation of the leaders of MoEYS and MEF played a major role in the growth of this subjection.

7.2.1. The OECD and the World Bank partnership

This subsection scrutinises the partnership between the OECD and the World Bank, formed in 2006, to uphold and expand PISA – PISA-D – as a benchmark for global education (Auld, Rappleye, & Morris, 2019). As part of the 'heterarchical governance' (Lewis et al., 2016), this collaboration represents a small aspect of the OECD's ability to govern 'in and by heterarchies' as described by Ball (2010, p. 157). The partnership enabled the OECD to leverage the World Bank's financial resources to inject neoliberal policies into the Cambodian education system, particularly as examined by the PISA-D programme.

After 15 years of PISA, the OECD has released a report detailing the experiences of middle-income countries participating in the assessment. This report outlines crucial recommendations for developing countries, the World Bank, and the OECD to enhance the effectiveness of educational assessments like PISA. The recommendation for developing countries is to cultivate a robust assessment culture by fully funding participation costs and promoting discussions around assessment results, thereby fostering a greater understanding of their educational outcomes. The report urges the OECD to recognise the unique challenges faced by lower-middle-income countries and to adapt its assessment tools accordingly, while also improving training and support for PISA implementation. Meanwhile, the World Bank and other DPs are recommended to focus on providing financial assistance and research grants to alleviate the financial burdens on these countries, facilitating their participation in

international assessments and enabling them to leverage PISA data for informed policy-making (Lockheed, Prokic-Breuer, & Shadrova, 2015).

In Cambodia, Participant A indicated that the DPs' aid required Cambodia to take up the PISA-D programme.

> *Another thing we know is that we were heavily dependent on their aid. Depending on such aid, we sometimes had to align with some of their agenda that requires the knowing of our student performance level. So we started to bring it in. Participant A*

Such requirement marked the necessity of the partnership between the World Bank and the OECD as it enabled these two IOs to send Fernando Cartwright on a mission to Cambodia. This consultant was selected by the OECD but paid by the World Bank. This work-payment assignment made Fernando Cartwright's mission possible to assess Cambodia's capacity to enact PISA-D – mentioned in the previous chapter. Such arrangement confirmed Participant I's statement that the payment was the fund 'mobilised' by the OECD from the World Bank and that hiring this consultant was part of the plan the World Bank and the OECD were crafting together to get Cambodia into the PISA-D programme.

> *Technical assistance was provided by mobilising funds from the World Bank to support consultants in preparatory work, while outreach to policy makers and government officials was conducted. Additionally, several phone calls were received from the OECD to support this process. This illustrates the networking efforts involved in the initiative. Participant I*

Participant I's quote showcases a comprehensive approach to collaboration and resource mobilisation and reflects a strategic networking approach that is essential for advancing the goals of the PISA-D programme and fostering the partnerships. The terms 'mobilise' and 'networking' in Participant I's language illustrated how the OECD was able to exercise its governance 'in and by heterarchies' (Ball, 2010, p.157). Described in Chapter 3, these heterarchies were the result of globalisation and had been established by the OECD's 'international networks and systems' (Sellar & Lingard, 2013, p.722) to bolster the OECD's global education governance through PISA and other ILSAs under the OECD. In Cambodia's case, the OECD was able to galvanise resource and support from various IOs through the World Bank for its PISA-D programme. Participant I's statement corresponded to the information given by Participant C who claimed that PISA-D was the OECD's initiative long before 2015 but back then Cambodia was significantly focusing on the national assessments during the two World Bank's projects, EQIP and CESSP, as described earlier by Participant B.

As argued in Chapter 3, when it comes to enacting policies from IOs, they were often contested at the national and local levels (Zajda, 2018). In the first place, the PISA-D programme in Cambodia was turned down by a few major education-targeted IOs, two of which were known to be UNICEF and UNESCO. The turning down led to the Minister's rejection of the PISA-D programme as a consequence. Upon seeing these issues, the World Bank took direct action to persuade the Minister of the benefits of participating in PISA-D and to divert his attention from strengthening the national assessments (Auld et al., 2019).

In the interview, Participant B confirmed that there were a few huge IOs that opposed Cambodia's PISA-D participation and explained that these IOs opposed so because they were worried that the EQAD team would not have adequate capacities to manage such heavy work, managing the assessments at the three levels, and shift the attention to only PISA-D, leaving the existing assessments they supported behind. Participant B clarified that UNESCO wanted EQAD to focus on the national assessments, rather than ILSAs such as PISA-D. This clarification was agreed upon by Participant I but that UNESCO supported the UNICEF-led assessment SEA-PLM, suggesting what Participant B claimed was not the whole truth. Based on Participant I, UNESCO expressed significant criticism regarding this regional assessment.

Participant B recalled that the objection was taken to a serious level that these major education-sponsoring IOs would stop assisting Cambodia.

> *…there was disagreement from two or three big organisations. Only the World Bank and USAID supported joining. We thought that the thinking of the two organisations was similar because they both were American, but others were against it and even strongly opposed Cambodia's participation in PISA-D. Well it also affected the condition: If you join, I will stop assisting. Participant B*

Participant B's quote suggests a significant disagreement among major IOs regarding Cambodia's participation in the PISA-D programme. While the World Bank and USAID supported Cambodia's involvement, other IOs strongly opposed it. The key point is that these opposing IOs indicated that if Cambodia were to join PISA-D, they would halt their aid to the country. This implies that participation in PISA-D is seen as a contentious issue that could lead to serious consequences for Cambodia's financial support from these IOs.

Participant B stated that the EQAD head hence needed to report this rejection to the OECD for a solution as this level of opposition would make the Minister decide not to join the PISA-D programme.

> *When Michael Ward knew that there were objections and that the Education Minister would not allow participating. (He) would not want the relationship between partners and the government and partners and partners to be problematic as it would be difficult for us to work together….the OECD approached the top leaders of those huge opposing organisations during the event at the headquarter… they immediately and urgently… them in Cambodia that they must support Cambodia's participation in PISA-D. Participant B*

The term 'must' in Participant B's quote could be referred to as a command from an entity of higher status to that of lower rank. Such command then helps verify the amount of power of these forms of 'heterarchical governance' (Lewis et al., 2016) in this context. It serves as a crucial indicator of power dynamics and obligation within the educational landscape. By asserting that those opposing IOs 'must support Cambodia's participation in PISA-D,' the OECD exerts authority, framing compliance as a necessity rather than a choice. This imposition of obligation highlights the complexities of collaboration among diverse stakeholders, suggesting that existing objections and tensions must be set aside to achieve a unified goal. The urgency conveys through phrases like 'immediately and urgently' further amplifies this pressure.

From Participant B's quote, instead of fostering a collaborative environment, the OECD's decision to approach the leaders of opposing IOs appears to have been a desperate and urgent manoeuvre. This intervention, rather than addressing the concerns constructively, likely exacerbated tensions. By pressing these leaders to support Cambodia's involvement, the OECD seemed more focused on pushing an agenda than on genuinely resolving the underlying conflicts. This approach risks further alienating key partners and complicating future cooperation, undermining the very relationships that are crucial for effective collaboration.

The divided collaboration was also reflected in the development of Cambodia's ESPs 2009-2013 and 2019-2023 (MoEYS, 2010, 2019a) which ESWG assisted. While the former referred the group as one entity, the latter specified it down to members. This could indicate that some of the ESWG members continued their disagreement to relate Cambodian ESPs to the PISA-D programme before and after the enactment of PISA-D. The ESP 2014-2018, which was developed at the time PISA-D arrived in Cambodia, did not mention the ESWG's involvement at all. The ESWG's absence in this case may have intensified their boycott against the PISA-D programme and what would bring along as consequences. The representative of UNESCO – the leading IO of ESWG – kept claiming that UNESCO was not in favour of the PISA-D programme.

> *SEA-PLM was another assessment exercise developed by the Australian Assessment Institution in collaboration with SEAMEO and funded by UNICEF. The position at that time focused on strengthening the Grade 3 national assessment, particularly in reading. There was no advocacy for PISA-D or SEA-PLM. Participant I*

From Auld's article, the Minister's reluctance to approve the PISA-D initiative reveals a clear prioritisation of existing government projects over new reforms and his refusal to establish a National Centre for administering PISA-D, as well as to allow EQAD members to travel to OECD headquarters, highlights a significant resistance to engaging with this initiative (Auld et al., 2019). Their article suggests a disconnect between international agencies and local governance, resulting in a top-down implementation that lacks genuine partnership or support from local authorities.

> *The Minister's unwillingness to approve PISA-D underscored that the government priorities were on the implementation of existing initiatives… rather than embarking on new reforms. Not only did he refuse to establish a National Centre for administering PISA-D… but he also refused to let EQAD members travel to OECD headquarters… (Auld et al., 2019,p.207).…the arrival of PISA-D in Cambodia was initiated and pushed through by the World Bank and OECD, in ways that by-passed earlier aid coordination mechanisms (ESWG) and largely by-passed the Cambodian government. There was neither local ownership nor demand, let alone genuine partnership (other than between the World Bank and the OECD) and support for the whole policy direction from the beginning (Auld et al., 2019,p.210)*

From their language, Auld et al (2019) made a distinction between 'existing' and 'new'. The term 'existing' signified what the Minister had been implementing and what he was certain of doing to improve the education quality whereas the term 'new' implied modernising which may require reshuffling the system. They also highlighted that the Minister refused the PISA-D enactment and to dispatch his relevant officials to the OECD headquarters. They also stressed that there was no local demand for the programme and that Cambodia would not be entitled to run it independently. The term 'bypass' in Auld et al's article suggested that the PISA-D programme was intended to avoid or ignore the local barriers to its implementation, including the rejections from both the Minister and the leading IOs, UNICEF and UNESCO, in ESWG. Auld et al (2019) referred the World Bank and OECD's partnership as 'genuine' to indicate their strong commitment expressed in their agreed strategy to achieve their common goals.

Despite the limited involvement of Cambodian actors in the decision making process regarding the acceptance of the PISA-D program, a significant barrier to its implementation was the lack of budgetary resources to cover the associated costs. Some participants in my study expressed reluctance, uncertainty, or a general lack of awareness about how the PISA-D program was enacted in Cambodia, as well as doubts regarding the Minister's reported

rejection. The Minister's refusal, as noted in Auld's article, may be confused for his indecisiveness stemming from financial constraints surrounding the PISA-D initiative. The rejection by ESWG created such substantial funding challenges that it prompted intervention from the OECD and the World Bank to facilitate the programme's enactment in Cambodia. Faced with objections from prominent IOs within the ESWG, the Minister found himself unable to make a definitive decision and instead sought external assistance, as described by Participant B.

> *When PISA-D arrived, he (the Minister of Education) also supported but he was reluctant because some of our DPs disagreed. The second is our budget, because our government, when (the PISA-D programme) first arrived, had no money to participate, but we kept looking for our DPs from outside for help. When those DPs came to agreement, he was OK and he was happy to support us to participate fully at once. Why did he change his mind back and forth? Because he was a facilitator who could not do anything that caused disagreement as some would go here and others would go there. (He) did not want to see such a situation in the Ministry. Participant B*

Participant B's quote highlights the Minister's reluctance toward the PISA-D program, suggesting a negative approach to leadership. Although he initially expressed support, his hesitation stemmed from disagreements among DPs, revealing a lack of conviction in his decision-making. This uncertainty raises questions about the potential benefits of PISA-D for Cambodian education. Additionally, the Minister's position was weakened by budget constraints, making it challenging for him to navigate conflicting opinions effectively. Rather than proactively seeking solutions, he appeared to wait for external support. His reluctance to confront conflicts among DPs further indicated a failure to take a strong stance or advocate for essential changes needed in Cambodian education.

