

The Neoliberalisation of Cambodian Higher Education:
Perspectives of Policy Elites and Graduates

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the neoliberalisation of higher education in Cambodia by analysing the perspectives of policy elites and graduates in the context of the Global South. It examines whether the formation of current policy and practice in the education sector contributes to a developmental pathway that enhances social justice and well-being for all individuals in the nation. This review found that the neoliberal agenda has served the dominant interests of the corporate world, private individuals, and the hegemonic discourses and ideologies of the capitalist world. In some respects, this practice has contributed to the modernisation of quality standards, the expansion of access and equity amongst students, community-wide-collaboration, and flexible options for students in Global South Cambodia. However, it has undermined the long-term needs of the nation for social justice and well-being for all.

Neoliberalism in this study reflects a terrain of contest between historical legacies and modernity. Power struggles were evident during policy implementation where emerging policy elites manifested and shaped the rationale for the neoliberal agenda. The affinity space of neoliberalisation in Cambodia reflects an interdependent relationship, and power interplay, involving forces from the historical legacy, and the Global South hegemonic cultural-political project of the West. The historical legacy, together with local socio-cultural norms, and traditions of socio-political practice, have formed strong cultural positions amongst policy elites which manifest and shape the rationale of neoliberalism within the community of practice. This agenda advances through the tyranny of global technology, globalisation transformation, and economic theory based on the homo economicus rationale. Thus, neoliberalism forms a regime of truth where its logic is shaped as and manifested in a cultural belief in the peripheral world that serves a divided economy rather focusing on broader national growth.

To elaborate and expand on the theoretical and conceptual framework, this study utilises the analytical tools of Foucault's genealogy and governmentality (Foucault, 1991a, 1991b), and theories of postcolonialism and globalisation (Andy Green, 1997; Tikly, 2001) to examine neoliberalism's influential aspects, which are strongly embedded in the historical legacy and postcolonialism of the communities of practice of local higher education institutions (HEIs). This study also casts light on the theoretical lens of 'thin-communitarianism' (Olssen, 2004a, 2017) within the Global South.

What stands out in this study is the rationale and contextual reality of the policy practice of HEIs. The rationales reflected the cultural position as being rooted in the neoliberal agenda. Emerging policy elites manifest and shape cultural beliefs and rationales through discourses of technology. The resulting materialisation reveals that the education sector is serving the state–corporate interests of professionalisation along with the dominant interests of the capitalist world, rather than serving the mass public. In opposition to these interests, I suggest a state-regulated model framework for Cambodia based on thin-communitarianism (Olssen, 2004a, 2017; Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004). This framework is further enriched by the concepts of 'affinity spaces' (Gee, 2005), local traditions and culture, governmental culture, and contextual realities of the contesting terrain and power struggles, which are limited in Global North settings. It emphasises policy practices that build 'pastoral power' amongst the HEIs' community of practice, especially the learners, for quality local human resources and social democratic reform and well-being for all individuals. The framework strives for a mutually beneficial relationship within the HEIs' community of practice which is necessary for the advancement of the nation's long-term needs for more social justice, and well-being for all individuals.

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Attestation of Authorship

This is to certify that:

- i. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where reference is made in the text;
- ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used;
- iii. this thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution; and
- iv. the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, bibliographies, and appendices.

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

3rd March 2023

Signature

Date

Preface

My academic nature has long been shaping my motivation and inspiration towards this PhD journey, even since my childhood. I hope to put all these interests and insights together, through the practical experience that I have been withholding in my academic commitments, to bring me to this stage of my academic pursuits.

I was born just a year after the end of the genocide regime and have mainly grown up in Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia. From my early childhood I observed the local mindset of the people, adults and elderly, through living and working with them; they include all people in my neighbourhood and the community: my parents, family, relatives, teachers, and colleagues. As for textbooks on national history, in general education the curriculum constantly reminded the young students, as well as the teachers, about the historical legacies. Sometimes, when I asked them about life during the colonial period and the genocide regime, I had a chance to hear a brief story of their fearful and disastrous experiences; I could feel how they reflected both life in a better new freedom after the genocide regime and also the psychological insights of despair, remorse, anger, and unstable emotions.

When I grew up, I read many books related to national history, culture, and then English textbooks regarding cultures, stereotypes, the globalisation movement in the Western and European nations spreading to the rest of the world, particularly into Asia. Mainly those books were the materials I need to study in my general education, undergraduate programme, and English language courses.

Moreover, I can understand how people during my father's generation could enjoy a high-quality standard of education during the beginning of end of the French colony; I can understand how his mindset also got shaped by the colonial mindset through his teachers, neighbourhood, and social community during that time. In fact, his generation could maximise the best education experience and social life for the period of almost 25 years until the arrival of the genocide regime. After the end of the genocide regime, he and some key people amongst his generation became the remaining national human resources, led the local institutions, got further educated overseas, and currently hold key positions amongst national political elites. One important interpretation from this anecdote of people from this generation lies in the strong foundation of capable human resources with a colonial mindset who currently remain influential in key position of power for policy

formation and practice, despite the greater knowledge that has developed and the changes that have happened with modernity.

Alternatively, a starkly contrasting mindset emerged in another group in the elderly generation who were born during the period a decade before the civil wars and up during the civil wars; rather than learning with quality standards or in stable school settings, their basic education was heavily distracted and incomplete. The only knowledge they acquired early in life was experienced through a regime of truth consisting mainly of social intimidation, violent and aggressive management, and irrational human executions for any disobedience or resistance to the regime's order. Now, this generation group has formed most of the community of practitioners working at HEIs at levels carrying out the duties and responsibilities of policy practices. Amongst their age group of over 50 years old, many live through a reinvestment in the mindset of their childhood and teenage life, reflected through aggressive, violent and irrational behaviour at work and within their families.

My mother was considered to be amongst the second generational group I mentioned above. Despite not being highly educated like my father, her attitude and life experiences oriented towards a noble and disciplined lifestyle. One reason for this was due to the facts of her childhood living and working in a big company own by her uncle's family. Another reason is because she met my father and was shaped by influences from my father's way of life and attitudes.

This exemplar is one of the notions I experienced through my social life and living in the local context which clearly reflected one generation of the local people who experienced and developed lifestyles in the postcolonial era. The narratives above are offered as a foregrounding to the background of my epistemology as a scholar from a Global South research setting.

Local epistemological insights from practical experiences at the HEIs and policymaking

My educational background also contributes to advantage of my ontological and epistemological lens. My academic experiences have taken place across the social, cultural, and environmental settings from Global South to Global North societies; I graduated from my undergraduate and master's degrees in Cambodia, then took a master's degree in Japan, and currently I am pursuing my PhD in New Zealand. My academic experienced also involved staying in the United States of America (US) and I

presented a paper in the CIES conference there, and I also spent several months in a training programme in Singapore. Throughout the journey of these academic experiences, I developed my academic and philosophical knowledge through practical interaction, experience building, and researching across national and international levels. It is, thus, another part of my life which is beneficial to my conceptual epistemology contributing to this research. In addition, my practical experience involved with Cambodian HEIs for nearly 12 years, has shed light for me on the contextual realities of the local deficits amongst the HEIs' community of practice.

Personal thoughts and reflections on the local mindset in Global South societies.

In the context of a postcolonial and post-conflict setting, neoliberalisation as the overall process of policy formation and practice reflects a terrain of ideological contest, and appropriation across space. The power dynamic existed amongst a community of practitioners with mindsets embedded within historical legacies, and hegemonic discourses and an ideology for modernisation and reform, and the emerging complex 'regime of truth' manifested by the emerging interest groups across spaces who became policy elite groups at a social level, with national and global dimensions. Unsurprisingly, these emerging policy elite groups, regardless of whether they are professional or not, are appropriated by the neoliberal logics to join the government and complement each other for the development of the national economy.

Chapter 1 Introduction

De-professionalisation operates at several levels: firstly, through the external imposition on universities of models of assessment by the state.

Secondly, a parallel process operates internal to universities.

Universities have inaugurated line management systems which have excluded academics from meaningful and effective participation in running the institutions. (Olssen, 2016b, p. 142)

1.1 Setting the scene

One argument in this study is the premise that higher education (HE) policy formation and practice, in post-conflict nations, contributes to an instrumental approach geared to market hegemony rather than a broad ‘liberal’ concept of HE. In essence, democracy, social justice and well-being for all, as well as the potential for knowledge to be relevant to local needs, are largely absent in this model. Rather than responding to broader social and global needs, HE reinforces a corporate worldview that invests in social inequality, disparity of distribution, deterioration of academic freedom and social justice (Guion Akdağ & Swanson, 2018) which leads to a distorted form of development. This ‘regime of truth’ (Butler, 2005; Foucault, 1988) reproduces in an HE context a power dynamic that can be characterised as post-conflict hybrid-governmentality.

HE policy formation and practice is linked to economic, political and cultural development (Tikly, 2001). From a transitional socio-political perspective, HE policy has become the terrain of competing interests that manifest a form of political symbolism (Jansen, 2002). In post-conflict, postcolonial or post-communist states, regime change may only show “the gap between the new emerging discourses and old persistent practices” (Fimyar, 2008, p. 572). The contextual reality can exhibit national instability, dependency on foreign aid, weak state institutions, and levels of corruption that inhibit social, economic, and political transformation. This political dislocation, coupled with a lack of resources for rehabilitation and infrastructure, reveals a disparity between policy and actual practice.

Cambodian HE is governed by a neoliberal ideology, where HEIs are left to resolve a set of displaced tensions, and work through self-finance and governance to develop themselves. As a result, some HEIs have become far better in terms of quality and

efficiency, while others are left behind risking bankruptcy. The politics of education forms HE policies that prepare individuals and institutions with the capability to enhance society through democratic social reform, or not. In a discussion on a critical postcolonial analysis in the context of developing economies (Guion Akdağ & Swanson, 2018) higher education policy formation and practice reflects the effects of global inequality, injustice and oppression through and beyond HE policy in the Global South setting. This study analyses the genealogical threat to Cambodian HE since its adoption of the structural adjustment policy framework and the neoliberal agenda. The genealogical analysis will scan the situation using a number of important theoretical lenses onto a range of Cambodian HE policies, specifically *Education Strategic Plan 2014-201* and the *Policy on Higher Education Vision 2030* which have become major contributors to the discussion on research methodology.

Rather than simply adopting the proposed model of HE policy, this study offers an analytical framework that advocates for a socially just and democratic HE sector, providing for the well-being of all individuals in the context of the Global South and developing economies in countries such as Cambodia. Given local stakeholders' 'instrumental approach' as a solution for the perceived best choice for HE policy, I propose a 'thin communitarian' policy framework (Olssen, 2002, 2004a, 2017) to broaden the consciousness of courageous, and continuous self-improvement amongst all HE stakeholders, namely the policy elites (i.e., those people who have influences on HE policy reform and practice), academic staff, students, and the HEIs community of practice. Within this framework, Foucault's 'third face of power' (Ball, 2016; Perryman, Ball, Braun, & Maguire, 2017) is used to show how, through the technology of government or a free-market oriented economy, HE policy elites¹ can embrace the HE advancement appropriate for the nation's and learners' long-term needs/goals. While proposing this approach, the study maintains that the three forms of power—sovereign, disciplinary, and pastoral—interconnect in the process of HE policy formation and practice.

¹ While HE policy elites can refer to a variety of HE professionals who have duties and responsibilities in HE policy formation and practice, it is more often the senior bureaucrats in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), those acting in the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC), those in charge of Education Research Council (ERC), and HE academics who make policy decisions. These stakeholders are perceived to influence HE policy reform, formation and practice at local and international levels. They have a direct influence on the process.

1.1.1 Education policy and policy elites

Adopting a policy-as-discourse perspective necessitates an elaboration of certain terms (Ball, 2015; Doherty, 2007). ‘Policy’ (Doherty, 2007), in this study, becomes the formal means through which a government brings about the desired end to a problem (Doherty, 2007, p. 198). Olssen et al. (2004) refer to education policy, as “any course of action (or inaction) relating to the selection of goals, the definition of values or the allocation of resources” (p. 71). Education policy is seen as explicitly political, designed to achieve specific ends in society, as the technology of government, or the art of government, uses policy to shape social order and practice through discourse, or so-called policy discourse. The current process of HE policy formation and practice in Cambodia has become a contestation of power between neoliberal ideology and any other discourse advocating social justice and well-being for all. Manuel (2015) characterises this engagement as a “view of policymaking as a complex process characterized by conflicts and contradictions among competing discourses, hegemonies, and economic interests” (p. 94). Policy texts embedded within a discourse “operate to constitute, position, make productive, regulate, moralize and govern the citizen. Such texts are also indelibly marked by hidden conceptions of government, the task of governing, and its associated technologies” (Doherty, 2007, p. 195).

The term *policy elites* in this study refers to those who have influence and power to change, adapt and develop HE. They include senior bureaucrats at ministry levels, academics, key professionals and HEI practitioners such as rectors, vice-rector, deans, and instructional staff, and international development agencies. According to Skrentny (2006), policy elites can be those state actors who have an influence on the process of policymaking, including its direction, shape, and timing. These individuals, namely business and political figures, are in a position to adopt and influence policy change, formation and practice (Tumlison, Button, Song, & Kester, 2018). It is essential to understand the perspectives of policy elites because they can select the policy for reform, make policy choices and enforce the policy. These policy elites’ perceptions influence their making sense of policy to influence certain social groups in their respective countries. Therefore, how they view social class and groups in society will have a direct influence on people’s lives.

A study of social science is predominantly involved with the grassroots who are the ‘objects’ of this discipline. Liazos (1972) called for research on the ‘real’ influencers on social matters during the 1970s. A designation of sociological studies was selected that

centres on the perceptions of influential figures in society, as to how they may deviate from centred views of “nuts, sluts and perverts” (Liazos, 1972, p. 103). Punch (1986) has maintained that researchers tend to repeatedly target lowly minority groups rather than look into the territory of those who influence changes in policy formation: “it is still painfully obvious ... that researchers have rarely penetrated to the territory of the powerful and many field studies still focus on lowly, marginal groups” (p. 25) A decade ago, Neal and McLaughlin (2009) criticised social studies that are “disproportionately focused on vulnerable, powerless and ‘problem’ populations” (p. 689)”. As elites are those who decide on policy reform, some researchers have turned their focus to this group. As Neal and McLaughlin (2009) have emphasised

not only does a multi-disciplinary body of work concerned with the study of elite populations exist ... but alongside this is an expanding set of methodological accounts of the experiences of researching ‘upwards’ and engaging the seemingly powerful in the research process. (pp. 689-690)

Involving elites in research uncovers issues associated with power relations within a contested policy formation and practice process. As Duke (2002) argues, policy study has to uncover a unique set of dilemmas and complexities within the process of HE policy formation and practice. This recognises “the importance of switching the research gaze from the ‘object’ of policy to those who are in the dominant positions of ‘making’ policy” (Duke, 2002, p. 39). The practice of engaging the elite as potential participants in policy research is now growing. This paves the way for perceiving how end users of HE policies can be impacted directly through HE policy reform/formation and practices.

1.2 Problem statement

The main research question is: ‘Why has the HE policy framework in Cambodia become neoliberalised?’

The research sub-questions that follow are:

- (1) What effects has the colonial past had on HE policy in Cambodia — and what effects has globalisation had on HE policy in Cambodia?
- (2) To what extent has the transformation of the HE system in Cambodia addressed the nation’s needs in terms of the neoliberal agenda?
- (3) How might Cambodia develop a more democratic/socially just HE policy framework?

Studies relating to Cambodian HE include: the anatomy of the HE system (Sen, Ros, & Thiraphumry, 2013); stakeholder involvement and transition (Sam & Dahles, 2017; C. Sam, 2017); policy misalignment (Ros & Oleksiyenko, 2017); skills mismatch in HE (Peou, 2017); and HE structures expansion and quality (Chealy, 2009; Kitamura, 2016). However, few studies have explored the complex issues surrounding HE policy formation and practice. There are small emerging studies by local and international scholars conducting comparative studies of reform efforts and development pathways for HE sectors in Cambodia and Malaysia. Despite commenting on the existing gaps between the education development of the two countries, the authors share common ideas regarding the downside of reform pathways in the neoliberal environment. They suggest alternatives to reform by proposing development pathways in the education sector that respond to local needs and contexts. A study by Fechter (2020) notes the practice of the neoliberal agenda in Cambodia in emphasising reform efforts for a ‘moral neoliberal’ agenda for wider benefits reaching out to local ethical citizens through a stronger role of state frameworks and interventions.

Another study conducted in Cambodia by Lawreniuk (2019) identified that neoliberalism is used as a strategy by authorities for a demographic and spatial shift in workers’ power and, thus, she calls for re-centring of local geographies through a renewed focus on the grassroots. In this vein, a recent study of Cambodian HE (Sen, 2019) shows that the system is a form of ‘hybrid governmentality’. The term ‘governmentality’ here refers to the art of government (Dean, 2010) or how governing is considered through different rationalities (Dean, 2010, p. 24). Sen (2019) notes that it is essential to consider how national HE policies are formed and implemented to reveal the gap between Cambodia’s context, the political orientation of the voters and the dominant models of governance from the West.

To respond to the growing complexity in HE systems, the Cambodian Government has undertaken numerous efforts to reform and strengthen the system through a wide range of institutions such as: the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (RGC, 2003); the educational policymaker team; and the national strategic development plan 2014–2018 of the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC, 2014). Education law has also been enforced in order to balance the quality and quantity of HE practices (Chealy, 2009), as well as matching skills with policies (MoEYS, 2014a; RGC, 2012, 2013a). However, problems in the Cambodian HE system remain widespread (Sothy & Madhur, 2015).

Policy formation and practice have to attend to the long-term needs of the nation—that is, social democracy, social justice, and the realisation of potential human capital—to be able to compete in a single market and in production with other nation members in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN, 2008) and comply with ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) goals of 2025, and benefit the livelihoods of its citizens (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2015). It has also been noted that Cambodia will face HE disadvantages in years to come unless policies are implemented that address both skills shortages and mismatches (Sothy & Madhur, 2015). It remains an important question as to whether the current HE system can provide the appropriate policy and practice to match the expectations of the ASEAN charter, and the global development goal of democracy, social reform, and well-being for all.

1.3 My positionality: Beyond the insider-outsider dichotomy

As a Cambodian growing up in a period of rehabilitation following the genocide regime in power in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979, I was often considered by the research participants and people from the study context to be an insider. In this sense, I went through all my general education, undergraduate study and one master's degree, as a domestic student in Cambodia. I have gained enriched academic and social experiences via experiencing social interactions through primary and secondary social institutions (Bourdieu, 1990; Burke, 2018), from my parents and family, and the school and social spaces that have shaped my life and identity. Additionally, I was involved in the HE sector as a senior lecturer across state and private HEIs in Cambodia for 12 years, until I began to pursue my PhD journey in New Zealand.

My personal motivation for this study has been shaped by my employment experience in HEIs in Cambodia as a lecturer, researcher and senior academic manager. Seeing HE from these different standpoints has provided me with an insight into the difficulties of teaching with limited resources in a system governed by those who see education as an 'industry'. Indeed, the history and current legacy of HE in Cambodia, a country still heavily influenced by historical trauma, has influenced my scepticism on the place and purpose of HE policy in preparing potential and qualified graduates for the needs of the nation. It is my belief that Cambodian people, like those in many countries who have suffered trauma, find themselves under pressure from external agencies, with insufficient attention being paid to their own local economic, cultural and historical circumstances.

1.4 Conceptual and analytical tools

A number of theories have been instrumental in clarifying the purpose and focus of this study. While my theoretical framework is described in detail in Chapter two, the conceptual and analytical tools that assisted me in framing the main questions of this study warrant further discussion here. They include Foucauldian discourse analysis (Foucault, 1974), emerging governmentality and hybrid governmentality (Fimyar, 2008; Foucault, 1991b; Tikly, 2003), liberalism (Divala, 2008; Olssen, 2010), dependency theory (Frank, 2018), postcolonial theory (Dirlik, 1994, 2002, 2018), and neoliberalism (Olssen, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2016b, 2017; Olssen, 2010; Peters, 2009).

1.4.1 Foucauldian discourse analysis

This study utilises discourse analysis of selected policy documents and interviewees' perspectives (data from in-depth-semi structured interviews) to identify how the contexts of HE policy discourse have shaped the way people understand. This includes the way discourses are used for different interests aside from the long-term needs of society for social justice and well-being for all. This exploration demonstrates how the policies are influenced, understood and reshaped by the HE policy elites, and put into practice.

Policy discourse can shape the way people perceive reality and construct social reality. These policy discourses work through power relations of language, identity and practice. The analysis of policy discourse also involves different ideologies and politics, which are enforced and practised both at institutional and individual levels. Analysing how policy discourses in this study have developed and been expressed through ideology, politics, and power relationships enables the examination of the way power is structured and makes sense of practice. Foucault (1974) notes that policy discourse has played a role in transforming knowledge and the way people practice, and “form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49). Many attempts to develop and enforce policies fail due to over-emphasis on how the meanings of the policies should work rather than on how those meanings are formed as existent policies (Ball, 2015, pp. 9-10); in other words, policy research has emphasised “a lot more text work than discourse work; that is, a lot more focus on what is written and said, rather than how those statements are formed and made possible” (Ball, 2015, p. 311). Poole, Sen, and Fallon (2016) claim that there is an interplay of power between the process of policy formation and implementation, specifically, “policy effects implicate power relations, and so do the ways in which policy is produced and used” (p. 18).

Coupling discourse analysis with Foucault's genealogical analysis make it possible to look at traditional practices and the existing 'regimes of truth' and dynamics of power relations within the formation and practice of Cambodia's HE system. A general approach is used in this study to explore the history of Cambodian HE from the position of the present. Foucault (1991a) claims that influences of 'hidden history' have been shaped throughout the long-lost historical events of the past, and that it is vital to review discourse and phenomena from each time critically, rather than merely accept the so-called widely known 'error history'.

1.4.2 Emerging governmentality and hybrid governmentality

The concept of hybrid governmentality is employed in this study as one of the analytical perspectives on past and present HE policy formation and practice in Cambodia. These approaches have been used by Fimyar (2008), Guion Akdağ and Swanson (2018), Perryman et al. (2017) and Sen (2019) to explore the process of HE policy formation and practice in Europe and post-conflict nations in Asia. Cambodian HE policy formation and practice reflect a form of hybrid governmentality (Sen, 2019). In employing this concept, I examine how traditional socio-cultural and political norms and values interface through a process of neoliberal hybridity to form HE policy. The term 'governmentality', as used by Foucault (1991a), makes sense of the rational implementation of government through the connection between forms of government and rationalities about governing. While the art of government is to establish 'truth' within spaces of society, culture and politics become the analytics of governmentality (Fimyar, 2008). This process is often hidden from public attention (Tikly, 2003). Informed by the concept of 'emerging governmentality' (Foucault, 1991a), 'hybrid governmentality' has been utilised by Fimyar (2008), Sen (2019), and Tikly (2003) to explain the struggles facing developing nations in the process of HE policy formation and practice in the era of globalisation transformation and neoliberalism. When developing economies undergo a period of transition and regime change, emerging issues reflect the struggles that shape their process of HE policy development (Fimyar, 2008; Olssen, 2016a; Sen, 2019; Tikly, 2003). During these periods, developing economies are heavily dependent on social and political instability. Cambodia, as a case study, has experienced many transitions through the civil war from the 1960s until 1993 which impacted on the process of HE policymaking and practice. As many national leaders in current positions are those from the previous regimes, power dynamics and tensions are in a state of perpetual change in the country (Sen, 2019).

1.4.3 Liberalism

At the centre of this discussion lies the tension between liberty and democracy. While these concepts are often conflated with each other, there is a danger in overlooking their differences. The liberal concept employed here has been widely used to understand politics that strives for the value and virtue exhibited through its ideology, philosophy, and political institution (Divala, 2008, p. 20). This concept has sometimes been used to refer to more diverse perspectives which are harmful to the well-being of social justice and development, rather than to ensure the freedom and rights for citizens. To highlight this, Divala (2008) points out that certain characterisations of governance tend to restrict the freedom of citizens at large despite the adoption of liberalism. Such characterisation refers to liberal concepts as

individual rights, freedom of thought for individuals, limitations on governance powers, especially by governments and religious institutions, the rule of law, the free exchange of ideas, a market economy that supports relatively free private enterprise, a transparent system of government in which the rights of all citizens are protected, and many more. (p. 20)

Even though the terms liberalism and democracy are interlinked in a different context, their common foundation lies in individual freedom. The two terms do not mean the same thing (Divala, 2008). The dominant American models, as seen in Cambodia through neoliberalisation, generally conceptualise the benefits for the corporate world, especially through the development discourses of a ‘knowledge economy’ or ‘knowledge capitalism’ (Olssen & Peters, 2005) and performance benchmarking of ‘best practice’ (Noblit & Pink, 2016). When each nation competes with every other for advancement, HE has been utilised as a tool that serves the development of research and technology (Scott, 2006, pp. 129-130). In this sense, HE has been exploited by certain interest groups who have control over the development of research and technology under the guise of corporate values (i.e., maximising profits through the investment), which prevents HE from being committed to valuing academic freedom, social justice and long-term development for the nation. As such, neoliberal and global interests have fashioned HE policy in developing nations, whose origins are particular to that context (i.e., historical, socio-cultural, political, and economic), hence the HE system can undermine local social justice and academic freedom.

Neoliberal and global agencies have origins that are external to developing nations. According to Bourdieu (2003), at the centre of neoliberalism is the mindset of ensuring sufficient regulation and institutional structures to promote the market. As Marginson (2011) notes, globalisation tends to undermine the local and national contexts. It can be argued that many features of developing nations contrast the characteristics of neoliberalism and globalisation. Take, for example, social norms, values, tradition, and cultural beliefs. People from Asian nations tend to put community values and norms first, in which individuals are expected to conform to the common practice, tradition, and beliefs of their social settings, including their families (Marginson, 2011, pp. 599-600). Despite the influences of Western HE models, there has been a complex history amongst Asian education development models under which the interplay of Western influences and indigeneity has been structured both during and after the colonial era, and not all of these nations have attained the same level of influence or history as a country such as China (Altbach & Selvaratnam, 2012). A major player in the local and national context, China sees Asia rooted in the mindset of Confucian philosophy. This rests on a tradition that considers education and scholarship with the highest respect, which functions as a cultural condition for the foundation of norms, values, and practice in education amongst Asian nations (Marginson, 2011). It is through the fundamental cultural belief in Confucianism that HE in these countries has been supported, funded, and developed as “an organic hybrid of old and new” (Marginson, 2011, p. 607). It is perhaps unsurprising that such hybrid formations of HE development have blended through time in a complex history of dynamics and tension.

Although neoliberal and global ideologies have ostensibly been founded on notions of freedom (Divala, 2008, p. 172), I argue that these ideologies have undermined goals of current policy formation and practice in developing economies given their focus on corporate commercialisation, commodification, and global-benchmark-oriented competition. In other words, unless these ideologies are modified to incorporate the local context, including the historical, socio-cultural, economic, and political tensions, developing nations are not in a position to grow and develop HE framework to serve their national needs.

1.4.4 Dependency theory

Amongst the theories that have been influential to shaping this research, dependency theory is highly relevant to the context of neoliberalism in the Cambodian HE system.

This theory highlights the way developing economies have become dependent on foreign aid and technical assistance in the process of HE reform. It also explains how the current Cambodian HE development models have been influenced and shaped by foreign agencies towards certain ends of HE development.

Dependency theory was developed in the 1960s to explain the reasons for underdevelopment amongst peripheral nations, especially in Latin America and Asia. It maintains that the underdevelopment amongst nations in Latin America resulted from such external factors as economic and political influence from the advanced nations in Europe and the West (Frank, 1979, 2018). Dependency theory argues that the world economy is formed by a single capitalist system, through which different nations perform their economic function differently. This theory acknowledges that “the world is not a collection of independent, bounded nations, but an integrated, international system—the world system” (Clayton, 2004, p. 279).

In this study, dependency theory (Frank, 1979, 2018) is considered when exploring the process of HE policy formation and practice in developing economies through which the hegemonic nations influence periphery states, especially those in Asia and Latin America. It reveals the consequences of global economic and political influences from Europe and the West, and how they have led to underdevelopment amongst the peripheral countries through their economic and political influence. Even though the West has supported a number of welfare programmes to the peripheral nations, such as technology, capital and skills for local economic growth, “these so-called ‘reforms’ have led to increasing impoverishment and lives of misery for many instead of improving the lives of individuals and their communities” (Arnove*, 2008, p. 79). From this perspective, the West “essentially engage in ameliorative practices to maintain social and economic systems that generate the very inequality and injustices they wish to correct” (R. Arnove & Pinede, 2007, p. 389).

1.4.5 Postcolonial theory

For the purpose of this study, postcolonialism exhibits the way discourses are used in the process of HE policy formation and practice in post-conflict states, and uncovers how such discursive practices have formed ‘regimes of truth’ (Butler, 2005; Foucault, 1988). Such regimes regard the formation and practice of HE that might better build social democracy, social justice, and well-being for all individuals.

Postcolonialism provides theoretical knowledge about the history and legacy of colonisation, which enables us to understand how Europe exercises colonial power over peripheral nations around the world. At another level of dependency theory, postcolonialism shows how the colonial formation of discursive and cultural practices emerges through the use of discourse and power relationships. Postcolonialism has been used politically as a means to resist colonial power in order to promote global justice by showing how global inequalities are perpetuated through both the distribution of resources and through colonial modes of representation (Rizvi, Lingard, & Lavia, 2006). It strives for global justice, where everyone is entitled to equal access to material and cultural well-being through changes in how people think and behave (Young, 2003). Nevertheless, postcolonialism also poses negative impacts on the world agenda for peace and democracy and judgements on different cultural practice. Through the transaction of commodities across borders, postcolonialism has been regarded as facilitating transnational capitalism in the form of hybrid cultures, in serving the need for global peace. Dirlik (2018) argues that “boundaries that divide by essentialized notions of self and the other must be rejected in favour of ‘border crossings’ which underline mutual dependency in the reconceptualization of identity, which ‘enshrines syncretism and hybridity’” (p. 6). Postcolonialism has facilitated global movements that prioritise the benefits of neoliberalism, rather than ensuring social justice and well-being for all individuals (Guion Akdağ & Swanson, 2018).

This study explores Cambodian HE policy formation and practice through a methodology of a ‘history of the present’ (Foucault, 1991b), to understand how contemporary policy formation in Cambodian HE systems have been implemented.

1.5 How neoliberalism emerged and spread into the Global South and Cambodia

Neoliberalism emerged as a political ideology from the West. It spread to peripheral states with its main argument for a better social policy framework and the West’s responsibility to help reform post-conflict dependent states towards social and political stability and harmony. For instance, after World War II, the West applied pressure in the South-East Asia region to influence socio-political reform and economic management. According to Canterbury (2019),

As America positioned its hopes of future capitalization in the region on the back of a successful war effort, those states that refused to conform to the (neo)liberal

democratic status quo were quickly regarded as “rogue,” “failed,” or were “condemned to economic backwardness in which democracy must be imposed by sanctions and/or military force . . . by the global community of free nations.” (Canterbury, 2019, p. 2)

This began when Keynesian political and economic theory for democracy was introduced across the globe such as in Korea in the 1950s, and Vietnam in the 1960s and early 1970s, allowing the market and democracy to operate (Springer, 2015, p. 4). Keynesian theory became the key agenda in US foreign policy and lay the groundwork for capitalism in the region. This groundwork gained momentum when neoliberalism offered “freedom” between market and democracy, hence, it came to be seen as the better solution for the global economic crisis during that time (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Springer, 2015).

But the social reform began with violence and mass killing. The US war in Vietnam and neighbouring Cambodia during the 1960s and early 1970s was based on a discourse for harmony and development in the region as well as the globe. Unfortunately, rather than bringing the nation towards harmony, the US’s actions centred on large-scale bombing in attempt to expel the Viet Cong from Cambodia. These actions severely affected the country and resulted in the deaths of at least 600,000 Cambodian citizens (Kiljunen & Kampuchea Inquiry Commission, 1984; Herman, 1997). Consequently, more Cambodian peasants joined the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979) causing mass killing during that period, until a group from the Khmer Army, aided by Vietnam, defeated the regime on January 7, 1979. Yet Cambodia was still ignored by the Global North governments over a decade thereafter due to the Cold War geopolitics of the global political climate during that time, until the fall of Berlin Wall. At that point the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) came into Cambodia to preside over a triple transition: from a war-torn state to peace, from authoritarianism to democracy, and from a planned economy to neoliberalism (Springer, 2015, p. 42).

Nevertheless, Springer (2015) emphasises that “Neoliberalisation in Cambodia has hindered the potential for social justice, exacerbated poverty and inequality, and is now increasingly thrusting thousands of Cambodians into a position of landless proletarianism” (p. 2). Amidst deepening neoliberal reform, the major causes of the failings of neoliberalism in contemporary post-conflict Cambodia are the intersections of development, discourse, and dispossession (Springer, 2015). First, development under neoliberalism fails due to impractical reform policy frameworks. This is because the

quest for democracy remains under the dominant patronage system of the local community of practice. Secondly, the hegemonic discourses that emerged through neoliberal policy frameworks are geared towards serving the dominant interests of the market and have undermined the essence of local needs for socio-cultural growth. Lastly, neoliberalisation has led to the violent reform of an ongoing regime of skewed and unjustified distributions of property and possessions of the grassroots population through forced eviction (Springer, 2015, p. 2).

The rise of neoliberalism began with three focal arguments. First, neoliberalism functions as an intervention for the shortfalls of classical liberalism: that government intervention has caused barriers to individual freedom in articulating its needs and desires towards certain goals (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2015). Secondly, individuals would pursue their economic capacity better, more effectively, and more efficiently through an unregulated market. Finally, a property regime is considered to better ensure individual rights, the well-being of the market, and economic growth, specifically through the state being noninterventionist (Hackworth, 2008; Plehwe & Walpen, 2007). Springer (2015) claims that neoliberalism is fostered by the invisible hand of the global free market and by the invisible hand of the Western superpower through contemporary critical geopolitics.

Neoliberalism in Cambodia began through its historical context of the geopolitical battle spearheaded by the US President Nixon. The US operations in Cambodia imposed the Western political ideology as regime change in South-East Asia, beginning in the 1970s. Springer (2015) claims that in

Cambodia in 1970, ... the instillation of Lon Nol's republican government was actually preceded by an even more grotesque violation as from October 4, 1965 to August 15, 1973 American bombardiers turned Cambodia into a napalm inferno in an effort to flush out Viet Cong forces thought to be operating from within Cambodia. The carpet bombing literally incinerated the country, leaving an estimated 600,000 Cambodians dead. (pp. 4-5)

But wider Western awareness of the state in Cambodia only grew following the deaths of four unarmed Kent State College students, who were shot dead by the Ohio National Guard on May 4, 1970. They were killed while peacefully protesting President Nixon's operation in Cambodia during that time (Springer, 2015).

Neoliberalism's relationship with "post-conflict" development is complicated and as Springer (2015) emphasises, it is fostered by a critical and violent geopolitical framework for targeting region or nation for reform through civil war. According to Paris (2002), the principles of neoliberalism function through social engineering practices of international peacebuilding. Through this social engineering, the dominant West can enforce the "western-liberal" core as the standard for "appropriate behaviour" in the periphery states. This relationship brings the updated practices of colonial-era belief and imperial power to the dependent states (i.e., the Global South).

Unfortunately, this Western ideal of political economy has led to social instability, social division, and skewed economic power and wealth distributions across regional, national, and socio-cultural levels (Guttal, 2005). Guttal (2005) argues that the roll of neoliberalism is social engineering for the development focus on market-based capitalism, and a political regime to promote and protect neoliberalism. Additionally, this type of reform reveals the state's responsibilities to facilitate and protect conditions for the capitalist network, specifically the emerging national elites and the private actors from national and global dimensions.