Mentioned in Chapter 2, the OECD and the World Bank were two interlocked IOs that had massive networks and act as an internationally influential learning platform where concepts and ideas were co-developed to be internalised, transmitted, rejected and imposed to their members (Shahjahan, 2016). He reveals a complex interplay of power and epistemic authority that the OECD and the World Bank employed to shape global higher education policy in Vietnam and Ethiopia. According to him, both IOs are positioned as influential entities that promote standardised, one-size-fits-all solutions rooted in Western-centric perspectives, thereby perpetuating neocolonial dynamics. Their discourses often frame technical expertise as essential for developing countries, creating a dependency that undermines local autonomy and knowledge systems (Shahjahan, 2016).

From Chapter 4, in the late 1990s, the World Bank shifted the focus of educational initiatives from UNESCO's EFA in Cambodia to a KBE framework. Initially, both the OECD and the World Bank had minimal engagement in education. The OECD concentrated on economic cooperation until the 1950s and later established its Education Division in 2000, while the World Bank began involving itself in education through loans tied to economic conditions (X. Liu, 2022). Participant A experienced that most DPs, except for the World Bank, which offered grants did not impose students' learning outcomes through a standardised test and their interventions employ various strategies.

> *In fact, the money that was related to the World Bank was all loans. I also do not know how to let them impact on us because mostly the partners that offered grants, they did not impose it much – students' learning results through a standardised test – no (imposition). Any intervention would be aimed at raising student's learning results but they did not use the standardised test as a means; they had different strategies. But for the World Bank, they very much imposed students' learning results as a mean, as a key. Participant A*

Participant A's quote criticises the World Bank's funding approach, noting that it relies solely on loans while imposing rigid requirements on educational outcomes. Unlike other DPs that offer grants and adopt flexible strategies to enhance student learning without the pressure of standardised tests, the World Bank prioritises these tests as a primary measure of success. This heavy-handed approach not only stifles innovation and adaptability in educational practices but also creates undue pressure on students and educators. By focusing narrowly on standardised assessments, the World Bank undermines the potential for more holistic and effective educational interventions that could genuinely improve learning outcomes.

On this point, Participant C indicated that the World Bank decided to finance Cambodia's PISA-D enactment because the programme's outcomes were intended to help it advance its mission, which was to enhance accountability in Cambodian schools through SBM.

> *Obviously, it is the World Bank because at that time the World Bank was developing a project called SEIP. In this design, they want to strengthen school accountability and improving students' learning results is in that. That is why there is a budget line of action to improve the implementation of PISA-D testing. In that, as I mentioned, there is assistance to cover various operation and consultant costs. They have a long-term budget and this project, as far as I know, will be finished this year or mid year. They have a continuing project in relation to school accountability. They use the term SBM in order to strengthen the management in schools. Participant C*

From Participant C's quote, the World Bank supported PISA-D testing through SBM as part of its SEIP project to strengthen school accountability and enhance student learning outcomes. By implementing PISA-D, the World Bank aimed to gather valuable data on student performance, which would inform educational policies and practices. This testing

initiative allows for a better understanding of educational challenges and successes, enabling targeted interventions to improve teaching effectiveness and student achievement. Ultimately, the goal was to create a more accountable and effective educational environment, ensuring that resources are used efficiently to benefit students.

Participant A agreed that the OECD's knowledge transfer through the PISA-D progamme alongside its impact onto Cambodia was useful but argued that it should not be 'imposed' at the policy level. Participant A claimed that the imposition was done through the World Bank and this IO did not only offer financial support for Cambodia's participation in PISA-D but also allocated a loan of USD140 million to fund its SEIP and GEIP as the two programmes in response to the PISA-D results.

> *Now I am talking about their impact a little bit. First, they provide loans – we borrow their money. Their current project is 40 million worth and the next one is 100 million worth – all we borrow. So we have to pay back; why imposed on us? Second, I believe that it is about the World Bank's mentality which is economic-oriented. All about profit and loss as we see they are a bank – a bank so in what they do they only think about profit and loss very much. The organisation's mentality is like that. Participant A*

Regarding this quote, Participant A used the term 'impose' in English during the interview to inform me that Cambodia was not willing to join the PISA-D programme but that it was under the influence of the World Bank's fund allocation for future projects – SEIP and GEIP included. This sense of being forced into a financial relationship is compounded by the World Bank's profit-oriented mentality, where decisions are primarily driven by considerations of financial gain rather than the social or economic well-being of the borrowing nations. Consequently, the imbalance of power between the bank and its borrowers becomes evident, as the latter often have limited options and must navigate the challenging dynamics of economic dependency, leading to a pervasive feeling of constraint imposed upon them by the institution's policies and priorities.

Participant A's also seems to convey a strong sense of frustration regarding the imposition of debt from the World Bank and highlight the burdensome nature of borrowing significant sums – $40 million for the current project and $100 million for the next – suggesting that this obligation to repay feels unfairly forced upon Cambodia. Although seeing the World Bank as a DP, Participant A perceives the relationship as one of coercion, where the weight of repayment looms heavily and further criticises the World Bank's profit-driven mentality by arguing that its relentless focus on economic metrics reduces their plight to mere numbers.

According to Participant C, the OECD and the World Bank collaborated closely when it came to formulating policies and assessing educational systems and that the one factor that led the World Bank to promote PISA was that the OECD was a significant partner. As the World Bank had written numerous books about the evaluation of educational systems, there may be a relationship through the technical level between them in assessing for results. Participant H said that the World Bank had investment plans or loans for Cambodian government, so they had to conduct a thorough assessment to determine their impact on Cambodian education system. However, Participant D suggested that despite conducting numerous surveys, the World Bank itself did not carry out any learning assessments but that the OECD and the World Bank depended on each other constantly. From Chapter 4, the OECD-World Bank's pressure on a country to conform to externally defined success metrics can hinder local policy making, leading to short-term gains at the expense of long-term educational goals. This dynamic exacerbates inequalities and limits local governments' ability to implement contextually relevant reforms (Elfert & Ydesen, 2023).

Concerning their common goals or 'converging agendas' (Auld, Rappleye, & Morris, 2019, p.203), Participant B detected that the OECD's policy was to link education to economic growth – the KBE discourse. Along the line, Participant B believed that the leaders of MEF fully supported Cambodia's participation in PISA-(D) because they shared 'the same vision and ideas' as the OECD. In particular, the national budget planner of MEF was also an economist as the Minister of MoEYS and they understood that only education produced human resource rather known as human capital in the current discourse for the national economic growth – also mentioned in Chapter 6. Participant F regarded the Minister as a very wise man because he saw the strong correlation between the national economic growth and the education system performance. According to Participant F, the Minister had learnt that investors established factories in nations that were successful in luring this investment because they knew there was a skilled labour there.

Based on Participant F, while some ministers had questioned the need to display to the public the shortcomings of their educational system and considered the exposure as their positions being striped, Minister Naron took it – 'expose(s)' the education system to the world – as a logical step towards improving the educational system in Cambodia and was 'the strongest supporter' of the PISA-D programme. This corroborated with Participant B's description that

the Minister was a strong supporter of evidence-based policies offered by a programme like PISA-D and had far visions, compared to the officials in the entire Ministry, for which he deserved to have the final says in the development of Cambodian education system. On this point, Participant E agreed that it was likely that the agenda of the donor nations and Cambodian education policy making were somewhat related. However, the Minister ultimately chose how much it would impact and was important when it came to dealing with the donors and what they desired.

Already mentioned in Chapter 2, Kijima finds that ILSA results were used, especially by the countries whose national assessment mechanisms were weak, to attract aid from the international communities for their education needs (Kijima, 2010). In the case of Cambodia, Participants B and C mentioned that for national development, the fourth phase of the Royal Government of Cambodia's Rectangular Strategy considered human resource as a major contributing factor and that the Minister was attempting to reform the education system towards it. However, Participant C observed that relatively before the PISA-D programme, the learning results of Cambodian students did not improve when comparing 2009 and 2015 over time, despite the support of many DPs. Hence, Cambodia was facing huge challenges in building its human resource base. That is, Cambodia needed more investment and assistance in generating its human resources for the national development.

As Cambodia was an aid-dependent nation, this country had to meet all the requirements of the concerned DPs' loans for its education needs. Already mentioned in Chapter 2, the 'hard power' (Volante, 2018, p.34) of the OECD was established through economic and political sanctions either applied by the OECD itself or its strategic partners – the World Bank and IMF through suppressing 'loans and grants' (Steiner-Khamsi, 2020, p. 244). These three partnering IOs had long been denounced for 'disseminating their own portfolio of public administration reforms in the form of (funded) best practices' (Steiner-Khamsi, 2020, p.244). However in the case of Cambodia, Participant B confirmed that IMF was not involved in getting Cambodia into the PISA-D programme.

> *IMF was not in. I think IMF involved in macro-level activities. For micro-level activities as such, we had not seen (the IMF involvement) in Cambodia. Participant B*

Participant C was convinced by the OECD's narrative (Steiner-Khamsi, Appleton, & Vellani, 2018) that investing more budget could not guarantee an increase in the students' performance results and the interventive policies implemented before the PISA-D programme

had been unsuccessful as they failed to hit the targets. Prior to PISA-D, Cambodia had never taken part in any global or international tests and as the World Bank and the OECD value such learning assessments, Participant D believed that the World Bank played a part in pushing Cambodia into PISA-D while Participant A asserted in all seriousness that it was the World Bank that first popularised the PISA-D discourses in Cambodia. Participant F confirmed all this by suggesting that the World Bank introduced Cambodia to PISA-D for the reason that it was an international assessment. On Participant F's counts, at least 30 countries, and possibly more, were receiving assistance from the World Bank, as the main supporter playing the most active role, to participate in PISA, as mentioned in the previous sections.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, developing countries had little political will to interpret the PISA data for their nationwide policy benefits (Bloem, 2013, 2014, 2015). In the case of Cambodia, Participant A asserted that the World Bank seemed to have the most financial power over Cambodia when it came education policy and the Minister's decisions were under the influence of this DP. Based on Participant A, Cambodian leaders today, particularly those in the education system, had started talking about PISA and developing policies and interventions that were aimed at improving Cambodian students' performance on PISA. Participant B also suggested that EQAD had a plan to enhance the national assessment test items in accordance with the OECD's policy directives and PISA pattern, as mentioned earlier. In this sense, Participant A asserted that the OECD had had an impact on Cambodian policies through ideas and discourses echoed by the World Bank. Those ideas and discourses revolved around accountability via ILSA, school transparency, performance-based and result/evidence-based policy making as reflected in the SBM implementation.

Alongside Participant A's argument that PISA-D was a one-size-fits-all programme, Shahjahan's critique of the World Bank-OECD's partnership and their influence on higher education policies in Vietnam and Ethiopia is particularly relevant to Cambodia's PISA-D participation. This participation promotes Cambodia's reliance on such standardised assessments which could exacerbate existing inequalities by promoting a 'one-size-fits-all' (Shahjahan, 2016, p.695) approach that overlooks local educational needs and cultural contexts. Shahjahan's emphasis on the dangers of neocolonial dynamics serves as a cautionary reminder for Cambodia to critically evaluate how PISA-D aligns with its national educational goals. While the initiative may offer valuable data and insights, it is essential for Cambodian policy makers to ensure that any reforms or policies derived from PISA-D

findings do not reinforce dependency on external frameworks. Instead, they should advocate for adaptations that respect and integrate local knowledge and practices, thereby fostering a more inclusive and contextually relevant educational system. Ultimately, Cambodia's engagement with PISA-D should be approached with a critical lens, prioritising its sovereignty and the unique educational aspirations of its people.

7.2.2. Cambodian education and the OECD's policy directives

This subsection examines further the relation between the Cambodian education system and the OECD's policy directives and procedures established through the PISA-D programme. With its infrastructural and epistemological power, the OECD was at liberty to select and manage the meaning and purpose of Cambodian students' achievement for political reasons and this IO with the World Bank's financial power was directing the Cambodian education system towards an economic goal. I also find that Cambodians first start to cooperate with the OECD for its expertise in assessment. As a result of this cooperation, conformity gradually develops into subjecting the education system to the OECD's policy directives.

Participant B claimed that since the current Minister took office in 2014, Cambodian education had also been subjected to reform even before the arrival of the PISA-D programme but that the system was in darkness as of not being able to identify what aspects of it required reform and how to reform. Hence, Participant B considered PISA-D as a tool to shed light on what to reform and the need to see the results of Cambodia's performance on this ILSA was a priority. In Chapter 2, reform in education policy starts with a slight gradual change that a particular programme offers by proposing a new solution (Ball, 2016). In this sense, PISA-D was considered as a technology reform initiated by the OECD. Ball (2003) argues that once such technology was accepted, it makes future reform feasible and eventually vital. Such reforms even shift the policy makers to other policy directives that may result in different accomplishments (Ball, 2003). He emphasises that league tables, policy procedures and templates, and performance and evaluation reports were examples of how these reform technologies were unconsciously used at work (Ball, 2016).

These 'technologies[70] of reform' or 'policy technologies' (Ball, 2003, 2016) had paved the way for neoliberalism to be incorporated in the education systems under the OECD's PISA testing program (Ball, 2016). For Cambodia under the PISA-D programme, the local policy

[70] market/marketisation, management/managerialism, and performance/performativity (Ball, 2003, 2016)

makers had planned to integrate the PISA-D findings into the local education policy making and strategic planning. With the understanding that the OECD did not work directly with Cambodia, Participant A stated that their department had never discussed with the OECD but had always been consulting all the OECD's publication in various policy aspects in the hope to improve the local education quality. On this note, Participant A believed that their department had been unwittingly affected by the OECD's ideological power. Participant A justified that their department had to investigate the OECD's research findings about a certain pool of its member countries in order to transform Cambodia to be as developed as those countries of interest.

According to Carl E. Pletsch in Chapter 3, for the Third World country to be the First World one, the Third World governments and citizens had to make sure their country was being built of course by the unavoidable use of science and technology - embedded in the modernisation process, but the science and technology used must not be oriented by any mentality or ideology – the 'converging agendas' (Auld, Rappleye, & Morris, 2019, p.203). As PISA-D was a technological product marketed as a policy tool to (re)build or modernise the Cambodian education system under the influence of the OECD's geopolitical ideology through 'externalisation' (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010). In other words, the OECD as an influential actor in this globalised world deployed the SDG4 to influence the local politics of the PISA-D member countries (Addey, 2017). The political interference from an external organisation was exactly how Nkrumah Kwame, the Ghanian leader, had long identified neocolonialism – the last and most perilous phase of imperialism. According to him, the core of neocolonialism was that the state it governs was theoretically independent, but in reality its economy and thus politics were influenced by foreign ideology (Nkrumah, 1965).

Also presented in Chapter 3, Cambodians were oriented to short-term thinking as they commonly live and work by the day and oftentimes their planning was restricted by their skills and abilities (Berkvens, 2012, p.352). On this point, Participant A indicated that when something as new as PISA-D came along, Cambodian policy makers typically were not very much critical of its costs and benefits since the public was in a phase where PISA-D was considered as 'a buzzword'. I find that, during the arrival time of the PISA-D programme, Participant G seemed to have very limited knowledge of what the programme was, what it would do to the local education system and often time either offered short answers or re-

directed the interview[71] questions to EQAD. Part of EQAD's team, Participant B proved themselves as a technician who could offer a great amount of insight over how the PISA-D programme was implemented in Cambodia but lacked a great deal of information about the OECD's ideology behind the programme and had no knowledge of the strategic partnership between the PISA-D operator and the EQAD's long-lasting sponsor. That is, there appeared to be methods of micromanagement used at the project level but the broader strategic implications of the project were concealed to the local officials.

Back to the PISA-D arrival, the Minister's rejection of PISA-D occurred not because he was critical of this ILSA but rather because Cambodia allocated no budget for such an unplanned programme, confirmed by Participant F.

> *At any time they could have(rejected PISA-D). They expressed their willingness to join. The only issue for them was the money. How could they pay for their participation? And so the OECD managed to get DPs' support and then the World Bank provided support. That was the only issue. There was no other issue affecting their participation other than how can it be paid for. Participant F*

Participant F's quote highlights the OECD's effective management in facilitating Cambodia's participation in the PISA-D program. It illustrates their ability to navigate potential barriers by securing financial support from DPs, especially the World Bank. Their proactive approach in resolving the funding issue underlines their competence in managing international educational initiatives.

Argued in Chapter 3, Addey (2017) suggests that education under the OECD's governance may be confined to a relatively restricted framework, which does not adequately capture the diversities embedded in the various educational settings. This means that by making data infrastructure more widely available, it could lead to a dominating paradigm that discounts the existing others (Addey, 2017). In this sense, the OECD's global education governance may produce a new kind of colonialism – neocolonialism (Chitpin & Portelli, 2019) which could be linked to 'global coloniality' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p.181).

As PISA-D was constitutive to building such data infrastructure in 'developing countries', PISA-expands the influence of the OECD globally, as a dominating paradigm. Such domination could be achieved through the OECD's power mechanisms vested in and by the

[71] Due to the lack of response, my interview with Panha was cut very much shorter than expected.

‘heterarchical governance’ (Lewis et al., 2016) which, I have exposed and argued, have a dimension of coloniality over the aid-dependent governments. The domination constitutes ‘epistemic racism’ (Del Monte & Posholi, 2022, p.84) through the ‘epistemic activities’ (Shahjahan, 2016, p.701) of technical experts carried out within global south nations’ bureaucracies, which recourse to them in search for development aid.

Participant E asserted that the Cambodian education system was self-sufficient. That means, the results of the PISA-D programme would have no bearing on how the system was to be operated by the locals. However, Participant A explained that, for the past few years, particularly when Cambodia began receiving a large amount of aid, the OECD had played an indirect role in the development of Cambodian policy through their attempt to get Cambodia to administer assessments on learning performance. Considering the OECD as indirect for it did not offer funding yet powerful in its network, Participant A thought that the OECD may be seeking to exert more influence on Southeast Asian nations. Participant A noticed that the OECD was able to do so through the CBP offered by the PISA-D programme and the online information-sharing platforms such as Webinar. On this point, the CBP had impacts on local knowledge production, as mentioned earlier. Raised in Chapter 3, setting out and directing the knowledge production agenda – towards KBE – concerns the ‘geopolitics of knowledge’ which allows the IOs such as the OECD to exercise as a justification on the amount of assistance to the ‘fragile states’ (Nay, 2014, p.210) or peripheric nations – developing countries.

7.2.3. Epistemic power and coloniality

This subsection delves into the intricate dynamics between the OECD and its influence on local knowledge production in countries participating in the PISA-D programme, particularly focusing on Cambodia. Utilising the theoretical frameworks of 'colonial difference' and 'coloniality of power,' it examines how the OECD operates as a pivotal arbiter in global education governance, shaping national policies and practices through its hegemonic position.

Explained in Chapter 3, Walter Mignolo used the idea of ‘colonial difference’ (Del Monte & Posholi, 2022, p.84) to describe the domination of Western knowledge over the local knowledge due to the ‘coloniality of power’ (Quijano, 2000, p.533). In this study I show how the OECD gains influence on countries through the coloniality of heterarchical governance. The OECD may become the only ‘arbiter’ (Meyer & Benavot, 2013, p.9) who can govern the

'means and ends' (Thrupp, 2014) of global education. In the case of PISA-D member countries, the OECD's influence over the local knowledge production can be exploited by the aid conditions of the OECD's strategic partners and other IOs within the OECD's networks (Ball, 2010, p.157). In this sense, the PISA-D programme strengthens and renews the power structure between the IOs, known as donors or DPs in the global south, and those aid-dependent nations. This is a 'new articulation of power' (Del Monte & Posholi, 2022, p.84) and a new iteration of what Anibal Quijano called the 'coloniality of power' (Quijano, 2000, p.533).

Already mentioned in Chapter 2, the OECD unlike the other transnational entities it forms alliance with[72] does not had financial power or legal mandate (Grek, 2009; Mahon & McBride, 2014b; Meyer & Zahedi, 2014). This means it was unable to make (non)-member countries carry out proposed reforms in their national policy for education in its direction. Rather, it runs as an influential platform for the construction and circulation of transnational research and policy templates, addressing a broad variety of issues. In the case of Cambodia, the OECD had been seen as 'experts' (Berkvens, 2012, p.352) with whom Cambodians had a strong desire to cooperate – the finding in Chapter 3. This cooperation marked the start of conformity which eventually leads to subjection to the OECD's policy directives. In the development of this subjection, there were four local key actors involved: the leaders of MEF, the Minister of MoEYS, the PISA-D NPM, and the PISA-D national consultant.

For instance, Participant C viewed the OECD as a 'hub' for the synthesis and accumulation of information from various contexts to produce 'best practices', to provide policy directives for other countries to implement.

> *The OECD acts as a hub in the synthesis and collection of evidence from various countries, which we call best practices, to formulate policies and directions for various countries to implement or use. Thus, the OECD acts as a hub to help with intellectual capabilities, help train different countries to prepare policies that respond to the outcome. But what I see – maybe need more reading or experience, what I see is that the policies that the OECD comes up with are sometimes deem to be broad – broad as real big and too broad – and it it impossible to implement. Participant C*

Participant C's quote stresses that its policy recommendations often tend to be overly broad, which can complicate their implementation. While the intention is to provide comprehensive frameworks, these expansive guidelines may not adequately account for the unique contexts

[72] World Bank, IMF, EU, ILO, UN, UNICEF and UNESCO (Grek, 2009; Mahon & McBride, 2014a; Meyer & Zahedi, 2014)

and challenges faced by individual nations. As a result, countries may find it difficult to adapt these wide-ranging policies to their specific needs, highlighting the importance of more tailored and context-sensitive recommendations that can facilitate effective governance and practical application.

Participant A also recognised the OECD's essential role in global education governance on the ground that they conduct extensive research and had superior ideas than Cambodian policy makers did. Hence, Cambodian officials should thank the OECD for innovative ideas that they were unable to generate. Participant E understood that the OECD was both independent and large, with membership from both developed and developing countries. On this ground, Participant E considered the OECD as 'international and acceptable'.

When asked how Cambodia was going to cover for the 2023 PISA implementation cost, Participant C reflected that it was not budgetary issues as Cambodia back then had financial capabilities to spend on various things for the PISA-D programme but that the programme was new, which received no 'buy-in support' from the relevant ministries, especially MEF.

> *... It was not because of lack of funds, but because it was new, so the buy-in support from the relevant ministries, especially the Ministry of Finance, did not seem to exist yet. But through the presentation of results, the results are acceptable and standardised because the results are at the international level, and we make national reports in both Khmer and English to MEF every year. Participant C*

Participant C further explained that the MEF favoured the Cambodian education system to put learning outcomes first in order to balance out the investment provided and the results received and that through the national reports the MEF started to understand and substantially support that the PISA-D results were 'acceptable', 'standardised' and 'international' and for the first time had allocated budget for 2023 PISA without assistance from NGOs[73] or DPs. In the earlier quote, Participant B indicated that the Secretary of State in charge of the national budget, Vongsey Vissoth, always supported Cambodia in joining PISA and approved the EQAD's request for budget in any specific amount. Participant B thought that this economic-oriented government official shared the same 'visions' with the OECD that education was what developed human resources.

[73] Davuth also mentioned that some NGOs had offered to fund trainings.