In contemporary times, like other nations across the globe, Cambodia has been dramatically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2019, and escalated in February 2020 with nationwide lockdowns. This unfortunate event has brought down the nation, with dual concerns over the public health crisis impacting the population and the negative consequences for economic activities. Through the Cambodian Digital Economy and Society Policy Framework 2021–2035, the RGC (2021) has put forward the view that postcolonial Cambodia requires a restructured strategy for a post-COVID-19 economic recovery with responsive changes in the economic strategy and international trade. In this sense, the RGC has adopted a policy framework for bringing greater potential with local economic benefits in the digital sector to boost national economic growth. Their approach is based on increasing productivity, economic diversification, and local employment opportunities towards the medium-term and long-term needs of the nation in social reform and progress.

1.6 Concepts of policy formation and practice through neoliberalism

Central to this research is an examination of how Cambodian HE policy formation and practice could be focused on the broad 'liberal' concepts of education that are relevant to social justice and well-being for all. The research identifies how the transformation of

HE can influence development pathways, and how HE policy might prepare students through a broad liberal education for life.

1.6.1 Political symbolism

According to Jansen (2002), reform efforts amongst developing nations sometimes reflect the underlying assumption of the political symbolic policy. In this environment, those in power who are ruling the country play the political game to impose a substantial reform policy agenda for reform efforts. However, the contextual reality of the government demonstrates multiple shortages, including limited financial resources and infrastructure to carry out the reform agenda, increasing dependency on foreign funding. This shortfall is exacerbated by insufficient human resource capacity and weak government and administration systems, which makes the practical implementation of the policy for reform impossible to accomplish. With these rationales, the state can successfully convince their citizens to maintain trust in their ‘regime of truth’. This analysis holds that failure to reform is not because of the government intention or inability but due to constraints described here. Jansen (2002) theorises this state governmentality as ‘political symbolism’ achieved through the politicised ‘regime of truth’ needed for the government to invest in its regime of power.

The concept of political symbolism is very interesting as it has many implications for its use as one of the analytical lenses when analysing the process of policy formation and practice in other parts of the world with similar contexts. Scholars utilising Foucauldian analytical tools indicated many active reform efforts through the numerous policy papers being developed amongst the developing economies emerging from a complex history of colonial past and civil wars (Fimyar, 2008; Jansen, 2002; Sen, 2019; Tat, 2020; Tikly, 2003). These postcolonial and post-conflict nations face complex power relations, in the form of contestation between a drive for local traditions, and the socio-cultural and political-economy that forms that contextual reality, and a drive for modernisation.

The experiences of these countries reveal not only the failure to make effective reforms but also the change in which the existing education sector deteriorates and is neglected by various interest groups and emerging policy elites. These interest groups also include the unethical interest groups (Manuel, 2015), which are those emerging policy actors and players who are in the elite group through their capital resources and networks with the dominant political elites (Guion Akdağ & Swanson, 2018), and supporters for neoliberalism (Olssen & Peters, 2005; Rizvi et al., 2006). Hence, amongst the

postcolonial and post-conflict states, neoliberalism reflects illiberal rationales including political governmentality, power contestation, and the dominant ideologies that are at play amongst various actors at various scales (Ball, 2016; Butler, 2005; Dean, 1996; Olssen, 2017; Rizvi et al., 2006). Given the political context of Cambodia that has given rise to neoliberalism, political symbolism is a useful tool for extending this examination to the HE sector.

1.6.2 Governmentality

The reform efforts link to the theory of governmentality of Michael Foucault (1991a). At the national level, governmental technology is manifested in multiple rationales through the exercise of sovereign power, disciplinary power, and pastoral power. Governments ‘technologise’ their power, through the official policy texts and embedded discourses that link the reform effort towards their expected goals.

1.6.3 Emerging culture of governmentality

This study identified local governmental technology that contested the ‘cultural’ terrain of a historical legacy within a neoliberal ideology. The findings reflect the state rationale for a particular mode of government that was not based purely on ‘government technology’ theory (M. Foucault, 1991; Manuel, 2015; Tikly, 2003). What became clear was that the state apparatus, influenced by a historical legacy, was in its operation promoting national stability and peace. Unfortunately, this historical legacy was limited in capacity, knowledge, mindset, experience, and strategy.

1.6.4 Emerging cultural politics towards state-corporate-professional interests

At the global level, funding agencies exert a powerful influence through their aid conditions while, at a national level, the state apparatus reflects neoliberal governmentality through a ‘symbolic policy’ increasingly shaped through a state-corporate-professional rationale that allows interest groups and private individuals, disguised as HEI practitioner experts, to become idolised and monopolise the education professional (Larson, 2013; Peck, 2010; Reed, 2018).

1.6.5 Postcolonialism and globalisation theory

This study can be linked to Dirlik's theory of postcolonialism and globalisation (Dirlik, 1994, 2018) whereby external policy elites influence funding conditions by urging periphery nations to follow their experience. This exploits the dominant benefit around services for reinvestment toward global inequality and social stratification, specifically through the copy-and-paste model.

1.6.6 Pastoral power as solutions

As a final point, the study developed a conceptual framework to examine the state level intervention in quality reform through an effective mechanism of policy implementation and incentives developed from a bottom-up approach. This aligns with Olssen's (2002) theory of 'thin-communitarianism', Foucault's (Foucault, 1988, 1991b) theory of 'technology power', and Blake's (1999b) concept of 'pastoral power'. This study offers a model of neoliberalisation in the Global South context through the lens of thin-communitarianism, but with critical refinements and additions to the framework.

1.7 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. Following from Chapter 1, which provides the introduction to and background of this study, Chapter 2 presents the complete theoretical framework of this thesis. In this chapter, I elaborate three main sections: (1) the country overview, which elaborates Cambodia context of economy and its identity in the region (both history and contemporary), and the genocidal threat that has led to its current context; (2) the important theories, where I present the meaning and nature, and its emerging arguments into philosophical and academic discussion; these theories, hence, mark as the theoretical lens and as the theoretical framework that help to form analysis and interpretation on the contextual reality of the neoliberal reform in the education sector; and (3) the genealogical threat in the education sector through regime changes in Cambodia, where I explain how the history of the present has shaped Cambodian tertiary education through various regime changes, political calamity, and ideological influences, since the colonial period until its contemporary neoliberalism.

In Chapter 3, I connect four bodies of literature: (1) HE development, which examines Eurocentric HE development models, as well as those of developing economies; (2) the context of HE development models in post-conflict states, where I offer a concise elaboration of policy formation and practice, identify key players and the driving forces

behind HE reforms, and consider the political economy of education to shed light on the context of HE policy formation amongst post-conflict states; (4) a historical overview or ‘history of the present’ in Cambodian HE; and (3) ideology and neoliberalisation in post-conflict developing economies, where I introduce the ideologies that have negatively impacted on HE policy formation and practice under the impact of global international aid networks and the Western dominance of development assistance. This is a deconstruction of local, regional, and global influences that have shaped HE policy formation. I highlight the typologies of HE development models from the Global South, specifically the hegemonic model that has been influencing the worldwide HE development model. I also elaborate on an HE development model of local history which has undergone transition and development at the stage of postcolonialism. Finally, this chapter also explains the multifaceted influences from emerging key players/policy actors, hegemonic ideologies and supra-national organisations that drive reform efforts towards certain contextual realities, especially within Global South nations.

Chapter 4 introduces the research design and methodology in this study. In this chapter, I explain the choice of research paradigm, ontology, and epistemology of this study. The chapter also provides a broad picture of the research participants’ recruitment and the research methodology. In addition, I elaborate on the critical research method that was involved throughout the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation in regard to certain empirical research findings in this study. The chapter also provides a broad picture of the research participants’ recruitment and the research methodology. The chapter traces the theories used to analyse policy discourse and documents with respect to governmentality and hybrid governmentality, dependency theory, Foucauldian discourse analysis and postcolonial theory. This conceptual framework considers the underlying forces and ideologies within HE. It then offers an avenue to proposing a model reflecting concepts of social justice within a broad liberal ‘thin communitarian’ cosmopolitan democratisation (Divala, 2008; Olssen, 2004a, 2006).

Chapter 5 offers key findings from this study. This chapter responds to the first research sub-question, ‘To what extent has the transformation of the HE system in Cambodia, addressed the nation’s needs in terms of the neoliberal agenda?’ Key findings from this chapter reveal how the logic of practice of HE policy has been shaped by emerging policy elites across national boundaries. Essentially, this chapter highlights how emerging policy elites use various strategies and tools such as rhetorical discourses, power systems,

and a culture of governmentality to ensure the logics of practice for HE neoliberalism in the postcolonial state of Cambodia.

Chapter 6 offers the key interpretations from the findings in this study. Thus, it provides answers to the second research sub-question of this study, ‘What effects has the colonial past had on HE policy in Cambodia — and what effects has globalisation had on HE policy in Cambodia?’ Specifically, this chapter explains the contextual reality of neoliberalism in HE in Cambodia and how the colonial past and global movement have effects on the current neoliberalisation.

Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 offer the answer to the third research sub-question, ‘How might Cambodia develop a more democratic/socially just HE policy framework?’ These chapters consider the original purposes and expectations of neoliberalism in HE in the Global South context, which was intended to deliver national development towards a HE policy framework for more social justice. In addition, this chapter suggests a HE development framework in the Global South context through a state-regulated neoliberalism that emphasises the essence of the community of practice, and beyond.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by offering a summary of all the main findings emerging from the study, and the interpretation of the findings. It also briefly recaptures the suggested HE policy framework in the Global South context and the direction for future research towards a greater focus on policy of a more socially just society, within an enduring neoliberal context.

1.8 Chapter summary

As Cambodian society is increasingly integrated into regional and global systems, the role of HE in determining social values has changed drastically over the decades. There is a rapidly growing rural–urban migration to pursue these opportunities in tertiary education. This has, in turn, driven increasing urbanisation. However, those with economic means or the right connections have benefited more than others from these emerging opportunities of neoliberalism. Those with little or no schooling or very limited economic resources, especially women, can only benefit minimally from these opportunities. Although the French left Cambodia almost seven decades ago, the French colonial discourse and policy continue to colonise the mind of Cambodians, shaping their inspiration for university education in ways that draw upon the colonial inertia of educational development and policymaking along this trajectory.

The post-conflict reconstruction has further perpetuated the French legacy with the massification of access to HE, especially through the neoliberal agenda and the privatisation of HE. This neoliberalisation has resulted in the influx of rural Cambodians to urban centres hoping to capitalise on the widespread availability of educational opportunities to better their employment prospects in urban centres, improve their lives, and elevate their socio-economic status. Meanwhile, the neoliberal ideology and discourse were injected into the post-conflict Cambodian society by emerging policy elites from beyond the national borders—agencies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) and so forth. The presence of these emerging policy elites in Global South countries such as Cambodia constitutes a new form of colonialism or neo-colonialism. Neoliberalism in the Global South context has not only reframed education as a commodity to be consumed and utilised for the betterment of oneself but also shaped the mentality and practice of post-war Cambodians in their pursuit of education as a form of capital accumulation that serves the dominant interest of the Western world.

As discussed in this chapter, globalisation and neoliberalism have impacted the formation and practice of Cambodian HE policies. Global phenomena and the international aid networks impact and shape HE development models and practices in Cambodia. What can be considered to be the main argument in this study will propose the advantages in the adoption and enhancement of a broad education concept of context-based democracy, social justice, and social development for the well-being of all individuals (Olszen, 2004a,

2006, 2017). This will counter the neoliberal narrative in HE systems to address individuals' intellectual, political and social needs. These development models are provided to determine whether the broad liberal concept of HE policies and curriculum is relevant or not to the local needs today. The argument will present a vision of HE policy formation and practices within a broad liberal conception of education for life. Within this broad liberal concept, the rationale for a HE policy is embedding individuals' 'personal qualities' of values and norms within a democratic, social justice and development concept of education (Divala, 2008; Olssen, 2004a).

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed (metaphorically and literally) for a research study. It serves as the structure and support for the rationale for the study, the problem statement, the purpose, the significance, and the research questions. The theoretical framework provides a grounding base, or an anchor, for the literature review, and most importantly, the methods and analysis. (Grant & Osanloo, 2014)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a number of key theories that are important for my study in this thesis. It builds the theoretical framework of this thesis through three main objectives. First, it begins with the country overview providing country profile, background, economic, and national context of political-economy and demographic status in line with regional and international communities. This chapter presents how national history has moved from the genocidal threat to the systematic adoption of the neoliberal agenda as a reform strategy in the education sector. This section also offers a high-level timeline of the key events of the educational reform and education development pathway across history of regime changes in Cambodia. Secondly, the chapter then explains the key theories used to build the framework to view the contextual reality of policy formation and practice in the education sector. It also elaborates on how these theories are at play within the national, regional and global dimensions that shape the education reform context in Cambodia. Finally, the chapter then moves on to elaborate on the neoliberal context and challenges in the education sector. In this section, the chapter explains how context of neoliberalism functions in government policy formation and practice, the key drivers or supporters of the reform policy, and the impacts (both positive and negative) of the implementation of the policy into the education system. Furthermore, this section shows how the government takes actions through various policy development frameworks and strategies both to deal with the growing problem in the education system as well as to deepen the neoliberal agenda in the HEI community, among stakeholders and in the private sector, and within the overall community of HE services' consumers.

2.2 Country overview

Cambodia formally joined ASEAN on 30 April 1999, and reached its status as a lower-middle-income country in 2015. If there are quality political formations and practices employed in the education system, specifically the neoliberalisation of the HE sector, this is because the country is one of South-East Asia's economic potential due to its youthful population, and its political stability over decades (McNamara & Hayden, 2022). WB (2021) noted that about one-third of the national population is children under the age of 16, whereas three-quarters of the population lives in rural areas. McNamara and Hayden (2022) noted the country is one of the poorest countries in South-East Asia. The country's gross domestic product per capita stood low at only US\$4583 in 2019 (WB, 2021). This figure was lower than those of its immediate neighbour countries: Laos (US\$8172), Vietnam (US\$8397), and Thailand (US\$19,276) (WB, 2021). Poverty remains prevalent amongst ethnic minority groups. Poverty affects about 13% of the population despite the economy growing by 7% in 2020 (WB, 2021). The country has low ethnic diversity as 90% of Cambodians are ethnically Khmer (Open-Development-Cambodia, 2016) and "other ethnic groups include Vietnamese, Chinese, Cham, and indigenous peoples, but only the Cham and the indigenous peoples are officially recognised as ethnic minorities" (McNamara & Hayden, 2022, p. 1).

Despite the glory of the ancient Angkor era in the 11th century, the recent history of Cambodia is unfortunate due to communist geopolitical ideology, and especially the political ideological influence of Maoism. There were frequent invasions by Cambodia's neighbours from the 15th century until the arrival of the French colony in 1853. The colony helped protect the nation yet it exploited the local resources and culture. After independence in 1953, education in the country reached a milestone of rapid development and expansion during the 1960s. Although the French colony had established the formal education system in Cambodia, the education system was demolished almost completely during the 1970s' civil wars. After the end of the major civil wars in 1979, the system began to rehabilitate from scratch, just to function and without the expectation of any quality in the system, while the civil war continued throughout the rural provinces of the country until the official agreement for first national election in 1993.

2.3 Historical context and genocidal threat

Cambodia has experienced much recent tragic political history. According to Ayres (1999), the genocidal regime in Cambodia took power on 17 April 1975, after the

Khmer Rouge betrayed the war-weary population of the nation at gun-point and through the evacuation of the entire city population. The event marked the beginning of ‘Year Zero’ that spanned three years, eight months and 20 days. Ayres (1999) defines ‘Year Zero’ to mean a period of genocidal regime with the mass execution of the people in Cambodia, with all social institutions suspended while the nation was under the embargo. The period was the darkest period of the history of the nation as Cambodia’s border was closed to the rest of the world. The leader of the regime known as the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) ruled the country through the most radical and terrifying programmes that aimed “to transform Cambodia by replacing what they saw as impediments to national autonomy and social justice with revolutionary energy and incentives” (p. 205).

The education sector in the country was targeted for destructions by the regime. At least 1.7 million people were dead by 1979 under the PRK, and all national infrastructure was demolished. Rather than building the nation, the Khmer Rouge regime utilised a new agenda that served a destructive discourse to promote policies and practice towards destruction in the education sector. As cited in Ayres (2000b, p. 451), Ea Mysliweic noted:

The country had no currency, no markets, no financial institutions and virtually no industry. There was no public transport system; no trains ran and the roads were damaged and unrepaired. There was no postal system, no telephones and virtually no electricity, clean water, sanitation or education.

The most prolific period of educational expansion in Cambodia took place after the nation gained independence from France in 1953. The nationalist and founder of national independence from the French protectorate, the former king Norodom Sihanouk, at his peak of popularity and authority, strived to step away from neocolonial dependency through professional preparation and well-educated men for national progress and economic growth. Education expanded dramatically in the Sihanouk era (1955-1970). To exhibit the country’s modernity and his devotion to his Cambodian people, Sihanouk used an ambitious national education system (Chandler, 2003). Under Sihanouk’s government, as Ayres (1999) noted, the developments in the education sector often received 20% of the annual national budget, positioning the nation’s teaching corps amongst the most well-remunerated in South-East Asia. Likewise, Cambodia’s educational infrastructure was the envy of many of its developing world counterparts by the end of the 1960s,

reaching the establishment of 3202 primary schools, 163 secondary schools and nine universities throughout the nation. This achievement in the education sector marked a collective increase of over 130% of educational infrastructure since independence. Unfortunately, the system suddenly faced severe financial constraints and ideological pressures from the left and the nation plunged into civil war after King Sihanouk was driven from power in 1970.

The arrival of the Khmer Rouge regime marked the beginning of the genocide, in which the national human resources, including national infrastructure, were almost completely destroyed. The Khmer Rouge regime destroyed educational institutions, classrooms, and study materials from the old regime because they considered educational practices in the former regime were vestiges of imperialism. In a period of four years, many educational institutions attacked by bombing, others were turned into barracks or prisons, or used as warehouses of the Communist and Republican protagonists. People with an HE qualification, especially teachers, were targeted for destruction by Khmer Rouge policies as they were suspicious of prospective rebels opposing their regime. Ayres (1999, p. 206) noted the regime “claimed that 75% of teachers, 96% of HE students and 67% of primary and secondary school-aged pupils were murdered by the Khmer Rouge”. Thousands amongst those former educators and students survived by fleeing to Thailand. The Khmer Rouge regime destroyed education in Cambodia which caused long-term national deficits for the country in the post-Khmer Rouge period.

After the Khmer Rouge regime ended on 7 January 1979, external financing and aid agencies flocked to the country during the early 1980s. The early donors supporting the Cambodian Government in its national rehabilitation were those from the socialist bloc of nations, and communist nations such as Russia and Vietnam. These donors focused on national reconstruction and stability. Their funding programmes mainly included political ideology training, teacher training, and other social welfare rehabilitation. These offers of support provided immediate aid to the local residents for survival, and basic skills and knowledge for employment in government occupations. Nevertheless, as Ayres (2003) mentioned, these funding projects were mostly incoherent and operated on a short-term basis, leaving the local people in a vulnerable condition and surviving from hand to mouth. With the presence of the new Vietnamese-sponsored government, the international community such as the United Nations, United States, the members states

of ASEAN, with the support of China, imposed an international development assistance embargo on both Cambodia and Vietnam.

With the official withdrawal of the Vietnamese-sponsored troops from Cambodia in 1989 the nation returned to the fold of the wider international community, and joined with other developing nations in embracing a programme of structural adjustment. The attention from the West and other world-leading nations began to offer conditions for Cambodia so that the nation can participate in the international community with cooperation projects, trade, and economic activities. These foreign funding agencies are those from the United Nations, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and other major financial institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, the Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Their funding and loan conditions focus on national reconstruction projects and development programmes, and followed from formal recognition through the first national elections in 1993. Social development policy was implemented through neoliberalisation (the term is elaborated in the next section).

2.4 Neoliberalisation

Neoliberalisation refers to the paradigm shift that puts an emphasis on free market competition to provide services over the public goods in areas such as education, health, and social security (Olssen, 2004a). The rationale of the neoliberal order is to resist the state deficit and make state welfare more efficient than public goods (Olssen, 2004a). Neoliberalism earlier entered public controversy in the 1930s and 1940s when a novel state welfare distribution system developed a middle way between capitalism and socialism based on the belief that market commitments work best for the maintenance of a free society through significant state regulation and redistribution (Jackson, 2010). Harvey (2007) noted that it was not until during the 1980s that Chile was the first neoliberal experiment in the world took place, following the recommendations of Milton Friedman who was a mentor of Chilean economists who obtained their PhDs in economics at the University of Chicago during the 1970s, their team being known as 'the Chicago Boys' (Cabalin, 2012). The neoliberal model privileges the free market and the role of state in promoting individualisation and competitiveness in the market society through an individual's freedom to choose.

The critics of the deficiencies in state planning came to prominence in the early 1970s when there were increasing criticisms by academics of the inefficient expenditure of the welfare state through the lack of accountability or performance targets (Raaper & Olssen, 2015) that led to a skewed distribution of the national budget plan within Keynesian management. Keynesian demand management was applied to professional group services beside educational institutions, such as healthcare, legal bodies, and others that demanded a more effective system of accountability, management, standards of work and performance targets. The political and economic freedom doctrine impressed upon the rule of law emerged in the 20th century through the development of the Austrian, Freiburg and Chicago schools in neoclassical economics in 1930s, and the emphasis by a series of authors in the 1940s, including Frank Knight, Milton Friedman, George Stigler, Ronald Coase, Gary Becker, and others, on imposing “rationality on macroeconomics, monetarism, economic of education, human capital, the economics of information, innovation and the political economy of property rights and contracts” (Peters, 2009b, p. xxviii). Peters (2009b) claim that George Stigler’s leadership and Friedman’s monetarism in the 1960s was fiercely opposed to Keynesian and the market failure concept, and established the neoliberalism of the Chicago school. Since then, with the adoption of the official neoliberal ideology in Chile in 1973, the minimal state and the open global market took root as the neoliberal agenda spread around the world.

Neoliberal ideology was fostered from the 1980s onwards through ‘structural adjustment’ policies imposed by the global financing agency network such as the IMF, the World Bank, World Trade Organisation (WTO), the OECD, and the ADB, starting from Latin America and expanding widely, including to Asia. The tenets of neoliberalism in ‘structural adjustment’ policies lie in the logics of liberalising trade, the monetary system, and boosting the local economy through privatising state assets and reducing expenditure on state welfare (Peters, 2009b). Within a decade, as the global economy became challenging with recession, neoliberalism penetrated into the HE sectors in the United States, the United Kingdom, and spread around the globe, and more specifically into developing nations. Neoliberalisation in HE was spearheaded by the global financing agencies, such as the World Bank, the IMF, OECD, and the ADB, which offered official loan assistance to the developing world; they demanded the loan recipient nations adopted the structural adjustment policy to align them with the neoliberal agenda.

The common failure of the neoliberal agenda reflects the intensity of profit maximization rationales that defines the losers as being accountable for their own failures in not

fulfilling duties to take the available profitable opportunities. The neoliberal agenda has put state education in crisis and put basic human needs at risk. The market provision of public goods remains limited to the market's logic that treats tertiary education services as commodities to be afforded only by those who are able to pay and have the right access, rather than a broad concept of social justice and well-being for all citizens in society.

The neoliberal reform agenda concentrated so much on wealth accumulation and profit maximisation that it treated education services as commodities. Specifically, HE services are obtained under extreme socio-economic stratification (Sadlier, 2019) and pressure of personal investment within a competitive market where the services are stratified to serve interest groups, and are more accessible to those who are able to afford the cost of a better quality standard of education services. Privatisation of the education sector has predominantly imbued schooling with the spirit of marketplace through non-market practice (Done & Murphy, 2018). The process places more emphasis on individual academics being more responsible and accountable for his/her own thoughts and actions through a devolution towards economic activity (Brown, 2015), where the centralised state has less responsibility for managing and operating the services available to the public. While neoliberalisation has stimulated market competition and corporate foundation support to stimulate low-performing HEIs through market competition, the practice opens doors to multiple and entangled sites of social movement intervention (Sadlier, 2019) through space and time across national borders.

Research also argues HEIs' practice, funding, and symbolic and cultural capital is changing through institutional policies shaped by the neoliberal shift (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Busch, 2017; Hill & Roskam, 2009). We have also seen HEIs increasingly practice through business-oriented approaches (Ball, 2012), and the consolidation of the 'student as consumer' discourse into academic practice (Molesworth, Scullion, & Nixon, 2010; Naidoo & Williams, 2015). The incorporation of this discourse into practice has impacted on students' perceptions of and behaviour in their studies, potentially making them into passive and instrumental learners who are unwilling to extend the scope of their critical intelligence for the long-term benefits (Naidoo & Williams, 2015, p. 219). This consumerist perception has also damaged teachers' wellbeing and practice, and the methods of knowledge construction are also impacted this perspective (Connell, 2013; Slater, 2015).

2.5 Governmentality

Governmentality is understood broadly in the work of Michel Foucault and concerns the power of the government over the population. According to Dean (2017), governmentality has several meanings and is adopted to address how the state practices government in modern societies through the rationalities and technologies of governing. The wide variety of meanings of governmentality include: the chronological process in which the state accepts economic knowledge as its responsibility in governing the population; a field of power relations concerning the self-government of individual and collective others; a form of analysis of Foucault's broader project identifying experiences from the history of the present; and it also defines a subfield of social science study. In brief, governmentality refers to the art of government to govern the state and social institutions through thinking about the state and different mentalities of government.

In modern times, sociologists have defined the term 'governmentality' in two main dimensions: the national dimension and the trans-national dimension. The former refers to the art of governing the state through managing the rule of law and the population to develop the national economy; and the latter connotes the interplay of government power relations with international community, specifically through managing the power dynamics within modern world politics, which are transformed through time and space, for the sake of the global political economy, geopolitics, and security building amongst the hegemonic West, Europe, and the peripheral world. Foucault conceives the term 'governmentality' as the 'conduct of conduct', a phrase in which the term 'conduct' is used as a verb and a noun. As a verb, to conduct means to lead, to guide, and to direct; whereas as a noun, sociologists define conduct as 'habitus' which almost equals behaviour, action, and comportment (Dean, 2002, p. 119).

Governmentality conveys government rationalities and technology through different form of power to manage, shape, and develop the national population and the economy, and maintain security at the national level; and in geopolitical arrangements, the global political economy, and security building at the global level. At another level of complexity in world politics, governmentality also incorporates sovereignty, biopolitics, pastoral power, and disciplinary power to locates particular governments into zones of power relations within the global community, and particularly between the hegemonic world and the former colonial states through postcolonial interaction (Dean, 2002). Governmentality, thus, involves shaping the conduct of the conduct of the population,

individuals and government through distinct forms of state apparatuses and technology, with time and space to achieve the common goals of the state and the global communities/networked institutions.

According to Foucault's notion in his 1979 analysis, the term 'governmentality' refers to the art of government that is constructed and developed over time, as a historical form, through distinctive types of rules. This 'art of government' began to fundamentally shape the form of government, politics, and the rationality of political economy that became the basis for the state apparatus, the science of social and political economy in our modern times. Pointing to a series of government problems regarding security, population, and government in the 16th century, Foucault (1991a) maintains that 'the art of government' became the central focal point of state governmentality in dealing with different questions, as Peters (2009b) noted 'the government of oneself (personal conduct); the government of souls (pastoral doctrine); and the government of children (problematic of pedagogy)' (p. xxxii).

Initially, in the sixteenth century, the problematic of government was centred between state centralisation and the logic of dispersion that matters to the intrinsic rationality of the art of government without subordinating to the prince or the relationship with the lord and master during the time. Later, the art of government became widely understood in a positive sense as intrinsic to the state's rationale to govern and around the notion of the state's reason which, Foucault (1991a) maintains, is why the state introduced 'economy' into political apparatuses indifferent to management goods and wealth within the family. Since then, governmentality has been based upon a 'science' of political economy as a specific form of government power and, over a long period, government transformed the administrative state into a governmentalised one that was later formed into 'governmental apparatuses and knowledge' (Peters, 2009b, p. xxxii).

State government, in modern times, is characterised by the 'governmentalisation' of the state through its complexity and its techniques, specifically in education choice, when state apparatuses are geared through the features of neoliberalism that promote the entrepreneurial self to be responsible for making welfare choices through a consumer-oriented market individual model rather than a rights-based welfare model. State governmentality and apparatuses in the neoliberal era reflect a concept of the Rule of Law that is "anchored in a notion of individual rights, property rights and contractual freedom

that constitutes, in effect, an economic constitution” (p. xxxiii) and is geared predominantly to promote the national economy.

In the global dimension, governmentality reflects another level of complexity in which supranational bodies and predominant global networks exercise governmental power, shaping regional, national, and local governmentality and technology towards the neoliberal agenda. Through times and spaces, this global governmentality has manifested transformations of neocolonisation, cultural imperialism, and the commoditisation of public welfare through endless competitive market-driven lifestyles, particularly amongst the peripheral world. As globalisation increased, Peters (2009b) maintains that governmentality systematically addressed three themes, namely: 1) governmentality beyond the nation state (i.e., sovereignty, biopolitics and transnationalisation; 2) the governmentality concerns of biological citizenship and life; and 3) governmentality for the economy.

These days, as state welfare budget planning is under pressure across the developing world, ‘governmentality’ has been further analysed into two schools of thought: 1) the transnational market interests and optimised public services such as the health and welfare of the population; and 2) the way governments use particular representations, knowledge and expertise through which the government technology and state apparatuses reproduce particular ‘truths’ about the population’s social constitution. Transnational governmentality can shed light on the way state transforms its governmentality practice of political rule and technology in relation to world politics, specifically concerning a deterritorialised and ‘de-stated’ concept of politics. The complex relations between culture, power, and different spatialities of social practices have led to a particular spatialisation of social subjects and technologies of the self that are dependent on the emerging disciplinary power paradigm (Barnett, 1999). Specifically, there is perpetual change in the logics or rationality of governmentality in which the key actors and players at the global dimension, such as civil society, finance institutions, philanthropists, development partners, and private companies, have become both objects and subjects of government. Such logics and rationality of governmentality – so-called ‘Networked Governance’ – cast light on the idea of the role of the network and its complexity effects in promoting the new economisation of the state, human capital logics, and the entrepreneurship of the self.

2.6 Globalisation

Globalisation envisages the waning power of the central state political power that controls, represents, and limits the national economy (Waters, 1995), where the forces of global communications and cultural commodification transform the national culture (Arthur Green, 2015). The transformation process has led to devolution in national economies to be interdependent with the emerging transnational, regional, and global market competition. Harvey (2001) emphasised that globalisation opens avenues for global exchanges of market that are compromised through time and space. The best way to understand production of time and space is through seeing how the world is partitioned into geographical entities. Through time and space production, the so-called ‘spatial fix’ (Harvey, 2001), each country must undergo some kind of temporal process of development. The process also leaves different temporal trajectories and pathways of development within that territorial entity.

Globalisation creates a hybridity of cultural styles as world culture has become increasingly standardised and the global and local cultures increasingly interpenetrate each other (Robertson, Bonal, & Dale, 2002; Robertson & Dale, 2015) and interdependent in the world of market movement and competition. Global market transactions, technology transfer, development agendas and cultural exchanges are fostered by the regionalisation agendas which both exploit and confirm national-state sovereignty in certain essential aspects. Olssen (2004b) maintains that the presences of regional and global economic and political exigencies, which demand national ‘constraints’ and ‘conditions’, also bring new possibilities for national development. Like other developing countries, globalisation transformation has elevated the Cambodian national government’s control of their education system and aligned it to global and regional norms and standards as they have to adopt structural adjustment policy reform to fulfil the loan conditions from supra-national finance agencies. Thus, globalisation has resulted in interdependent relationships for political economy, trade, geopolitics, and trade expansion amongst nation-states and across borders.

Scholars have also noted the transformation of globalisation movement into ‘hyperglobalisers’ and the ‘skeptics’ (Held & McGrew, 2000). The former argue that states only have a certain degree of decision-making power over some arenas and some issues for their national policy formation, and have less power to maintain national authority against decision-making by supra-national bodies. There are certain issues such

as environment, trade and healthcare that states no longer have sole power to decide but which require interdependent collaboration with international agencies (Olssen, 2004a). The latter refers to those with the idea that globalisation has led to uneven patterns of global economic integration amongst different nations and regions, and they emphasise the ‘transnational flows’ (p. 239) that are denying a successful transformation and leading to novel developments of ‘globalisation’. According to Olssen (2004a), globalisation is having a marked effect at the cultural level, while it is fragmented and complex at the governance level, creating a novel avenue for an ‘alternative spatialisation of politics’. Thus, globalisation can be argued to be bringing about two phenomena, in the terms Olssen (2004a) coined, ‘Globalisation I’ and ‘Globalisation II’. The first refers to the change in science and technology that has caused a high degree of global interconnectedness, whereas the second refers to the policy formation and practice amongst the powerful states and capital flow across borders at the level of a discursive system.

2.7 Thin communitarianism

The ‘thin communitarianism’ concept emerged when scholars came to criticise the failure of liberalism and the cosmopolitan ideal. Liberalism has been criticised for the limitations it placed on the rights and freedom of individuals, groups, and the community. It has led to corruption through an overemphasis on state power and authority to make decisions, thus limiting individuals’ efforts in terms of choice of lifestyle, innovation potential, and creative ideas for the development of the society and the national economy. On the other hand, the cosmopolitan ideal expresses an overwhelming trust that international relations and global governance can be regulated through the principles of universal reason. This cosmopolitan conception has been criticised for its over-reliance on the nation-state to conform to and abide by the so-called ‘universal’ rule of law (for democratic citizenship), culture, and global rules, while each nation-state possesses a distinct historical background, contexts, culture, beliefs, custom, tradition and practice, and political orientation. It fails not only to relate issues of universal justice to the actual contexts of people’s lives and communities, but is also possibly unable to explain how democracy works at the national and global levels through communities and agencies, the inevitable consequence of the global power of transnational capital and ‘uneven’ development (Olssen, 2004b). Nevertheless, cosmopolitan morality is considered to make sense through a consideration of individuality, rights and their relationships to societies, and is considered to work within a communitarian framework which leads Bellamy and

Castiglione (1999) call it ‘cosmopolitan communitarianism’. Realising that communities across the globe are characterised by different customs, traditions, ethnicities, and political and social practices, Olssen (2004b) maintains that communities also potentially possess common structures and beliefs, and shared ends for self-determination, the freedom of individuals and individual well-being. Thus, ‘thin communitarianism’, he argues, establishes ‘bridgeheads’ which possibly address the issues concerned with moral relativism, solving the contextual problems they confront in relation to democratic standards. Democratic principles, to be trusted, he maintains,

‘must cut across a wide range of groups—gender, ethnic, prisoners, war widows, gays, those with special needs. Common democratic principles must cut across group differences, and practices based on tolerance and trust are commonly required by all groups’ (p. 263).

‘Thin’ communitarian policy reform can potentially be structured at different levels of federations of nation-states, and based on the global democracy principles which mean citizens can contest policies within the global political process through active participation and the rights of citizens.

In addition, the ‘thin’ communitarianism concept also supplements the gap in the ‘demarchy’ perspective, in which democracy is organised at the level of regional and global politics rather than individuals or states (Burnheim, 1985), by adding the ideas of democracy formation at the nation-state level. For Olssen (2004b), the nation-states are also important for checking on and guaranteeing context-specific interests in how global agencies operate; thus, demarchy can be best strengthened by an independent system of nation-states operating through ‘grassroots’ social movements, such as civil societies and movements, that potentially contest the actions of international and national institutions and authorities. Thus, ‘thin communitarianism’ is believed to utilise social movements to empower publics in both supra-national and national dimensions for the development of redistributive policies that radically reduce injustice, domination and oppression, and develop the prospects for a just world peace, solidarity, and critical consciousness amongst the world population.

2.8 Neoliberal context and challenges

After the Khmer Rouge regime fell in 1979, Cambodia rehabilitated itself from scratch in the 1980s, with support and influence from Communist and socialist blocs including,

Russia, Eastern Europe and Vietnam. Their support was mainly through financial aid, technical assistance and training on political ideology, bureaucratic administration and education. By the end of 1980s, the Communist and socialist influences were eroded and replaced by the strong influence from the hegemonic world, such as the United States, Western Europe, and Australia. The Cambodian Government's adoption of the structural adjustment policy started in October 1991 when the prime minister signed the Paris Peace Agreement (Ayres, 2003). This peace agreement marked the establishment of an international control mechanism known as UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) that would temporarily rule the country to prepare for the first national election in 1993 and involved a commitment by the UN to 'peace-building' (Ayres, 2003). Central to this peace agreement is the final component concerning the declaration on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Cambodia, which called for economic aid to benefit all areas of Cambodia. The component effectively signalled the return of Western-oriented multilateral and bilateral development banks and agencies to establish a needs-assessment activities report jointly developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the IMF, and the ADB.