While the leaders of MoEYS and MEF possessed 'the same vision and ideas' as the OECD' – mentioned earlier, the PISA-D NPM and the PISA-D national consultant were more directly involved in the PISA-D enactment. Firstly, the mandate of the PISA-D NPM served as the other illustration of Cambodia' conformity to the OECD's policy directives. In Cambodia, the PISA-D NPM was the head of EQAD, which had been under the World Bank's sponsorship as shown in the previous chapter. Also briefly mentioned in Chapter 3, PISA-D NPMs were accountable for the successful implementation of the PISA-D assessment at the national level, ensuring adherence to international standards, guidelines, and timelines. They reported to national education authorities and governing bodies about progress and outcomes while communicating with international contractors for guidance and updates. NPMs maintained the integrity and quality of the data collected, adhering to the technical standards set by the OECD. Additionally, they managed the human, financial, and material resources allocated for the project and collaborated with local stakeholders, such as schools and educators, to facilitate cooperation and support. In essence, NPMs were accountable for the overall execution of the PISA-D project and were answerable to both national and international bodies involved in the assessment (OECD, 2018d).

Shown in Chapter 3, these PISA-D NPMs had little chance to express questions[74] regarding validity but in the end submit their approval to all the decisions made in each formal technical meeting and there were cases where actors had to make a trade-off between their validity concerns and technical standardisation requirements (Addey et al., 2020). Nevertheless, Participant B explained that the OECD never imposed requirements on its member countries to follow its policies but that there were always discussions and carefully scheduled technical meetings.

> *The OECD never set any conditions for the implementing countries. (There are) always discussions and they have technical meetings that are properly set. For example, there are two main meetings. One is called PGB meeting. It is in this PGB meeting that they bring together the concerned countries and organisations that are willing to help with PISA-D. This PGB meeting is like the policy maker-like meetings. The other is called NPM meeting is where what has been decided in the PGB meeting is divided into actions. So in the meetings they discuss what to do for each country. Third, e-mail is used for exchange or if we do not understand a certain thing we can use Skype to communicate with the experts. I think (I) do not have anything to oppose and confront other than the technical aspects. As it is purely technical, there is nothing to debate strongly about. Participant B*

[74] Main concerns include the validity and general usage of test items or the 'appropriateness' of the materials in contextual questionnaires (Addey et al., 2020)

Participant B's quote highlights the OECD's approach to the PISA-D initiative being characterised by a lack of imposed conditions on participating countries, fostering a collaborative environment for technical discussions. Given the structured and cooperative framework, Participant B had little to debate and considered the OECD's focus was firmly on technical aspects rather than contentious issues. Based on the PISA-D experience, Participant B claimed that OECD never directly gave or recommendations; instead, all concerned matters went through EQAD technical officials.

On one hand, the Cambodian PISA-D NPM was required to submit their approval in the above-mentioned technical meetings in accordance with the OECD's manual – as mentioned in the previous chapter. On the other hand, their submission of approval could be explained by the Hofstede's five cultural dimensions illustrated in Chapter 3 that Cambodians in general had a reluctance to contribute during discussions and a high level of 'uncertainty avoidance' as they dread to make mistakes when facing uncertainty or instability that potentially affect their dignity (i.e. losing face) (Berkvens, 2012, p.352). On this subject, Participant A asserted that even EQAD as the leading department was unsure if the assessment was suitable for Cambodian context. Also mentioned in the previous chapter, Participant J confirmed that EQAD was formed to make sure that the PISA implementation complies with the OECD requirements.

Another example of such conformity lies in the OECD's data collection for national report writing process where the OECD created a set of materials for its CBP and made them handy to the Cambodian 'lead analyst' for consultation and use. In Chapter 2, using PISA as a data collecting tool, the OECD as a data utiliser equips itself with a privilege to select and manage the meaning and purpose of student achievement in a given country. With the infrastructural and epistemological power (Sellar & Lingard, 2013), the OECD was able to interpret its collection or rather selection of big data – datafication – in education into different versions of narratives (Waldow, 2020b) for local policy makers to best pick for their local politics. Also in Chapter 2, datafication and privacy were on two different ends of the spectrum. Different countries apply different legal and ethical standards to weigh out between the two (Williamson, 2018). In Cambodia, the PISA-D assessment was carried out in a manner that maintained the confidentiality of the data that was gathered. From a technical standpoint, Cambodia's performance – high or low – should had been made public so that the appropriate

steps could be done in response. Yet, this disclosure had an impact on the political climate of the nation. In other words, whether to disclose relies on the local politics necessary.

From Chapter 3, the CBP was essentially affecting the local knowledge production which enable the OECD as the capacity builder to meddle the internal affairs of post-conflict Cambodia (Hughes, 2011) – also mentioned in the previous chapter. Argued in Chapter 3, the interference with the local affairs in these independent nation-states may confirm the shift in the look of colonialism from physical to ideological and geopolitical. Those CBP materials were essentially the OECD's best practices which originate from a pool of high-achieving education systems on the PISA's league table. Already mentioned in Chapter 2, choosing a reference society from this pool of PISA-determined High Performing Education Systems (HPESs) was obviously a political decision as the inclusion of some high-performing countries and the exclusion of others was impacted by geopolitical factors, cultural considerations and the perceived status of prospective reference societies (Parcerisa & Verger, 2019). That is, the OECD labels those high-scoring countries on its PISA's league table as HPESs or reference societies to allow for policy transfer or policy borrowing – 'externalisation' (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010), but it turns out that the policy borrowing process was significantly impacted by nations' political choices about which reference societies to learn from. In the case of Cambodia, Participant A had been researching on two Asian countries namely Singapore and Japan. However, the choice of countries for its policy borrowing purposes faced challenges embedded in the neoliberal policies induced by the implementation of the World Bank's SBM – illustrated in the previous chapter.

'Externalisation' (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010) provokes political will to adopt a certain model to expand local institutions in order for them to be viewed as modern – modernisation (see also in Chapter 3). For either local politics or institutional functionality, the expansion model had been considered as a global development or isomorphic phenomenon as it had brought relatively identical structural changes – structural isomorphism – in the studied countries (Kim et al., 2002). When asked about the OECD's interest in the PISA-D enactment, Participant E cited the OECD's ability to achieve standardisation and expresses confidence that this IO would be successful in directing its member education systems towards a common goal, which Participant B approved to be economic growth endorsed in the OECD's promotion of KBE, which is derived from the World Bank's HCT.

Their common goal in this sense represented the ‘converging agendas’ (Auld, Rappleye, & Morris, 2019, p.203) mentioned earlier while the OECD’s attempt to achieve standardisation or rather homogenisation had been seen the case of Zambia in Chapter 3 (Gorur et al., 2019). In the case of Cambodia, Participant E recognised that the Cambodian education system was independent, implying that Cambodia could choose to do in its context, but when it came to standardised assessments like PISA-D, Cambodia had to perform it in their context and in accordance with the standards they established. In other words, Cambodia would not be able to deviate from the course they had established. Otherwise, standardisation could not be achieved. In this respect, Participant E asserted that Cambodia had to follow the OECD’s policy directives.

7.2.4. Clientalist Cambodia

This sub-section investigates the relationship between Cambodia and the OECD regarding educational standardisation. It reveals complex dynamics of sovereignty, power, and policy adaptation. Participants in the discussion highlighted that while Cambodia is not legally bound to adhere to OECD guidelines, the influence of these international directives remains significant.

Regarding standardisation, Participant A also realised that Cambodia had sovereignty and power, thus no one could legally impose on the nation, but in politics, Cambodia had to follow the OECD as well.

> *We are a country that has sovereignty. Our state has power; our government has power, so seriously, there can’t be others to impose on us. If we talk about legality, it can’t be but in politics at some point we have to follow them too. Participant A*

Participant A’s quote emphasises Cambodia's sovereignty, asserting that the Cambodian government holds the ultimate authority within its borders. It suggests that no external entities should impose their will on the country. However, it acknowledges that, in political terms, Cambodia may need to align with international policies, such as those set by the OECD. This highlights a tension between national sovereignty and the influence of international norms or guidelines.

However, Participant C thought that Cambodia was not required to follow the OECD's guidelines. What was crucial to note was that Cambodia only performed the assessments in accordance with their standards, only participating in the administration of the assessments. In this sense, the OECD was not engaged in the management of the education system. As in

the Zambian experience in Chapter 3, to ensure standardisation, the OECD addressed contextual differences and challenges from above, while local settings were fully recontextualised to 'adapt the (global) standard' (Gorur et al., 2019, p.326).

Their findings show that the contextual differences and challenges affecting PISA standardisation had to be controlled outside of the purview of local governments. This phenomenon tended to come in the form of bypassing the local government as argued in the case of the PISA-D arrival shown in in Auld's article. For Cambodia, Participant C indicated that the OECD employed the long-distance methods to avoid coming down to Cambodia while ensuring quality in every step of the way with the support from the partner corporations. Presented in Chapter 3, the 'power distance' was rather substantial as Cambodian officials were not only willing to accept power imbalances in exchange for 'peace and political stability' – a 'clientalist' state (Hughes, 2011, p.1509) but also avoid openly speaking in front of superiors (Berkvens, 2012, p.352).

Four participants[75] asserted that there was no subjection and imposition because Cambodia was able to decide which of the policy directives and recommendations the OECD produced were appropriate for its situation and then designed interventive policies accordingly. That is, the decision of which policy was best for Cambodia rests with its policy makers. The OECD's policy directives and recommendations were written in two forms of reports – international and national. Participant C clarified that the general recommendations in the international report were not adapted to the local context of any participating country, but the specific recommendations in the national report were produced by locals. In this sense, Participant C opined that the OECD should not be held to account for any recommendations contained in Cambodia's national reports.

> *Regarding those recommendations, I want to clarify that there are two types of reports: international and national. The international one does not seem to have many recommendations specific to each individual country as it is an ethical issue whereas for the national one, the OECD is not the one who writes it – the Cambodian side who writes, the Cambodians. So this point is not relevant to the OECD. As policy recommendations, we cannot tie that you have to do the exact same (as recommended) – they just show the way; whether (we) do it or not, it is a policy option for each individual country. Participant C*

However, Participant F's earlier quote explained earlier that as part of the CBP, the OECD 'trained' all the PISA-D member nations' 'lead analysts' to generate national reports using the

[75] B, C, D and J

OECD's readymade templates and (best) practices, where a set of policy directives and recommendations were made available for them to hand-pick.

Secondly, in the case of Cambodia, the lead analyst was the same person to the PISA-D national consultant. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the PISA-D national consultant, now doubled as the lead analyst from Cambodia who wrote the national reports, was paid by the World Bank under the terms that they carry out tasks specified by the OECD and its contractors (MoEYS, 2017). Not part of the lead analyst team, both Participants B and H suggested that the OECD's policies were significant and important to implement and that those policy directives and recommendations could not go wrong. Participant B, however, mentioned that it could not go wrong unless there were political elements in them, which the OECD should not do. In the case that such policy directives and recommendations were misleading or causing a great loss, the OECD together with the World Bank and the Cambodian most concerned government officials should be held accountable for meddling in the local affair.

Like PISA for Schools, SBM under SEIP and later SCS under GEIP would allow the World Bank and the OECD to 'reach into' local school management and therefore 'open(s) up additional local education policy spaces' to the OECD's governance (Lewis et al., 2016, p.27). From Chapters 2 and 3, the 'visibility' (Foucault, 1977, p.187) imposes discipline and accountability onto the two levels of school systems (national and subnational) and subject them to the OECD's power whereas the 'invisibility'(Foucault, 1977, p.187) or the 'informal authority' (Lewis, 2020, p.31) of the OECD had been secured as there were no pathways for the member countries and their citizens to hold the OECD accountable in return; consequently, the OECD's path to hegemony can be constantly maintained (Lubienski, 2016). In Cambodia, Participant A verified that lawsuits would not work in this matter of international politics since the relationship between a state and an IO was primarily focused on politics and significant power dynamics at work and that the OECD wields power over Cambodia that the local officials and other stakeholders were unaware of.

Apparently, all participants realised that there was no legal mechanism available for Cambodia's use to hold them accountable for any misleading policy directives and recommendations. A few participants[76] even considered it as completely a Cambodian choice

[76] D, G and H

at all times to participate in the PISA-D programme. The participants came to these thoughts because they were not aware of the OECD's hard power exercised through the OECD's heterarchical governance and the flexibility of its given narratives derived from the OECD's bank of best practices for each member country to fit in the local politics. Mentioned in Chapter 3, those policy directives from above applied within the apparatus of the heterarchical governance may be the perpetuity of coloniality that allows the OECD to continue such exercise of power through its ILSAs – PISA-D in particular. On this point, Participant I corresponded that the Cambodian education system was not subjected to anything at the present time because it was the country's decision to implement PISA and could choose not to make the report public if the country was worried about making its education system visible or transparent through PISA-D.

However, PISA-D was not owned by the OECD alone but also other assessment companies. On this point, Participant I believed that the subjection might occur in the future, but not just to the OECD. Participant B explained that although the PISA-D programme was operated under the OECD, what would matter more was how EQAD communicated with the international contractors for assistance in their weak areas of work. Participant D remarked that it was the local officials who executed PISA-D, but with technical assistance from the OECD and that Cambodia established policies entirely by itself while it was only that Cambodia may draw from them although there was no requirement for Cambodia to follow their policy directives. Participant H also believed that the Cambodian education system did not appear to be subjected to the OECD policy directives and that Cambodia had to develop its own specific policy and strategy. However, to benefit from new OECD and ASEAN experiences and initiatives, Cambodia had to adapt them to its setting.

In conclusion, with the Minister's strong support for the PISA-D programme, local policy makers began exploring how PISA-D results could inform educational improvements. The World Bank leveraged ILSAs to advocate for its SBM project, aiming to enhance accountability and teacher performance. While school principals and teachers faced new responsibilities, students remained unaffected for now but would eventually encounter new testing aligned with PISA-D goals. The OECD-World Bank partnership exemplified how the OECD exerted global education governance through financial resources, steering Cambodia's education towards economic objectives. SBM became a key element of the Minister's response to PISA-D results, contributing to the neoliberalisation of Cambodian education.

This partnership positioned Cambodia for potential participation in the OECD's PISA for Schools, which would deepen local education policy engagement. The OECD's expertise in assessment facilitated collaboration with Cambodian leaders, ultimately aligning the school system including school principals, teachers and students with OECD directives.

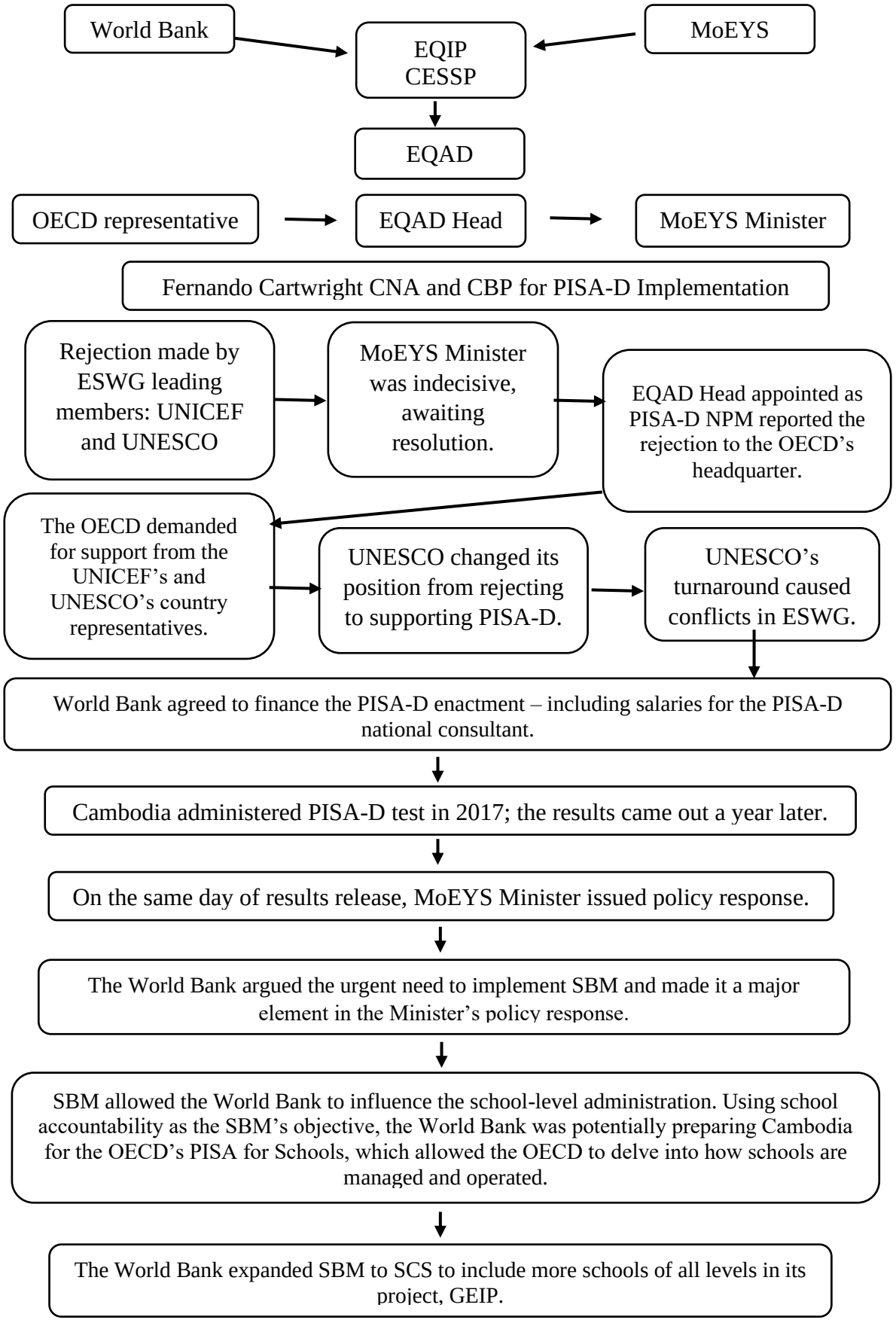
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

8.1. Summary of the findings

Research question 1: *What do Cambodian actors understand about why PISA-D was introduced to Cambodia and why the OECD developed PISA-D?* The OECD had planned to get Cambodia to participate in PISA-D. In this sense, the OECD's representative approached the EQAD head first, and this local official later became the primary point of contact for the OECD and the Minister – see Figure 11. The accounts presented by these officials are consistent with the establishment of the MoEYS's principal assessment unit, EQAD and the strategic partnership between the OECD and the World Bank. Since its start in 2010, EQAD has been supported by the World Bank and has been designated by the OECD as the National Centre in charge of administering PISA-D and, later, PISA. Given the time length between the establishment of PISA and EQAD, the World Bank may have had nearly a decade to develop EQAD's capacity to implement PISA, using PISA-D as a pilot test. In addition to the national assessments and regional assessments, Cambodia decided to participate in the PISA-D programme due to the ambition, initiative, and choice of the Minister, as well as pressure from the World Bank and the OECD. This ILSA was meant to serve as the third level of assessment.

Research question 2: *What PISA-D is able and not able to measure in the Cambodian context and what do Cambodian actors see as possible alternatives to policy represented by PISA-D?* The PISA-D test materials were not contextualised and translated into the local tongue correctly. They thus frequently diverged from what Cambodian students had been taught and fell short of achieving the goals of the national curriculum. PISA-D was linked to the SDGs and aid provision, so refusing to participate in the initiative would generate political problems in the global south nations like Cambodia. Consequently, it was advised that Cambodia would do better to improve its national assessments by including some of the PISA-(D) standards and making them a regular testing for schools rather than conducting infrequent standardised assessments with items from outside sources that were not locally relevant to Cambodia's context.

Figure 11: The outlook of the PISA-D enactment in Cambodia



Research question 3: *How do Cambodian actors perceive the OECD's policy directives and procedures and the PISA-D policies being enacted in Cambodia?* The local policy makers started looking at how the PISA-D findings influenced their policy making process to strengthen the educational system after seeing the Minister's unwavering support for the PISA-D programme. The World Bank exploited the ILSAs' typical narratives to highlight the urgent need to adopt its project, SBM, to improve accountability, teacher performance, and decentralisation. Although the SBM implementation resulted in the assignment of new duties to some school principals and teachers, it appeared that students were not currently impacted.

Research question 4: *In colonial sense, is Cambodian education subjected to the OECD's policy directives?* The OECD-World Bank partnership exemplified a limited facet of the OECD's capacity to govern 'in and by heterarchies,' as articulated by Ball (2010, p. 157). Their collaboration enabled the OECD to utilise the World Bank's financial resources to infuse neoliberal policies into the Cambodian education system. The OECD, along with the World Bank's financial power, was directing the nation's educational system in the direction of an economic goal. In this regard, the World Bank had succeeded in incorporating SBM as a crucial element of the Minister's policy response to the PISA-D results. In this sense, the PISA-D and SBM projects from the OECD and the World Bank have sparked the process of neoliberalisation to the Cambodian educational system.

The Cambodian education system began to shift from a dark period characterised by traditional goals and an inability to identify necessary reforms to a more promising framework focused on economic-oriented education policies. This transition positioned local stakeholders – particularly school principals, teachers, and students – as central to accountability and transparency, all under the oversight of the OECD through PISA, initiated with the PISA-D programme. In this context, the OECD influenced local knowledge production via the aid conditions set by its strategic partners, notably the World Bank, which exemplifies governance 'in and by heterarchies' (Ball, 2010, p.157). Ultimately, the PISA-D programme reinforced and transformed the power dynamics between the OECD and Cambodia, enabling the OECD to leverage the 'coloniality of power' (Quijano, 2000, p.533) to manage Cambodia's education system.

The World Bank used the narratives typical of the ILSAs to necessitate the urgent implementation of its SBM programme which was sponsored by SEIP and GEIP in order to

promote ‘accountability, teacher performance and decentralisation’ (Steiner-Khamsi, Appleton, & Vellani, 2018, p.1). The World Bank had successfully argued its ways to integrate the SBM project as a key component of the Minister's policy response to the PISA-D findings. Consequently, the neoliberalisation of the Cambodian educational system was made possible by the PISA-D and SBM initiatives of the OECD and the World Bank. Seeing the Minister as the PISA-D program's most vocal supporter, Cambodian policy makers were beginning to investigate it further for its potential policy value. While its impacts had not been seen on students, some principals and teachers in the SBM schools were made aware of their responsibilities through the Minister's policy document in response to the PISA-D results.

As PISA-D was a technological product marketed as a policy tool to (re)build or modernise the Cambodian education system under the influence of the OECD’s geopolitical ideology through ‘externalisation’ (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010). In other words, the OECD as an influential actor in this globalised world took the advantage of the SDG4 to mask its intention to influence the local politics of the PISA-D member countries (Addey, 2017). Regarding why the OECD designed PISA-D and what it was intended to achieve in Cambodia, the OECD aimed to steer Cambodian education policy to be KBE-oriented. The OECD intended to implement PISA methodology in EQAD through its CBP under the pretext of boosting the national assessment system, and this implementation was a tactic used by this IO to impede local knowledge production while the cost of the programme to this country in the global south was subject to varying reports and viewpoints.

The OECD’s CBP was essentially affecting the local knowledge production, which would enable the OECD as the capacity builder to meddle the internal affairs of post-conflict Cambodia. Such interference with the local affairs in these independent nation-states may confirm the shift in the look of colonialism from physical to ideological and geopolitical. The political interference from an external organisation was exactly how Nkrumah Kwame, the Ghanian leader, had long identified neocolonialism – the last and most perilous phase of imperialism. According to him, the core of neocolonialism was that the state it governed was theoretically independent, but in reality its economy and thus politics were influenced by foreign ideology (Nkrumah, 1965).