The official framework for Cambodia's rehabilitation and reconstruction was put in place in June 1992 through the ministerial conference hosted by Japan and known as the International Committee on the Reconstruction of Cambodia (ICORC). Cambodia's structural adjustment policy was signed within days of the national election and the establishment of the coalition government in October 1993 (Ayres, 2003). At this time, structural adjustment emerged in Cambodia through a two-fold dilemma: the need for aid to build national human resources, skills and capacity to promote economic transition, and the need for educational sector reform towards more efficiency, institutional strengthening and market capital influx through privatisation.

Since then, the universities obtained formal regulations to generate potential commercial gains and became public administration and semiautonomous institutions (Pit & Ford, 2004). In addition, under the regulation for the privatisation of HEIs, the private sector was allowed to join the government in establishing HEIs and making investments under licence from the state. Through the privatisation regulation, the number of HEIs increased dramatically after the first establishment of private university in Cambodia in 1997, known as Norton University. Since then, the number of HEIs and students' enrolment rate increase rapidly. The number of HEIs mushroomed to 16 within just 10 years, 70 in 2009, and 121 in 2018, 73 of which are private HEIs (MoEYS, 2019a). The gross

enrolment rate in the education sector rose from just 1% (of college-aged youths) in the early 1990s, to 6% in 2006, and 10% in 2018 (p. 15), and enrolments in bachelor degree programmes reached 10,000 in the 1990s and 174,142 in 2015-2016. This exponential development in the education sector under neoliberalisation has led to multiple problems, such as poor-quality services, skills gaps and skills mismatches, and high graduate unemployment (Sen et al., 2013; Un & Sok, 2018; UNDP, 2011). It is clear that during the early stage of the neoliberalisation of the HE system, the education sector experienced a mushrooming stage in the number of private HEIs nationwide. Nevertheless, the majority of the newly established private HEIs were located in the capital city, and were limited to only one or, at most, a few HEI campus branches in the rural and provincial areas. This phenomenon had both positive and negative consequences for the education sector and has evidently marked the emergence of the effects of neoliberalisation in the education sector through the pros and cons of the neoliberal reform agenda, policy formation and practice, as described in the following paragraphs and section 2.9.

On the bright side, the HE sector received a dramatic increase in the number of students enrolled. More students from different backgrounds could gain access to tertiary education services through their own capacity, affordability, and choices of subjects. Those who could afford the higher self-financing option to pay for the high-quality HEIs could afford to study in an international programme at a satellite campus in Cambodia, specifically Lim Kok Wing University, Panhasastra University, Zaman University, CamEd University, American University of Phnom Penh, Charles Sturt University, and SETEC University. By contrast, those who could barely afford lower self-financing options could choose to enrol for a nationwide competition for scholarships to get enrolled into prestigious state tertiary education institution, such as The Royal University of Phnom Penh, The Royal University of Laws and Economics, and the Institute of Technology of Cambodia, or into a sub-standard private university. Others who could not compete for the scholarship had to decide whether to pay for a low-standard private HEI to pursue a university degree or go straight to looking for one of the full-time jobs that were at hand. Universities, especially low-standard private universities, gain the benefit from enrolment numbers amongst these students as their main source of income.

Moreover, more job opportunities were established for those working in the education sector through working as office staff and lecturers in those newly established private universities in the neoliberal context. Any fresh graduate who is capable of offering lectures to freshmen or juniors are recruited, especially in the private universities, because

they are willing to accept low pay compared to experienced or professionally trained lecturers. Thus, the neoliberalisation of the education sector brought an increased student enrolment rate to the education sector, the offer of more desired study programmes to tertiary education students, and more job opportunities amongst HEI employees. The neoliberalisation agenda opened opportunities for the private sector to fulfil their licence requirement so that they could join with the government in investing in the education sector through operating private universities under the supervision of the state. This permitted the unrestricted invisible hand of the market to allow a large capital investment influx into the education sector.

With the rapid increase in the number of HEIs, specifically private HEIs, and the competitive tuition fees set by different HEIs, more students from various backgrounds can access university education, make choices on their desired subjects, and obtain flexible study arrangements (such as full-time or part-time programmes). Students who are capable of passing the entrance exam, and who can afford to pay more, can opt to enrol into prestigious universities, and some chose to study two majors or more at the same time hoping to get good jobs upon their graduation. In addition, more job opportunities have become available in the academic world. There are more board officers, rectors, vice-rectors, chancellors, lecturers, researchers, and administrative and management officers who gain the benefits of the booming of the universities. It is clear that neoliberalism has provided nationwide access to students who are capable enough and able to pay tuition fees, and given them the chance to obtain tertiary education in their desired subjects and programmes.

Neoliberalism in Cambodia shows that the government has served the population by providing access to tertiary education and building the potential of higher quality local human resources for the target of national economic development, social development, as well maintaining peace and political stability for the nation in the long term. Through the wise vision of the government, neoliberal reform has brought forward thousands of scholarships from private universities, charities and elites from various sectors to offer tertiary education to students, specifically high-school graduates from poor family backgrounds but with enough capacity to further their tertiary education.

Table 1. Genealogy of threats to Cambodian HE—a high-level timeline

Chronological history	Relevant factors and trajectory	Reference
French protectorate/colony (August 11, 1863- November 9, 1953)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Helped transform indigenous education into modern schooling, but limited to the elite class (wealthy and state-sponsored students); the system served the (European and Western) colonial administration and enterprise, exploiting the local culture, resources, and tradition. – Faced funding constraints, unqualified teachers, sub-standard quality, and reinvested in destruction of pastoral power amongst the local population. 	(Ayres, 2000b; Rany, Zain, & Jamil, 2012)
King Norodom Sihanouk period, independence from French colonisation (1953-1970)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Officially signed at Geneva conference on November 9, 1953. The nation prospered and grew rapidly for about 15 years; 15 universities were created nationwide, increasing student numbers from only 200 tertiary students in 1953 to 5,753 by 1970. – The prosperity, though, was short-lived, facing intense political-ideological contestations between the pro-Western and the communist blocs, leading to funding deficits, social class protest, and intense civil war in 1970. 	(D. P. Chandler, 2008; Clayton, 2005; Howard, 1967; Pit & Ford, 2004)
Khmer republic 1970-1975	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Tertiary education reflected a platform of strong ideological interplay between Western, republicanism, capitalism, and democracy (the cold war influences). – Most universities were destroyed or closed down due to air bombardment, and most educated people migrated overseas or were killed; this was a period of heavy destruction of HEIs. 	(Ayres, 2000b; D. P. Chandler, 2008; RGC, 1997b)
The Khmer Rouge regime (genocidal regime, 17 April 1975-1979)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The regime targeted an agrarian-based economy through discourses of ‘self-reliance’ and ‘self-mastery’; it eliminated national economic, political, and cultural infrastructure, following the cultural revolution of China. – Ideology meant 75% of universities lecturers and 96% of the students were lost in the genocide, and about 90% of tertiary educational facilities and documents were completely destroyed; tertiary education staff were targeted to be executed, being accused of rebellion against the regime. 	(D. Ayres, 1999; D. Chandler, 1993; Clayton, 1998)
The Vietnamese occupation and Soviet/socialist assistance (1979-1991)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cambodia rehabilitated from scratch (deficits of human resources, funding, and policy agenda); and under the embargo from the international community, including ASEAN states, China, and the United States. – Education system received assistance from the Soviet Union, Vietnam, and Eastern-bloc nations, and several HEIs gradually opened; 6,509 students were sent abroad 	(Ayres, 2003; Virak, 2009)

	between 1979 and 1989, and 5,712 students graduated from local Cambodian HEIs by 1990.	
The UNTAC and adoption of structural adjustment policy (1991-1997)	– Cambodian Government signed Paris Peace Accord in October 23, 1991, removing the embargo sanction from the international community; the framework for Cambodia’s rehabilitation and reconstruction was established in June 1992, at a conference hosted by Japan. Structural adjustment policy began (October 1993).	(Ayres, 2000b; D. J. H. o. E. Ayres, 2003)
First National Education Seminar (January 1994), held jointly by the government and the development partners	– The government began working with donors to develop education policy and projects, including initially, National Development Strategy: “National Program to Rehabilitate and Develop Cambodia (NPRD)”; and “Program to Rebuild Quality Education and Training in Cambodia”.	(Ayres, 2000b; D. J. H. o. E. Ayres, 2003)
ADB review projects (adopted by the government in December 1994)	– ADB education projects began in Cambodia, including “Basic Education Investment Plan (1995-2000)”; “Education Investment Plan”; and Cambodia’s First Socio-economic Development Plan 1996-2000. – Education funding was heavily influenced by a World Bank report on ‘rate of return’ (by George Psacharopoulos); development partners during the 1990s and 2000s interested in basic education level, and oversaw the tertiary level.	(Ayres, 2003; Ayres, 2000b; Psacharopoulos, 1985)
Two major policies to expand HEIs (adopted by the government in 1997)	1) Public HEIs can charge tuition fees for non-scholarship students (applied to some HEIs), as quasi-government or public administration institutions (PAIs). 2) Private sector to invest in HEIs.	(RGC, 1997b)
Neoliberalisation of HE in Cambodia started (since 1997)	– HEIs are centrally supervised by different government ministries, operating with limited financial resources, political interference, lack of transparency for academic recruitment, appointment and programme approval. - Uncontrolled boom in number of private HEIs led to problems in quality education, human resources, teaching capacity, academic relevance, research capacity, and academic freedom and autonomy issues.	(Ayres, 2000b; R. Sam, Zain, & Jamil, 2012)

2.9 Current challenges in the education sector

In contrast to the positives set out in the previous section, a number of problems emerged as the education sector was exploited and as it deteriorated. The government adoption of the structural adjustment policy since the early 1990s led to large market capital inflows for investing into the education sector. Since the regulation on privatisation in the education sector, problems in quality education and the unemployment rate amongst

graduates increased rapidly due to HEIs owners' focus on profit maximisation over the interests of the education sector in the long-term.

First, there are universities, mainly private HEIs and state universities operating with a tuition fee programme, focused on the number of students enrolled to maximise their income through students' tuition fees. Rather than focus on building a reputation in the long-term, these HEIs set out first to maximise profits through tuition fee income but put aside the quality of their services and graduate quality with a view to graduate employment. They lower the tuition fees to compete with other HEIs and employ untrained and less experienced lecturers. These private HEIs also reduce the number of tuition hours through exchange study tour programmes and unnecessary holidays so that they can reserve the cost of unused tuition hours.

Secondly, under the neoliberal agenda, some private and state HEIs operated with overcrowded classrooms to reduce the expense of tuition hours. Consequently, students could not concentrate well for their study as the class was too crowded, and they could not get enough of the interaction with the lecturers that they needed during the course semester. Scholars noted that 60% of the students in Cambodian HEIs felt their lecturers had no time to support them with consultations (Chen, Sok, & Sok, 2007, p. 128). In turn, students cheated during tests and examinations each semester in order to progress towards their graduation certificates. Thirdly, despite there having been a rapid increase in student enrolment numbers in tertiary education since the beginning of the neoliberal reform era, i.e., 1997, when the first private university was established, the current number of students enrolled in the universities remains low compared to the annual number of high-school graduates. While these high-school graduates should also have the option to go for immediate employment in the factory, or preferred organisations/companies, there needs to be enough graduates to enrol in technical/vocational education and training, and especially in university level study. Gross enrolment rate in all forms of tertiary education was only 14.7% of total number of students graduated from high school in 2018 (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2020). This figure, nevertheless, is considered by the RGC and the stakeholders of financing agencies to show a marked increase in the student enrolment rate over the past three decades since the 1990s' redevelopment of the national education system through the neoliberalisation.

Finally, the neoliberal reform in the 1990s has led to great concern, backed by evidence, about the quality issues throughout the education system. There are issues regarding the

HEIs not performing to quality standards. Many private HEIs employed low-quality lecturers who had not qualified in pedagogy training programmes or did not have enough experience to teach in tertiary education. Evidence found that there was low capacity amongst HEIs lectures, with only 6% of them holding a PhD degree and other 85% had never published any research paper (Chen et al., 2007). Moreover, books and study materials in each library at these universities are out-of-date and inadequate; 90% of lecturers reflected a culture of work without technical discussion or meetings (p. 145). It has been clearly noted that the working culture amongst lecturers in Cambodian HEIs adopts a teaching-oriented rather than a research-oriented approach (p. 145). This reflects a huge gap between the practice and the neoliberalisation education development strategy that focuses on a wide range of collaborations with private companies and the community through research and development, and partnership for essential funding projects. As acknowledged in Cambodia's Education 2030 Roadmap (MoEYS, 2019a), the downside of neoliberalisation has brought forward the most significant challenges in the education sector, which had been exploited and has deteriorated through the profit-maximising mentality, double standards in education services, and poor-quality education services provided to students.

These multiple problems in the HE sector are not separate from the domino effect from the secondary education and vocational education sectors. As indicated in Cambodia's *Education 2030 Roadmap* (MoEYS, 2019a), weak management and leadership capacities, including a weak policy framework, poor coordination, and inadequate monitoring, have resulted in poor student assessment and teacher absenteeism from the primary school education level upward. McNamara and Hayden (2022) noted that there has been no report on coordination from secondary education into vocational education and continuous education sectors. There is much lacking in reports on leadership and management issues in schools and the technical and vocational education and training sectors, possibly due to the government focus on school inspection and anticorruption policy framework (p. 6). Therefore, this lack of coordination amongst related management and leadership bodies in post-secondary education sectors has resulted in inadequate student learning assessment, absent of standardised evaluation of the education system, and inadequate continuous education support to individual students from different backgrounds.

In brief, the neoliberal reform agenda has satisfactorily brought forward modernisation in the education sector with a dramatic system expansion and competition. Not only the

number of HEIs but also the numbers of students enrolled and university graduates have increased rapidly within three decades. Inevitably, many problems have also arisen alongside this rapid modernisation and uncontrolled dramatic system expansion – specifically, the development of an education service with poor quality, low standards, a skewed distribution of HE services, a skills mismatch with market needs, and greater unemployment amongst university graduates.

To deal with the dramatic increase of the problem in the education sector, the RGC established a quality assurance body known as Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC) in 2003 (RGC, 2003). The main function of the ACC was to assess and evaluate quality standards and the acceptable criteria required for an HEI to be able to get a licence to operate and fulfil its mission in the education sector. Additionally, as observed by the MoEYS (MoEYS, 2019a), efforts are being made to prepare a strategic framework through Cambodia’s Education 2030 Roadmap. This roadmap is intended to strengthen the area of staff development, university performance standards, capacity development, and stakeholder engagement. As prescribed in the education policy, the roadmap targets the making of a clear link between the availability of financial resources and the attainment of results in each area mentioned above (MoEYS, 2019a, p. 11).

As elaborated above, the mechanism is built to foster the neoliberal agenda as the ACC functions to evaluate and benchmark the education service provision at the national level to regional and international standards. From one perspective, the function of the ACC is to strengthen the quality standard and ensure more development and modernisation in the education sector at the national level, while it also serves the objectives of the structural adjustment policy in embracing the lens of regional and global standards. From another perspective, this alignment to the expectations of the external world standard brings the system to serve neocolonialism and postcolonialism, and the state’s dependency on the hegemonic world. Such potential contextual realities reflect the system’s production of graduates that serve the disrupted short-term market demand and a perpetual, even deeper, dependency on the global financial agency network. Furthermore, this neoliberal agenda that is geared to and aligned with the external world’s dominant standards potentially ignores the role of universities in serving the nation in ways that are based on the local contextual realities of the local community and the national advantage.

2.10 Government's commitment under neoliberalisation

To strengthen the quality and effectiveness of the education reforms under neoliberalism, the RGC established the Education Law of 2007 as the legal foundation for the regulation of the national education system. As stated in article 31 of the Education Law, the MoEYS is authorised to promulgate rules and principles for its establishment and administration in the education system. As noted in McNamara and Hayden (2022), the Education Law prescribes “early childcare and childhood education; general education (primary, grade 1-6; lower secondary, grade 7-9; upper secondary, grade 10-12); technical and vocational education and training; and higher education” (p. 1). This reform is essential and has had a strong impact on the current policy formation and practice; the HE sector paid attention to ensure they fulfilled the requirements of the law. As it is the first law enacted in the education sector to prescribe punishment on corruption in education, this law is crucial to clear away the previously unresolved corruption problem in the education sector, specifically in the period of the uncontrolled boom in HEI numbers and student recruitment. It has led to a higher quality of internal evaluation; the recruitment of more qualified lecturers and students; the improvement of infrastructure, buildings, education resources and facilities; wider connection and cooperation with the private sector; and academic institutions networks with both local and international dimensions. This government practice marks the effort to ensure a halt in corruption in the system, and strengthen the policy formation and practice with the potential to absorb larger numbers of students throughout the nation.

Another Royal Decree was drafted in 2009 intending to create a Supreme National Council of Education (SNCE), yet it has subsequently lapsed. The SNCE was meant as a superior body that would control and supervise the whole education system, including the responsibilities for establishment of policy proposals, long-term strategies, and the evaluation of the performance of the education system. The government realised that policy reform and practice required another supreme body to supervise and control the process of making education law for effective and quality implementation achievement. Reports from the experts implementing the education law in practice sometimes challenged the individual interests of some HEI owners as, not unsurprisingly, they were owned or backed by people with elite power such as high-ranking officers, powerful politicians, and investors having strong networks with interest groups. The RGC, instead, authorised the MoEYS to be responsible for setting the priorities in education policy and the overall strategic plans for the education system. In this capacity,

the MoEYS is responsible for developing five-yearly National Strategic Development Plans (NSDPs) and five-yearly Education Strategic Plans (ESPs) that are considered to be necessary updates to align the national human resource development targets and the national socio-economic development policies.