In Cambodia, the OECD's capacity to exercise its governance 'in and by heterarchies' (Ball, 2010, p.157) was at play by using the World Bank's financial resources to implement their neoliberal agenda into the Cambodian educational system. For political reasons, the OECD was free of legal charges to choose and control the meaning and purpose of Cambodian students' academic achievements, and this influence, along with the World Bank's financial power, was guiding the country's educational system in the direction of the economic ideology promoted by these two partnering IOs. The OECD's assessment expertise was why Cambodians initially started working with them. Because of this collaboration, compliance eventually would transform into the school system including school principals, teachers and students being subjected to OECD's policy directives. Those policy directives from above applied within the apparatus of the heterarchical governance tend to be the perpetuity of coloniality that would allow the OECD to continue such exercise of power through the PISA-D programme in Cambodia.

The PISA-D examination process served as the first phase of its disciplinary power, keeping Cambodia's education system highly visible on the global stage. This visibility imposed a level of transparency and accountability on Cambodia's education policies and practices. To maintain Cambodia's participation in the PISA program, the OECD managed to leverage its influential networks within the heterarchical governance structures to suppress the loan and grant conditions as they could exploit Cambodia's aid-dependent status. The second phase of PISA-D's disciplinary power lies in the treatment and consequences imposed on Cambodia based on its performance. Combined with the lingering notion of coloniality, this allowed the OECD to send its neoliberal policy directives in a top-down manner, pressuring the aid-dependent Cambodian government to align its education system accordingly.

After examination as the first phase, Cambodia had to implement the World Bank's SBM project as 'treatment' induced by the second phase of the 'disciplinary power'. This SBM project was also potentially preparing Cambodia to participate the OECD's PISA for Schools, which had been seen to enable the OECD to delve deep into the local school administration. Due to its infrastructure and epistemic prominence, the OECD would be able to decide and oversee the meaning and purpose of Cambodian students' academic accomplishment for political objectives – without any legal mechanism against it. It was the assessment expertise of the OECD that played a significant role in explaining why Cambodians, particularly the MoEYS and MEF leaders, first started working with them. As a result of their cooperation,

Cambodia was eventually going to become compliant to the point where the country's educational system was subject to OECD policy directives.

PISA-D consists of at least two forms of power that alter the population and the governmental administration of Cambodia. The first is referred to as ‘governance’ in this thesis and relates to the methods used to influence state administration, authorities, and executives to implement education reforms and policies. The other is known as ‘disciplinary power,’ which affects the people of Cambodia through testing and treating while enforcing specific forms of accountability on the educational system. The articulation of these two types of power typically results in a form or iteration of coloniality, and they potentially allow the OECD to subject Cambodia to its policy directions through the PISA-D programme.

Here, I present the key findings regarding the enactment of the PISA-D programme in Cambodia. I conclude that:

1. Cambodia's acceptance of the PISA-D programme was both naive and coerced.
2. The programme was enacted through the Ministry's assessment unit, EQAD, with sustained support and guidance from the World Bank, a strategic partner of the OECD.
3. The OECD's release of PISA-D results provided the World Bank with a convenient justification for urgently promoting School-Based Management (SBM) as the primary means to enhance accountability and transparency in Cambodian schools.
4. Key Cambodian figures, including the current Minister and the National Project Manager, were led to believe that assessing students against international peers through PISA-D – and currently PISA – was essential for local education reform, viewing the results from these international assessments as valuable evidence.
5. Leaders from the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) and the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) were influenced by the World Bank’s and OECD’s assertion linking human resources – rebranded as human capital–to national economic growth, aligning with their promotion of Knowledge-Based Economies (KBE) to national economic growth.
6. The OECD aimed to use the PISA-D programme to impose ‘disciplinary power’ (Foucault, 1977, p.187) over the Cambodian population, leading to the negative

consequences of ‘externalisation’ (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010), ‘standardisation’ (Gorur et al., 2019), and the enforcement of its policy directives.

8.2. Limitations of my research

My research was intended to find out why Cambodia decided to participate in PISA-D, which would have allowed Cambodia to assess its out-of-school population. Later in my research, I found out that Cambodia opted out of the PISA-D’s out-of-school assessment. From Chapter 7, my interviewees[77] referred Cambodia’s opting out of the out-of-school assessment as a great loss of data on poverty-stricken low-performance students, considering Cambodian net enrolment rates in primary school were over 90%, but dropped to 20%-30% by the start of upper secondary. That is, the PISA-D incomplete assessment covered only about a fourth of the age group. In fact, only 28.1% of the entire 15-year-old population was tested at the time (MoEYS, 2018b, 2018a). However, there were other important aspects I had to investigate and gain insight from my participants. As a result, I failed to find out why Cambodia chose not to administer the out-of-school assessment offered by the PISA-D programme.

Regarding the arrival of the PISA-D programme, Auld et al (2019) argued that the Minister rejected the programme in the first place until the OECD’s intervention (Auld et al., 2019). On this issue, Participant B claimed that the Minister was actually reluctant about it all on the ground that the programme did not receive adequate support, especially the financial side of it. The lack of support was also described by Participants A and C. Participants F and B confirmed that the financing of PISA-D stirred up tension between the OECD, together with the World Bank, and the local education funding group, ESWG, while the Minister had to place himself aside, waiting for this tension came to be resolved. In this regard, although Participant B claimed that they could speak on behalf the Minister as they shared common understanding around the subject matter, I should have heard the reaction and explanation direct from the Minister but I was unable to convince the Minister to participate in the interview. In my findings, the World Bank was the main financer of the PISA-D programme and was seen as the OECD’s strategic partner in placing Cambodia under the OECD’s policy directives towards the PISA’s ‘disciplinary power’ (Foucault, 1977, p.187), ‘externalisation’ (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010), ‘standardisation’ (Gorur et al., 2019). However, I

[77] D and I

was not able to convince the World Bank's official who was in charge to participate in the interview. I mentioned how my failure to include these two important individuals happened in my methodology chapter.

8.3. Contribution

The majority of my study pays contribution to the literature on the 'coloniality of power' (Quijano, 2000, p.533) that concerns how power is exercised and to the studies on SBM which the World Bank has introduced to the Cambodian education system. I find these two sets of studies connected in my study case. Firstly, the findings of this study offers a new insight to the understanding of the coloniality of power which Santiago Castro-Gómez argues that instead of thinking of the coloniality of power as a single network of hierarchies, consider it to be a framework of three heterarchies: microphysical or corpopolitical, mesophysical or biopolitical and macrophysical or geopolitical (Castro-Gómez, 2023). Castro-Gómez (2023) finds that coloniality in its most basic forms involves the regulative mechanisms that manage people at the biopolitical level and operative methods that discipline them at the corpopolitcal level. This is essentially the case of the Cambodian Minister's policy response to the OECD's PISA-D findings. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the policy response prioritises the education policy reform at the biopolitical level and teacher education and school reforms at the corpopolitical level.

Also mentioned in Chapter 3, the 'coloniality of power' (Quijano, 2000, p.533) is embedded within the policies promoted by IOs at a global scale. This study goes in line with what Shahjahan discovered how the OECD and the World Bank operated in respect to the development of the local education systems in Vietnam and Ethiopia. This study is another case where the two strategic partners – the OECD and the World Bank in and by their network of heterachical governance – seek to expand the exercise of power by imposing policy directives through the use of numbers and templates, establishing themselves as the exclusive possessors of universal knowledge and the authority to 'delocalise' (Shahjahan, 2016, p.704) it while disguising themselves as both an economic partner and a funder.

Secondly, to achieve the reforms at these two levels, Cambodian education system had been piloted with the World Bank's SBM project which employed the discourses of decentralisation and accountability to rationalise its urgent implementation to meet the school

needs. This SBM project played the treatment part of the disciplinary power, what the two strategic partners had planned for Cambodian school system including school principals, teachers and students to go through after the PISA-D examination. Leithwood & Menzies (1998) investigate the forms and effects of SBM in respect to the management of budget, personnel and curriculum on the four main stakeholders: students, teachers, parents and principals. Based on them, SBM comes in three main forms.

The 'administrative' form, where school principals play the most crucial role and have the heaviest voice in the decisions for students, produces littlest impact on the development of schools. The 'community' form, where parents make all the decisions for their children's performance at schools, brings about the largest amount of impact when most effort from teachers and principals is put in place. However, this second form of SBM shows no signs of any more effective teaching and learning practices. The 'professional' form, where teachers considered as the closest contacts to students make decisions for their students' development, seems to contribute most to the improvement of teaching and learning. This third form of SBM, however, require teachers to be accountable to parents and the whole community. While Bo (2019) believes that local context is the determining factor on the form of SBM, Leithwood & Menzies (1998) find that the form of SBM is apparently chosen by school principals who are also in charge of managing the implementation consequences. They further conclude that in order to make any form of SBM work, it requires a great amount of time and effort from teachers and principals (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998).

In the case of Cambodia, the involvement of parents in school management received particular attention in the World Bank's SBM project (Shoraku, 2008). Interviewing 92 Cambodian parents, Shoraku (2008) found that the majority of them showed their participation in the school operation through their financial assistance, which was later banned by the government to promote new enrollments from poor families. In a committee meeting at one of the studies schools, Shoraku (2008) observed that there were 13 people but none of whom were not parents who were neither committee members nor representatives of the community. As the parents would not turn up, they failed to be part of the decision making that day but may receive the meeting report subsequently. In other words, only a few people who have previously held positions of authority in the communities still hold the power to make decisions (Shoraku, 2008). Considering SBM as beneficial for promoting participation in the decision making process for school operation yet negligible in terms of

positive impact on the teaching-learning quality, a local official considers the SBM project as an introduction of neoliberal policy reform to the Cambodian system (Bo, 2019). This official, quoting the ESP 2014-2018, emphasises that Cambodia under the neoliberalisation is committed to generating human resources to achieve its dream to be a 'knowledge-based society' (Bo, 2019, p.2) seemingly as the only way to achieve its 2030 and 2050 visions.

8.4. Recommendations

I agree to the recommendation offered by Participants A and I that Cambodia should learn from the PISA-D programme in respects to benchmarking but that the test items must be created by the local experts so that the relevancy and ultimately the credibility of the test would be enhanced. Until then, any policy value through the current PISA-D recommendations shall be examined with utmost care.

As I consider my study as part of the decolonial approach, I find the question: 'how can we decolonise Western universalism?' (Grosfoguel, 2012, p.95) appealing and relevant. I think the response to the question could be Mignolo's idea of 'global citizenship' (Mignolo, 2006, p.312). Seeing the notion of 'citizen' essential to the colonial matrix of power, Mignolo (2006) contends that 'global citizenship' is a potential project to overcome the 'imperial and colonial' disparities that have carved out and continue to chart global racism and dominance but that the overarching challenge is to decide the role of 'humanities' in the demolition of global racism that prevents the complete achievement of 'global citizenship' (Mignolo, 2006, p.312). He warns that without modifying the existing 'common sense[78]' (Mignolo, 2006, p.328) that hides the needs to exploit others, the mission would not be feasible.

Mignolo proposes an 'epistemic decolonial shift' which he strictly refers to 'delinking' – not deconstructing – from the rhetoric of modernity and the four 'macronarratives[79]' (Mignolo, 2006, p.313). The delinking is not meant to be out of the tent but to 'disengage' (Mignolo, 2006, p.313) and its process requires decolonisation of the mind – as the reverse process of 'the colonisation of the mind' coined by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (Adriansen, 2017) – of the lawmakers and policy makers not the changes they make in their laws and public policies

[78] Happiness is linked to accumulation; well-being is focused on improved production; and competition and meritocracy are the ultimate destination of human beings to their full fulfilment (Mignolo, 2006).
[79] Christian, Liberal, Capitalist, and Marxist hegemony (Mignolo, 2006)

(Mignolo, 2006). This epistemic decolonial shift should start by revealing the imperial assumptions that perpetuate a common conception of 'humanity' and 'human beings' that serves as a paradigm and 'point of arrival' and by continuously underlining the fact that marginalised and racialised subjects do not fight for 'human rights' (imperial concept of humanity) but to restore 'human dignity' (decolonial concept of humanity) that has been stripped from them (Mignolo, 2006, p.314). Considering the effects of dependency theory on the decolonisation in Latin America, Mignolo posits that dependency theory would also work in the other Third World nations in Africa and Asia (Mignolo, 2002). The majority of these nations should experience decolonisation and a fundamental redistribution of power simultaneously with any possible democratisation of society as in the case of Latin America (Quijano, 2000).

Otherwise, deconstructing how policies were developed, by whom, and in what historical and social contexts may assist in holding both IOs and local governments accountable for claims to distribute resource fairly in promoting access to inclusive and equitable and quality education (McCormick, 2012) – also mentioned in Chapter 3. Along this line, by scrutinising the objectivity of IOs' claims to 'expertise status', Shahjahan reveals how their knowledge is intertwined with political and economic interests, ultimately legitimising their influence over global education policy – and the local knowledge system in Ethiopia and Vietnam as the study cases (Shahjahan, 2016, p.706). This critique calls for a recognition of diverse epistemologies, advocating for a more inclusive approach that values multiple forms of knowledge in shaping education.

8.5. Suggestions for further study

PISA-D was a one-off project that was meant to help developing countries transition to taking part in PISA. After getting to know its performance on PISA-D in late 2018, Cambodia has been preparing itself to participate in the main PISA[80], which has been delayed from 2021 to 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As this PhD research has pointed out the impact of the PISA-D programme on the Cambodia's education system, a next study should look into how the OECD uses PISA as a continuing test cycle to complete the neoliberalisation of Cambodian education system through the imposition of the PISA's 'disciplinary power'

[80] Cambodia's participation in PISA began in June 2022 Cambodia to assess student learning to strengthen post-COVID recovery efforts (unicef.org)

(Foucault, 1977, p.187), ‘externalisation’ (Lingard & Sellar, 2019; Takayama, 2010), ‘standardisation’ (Gorur et al., 2019) and neoliberal policy directives.

This research has found out that the implementation of the World Bank’s projects has expanded from focusing only on the secondary school level to including the other three school levels, which are kindergarten, primary and higher education. That is, the goal of the World Bank is now going beyond the one hundred SBM schools under SEIP to the one thousand SCS schools under GEIP. This expansion represents the World Bank’s continuing effort in promoting accountability and transparency based on the PISA results. Considering the OECD-World Bank strategic partnership, a next study can look further into the feasibility of the World Bank preparing Cambodian schools to participate in the OECD’s PISA for Schools.

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APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Letter of Research Ethics Approval

Te Kura Toi Tangata
Division of Education
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand, 3240

DivEd Ethics Committee

fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz
07 8384500 ext. 7870
www.waikato.ac.nz/education

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

28/9/2020

Dear Chenda Khan

Division of Education Ethics Application Approved FEDU061/20

I am pleased to advise you that your ethics application for the project entitled "PISA for Development and its impacts on education policy and development" was approved by Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education Ethics Committee on September 28th, 2020.

Please be aware that the Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education Ethics Committee must be advised (by memo) of any changes to the details recorded in your ethics application. Please send any such advice to fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz. You will receive a memo of approval once the change(s) has been considered.

Kind regards

Co-chair
Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education Ethics Committee

Appendix 2: Research Ethics Memo Amendment

Pro Vice Chancellor's Office
Division of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata The University of Waikato Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand
Phone +64 7 838 4500
www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

MEMORANDUM

To: Chenda Khan

From: Dr Noeline Wright, Co-Chairperson, Research Ethics Committee

Date: 28 October 2021

Subject: Research Ethics Memo amendment FEDU061/20

The Division of Education Research Ethics Committee has considered your application for an amendment to your Approved research ethics application FEDU061/20

PISA for Development and its impacts on education policy and development

We note you wish to amend the following:

- your research will be undertaken in Cambodia via Zoom from New Zealand;
- you have amended your intended end date;
- the interview schedules and questions have been modified;
- participant groups now specify 'government officials, PISA-D national project manager and/or consultant, researchers and academics, and learning/teaching-related academics'.

I am pleased to advise that this extension/alteration has received approval.

Please note that all researchers are asked to consult with the Division's Research Ethics Committee in the first instance if you wish to propose further changes to the approved research design.

The Committee wishes you all the best with your research.

Dr Noeline Wright
Co-Chair
Education Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet

Project Title

PISA for Development and its impacts on education policy and development

Purpose

The overarching objective of the study is to understand why Cambodia chooses to become involved in PISA-D. The project seeks to understand the impacts of PISA-D on the local communities in Cambodia. To achieve the objective, I as the researcher will collect perspectives from six categories of individuals, mostly local, who are either directly involved in the PISA-D enactment or indirectly involved but have written articles and/or reports about it.

What is this research project about?

This research is concerned with an international testing program named PISA for Development (PISA-D), an offshoot of the well-known Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) that is operated under the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). According to the OECD, PISA-D countries benefit from a range of capacity-building and peer-learning activities. There are however a range of reasons for being concerned about the PISA-D development. PISA testing has faced considerable criticism over the last twenty years. The concerns include data collection methodologies, validity of its measurement and evaluation and its policy value and data relevance to educational planning and school contexts. It seems likely that PISA-D may face many of the same issues. There are critiques and concerns that are more specific to PISA-D as it has been seen to pose 'a number of challenges' to LMICs due to their low capacity, wealth and will. LMICs and the OECD countries 'may have similar motivations' but the policy priorities between the two groups of countries are bound to 'diverge' due to the different socioeconomic and cultural settings. The International Oganisation (IO) in this study, the OECD, has epistemological governance to 'shape the views of key actors in education across local, national and global scales'. Thus, the main purpose of this sociological study is to seek the vernacular response from relevant actors in respect to the enactment of PISA-D by this IO. Participants sought are outside and inside actors who participated in the PISA-D enactment in Cambodia.

What will you have to do and how long will it take?

As a participant, you will be invited to participate in a video-conferencing interview in which you will be asked to share your understanding, perspectives and policy options relating to the PISA-D enactment in your country.

If you are willing to participate in the study, you will need to:
1. Read the participant information sheet.
2. Sign the consent form for the study.
3. Answer questions via a semi-structured Zoom interview. This should take approximately 1.5 hours.
4. Allow the Zoom interview to be audio-recorded by the researcher.
5. Read, check, and approve the completed interview transcript. This should take one week.

What will happen to the information collected?

The information collected will be used by the researcher to write a PhD thesis at the University of Waikato. It is possible that articles and presentations may be the outcome of the research. Only the researcher and three research supervisors have access to the interview notes, recordings and transcripts. If translation is needed for the interview, interpreters will hear the interview content but their notes, if any, will be kept with the researcher. Each interview will be given a pseudonym and will be treated with the strictest confidentiality.

Please kindly note that whilst every effort will be made to protect the anonymity of all participants, this cannot be guaranteed'.

Declaration to participants

If you take part in the study, you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any particular question, to withdraw from the study at any time and to withdraw your data you have provided before July 31, 2022.
- Ask any further questions about the study that occur during your participation.
- Be given access to a summary of findings from the study when it is concluded.

Who's responsible?

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Researcher:

Chenda Khan
Te Kura Toi Tangata Faculty of Education,
The University of Waikato
Hamilton Campus, Hamilton City,
Waikato Region, New Zealand.
E-mail: **chendakhan@yahoo.com**
Mobile: 0220391638

Chief supervisor:

Professor Martin Thrupp
E-mail: thrupp@waikato.ac.nz
Division of Education
University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton 3240
NEW ZEALAND

Appendix 4: Consent Form

PISA for Development and its impacts on education policy and development

Consent Form for Participants

I have read the Participant Information Sheet for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. To participate in this study, I understand that I am required to do the following tasks:

1. Read the participant information sheet.
2. Sign the consent form for the study.
3. Answer questions via a semi-structured Zoom interview. This should take approximately 1.5 hours.
4. Allow the Zoom interview to be audio recorded by the researcher.
5. Read, check, and approve the completed interview transcript.

I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study before July 31, 2022 or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study. I understand I can withdraw any information I have provided up until I have approved my interview transcription before July 31, 2022.

Please tick in the box ☐ where the corresponding statements apply to you.

☐ I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Participant Information Sheet.

☐ I agree that 'whilst every effort will be made to protect the anonymity of all participants, this cannot be guaranteed'.

☐ I agree for my interview to be audio recorded.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 5: Summaries of the interviews

Summary of my interview with Participant A

The interview discusses the implementation of the PISA-D program in Cambodia, emphasising its origins, funding, and impact on education policy.

Key Points:

Arrival of PISA-D:

PISA-D was introduced in Cambodia around 2018, with significant involvement from EQAD and the Cambodian Minister of Education, who is an economist.

The program's introduction was influenced by international aid dependencies and the need to evaluate student performance for effective policy-making.

Economic Perspective:

The Minister views education through a lens of profit and loss, assessing the financial implications of administering PISA-D. Although the test incurs costs (2 to 4 thousand million Riels), it provides insights into students' weaknesses, which can guide policy interventions.

Role of OECD and World Bank:

The OECD plays a crucial role in shaping educational policies through ideas rather than direct funding. Its influence is seen as part of a broader framework of Development Partners (DPs) that includes the World Bank and others.

The World Bank is particularly noted for its economic focus, driving Cambodia toward standardised testing and accountability measures based on international benchmarks like PISA-D.

Impact on Education Policy:

While PISA-D has raised awareness of student performance, its results have not yet led to substantial changes in curriculum or teaching methods. The interviewee expresses concerns that the focus on standardised testing may overlook broader educational goals, such as fostering soft skills and holistic development.

Critique of Implementation:

There is skepticism about whether participation in PISA-D genuinely contributes to educational improvement, as the process has often been seen as performative rather than transformative.

The interviewee emphasises the need for more localised assessments that reflect Cambodian contexts rather than relying solely on international tests.

In summary, the interview highlights the complexities of integrating PISA-D into Cambodia's education system, influenced by economic considerations and the pressures of international organisations like the OECD and the World Bank.

Summary of my interview with Participant B

The interview discusses the introduction of PISA-D in Cambodia, highlighting key insights from Participant B, a participant involved in the process.

PISA-D Introduction

Origin: PISA-D was brought to Cambodia through a combination of coincidence and opportunity during international meetings. The OECD was interested in including developing countries in their assessments.

Criteria: Cambodia was deemed suitable due to its middle-income status and readiness in assessment systems, unlike several other countries that withdrew.

Role of the OECD

Engagement: The OECD initiated contact with Cambodian officials, providing detailed information about PISA-D through emails and workshops. Participant B and his team learned about the program primarily through these communications.

Support: The OECD facilitated the process by sending expert teams for capacity needs assessments and organising workshops with various stakeholders, including peer countries like South Korea.

Involvement of the World Bank

Support Structure: The World Bank played a crucial role in funding and supporting Cambodia’s participation in PISA-D, alongside contributions from other partners like JICA.

Capacity Building: The World Bank's previous projects, such as the Education Quality Improvement Project (EQIP), laid the groundwork for Cambodia's assessment capabilities, enabling a smoother transition into PISA-D.

Outcomes and Challenges

Benefits: Joining PISA-D has enhanced Cambodia's capacity for international assessments, increased visibility on the global stage, and helped improve local assessment techniques.

Challenges: Budget constraints and the need for technical expertise emerged as significant hurdles. The Cambodian government initially lacked the funds to participate, which required negotiation with international partners.

Overall, the interview illustrates the collaborative effort between Cambodia, the OECD, and the World Bank to enhance educational assessments and policy through PISA-D.

Summary of my interview with Participant C

The interview discusses Cambodia's involvement in the PISA-D program, a project initiated by the OECD to assess educational outcomes in developing countries.

Key Points:

PISA-D Introduction:

PISA-D was introduced in Cambodia after 2015, gaining traction as the Ministry of Education sought to align local assessments with international standards.

Initial focus was on national assessments, but the recognition of PISA-D prompted significant stakeholder engagement and support.