As indicated by the MoEYS (2019c), the latest strategic plan covers the period from 2019 to 2023. It is believed that this new strategy will bring more effective action and results to the education sector, as the MoEYS is granted sole power, based on the practice resources and contextual reality, to analyse and decide on the choice of strategy, implementation timelines, and responsibility to the government and the public. Thus, MoEYS has become more responsible and plays more crucial roles in efforts for policy formation and practice in the neoliberal environment through wider connections and cooperation with range of policy actors and players, including local experts, educators at grassroots community level, and external policy actors and players across the region and the globe, namely, development partners, financial agency networks, academics, networked universities. Authorised to be a ministry within the RGC governing hierarchy, the MoEYS is a relatively large entity. Currently, the MoEYS had seven directorates, one of which has responsibility for general education and another has responsibility for the HE sector (MoEYS, 2019a, p. 9). The MoEYS hierarchy also has 37 line departments, and 25 provincial offices that represent the ministry in all 25 provinces/municipalities of the country, and there are also 197 district offices (p. 9). This large hierarchical entity creates the potential for exchange with updated international curriculum and education programmes.

McNamara and Hayden (2022) note that the provincial offices have the responsibility to implement the national policies, and make future development plans for each authorised province/municipality. The district offices offer as direct platform for the MoEYS and the school management committees concerning the preparation, implementation and monitoring of school development plans. Currently, together with the MoEYS, there are 16 different ministries that supervise the HE sector. This allows the MoEYS to exercise line management responsibility for public HEIs and the private institutions that account for about 50% of all HEI students, whereas, the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT) is seen to be essentially responsible for the technical and vocational education and training sector.

Table 2. Genealogy of government's commitments under neoliberalisation—a high-level timeline

Decree/Policy (and year of adoption)	Chronological commitment and the objectives	Reference
Sub-decree on Criteria for the Establishment of University (2002)	– To define necessary criteria and conditions for MoEYS in full capacity to monitor and evaluate proposed documents on the establishment of the university.	(RGC, 2002)
Royal Decree on Accreditation of Higher Education (2003)	– To ensure and promote HE with effectiveness and quality consistent with international standards, and HE administration criteria.	(RGC, 2003)
Prakas [declaration] on Conditions and Detail Criteria on the Establishment of HEIs (2007)	– To set standards for conditions and criteria for the establishment of public and private HEIs in Cambodia.	(RGC, 2007b)
The Law on Education (2007)	– To build for the nation with human resources capable of knowledge, skills, capacities, with moral behaviour and characteristics.	(RGC, 2007a)
Education Strategic Plan 2009-2013	– To close the gaps between education policies and strategies concerning development programmes, planning and budgeting; a strategy through joint work between MoEYS and development partners to achieve better education quality and efficient budget management.	(MoEYS, 2010a)
Policy on Research Development in the Education Sector (2010)	– To enhance tertiary education quality, and promote research knowledge that helps develop the society, economy and culture; a guideline framework to promote HEIs with a wide range of research in all disciplines, researchers' capacities and capabilities, protection of research ethics and results, and the dissemination and utilisation of the research results.	(MoEYS, 2010c)
Master Plan for Research Development in the Education Sector 2011-2015 (approved by ministerial meeting on 14 th March 2011)	– Funded by the World Bank, the plan ensures HEIs are able to conduct a wide range of research, enhance the capacity of researchers and HEIs, address research ethics, and carry out wide dissemination of the research results that lead towards new knowledge and inventions.	(MoEYS, 2011)
Royal Decree on Professional Ranking (2013)	– To provide a standard and criteria in ranking HEIs' academics through academic status as: assistant professor, associate professor, and professor.	(RGC, 2013b)
Education Strategic Plan 2014-2018	– To enhance seven key sub-sectors: early childhood education, primary education, secondary and technical education, HE, non-formal education, youth development, and physical education and sport.	(MoEYS, 2014a)

Policy on Higher Education 2030	– To ensure mechanisms that support the tertiary education system, and the development of human resources, through comprehensive equity and access for learners, with efficient and smooth coordination and management; to build a tertiary education system capable to contribute fully to national development.	(MoEYS, 2014b)
Master Plan for Capacity Development in the Education Sector 2014-2018	– To ensure effective leadership and management of education staff at all levels led by MoEYS through a comprehensive and sustainable capacity development approach.	(MoEYS, 2015)
Cambodia Industrial Development Policy 2015-2025	– To embark on a “new growth strategy” for the nation to maintain sustainable and inclusive high economic growth through economic diversification, strengthening competitiveness and promoting productivity.	(RGC, 2015)
Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023	– To implement education, youth and sport reforms and establish a robust base for education towards 2030 and 2050. It ensures two key policies: inclusive and equitable quality education, with lifelong learning opportunities for all; and effective leadership and management of education officials at all levels.	(MoEYS, 2019b)
Capacity Development Master Plan in Education Sector 2020-2024	– This plan focuses on Cambodia’s SDG-4 Roadmap and ESP 2019-2023 reforms through strengthening six priorities as sub-sector capacity reforms including: policy, planning and financial management; human resource management; monitoring and evaluation; teacher training, school-based management and curriculum development; and school inspection and student learning assessment.	(MoEYS, 2021)
Policy framework based on the results and programmes of public investment in education sector 2022-2023	– To set a benchmark policy framework with four reform priorities: national level, institutional level, system and capacity building, and human resource for digital economy level.	(MoEYS, 2022)

In the 21st century, the transformation of globalisation has rapidly influenced the peripheral world, generally referred to as the (poor) developing world, in the receipt of aid from the advanced nation and donors. Looking specifically at Cambodia, the major influence of this global phenomenon has been the spread of knowledge capitalism from the West and the Global North into Cambodia. This has resulted in Cambodian acquisition of knowledge creation and data literacy skills, which have become the main focus amongst HEIs in Cambodia. Scholars, namely, Anthonysamy, Koo, and Hew (2020) maintain that sustainable development in lifelong learning requires human capital capable and highly efficient in digital literacy, with digital learning as the self-regulated learning

strategies. Knowledge capitalism also influences the choice of knowledge for the future of work, and organisation of knowledge institutions.

Under neoliberalism, HEIs can incorporate new technologies such as Learning Monitoring Systems (LMSs) to enhance the quality of teaching and students' learning. A study in a New Zealand institute, Auckland Institute of Technology, argues that Quality in HE in modern times has become multifaceted and complex and is a mean to address its accountability (Horsburgh, 1999), and quality monitoring must place emphasis on curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment despite the influence of the social, economic, political and personal context (p. 9). In this era of digital transformation, scientists also note the application of advanced technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) into HEIs in academic support services and institutional and administrative services, specifically through four areas—profiling and prediction; assessment and evaluation; adaptive systems and personalisation; and intelligent tutoring systems (Zawacki-Richter, Marín, Bond, & Gouverneur, 2019). Cambodia is expected to cultivate a seven-point plan for skills to move towards inclusive digitalisation (Banga & te Velde, 2020) and to promote sectoral transformation: “(i) radically transform innovation in the manufacturing sector; (ii) provide appropriate and quality skills for the future; (iii) nurture the digital startup economy for an inclusive economy; (iv) protect and enable the most vulnerable groups to take part in the digital economy; (v) ensure a public sector that leads by example; (vi) digitalise trade facilitation and boost e-commerce; and (vii) revise and extend social protection mechanisms to vulnerable groups” (p. iv).

In the neoliberal era, therefore, HEIs cannot avoid the need to incorporate all these perspectives, integrated through knowledge, skills, capacities in digital literacy and AI (Popenici & Kerr, 2017), and effective monitoring and evaluation strategies amongst their staff and students, so that HEIs function at their full capabilities to generate income from under neoliberalism that brings about robust public-private partnership projects. Modern HEIs in Cambodia must join with the government and private sector through multiple contributions. First, they must be capable of conducting research on the needs of future work (Parker, Wall, & Cordery, 2001), for example, in the next 10 years. Generally, the theory of work design incorporates both internal factors (including management, tasks, technology, information systems, staffing, strategy, history and culture) and the external factors (i.e., changing environment, customer demands, the available technology, social and cultural norms, economic circumstances, the nature of the labour market, and political and labour institution) (Parker et al., 2001). For modern times, scholars including Parker

et al. (2001) have proposed work design should build in two directions simultaneously: a general theory including relevant factors, namely antecedents, work characteristics, outcomes, mechanisms and contingencies; and the particular context identified through empirical research.

Second, cooperation between HEIs and private sector companies for student learning and the capacity-building of lecturers through the establishment of memoranda of understanding (MoUs) (Slaughter, Slaughter, & Rhoades, 2004). From this perspective, HEIs function as hybrid organisations working jointly with industries through job retraining programmes. Partnerships with various stakeholders are also reflected through HEIs function as development hubs that link external partners in public and private firms to graduate students and faculty to form new curricula, and new research and human resource development programmes (Hansen & Lehmann, 2006); this is the ‘triple helix model’ of government-university-industry collaboration (Sam & Dahles, 2017). The idea here is to send local staff or students for apprenticeships in industry so that these staff and students can access to modern study equipment and materials.

Third, project work enables students and lecturers to conduct research and project work, and acquire data literacy to promote 21st century skills such as innovation, creation, cooperation, and communication. Through a project work approach, students acquire 21st century skills such as modern technology tools in learning, socialising, and communicating with others and opportunities to reflect and form pluralistic worldviews through perspective taking, and community services (Mayhew & Fernández, 2007). All students have goals, planning, strategy, responsibility, and individual competency development in their new jobs, which do not yet exist. With mechanisms for learning that allow students to dialogue with various peers, role-play, reflect, and volunteer their services in the community, students can develop their capacities for social justice learning, especially through exposure to contexts that challenge them to think in new ways about themselves and the society in which they live (Mayhew & Fernández, 2007); this is the application of social justice in HEIs – in other words, equity.

This can be done through work-based training in industry, as stated above and, specifically in Cambodian HEIs, through a multipurpose small-scale fabrication hub, a so-called ‘open fabrication laboratory’, to create new digital products or ICT systems for community needs through community-based, scenario-based, and project-based learning (Chin, Hel, & Pec, 2021; Grunfeld, Siochrú, Unger, & Im, 2011). As a case in point, the

Institute of Technology of Cambodia (ITC) has programmes for research and innovation in collaboration with France and Belgium, and in Erasmus projects. Thus, learning and work training go hand in hand. With all these resources and exchange lecturers from overseas, such as from France and other European countries, the ITC has become an international HEI in Cambodia with a standard curriculum and approach to teaching and learning, and an orientation to the world of work of the future (Leng, 2015). The University of Battambang (UoB) has programmes that bring company entrepreneurship to respond to market demands. In case study on the UoB which involved the adoption of Mobile-learning (M-Learning) as a technological innovation strategy for students' learning and teaching methods amongst the academic staff implemented in the university curriculum and practice, Panhavuth, Boonget, and Intaganok (2020) identified that HEIs' adoption potential is good, leading to positive behaviour, attitudes, and readiness when the system is available and accessible to them. Another university in Cambodia, Kamchay Mea University, which is one of the East provincial HEIs in Cambodia, has applied new curriculum ideas such as transplanting young bananas. This enables students to engage with practical experience, team work, and innovation skills and experience development amongst fellow students through partnership amongst HEIs, private companies, communities and researchers across borders (Grigorenko, 2007; Grunfeld, 2011). In brief, policy formation and practice in the neoliberal era must always link indoors classroom education with practical work-based training to make the curriculum for students' learning beneficial and to develop skills at creating knowledge and in computer usage – the 21st century skills of data literacy, creativity, innovation, communication and values that are needed to develop the national economy and a socially just society for the long-term needs of the nation.

2.11 Conclusion

The first modern higher learning in Cambodia took place in the French colonial period (1863-1953) but was very limited and soon afterwards it experienced the most tragic history where the nation, including the education system with all documents, was totally closed down and destroyed. The peak development and modernisation in the education sector spanned about 17 years, from just after the end of French colonisation, during the period of the former King Sihanouk. The prosperity in the education sector at that time was heavily disrupted and fell into civil war during the 1970-1975 period of the pro-Western army; it then plunged into the most traumatizing history when Cambodia was seized by the genocidal regime, the Khmer Rouge, for nearly four years (1975-1979). The

time of long-term national security and political stability began in January 1979, but under an embargo from the international community, until the establishment of the first national elections in 1993 backed by the UN network. This time marked the arrival of the structural adjustment policy framework and the adoption of the neoliberal agenda into the education sector by 1997.

Through the grand theories mentioned in this chapter, one can see the contextual reality in which government adopted and implemented policy reform, specifically under pressure to systematically structure policy as demanded by the network of funding agencies from the hegemonic world utilising various forms of global technology and governmentality agendas. As explored above, globalisation theory sheds lights on the speed of the neoliberal agenda's movement across nation-state borders and its ability to penetrate deeply into the local community culture, trade, and political economy, and especially society, into new way of life and work, through deconstructing and reforming the traditional ways. Thin-communitarianism provides another layer of the framework which offers a critical position in which neoliberalisation, in the context of Cambodia as a nation of the Global South, could be improved in respect of social well-being, justice, and social reform through social democracy serving the long-term needs of the nation.

The neoliberal agenda in Cambodian HE took root over two and a half decades ago, and quite a long period has now elapsed since 1997. Since the adoption of neoliberalism, the education sector has expanded dramatically, bringing forward a high number of university graduates, developed a variety of major skills in the workforce and for the economy, and created greater job opportunity amongst local academics. Optimism in the sector reflects wider investment and collaboration from private sector capital inflows into the education sector, wider networking and collaboration amongst stakeholders (i.e., private companies, researchers, academic experts, development partners, and communities), more choices of HE services through the satellite campuses of overseas institutions, and more competition for academic excellence towards national and regional quality standards.

Nevertheless, quality standards and graduates with standard skills and capacity remain difficult to achieve. The downside of this policy implementation links to three constraints: lack of local human resources due to mass executions during the genocidal regime (1975-1979); the national context and priority focus of development affecting the proportion of the budget going into the education sector; and the commitments and budget distributions from the donors and the development partners, who were more interested in

funding the basic education level during the 1980s and 1990s. This is clearly seen in the stage of national rehabilitation in the 1980s, when the government built the nation from scratch and faced a dilemma in maintaining peace and initiating education through basic literacy and having a small number of unqualified teachers with technical assistance and dominant funding from development partners and, from the 1990s, from the international community. To deal with the budgetary shortfall and increasing problems in the education sector reform, the RGC and MoEYS have secured funding from various sources, mainly through grants and loans from the development partners such as the World Bank, IMF, ADB, and OECD. Through joint work and good collaboration with development partners, the RGC and MoEYS, have developed a number of Royal Decrees and policies concerning the regulation laws, the accreditation committee, the framework for monitoring and evaluation, the development strategic plan, and projects for capacity building and development to the academics at Cambodian HEIs.

It is clear that the government's adoption of the neoliberal reform agenda is politically wise as well as offering an open avenue for building the education sector with a framework for long-term development and progress towards regional standards. This education reform is essential and intertwined with national political circumstances and the local environment, the political economic rationale, geopolitical influences, and the interplay of power relations through the regional and global governmentality agendas. This policy implementation, to a great extent, has resulted in national development through all sectors and contributed to maintaining political stability and sustainable peace, and has established an avenue for a wide range of academic collaborations and networking opportunities through research and academic exchanges with professional networks worldwide.

Meanwhile, there are huge gaps in the policy formation and practice across levels, namely the community of practice (of HEIs), the national level, and the international level of power relations. Multiple issues have been prolonged and require immediate action. The reasons for these prolonged multiple issues and the implementation shortfall in policy formation and practice mark the central reason for this study's purposes and rationales. Utilising the theoretical lens of grand theories (as discussed above), this study considers that neoliberal practice in the education sector of Global South Cambodia can be promoted towards a greater quality policy reform and practice through a thin-communitarian framework with the additional concepts such as affinity space, national

culture of governmentality, and development of pastoral power amongst the community of practice.

Thus, this study can identify the middle-path approach offering a novel framework for neoliberalisation to potentially work best in the context of Global South Cambodia through an emphasis on power relations – on the state side for more responsible, efficient and effective mechanisms, and on the capital investors' side for more comprehensive collaboration and support, a quality knowledge orientation, and a local context-based orientation of skills and knowledge output. This is similar to the thin-communitarian framework, with additional concepts that are relevant to local contexts to ensure an effective and efficient mechanism for a neoliberal practice serving the long-term needs of the nation's growth economically and socially that ensures social justice for all individuals.

2.12 Chapter summary

This chapter began with overview of Cambodia as an ASEAN nation, officially joining on 30th April 1999 and obtaining lower-middle-income status in 2015. The country is one of the South-East Asia nations with great economic potential due to its highly youthful populations, and its political stability over decades, if there is quality political formation and practice through the education system.

Despite the glory of the ancient Angkor era in the 11th century, the recent history of Cambodia is unfortunate due to the communist ideology of geopolitics. The nation suffered frequent war and invasion by its neighbours from the 15th century until French colonisation in 1853. After independence in 1953, the education in the country reached a milestone of rapid development. This rapid development during the post-colonial independence was, however, short-lived, and the country fell into prolonged civil war after the pro-Western coup d'état against the King's government in the 1970. Moreover, the country fell into its most traumatic period, the genocidal regime, on 17th April 1975, resulting in the mass killing of innocent people, those targeted mainly being the educated. The education sector in the country was almost completely destroyed and at least 1.7 million people were killed by 1979 under the regime of the PRK, and all national infrastructure was demolished.

The end of the genocide regime took place on 7th January 1979, bringing aid inflow during the early 1980s from communist and pro-socialist blocs including from Russia, Vietnam, and Eastern Europe. They tried to help Cambodia with national reconstruction through political ideology training, teacher training, and other social welfare rehabilitation. After the official withdrawal of the Vietnamese-sponsored troops from Cambodia in 1989, the nation signed the Paris Peace Accord in October 1991 and gained support from the international community pledging to rebuild the country, with the official framework for rehabilitation and reconstruction set in place in June 1992. Through this, the UN network helped organised the first national election in 1993.