OECD's Role:

The OECD approached Cambodia to encourage participation in PISA-D, emphasising capacity building through training and support.

The initiative aimed to include developing countries in international assessments, providing a framework for evaluating educational performance.

World Bank Support:

The World Bank played a crucial role by providing funding and resources for capacity building, including hiring consultants and supporting seminars.

After joining PISA-D, Cambodia received budgetary support from the World Bank, which was essential for promoting the initiative.

Challenges and Concerns:

Despite participation, challenges remain in accurately measuring student capabilities due to cultural differences in education and a lack of self-directed learning among students.

Concerns were raised about the workload associated with assessments and the risk of becoming overly focused on test performance rather than holistic education.

Future Outlook:

The Ministry of Economy has shown renewed investment in education, recognising the importance of PISA-D results for policy formulation and accountability.

The interview highlights a shift in focus towards improving educational quality and school effectiveness, propelled by insights from PISA-D assessments.

Overall, the interview illustrates the complex interplay between local educational reforms, international assessments, and the support from organisations like the OECD and World Bank in enhancing Cambodia's educational landscape.

Summary of my interview with Participant D

PISA-D in Cambodia:

Introduction: PISA-D marked Cambodia's first participation in international assessments, aiming to measure education quality against global standards.

Motivation: Participation was driven by a desire to assess educational performance and align with SDGs, particularly SDG4, which focuses on quality education.

OECD's Role:

Influence: The OECD played a crucial role in encouraging Cambodia to join PISA-D, despite initial reluctance. Its support included technical assistance in assessment design and implementation.

Data Ownership: The Ministry of Education retains access to data collected through PISA-D, although the exact ownership agreements remain unclear.

World Bank's Influence:

Support and Pressure: The World Bank, as a significant donor, pushed for Cambodia’s participation in PISA-D. Its approach aligns with the OECD's focus on data-driven educational improvement.

Impact on Policy: The World Bank is viewed as the most influential entity in shaping Cambodia's education policy, emphasising investment in education as a developmental pillar.

Challenges and Considerations:

Costs vs. Benefits: There are concerns about the financial implications of participating in multiple assessments like PISA-D and SEA-PLM, questioning whether the benefits justify the costs.

Implementation Issues: While PISA-D provides valuable data, there are doubts about the ministry's capacity to analyze and effectively apply the findings to improve education policy.

Conclusion: The interview highlights the complexities of Cambodia's engagement with PISA-D, illustrating the intertwined roles of the OECD and World Bank in shaping educational assessments and policies, while raising critical questions about the implications of such participation for local education reform.

Summary of my interview with Participant E

The interview discusses the implementation and impact of the PISA-D test in Cambodia. Here's a summary focusing on PISA-D, OECD, and the World Bank:

PISA-D Test

Introduction to Cambodia: PISA-D was introduced more than five years ago, selected randomly by the Ministry of Education.

Workshop Details: Two workshops were held to inform and train schools about the PISA-D assessment. The workshops involved ministry leaders but were not participatory, focusing on information dissemination rather than discussion.

Selection Criteria: Only specific age groups of students were allowed to participate in the test.

Advantages and Disadvantages: PISA-D allows Cambodia to compare its education system with other countries. However, poor results could harm the country's educational prestige. The translation of test items into Khmer has been problematic, leading to misunderstandings among students.

Curriculum Alignment: The PISA-D test may not fully align with local educational contexts, with some questions deemed irrelevant to Cambodian students.

OECD

Role and Perception: Participant E views the OECD as an influential international organisation that provides opportunities for educational reform in Cambodia. However, it requires adherence to its testing standards, which may not fully align with Cambodia's educational goals.

Impact on Education Policy: The results from PISA-D are expected to influence educational policies in Cambodia, prompting curriculum modifications to improve alignment with international standards.

World Bank

Support for PISA-D: The World Bank, along with UNESCO, has been instrumental in pushing for Cambodia's participation in PISA-D, aiming to reform and enhance the education system.

Indirect Influence: While the World Bank's influence is significant, Participant E believes that Cambodia's education system retains its independence, with local leaders ultimately deciding how much to adapt based on international assessments.

Conclusion

The interview highlights the complexities of implementing the PISA-D test in Cambodia, emphasising the challenges of translation and curriculum alignment, while recognising the roles of the OECD and World Bank in facilitating educational assessment and reform.

Summary of my interview with Participant F

The interview discusses Cambodia's involvement in the PISA-D initiative, highlighting key factors and stakeholders such as the OECD and the World Bank.

Key Points:

PISA-D Introduction to Cambodia:

The Cambodian Ministry of Education, led by Minister Hang Chuon Naron, aimed to join PISA to enhance the education system and attract foreign investment by showcasing human capital.

ASEAN's goal for member countries to participate in PISA also influenced Cambodia's decision.

Role of the OECD:

The OECD initiated PISA-D to include low-income countries in the assessment framework.

The organisation provided support in capacity building and facilitated Cambodia's participation, working closely with local officials to prepare for the assessment.

World Bank's Involvement:

The World Bank supported Cambodia financially through loans aimed at improving education quality.

While the Bank encourages participation in PISA, it does not make it a condition for aid. Instead, it offers guidance on using data from assessments to evaluate educational progress.

Capacity Building and Outcomes:

PISA-D has enabled Cambodia to benchmark its education system against over 90 countries, fostering peer learning, particularly with South Korea.

The initiative has contributed to developing local capacity for data analysis and interpretation, aiding in national education reform.

Policy Implications:

The data generated from PISA-D informs Cambodian education policies, highlighting issues such as rural-urban disparities and gender gaps.

The findings encourage reforms towards a competency-based education system.

Overall, PISA-D represents a collaborative effort among Cambodia, the OECD, and the World Bank to enhance educational outcomes and inform policy making through international benchmarking and capacity building.

Summary of my interview with Participant G

The interview focuses on Cambodia's participation in the PISA-D program, its implications, and the roles of the OECD and World Bank.

Key Points:

PISA-D Introduction in Cambodia:

PISA-D was initiated following a request during an ASEAN meeting, with the Cambodian Minister of Education supporting the initiative to guide education reform.

The Ministry of Education assigned EQAD to lead the implementation.

Role of the OECD:

The OECD's interest in Cambodia is seen as part of its mission to expand the PISA framework to more countries, contributing to the exploration of Cambodia's education system.

The OECD provides policy advice but does not impose directives; Cambodia has the autonomy to adopt and adapt practices to fit local contexts.

Impact on Education Policy:

PISA-D results are viewed as crucial for shaping education policies and strategic planning in Cambodia, with a focus on improving education quality.

The Ministry of Education is accountable for the decisions made regarding PISA-D and its implementation.

World Bank's Involvement:

The World Bank, along with other development partners, plays a significant role in supporting education reform in Cambodia, focusing on various levels of education.

Each donor organisation, including the World Bank, contributes uniquely, emphasising the collaborative nature of educational support.

Accountability and Autonomy:

The Ministry of Education holds ultimate accountability for the outcomes of PISA-D and the decisions made, reflecting a commitment to transparency and improvement.

The interviewee emphasises the importance of local ownership in the education reform process.

Overall, the interview highlights the strategic significance of PISA-D in enhancing Cambodia's educational landscape, the supportive role of the OECD and World Bank, and the emphasis on local accountability and reform.

Summary of my interview with Participant H

The interview discusses the implementation of PISA-D in Cambodia, focusing on its origins, implications, and connections with organisations like the OECD and the World Bank.

Key Points on PISA-D:

Introduction: PISA-D was brought to Cambodia under the leadership of H.E. Hang Chuon Naron, emphasising reforms in teacher development, curriculum, and assessment.

Assessment Concerns: Participant H expresses concerns that PISA-D may not accurately reflect Cambodia's education quality, particularly at the primary level. He suggests that focusing on secondary education may not be advantageous until foundational issues are addressed.

Participation Reasons: The Cambodian Ministry aims to understand its educational standing relative to other countries, using PISA-D as a strategic tool for reform.

Role of the OECD:

Collaboration: The OECD's involvement is seen as part of a broader push for educational standards that include less developed countries. Participant H believes that, while PISA-D is a valuable tool, it should not overshadow the need for strengthening national assessments.

Impact on Education Policy: The OECD provides frameworks that help shape educational reforms, but Participant H warns against an overemphasis on standardisation, which could pressure students and detract from broader learning goals.

Involvement of the World Bank:

Financial Support: The World Bank has been a crucial supporter of educational initiatives in Cambodia, funding various assessments and emphasising the need for data to evaluate the impact of investments.

Influence on Policy: Participant H notes that the World Bank's funding is often tied to performance indicators, suggesting that participation in assessments like PISA-D serves as a baseline for evaluating educational outcomes and impact.

Conclusion:

Participant H highlights the importance of balancing international assessments like PISA-D with local educational needs, advocating for a comprehensive approach that includes both national assessments and international benchmarks to improve the education system in Cambodia.

Summary of my interview with Participant I

The interview centers on the implementation of the PISA-D program in Cambodia, highlighting the roles of the OECD and the World Bank.

Key Points:

PISA-D Introduction:

PISA-D, a pilot program aimed at developing countries, was introduced in Cambodia through collaboration between the OECD and the World Bank.

The OECD sought participating countries from the Asia-Pacific region, and Cambodia was selected due to its need for capacity building in educational assessments.

Roles of OECD and World Bank:

OECD: Provided technical expertise and instruments for assessment. It aimed to promote PISA as a global standard for educational assessment.

World Bank: Funded the necessary technical assistance and facilitated communication between the OECD and Cambodian policymakers. Its support was crucial for the program's implementation.

Impact on Cambodian Education:

Pros of participation included capacity building within the Ministry of Education and the promotion of rigorous assessment practices.

Cons included concerns about the relevance and necessity of PISA-D, given existing national assessments that already provided valuable data.

Controversies and Perspectives:

C10 expressed skepticism about the need for PISA-D, suggesting that Cambodia could focus on strengthening its national assessment systems instead of investing in international assessments.

The interview also touched on UNESCO's initially opposing stance, which shifted as additional funding became available for PISA-D.

Overall Influence:

The interviewee acknowledged that while Cambodia had the autonomy to decide on PISA-D participation, external pressures from the OECD and World Bank influenced the decision, reflecting a complex interplay of local and international interests in educational policy.

In summary, the interview illustrates the collaborative dynamics between the OECD and World Bank in introducing PISA-D to Cambodia, while also addressing the implications and debates surrounding the program's relevance and effectiveness.

Summary of my interview with Participant J

The interview conducted by Chenda Khan focuses on the implementation of SBM in Cambodia, particularly in relation to the PISA-D initiative, the OECD, and the World Bank.

Key Points:

SBM in Cambodia:

SBM is viewed as a reform strategy aimed at improving educational outcomes by decentralising decision-making to schools.

The approach is tailored to Cambodia's specific context, building on existing practices while incorporating successful elements from other countries.

PISA-D and OECD:

The PISA for Development initiative, which is under the OECD, aims to assess and enhance student learning outcomes globally.

Cambodia seeks to align its education system with international standards by participating in PISA assessments, enabling comparisons with other countries.

Role of the World Bank:

The World Bank collaborates with the Cambodian Ministry of Education to implement SBM and support educational reform through financial loans rather than grants.

The partnership emphasises sustainable development by focusing on human resources, institutional frameworks, and financial sustainability.

Implementation Challenges:

There are challenges, including initial resistance from teachers and communities, which evolved into competition among schools for better outcomes.

The process involves continuous assessment and accountability to ensure that improvements are achieved and maintained.

Future Directions:

The Cambodian education system is transitioning from SBM to a broader School Community Strategy (SCS), integrating early childhood, primary, and higher education to create a cohesive educational framework.

Overall, the interview highlights the collaborative efforts between Cambodia, the World Bank, and the OECD to reform education through SBM, aiming to elevate the country’s educational standards and outcomes in line with global benchmarks.