The official structural adjustment reform policy was then signed a few days after the formation of the coalition government based on the result of the first national election. Indeed, the dilemmas behind structural adjustment in Cambodia are two-fold. For one thing, Cambodia needed aid to build national human resources, skills and the capacity to promote economic transition. The other issue is that the nation needed education sector reform towards more efficiency, institutional strengthening and market

capital influx through privatisation. Meanwhile, the structural adjustment policy has brought forward rapid expansion and a rapid modernisation of HE but also poses many problems in the education sector. The booming number of HEIs in the education sector under neoliberalisation has led to multiple problems, such as poor-quality services, skill gaps and skill mismatches, and a high level of graduate unemployment. This uncontrolled expansion of HEI numbers led the RGC to take action with a number of regulatory strengthening measures for the education system.

This chapter has also presented a number of theories that are important to mark as theoretical lenses of this thesis. These theoretical lenses include neoliberalism, governmentality, globalisation, and thin-communitarianism; they mark the essential perspectives needed to see the contextual reality of policy formation and practice in Global South Cambodia. Utilising these theories as the theoretical framework, this study potentially identifies an effective and efficient neoliberal framework for Cambodia based on the contextual realities of the socio-political environment, the demands of the economy, cultural resources, and geopolitical economy in Cambodia at this time of digital economy transformation.

The significant failings in neoliberal reform in the education sector reflects gaps in collaboration with private companies, civil society, and local communities for a wide range of activities, including research and development, and partnership for innovation through essential funding projects. The current neoliberal agenda has brought forward significant challenges as the education sector tends to be exploited and deteriorates through the profit-maximising mentality, double standards in education services, and poor-quality education services. Problems also arise alongside this dramatic and uncontrolled system expansion leading to gaps in policy practice, specifically education services of poor quality, low standards, with a skewed distribution of quality HE services, a skills mismatch with market needs, and greater unemployment amongst university graduates.

To deal with the dramatic increase of the problems in the education sector, the RGC established a quality assurance body known as the ACC in 2003. The main function of the ACC was to assess and evaluate quality standards and the acceptable criteria required for an HEI to be able to get a licence to fulfil its mission in the education sector. Additionally, efforts are being made to prepare for a strategic framework through Cambodia's Education 2030 Roadmap to strengthen the area of staff development, university performance standards, capacity development, and stakeholder engagement.

To strengthen the quality and effectiveness of the neoliberal education reform, the RGC established the Education Law of 2007 as the legal foundation for the regulation of the national education system. This law has led to a higher quality of internal evaluation, the recruitment of more qualified lecturers and students, the improvement of infrastructure, buildings, education resources and facilities, wider connections and cooperation with private sector and academic institutional networks in both local and international dimensions.

These regulations by the Cambodian Government help to foster the neoliberal agenda to evaluate and benchmark the education service provision at the national level to the regional and international standards, specifically through the ACC. It helps strengthen the quality standards and ensures more development and modernisation in the education sector at the national level, while also serving the objectives of the structural adjustment policy by embracing the lens of regional and global standards. This alignment to the expectations of the external world standard brings the system to serve neocolonialism and postcolonialism, and the state's dependency on the hegemonic world.

Chapter 3 Literature

In basic policy analysis, a leading question is who pays and who benefits from efforts to change or reinforce the status quo. (R. F. Arnove, 2005, p. 79)

3.1 Higher education policy formation and practice

While education is politically and culturally defined within a geographic territory (Robertson & Dale, 2015), educational policy, reflects the interdependent relationships across national borders, specifically amongst global, transnational and national agencies (Sellar & Lingard, 2013). The process of HE policy formation stirs dynamic tensions amongst various stakeholders (Rizvi et al., 2006). Reflecting a neoliberal consensus, HE policy formation is often geared towards an instrumental approach (Olssen, 2016b), commodifying education and learners, rather than advancing the well-being and skills for economic growth of all citizens (Patrick, 2013). As Olssen (2004a) claims, HE policy could be seen as social development, creating job opportunities, sustainability and equality of income distribution amongst citizens. The fundamental role of HE thus becomes the development of society, as well as the recognition of individual rights (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002).

3.2 Higher education development models

Given the history of colonisation amongst post-conflict developing economies, HE around the world has been strongly influenced by Europe and the US. In other words, HE development models in emerging economies have been influenced by Western states, either through direct political pressure or lending. In this study, I examine what the dominant models are, and how they conceptualise their mission and practice relevant to recent HE reforms amongst developing nations. For this purpose, I review four dominant HE models and a fifth model that is currently emerging in developing economies.

3.2.1 The Humboldtian (German higher education) model

The German HE model was introduced during the 19th century when Wilhelm von Humboldt introduced the idea of the ‘research university’ to the University of Berlin in 1810. In this model, learning and teaching are oriented towards research and academic

freedom under subsidy from the government. With an emphasis on the right to free expression in learning, teaching and research, this model reflects the university's freedom from government interference, with teaching expected to advance a professor's research production (C. Sam & Van Der Sijde, 2014). Through this process of teaching and learning, (Gellert, 1993a), maintains that the focus of the university is 'pure science', so that students do research by themselves while the professors offer direction and support. This model implies a 'research culture', through which students and professors have their own scholarly freedom of expression. The university's function is to cultivate pure knowledge and a search for truth, without interference from external pressures such as government or market demands. Under neoliberalism and the massification of HEIs, this model is challenged by constraints in government funding.

3.2.2 The Napoleonic model

The Napoleonic model is the French model of HE that is centrally organised and directed by the state. At the centre of this model is the expectation that graduates develop their professional skills and knowledge so that they can obtain benefits from university qualifications when applying what they have attained into the professions (Schwartzman, 2001). Schwartzman (2001) maintains that given the state's control and supervision through professional councils, HEIs have no capacity to become institutionally autonomous, such as in making in choices in curriculum, staff, objectives, and governance structure. I conclude that the main function of the university in this model is to supply skilled professionals to work for the government. In this model, the HEI is influenced by the political economy, and the socio-cultural and historical context of the state.

3.2.3 The Anglo-Saxon model

Originated in the nineteenth century as a British model, the Anglo-Saxon model is based on a 'liberal education' that emphasises personal development (Gellert, 1993a). The British model was initially applied to Oxford and Cambridge Universities, and is recognised as a broad liberal-oriented model given its curriculum having less emphasis on subject-specific and skill-related disciplines. At the centre of this model is a broad educational base, with a less well-developed system of vocational training within HE. This model tends to put more emphasis on professionalism, so that students can deal flexibly and intelligently with challenges they face in the societies in which they live, whereas vocational training and subject-specific, skill-related content is provided subsequently by industry (L. Arthur, Brennan, & de Weert, 2007). At the centre of this

model lies personal development through a liberal education that develops intellectual and personal characteristics which enable students to respond to the real world (Gellert, 1993a, p. 35). This model is presumed to enable learners to grasp skills and knowledge from professional training courses/programmes that might be necessary for a career at a later stage of their lives (L. Arthur et al., 2007). Though operating under government regulation for quality and supervision, this model offers HEIs autonomy, reflected through the rights/freedom to manage governance decisions regarding effectiveness, finance, and staff recruitment. What is taken as the main method of operation for HEIs in this model is freely competing with other HEIs in quality and quantity, allowing for expansion by recruiting students into undergraduate (i.e., bachelor's degree) and postgraduate (i.e., master's or/and PhD) programmes.

It is in the concept of autonomy under government regulation of quality standards and open sources of funding alternatives that the Anglo-Saxon model is recognised as a broad 'liberal' model of HE. It is my belief that this is more suited to the context of nations that aim to cultivate individuals' potential, knowledge, and skills towards a broader conception of society. I argue that what is of high value in this model is the development of professionalism and personal development, as a foundation for people living in a fast-changing world (rather than a particular skills/set of skills just to function/serve in an unstable period defined/controlled by a disrupted political economy and socio-cultural context). My position is that a liberal understanding can equip individuals with the capacity to potentially build on subsequent skills training, or/and job-oriented education for careers and life.

3.2.4 The Anglo-American model

The Anglo-American model emerged at a time when the US began to restructure its HE models via the introduction of mass HE systematisation. This American model, known as the 'research university', was adopted from the German model during the 19th century (C. Sam & Van Der Sijde, 2014). While combining the British, German and European university systems into existing HE models, the US not only moulded these models into its own HE system but also modified, selected and cut out various features to form the new Americanised HE model. What the US added into its new model included the practice of decentralisation and free market competition amongst HEIs, along with the introduction of mass HE systems during the early 20th century. This in turn strongly influenced HE models in Europe and other nations across the world. Nonetheless, the

elements from the three principal HE models as mentioned above, remain the major components of the American model, and thus, it became known as the Anglo-American model. This model is now combined with the European model as a liberal arts framework with a range of subjects embedded in the undergraduate curriculum, with research emphasised at postgraduate levels, making the model appear as an evolution of the Anglo-Saxon and the Humboldtian models (Gellert, 1993b). The Anglo-American model is, therefore, considered a ‘hybrid model’, moulded into the Americanised form from the three European models. These European models got adopted and implemented throughout Europe, such as in British and German HEIs. The Americanised form, then, is influential in being adopted by HE systems in other countries worldwide (C. Sam & Van Der Sijde, 2014, p. 895). It is, therefore, essential to note that while the Anglo-American model has been found to powerfully influence HE models around the world, and form components of other countries’ HE systems, this Anglo-American model incorporates the three dominant models found in Europe. Simply put, the Anglo-American model of HE is taken from the European models. It is when the mass HE system of the US became popular, at the time when the world witnessed the victory of this superpower after the World War II, as well as the emergence of global financial institutions and developmental aid backed by Western ideologies (Altbach & Selvaratnam, 2012), that the Anglo-American model of HE has become predominant throughout the world.

3.2.5 Higher education models in developing economies

Altbach (2009) claims that educational models from the West have taken root in all Asian universities. The prevailing explanation for the success of HE amongst Asian countries, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Singapore, has been that these nations have copied their mechanisms and institutional structures from the West. As developing economies are heavily influenced by these Asian countries through development assistance and cooperation, the reform of their national HE systems has adopted a hybrid model. Despite HE systems in each country employing local language, Altbach (2009) claims that “no Asian university is truly Asian in origin—all are based on European academic models and traditions, in many cases imposed by colonial rulers” (p. 15). These HE models pay little heed to local traditions, norms, and values, while struggling to adapt to international standards. As indicated by Chan, Lee, and Yang (2017), “current Asian universities are a copied version of Western institutions without traditional values or practices, simply losing their connection with oriental essences such as Confucianism”

(p. 1803). These HE models from the West (i.e., the Anglo-American model) have now reached the periphery of South-East Asia. Here, countries now find themselves without their own HE models, or Asian academic models (Altbach & Selvaratnam, 2012), having come under the influence of Western industrialised economies and curriculum models. The process of forming such hybrid models inevitably reflects the interaction between the external and internal interests, as “this process not only stresses greater interaction with external or Western values, but is also deeply concerned with the traditional values, institutions, and practices” (Chan et al., 2017, p. 1805).

The root of these hybrid models have been formed through a history of colonisation (R. Arnove, 2008). R. Arnove (2008) contends that complex historical struggles that arose from the dynamics and tensions between the hegemonic global models and local contexts of political, economic, socio-cultural needs have formed this new hybrid model of education amongst the nations of the periphery. Huang (2007) adds that HE models in many developing economies are strongly influenced by the English-speaking countries (such as the UK, Australia, and the US) through the history of colonisation and dependency on aid. Such interaction has grown rapidly as a result of Western success in transmitting neoliberal ideology and mass HE systems through global marketisation by which global agencies utilise powerful technological tools. Through a range of mechanisms, developing nations conform to structural adjustment policies and development assistance through scholarship programmes, although “hybridization does not take place naturally, but is a painful and hesitant process as a result of social-cultural constraints and structure” (Chan et al., 2017, p. 1806). While it can be said that countries in Asia, including developing economies like Cambodia, have managed to enhance their autonomy in their HE systems to incorporate fundamental aspects of local needs and realities, their level of achievement remains very uneven. Shin, Postiglione, and Huang (2016) claim that, despite the substantial evidence of influence related to the Western models, the Confucian tradition is seen as commonly shared amongst Asian HE systems. As pointed out by Marginson (2011), Confucian philosophical concepts in HE rest on four foundations: (1) funding and prioritised regulations being overseen by a strong nation-state, (2) quantitative expansion occurring through joint funding from community and investors, (3) national competition enacted through a one-chance examination process, and (4) public commitments made to invest in research and university advancement. Neubauer, Shin, and Hawkins (2013) claim that the interactions amongst Asian cultural heritage, Western dominance, economic development, and globalisation

play a dynamic role in shaping East Asian HE models. Despite the dominant influence of the West, contemporary HE in Asia has been formed through a negotiation for space and elements by which models have evolved within the local context.

Given the contemporary hegemonic power of Western HE models, educational policy formation in developing nations often reflects exclusively Western ideology. Bhabha (2012) has observed that the notion of a hybrid model is the product of the struggle and resistance that occurred between the local and the powerful colony. Under globalisation, these processes have become imperfect because of local politics and the complex conditions that lie within the concept of hybrid models (Rizvi et al., 2006). While HE models in Asian nations have been recognised as substantially influenced by the West, they have also become intertwined with local needs, and the implementation of policy formation and practice. I would argue that there is now a need for a critical examination of the local contexts—historical, social, cultural, economic, and political power dynamics—that are rooted within the concepts of local policymakers, practitioners, and individuals.

I now move onto the context of HE policy formation and practices amongst Asian nations, to develop my assertion that it is a complex issue, though one that is dominated by the Western ideology concerned with the market potential of educational advancement.

3.3 Context of higher education development models in postcolonial states

3.3.1 Reform efforts

In the last 30 years, developing countries have reformed their HE systems to align with regional and global agendas, led by the main funding partner/agency, the World Bank (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002). While efforts have been made to improve quality, access and equity, as well as expanding HE service provision, educational reform has required decisions to be made between an indigenous model (despite such indigenous models already being hybrid or mainly formed by the colony) and a modernised system within a globalised system. Torres and Schugurensky (2002) emphasise that given the World Bank's dominant power in funding decisions, the rhetoric of educational reform policy has failed to incorporate a historical analysis of local/national political dynamics, conceptualising the issues as “inadequate investments, poor planning, institutional inefficiency, and misallocation of resources” (p. 439). As a result, there is a new form of

development, the so-called hybrid model of education policy, which is interlinked to local, national, and global scales (Rizvi et al., 2006).

3.3.2 Key players in higher education policy development

HE policies are formulated by global agencies when nations rely on both national and global ‘partners’. These actors/partners are referred to by Lingard and Rawolle (2010) as ‘national eye’ and ‘global eye’ governance, in which partners act as quality assurance actors; such partners include globalised networks such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Olssen and Peters (2005) claim HE’s role within this mechanism of governance has shifted to promote entrepreneurial advantage. The focus being on achieving outputs and targets, hence the governance of education policy becomes an ‘audit culture’ (Sellar & Lingard, 2013, 2014). As Ball (2015) and Sellar and Lingard (2013) remark, the formulation of education policies under neoliberalism is reshaped by local actors and practitioners towards new hybrid forms, reflecting the interdependency between the policy context and policymaking.

3.3.3 Driving forces for higher education development

Under neoliberalism, education practices are driven by the market, with the focus on competition and individualism, and support and encourage national and international standardised and high-stakes testing, i.e., ‘best practices’ (Noblit & Pink, 2016). The mainstream elites (i.e., interest groups, corporate agencies, and investors) often dominate indigenous groups through the use of public funds as a means to materialise private benefits and marginalise the rights of those less powerful groups. These reforms are often enforced through a range of cultural discourses including nationalism, pluralism, multiculturalism, or other interculturalist discourses that are imposed where native and indigenous communities are minimally recognised, while mainstream culture dominates. Though I acknowledge the importance of national and local development, discourses for HE reforms and development must account for social justice, equity, and subsequently the welfare amongst the native and indigenous communities. While HE development discourses are controlled by the practices of powerful interest groups, and fostered by neoliberal values, native and indigenous communities will remain victims of exploitative systems, serving the political and economic benefits of the mainstream groups.

3.3.4 Political economy of education

Education reform has become a target for governments and policy elites to help retain their political power and social stability with the expectation of ‘rates of return’ from investment in the education sector. One important role of the state has been to regulate national policies to serve the interests of the political, economic and educational development of the nation. Choices for HE policy formulation, adoption, and implementation are subsequently based on a rationale of excellence, efficiency, expenditure and rates of return, as well as national stability, and relevance to regional, global, and national contexts (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002). Unlike in developed nations, where capitalist management is controlled by the state, which also secures enough funding for the welfare system, developing economies are oriented towards international markets and dependent on growing foreign debt and high disparities in wealth distribution (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002). In developing states, the requirement for the local government has been to develop structural adjustment programmes, which enables the IMF and the World Bank to be more influential in policy development.

While education policy is controlled by the government and the policy elites, the era of neoliberalism reflects the powerful bio-power of and interlinked roles amongst various stakeholders and policy elites beyond national boundaries (Ball, 2012; Lingard & Rawolle, 2010; Lingard & Sellar, 2013). Philanthropic and social organisations, NGOs, international agencies, investors, civil society groups, trade unions, religious groups, and mass social media all compete to shape education policy. While one of the roles of education might be to promote peace-building in conflict-affected developing contexts (Lerch & Buckner, 2018, p. 27), neoliberalism widens the inequality gap at both national and local levels. Through globalisation, education ‘specialists’ appear from an ‘international relations’ background, which has led to a disconnect between education, human rights development, and the security sector (Lerch & Buckner, 2018, p. 43), though it is essential that these agencies work closely with each other. Policy formulation, which is almost generic, must be seen in cultural, social, economic, political, and environmental contexts, so that the interplay of cross-sector collaboration and power relations can be exercised between global aid agencies, national government, and local HE policy elites.

Current HEI restructuring has been dominated by specific interest groups who form the policy elites. While these interest groups are not necessarily legitimated at the national

level, they have been formed through networking with major global institutions, to the point where they have key roles in shaping national strategic policy. These powerful interest groups, working through their networks, maintain an influence over the exercise of their roles. It is thus, necessary that research is undertaken into the political economy of education at a country-wide level, to examine the political economy of education and where this may conflict with different ideological positions.

3.3.5 Social justice or “New Liberalism” in the higher education reform agenda

Craig (2002) defines social justice as “a framework of political objectives, pursued through social, economic, environmental and political policies, based on the acceptance of difference and diversity, and informed by values” (p. 672). For Craig (2002), ‘values’ adhere to achievements of fairness, basic needs, maximum reduction of all forms of inequality, and equal rights in participation amongst all individuals. While neoliberalism has fuelled a global exchange of ideas, knowledge, and business transactions, to an unprecedented level, broad liberal concepts of society have been largely ignored. Social democracy, justice, and well-being have been undermined by interest groups who have become policy elites within HE policy reform. This has resulted in HE policy in peripheral nations adopting those ideologies from the West that adhere to the interests of groups who act on behalf of HE policy elites. These groups invest in social ‘inequality’, or the mindset of corporate education, defining their ‘product’, or policy, as the solution for widespread failure in HE systems around the world (Guion Akdağ & Swanson, 2018). This global network now influences HE reform in every aspect of policy formation and practice leading to local policy groups awarding themselves funding through collaboration with other global funding elites (Lingard & Sellar, 2013).

What is the alternative to this corporate model of education? Hobson (1996) suggests that well-being and human welfare should form the basis of society, not simply the exchange of wealth, but rather the intrinsic value/worth or social good as human welfare. This has been argued before by Allett (1981), who maintained that “life-sustaining properties” (p. 18) should be uppermost in society’s ideals. Mackenzie adjudged: “[i]t is only through the development of the whole human race that any one man can develop” (Mackenzie, 1980/2006, p. 180). For Olssen (2009), it is only through the social-democratic structure of society based on liberal principles that societies will succeed: “the way we organize

the society at large and its institutional structures ... is crucial for the development of each and every person” (p. 83).

Social and institutional organisations can be the catalyst for individual success, according to Mackenzie (2006, originally 1890) and Olssen (2009). The inadequacy of welfare support will act as a constraint on social democracy and social justice as this removes the support for individuals to prosper in society. Enhancing the well-being of all is the end-goal, with adequate social structures to equitably redistribute wealth as a foundation for individual development. Welfare itself, viewed by Hobson (1996), is an important social good that provides a platform for the well-being of all humanity. Olssen (2009) contends that individual development requires support from family, educational institutions and the wider community. This extends to business partnerships becoming involved in planning, development, and resource management in ways that can both command capital and contribute to the social infrastructure of society. Seen in this wider context of people and work, creative energy for production and progress can be securely put in place. A society can become sustainable only if people can generate sufficient income; hence, without work or adequate wages, individuals and society cannot progress.

Without sustainable development, a deterioration in social justice and the well-being of individuals in society at large will follow. Olssen (2009) argues that individual development is dependent on having effective social structures in place. This relationship to social structures can be linked to Hobson’s theory of economic production. According to Hobson (1996), the so-called production surplus has failed modern society; cooperation is key to productivity, boosting both social and economic development. For Olssen (2009), such cooperation is a prerequisite for productivity coupled with social and economic development.

Cooperation amongst individuals in a society can result in contributions becoming a form of ‘productive power’, bringing about increased productivity and well-being society (Hobson, 1996). While capitalism sponsors the unequal distribution of wealth and inequality, resulting in a waste of productivity, and unequal development (Hobson, 1996), sustained development for within a social democratic system, reflecting social justice and well-being for all, becomes the most effective system by which the distribution of income and investment matches human needs and capacities.

3.4 Ideology and neoliberalisation

3.4.1 A snapshot of higher education policy formation and practices

One major impact of globalisation and neoliberalism on HE policy development by global policy elites/policymakers (Lingard & Sellar, 2013) has been a rescaling of the interrelated national, transnational and global dimensions (Lingard & Rawolle, 2011). The relevant agencies comprise national, transnational and global institutions whose role is played out through competing agendas and interdependent relationships that govern global education policy, spearheaded by a neoliberal agenda. They form policy elites because of their potential influence on HE policy formation and practice, on a global, regional, and local scale. Global education policy governance has emerged through initiatives and influence from transnational and international organisations such as the World Bank, the IMF, World Trade Organization (WTO), and the United Nations Education, Scientific and the Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Consequently, the current practice of educational policy formation looks toward a globalised neoliberal policy discourse, in particular the ‘knowledge economy’ and the comparative evaluation of ‘policy as number’ standards (Sellar & Lingard, 2014).

3.4.2 The negative impacts of globalisation and neoliberalism on higher education

The terms ‘globalisation’ and ‘neoliberalism’ are intertwined yet they are different. For Marginson (1999) ‘globalisation’ is seen as a world system that relies upon the internationalisation of commodities, monetary policy, people and knowledge. Its elements include “finance and trade, communications and information technologies; migration and tourism; global societies; linguistic, cultural and ideological convergence; and world systems or signs and images” (p. 19). This system constitutes a way of life which people face beyond local boundaries. Hoogvelt (2001) points out that although globalisation dates back to the onset of civilization and colonialism, the intensification of globalised networks began at the start of the 1980s. On the other hand ‘neoliberalism’ refers to a concept in which appropriate market conditions, laws and institutions are necessarily created (by the state) to allow free market operation (Olssen & Peters, 2005). Olssen and Peters (2005) stress that while both terms are sometimes confusing, they are of the view that neoliberalism is just one dimension of globalisation. Despite striving for liberty and individual freedom through globalisation and neoliberalism, the main concern is with economic development. To go further, global and neoliberal principles are

oriented towards corporate interests that ignore social responsibilities of justice and development, seeing only commercialisation and commoditisation as relevant in HE, through which learners, staff, academics, practitioners, and researchers are exploited and denied academic freedom.

While the massification of HE has been adopted and implemented worldwide (such as in Europe and Asia), this trend has prioritised a competition-concentrated model that creates a “winners take all” mentality (Scott, 2006, pp. 129-130). What is at stake in this model is the logic of free-market competition for making investments and development in HE that is focused on a knowledge-based society (i.e., the knowledge economy). According to Scott (2006, p. 129), the research revolution (or what is often referred to as the knowledge revolution) emphasises centres-of-excellence and research-technology-innovation, ushering in best practice (or centres-for-excellence) and an interdependent approach to technological research and development (i.e., research-technology-innovation), which is identified as neither relevant to traditional/local HE contexts, nor the classical values and roles of HE in regard to professional development (p. 129).

Torres and Schugurensky (2002) add that since the World Bank has had exclusive power in funding HE in developing economies since the 1980s and 1990s, the banks have demanded these countries conform to its ‘structural adjustment policies’ in the formulation of their HE policies, based on global statistics through neoliberal concept, without sufficient analysis of the historical and social context of education. They also show that, as a result of neoliberal-oriented policy, “while high costs are already being paid in terms of drastic deterioration of wages, cutbacks in spending on education, health and infrastructure, and massive unemployment, the majority of the population have not yet felt the benefits of these policies” (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002, p. 433).

In brief, the critique of neoliberalism is that, despite it being considered relevant to and more effective in Western states, this model has failed to incorporate local needs and circumstances, which prevents it from being relevant to the needs of developing economies given the difference in local circumstances. If this model is to be adopted and applied for developing nations, it requires a fundamental reconceptualisation of the process of policy formation and implementation regarding local needs—historical, social, cultural, political—and economic demands.

3.4.3 How globalisation and neoliberalism affect higher education in developing nations

Until recent market reforms, HE was seen within a global context, while issues of local concern were largely ignored. This led to questions as to whether local resources can play a role in shaping HE in developing countries in order to respond to their own needs. Globalisation sees civilisation and colonialism functioning throughout the globe, being intertwined with commercialisation (Divala, 2008). As former colonial states have obtained their independence and gradually became more advanced, commercial activities has become more sophisticated. This has eventually led to imperial powers establishing the necessary regulatory infrastructures in social welfare, education, justice, peace and prosperity for the developing nations. It is the concept that global markets can enable nations to attain a higher level of freedom and economic growth that motivates each country to join in the global community for trade and investment. Since the beginning of the 1980s, the intensification of cross-country networks of human interaction for enterprise has preferred global over local processes, so that today some consider globalisation to be irresistible, since it has been so widely applied in almost every field of research and development.

According to Kirkbride, Pinnington, and Ward (2001), globalisation has transformed the world to an unprecedented degree of interconnectedness, by which national authority is so compromised that globalisation becomes the alternative form of colonial exploitation to the peripheral states. Many projects under neoliberalism demand a high level of government expenditure in solving market problems and social consequences. Simply put, globalisation and neoliberalism have had a negative impact on developing economies in realising change in HE. In addition, while the IMF has argued that neoliberalism imposes privatisation, especially the values of individual freedom and free market competition, Stiglitz (2003, p. 55), claims that it has been government efforts to solve market problems, rather than global markets, that can fulfil social needs. As neoliberalism leads to the privatisation of HE, many universities have focused their priorities on raising student fees, which has resulted in HE services being treated as simply 'value for money' (Divala, 2008).

3.4.4 Impact of international aid networks and Western development assistance

Since the 1970s, international donors and funding agencies have formed networks for aid and knowledge diffusion aimed at coordinating programmes and policies for funding. This has been with a view to achieving the objective of educational development through investment and research (R. Arnove, 2008). A range of funding agencies have emerged, including development agencies and foundations, such as Ford, and Rockefeller; international financial agencies, namely the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the IMF; and the United Nations agencies, namely UNESCO and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These funding agencies have agreed on separate responsibilities (R. Arnove, 2008), such that the World Bank has become the biggest funding agency for HE development across the globe, turning its disbursements by the 1980s into almost double those of the UN agencies and accounting for up to 436 studies of HE projects (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002). Unfortunately, these projects have failed to achieve a development pathway for local people's needs, as the banks have undermined institutional power and emphasised the rationale that all aid recipient nations are homogenous, in terms of social, cultural, and political circumstances (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002). Torres and Schugurensky (2002) have shown that unless critical consideration is given to the context of the power dynamics within which various roles are played amongst institutions, corporate foundations and supranational institutions within the international economic system, an analysis of university restructuring remains neither responsive to local needs for development nor separated from business prevailing over common sense.

While the development of assistance for education to the Third World emerged after the Second World War with the US Foreign Assistance Act of 1948, the development ideologies and models brought in from the West were implemented as the US became a superpower. Altbach and Selvaratnam (2012) point out that given the US's cooperation with advanced ideological partners, and their expectations for social and economic development amongst recipient nations, their restructuring of HE systems was towards an unequivocal Western model in terms of administration and research development, sponsoring awards to international students to pursue their education overseas. It has been found that these funding policies were not coherent or sustained, as the flow of aid declined in the mid-1970s due to transparency and corruption issues. Over the past three decades, funding to Third World education has had merits and drawbacks. The merits of

foreign development assistance have helped build indigenous HE structures, including institutional and organisational capability, with new HEIs, more qualified human resources, and institutions for research networking, which has led to the developing countries accessing updated knowledge and research. However, the socio-political consequences of this expansion have been reflected in the curriculum, which is theoretically biased to the West and largely irrelevant to the local context and needs.

World-class scholars from developing nations have been influenced by the ideology and way of life in developed countries' university sector and, hence, they have influenced the intellectual orientation in their nations towards the West. Such acquisition of perceptions and ways of life are reflected not only in the academic ties to the West, but also the choices made for HE development models, more so when the graduates from the West are appointed to leading positions for policy development and reform in their home country afterwards. These first-class scholars, who graduate from those funding nations and later participate in HE policy elites, have withheld indigenous cultures and beliefs and become transmitters of Western cultures, norms, mindsets, and institutional traditions for diffusion in their home countries, having taken part in domestic HE policy reform (Schwartzman, 2001). It is not surprising that this biased adoption and diffusion of Western ideologies has produced HE models which are ineffective, as well as unable to sufficiently respond to social-political contexts amongst the developing economies. Given the universities in the developing economies reflect a shortage of human resources, an absence of well-informed research, and poor technological capacity, and taken together with historical, social-cultural, economic, and political matters, the on-going issues in these developing nations are that they have remained sub-standard, unable to produce standardised knowledge as well as respond to their local needs, no matter the considerable commitment and actions that have been made (Schwartzman, 2001). Despite vast amounts of funding from the agencies and the international aid networks, the process and means of HE development amongst Third World HE has remained sub-standard, and heavily dependent on the promotion of Western ideology, way of life, and practice.

3.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have elaborated on the literature related to the background of this study. In this study, the literature covers HE policy formation and practice, particularly in the Global South context. To vividly explain the literature on policy formation and practice in this study, I elaborated on the significant model of HE development across the globe that has influenced the HE policy formation and practice worldwide from past times and into the contemporary world. In addition, the literature in this study also elaborates on the context of HE development models in the Global South context, specifically the postcolonial state of Cambodia. In this sense, the literature discussed the issues involving HE policy reform efforts in the developing world. The problems reflect how key players and driving forces influenced, shaped, and manifested HE policy formation and practice under the neoliberal environment. In addition, I include the literature of the political economy of education in this study because the choice of HE policy also has a strong interdependent relationship with ideology, neoliberalism, the emerging liberalism in HE reform agendas and social justice in the local context. In the later parts of the chapter, I discussed more critically the literature on the negative impacts of globalisation and neoliberalism on HE across the world, and within the Global South context. In this later section, I also included the literature on the impacts of the international aid networks and Western development assistance on aid-recipient nations, especially in the Global South.

Chapter 4 Research Design

It is something of an academic truism that the social science gaze has been predominantly cast downwards and disproportionately focused on vulnerable, powerless and 'problem' populations. (Neal & McLaughlin, 2009, p. 689)

4.1 Introduction

Following the elaboration in Chapters 1 and 2 of the research background and the literature on neoliberalisation in Global South contexts, and specifically in Cambodia, this chapter deals with the study's research design and methodology. It starts with the choice and rationale for the research paradigm and design, followed by qualitative research methodology, research ontology and epistemology, then the overview of the constructivist paradigm of this study. The chapter then move on to offer an elaboration on details of data collection method, including sampling strategy, participants recruitment, and data collection procedure, and various tools which I utilise to analyse the data. Finally, the chapter explains the ethical considerations and the limitations of the study.

4.2 Research paradigm: My research paradigm and design

My study utilises a qualitative research methodology which operates under the philosophical assumptions of constructivism. According to Winston (2012), this paradigm or worldview emphasises that people “create subjective meanings of their experiences and the world that are negotiated within the social, cultural and historical context in which their lives are embedded” (p. 113).

4.2.1 Theoretical discussion on selected paradigms including epistemology and ontology

An interpretive paradigm provides an opportunity for me to obtain in-depth data from individuals, regarding their perceptions, experience, and knowledge of their practices. Interpretivism offers a means to uncover participants' subjective perceptions of their experiences that are socially constructed, complex and undergoing change. Foucault's genealogical analysis was used to offer an intrinsic critique of the present through various means of analysis looking at traditional practices and the existing 'regimes of truth' and dynamics of power relations within the formation and practice of Cambodia's HE system.

This analysis included hybrid governmentality, Foucauldian discourse analysis, the concepts/perspectives of dependency theory, and postcolonial theory. In addition, Foucault's approach to governmentality was employed in this study in writing the history of the present. These approaches have been used by Fimyar (2008), Guion Akdağ and Swanson (2018), Perryman et al. (2017) and Sen (2019) to explore the process of HE policy formation and practice in Europe and in post-conflict nations. It is when such complex pictures of history are taken into account that the origin of values in a society can be traced and brought into realisation (Foucault, 1991b). Thus, a general approach was used in this study to explore the history of Cambodian HE from the position of the present.

This constructivist paradigm adopts a relativist ontology, and a transactional epistemology. This means that the researcher believes that "realities are constructed, multiple and holistic" and "the inquirer and the 'object' of the inquiry interact to influence one another; knower and known are inseparable" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). The researcher adopted this paradigm base on the belief that any inquiry under this paradigm is not neutral and is value-bounded by the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The theoretical and conceptual framework of the study, thus, shaped the overall process of the study. This paradigm enables researchers to explicitly state their own values, beliefs, prejudice and judgement throughout the whole study process. Through the constructivist paradigm, researchers "focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants" (Creswell, 2003, p. 8). As elaborated in chapter one above on the theoretical framework section, my selection of the constructivist paradigm has led me to choose a qualitative research design and the adoption of the theory of thin-communitarianism for this research study.

Guided by the constructivist paradigm, my study follows a qualitative research methodology (Creswell, 2005, 2013; Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012) to identify the environment and circumstances surrounding the issue of the neoliberalisation of the Cambodian HE system. The problem was researched through the perspectives of policy elites and graduates in the Cambodian context, in regard to the process and implication of HE policy formation and practices under the environment of neoliberalisation. As emphasised by Creswell (1994), a qualitative study is "an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture,

formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (pp. 1-2). Through qualitative research, the researcher relies on “the views of participants; asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants; describes and analyses these words for themes” (Creswell, 2005, p. 56), and collects data through an inductive process or ‘emic’ inquiry which is primarily based on the perspectives of insiders (participants).

4.3 Research methodology: Theoretical discussion on qualitative research and critical discourse analysis

4.3.1 Critical discourse analysis as research methodology

With reference to Siegfried Jäger’s critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Jäger, 2001), this study adopted interview and discourse strands that look at “the ways that power manifests itself through language, thus identifying and demystifying the reciprocal power/knowledge relations that begets, and concomitantly, are inscribed within the discursive construction of reality” (Liasidou, 2008, p. 487). This implies that language can be seen as a cultural tool that “mediates relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge” (Rogers, 2017, p. 42). Policy discourse can shape the way people perceive reality and construct social reality. Foucault (1974) notes that policy discourse has played a role in transforming knowledge and the way people practice, and “form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49).

Discourses within policy documents have also been utilised to identify discourse strands and fragments embedded in policy documents. Literary and cultural scientist Jäger (2001) and his team noted that discourse strands and fragments that appear through collective symbolism in language-based and iconographic text illumination have power effects which contribute to the function as techniques to legitimise and ensure government. As Link (1983, as cited in Jäger, 2001, p. 34) defines discourse as “an institutionally consolidated concept of speech inasmuch as it determines and consolidates action and thus already exercise power”. Discourses (and discourse strands) function to exercise power in all their effects because they serves certain ends, not only as a means for social practice (Jäger, 2001). Various features for analysis are expressions and extracted phrases from the underlying policy texts; these offer an avenue for the researcher to unpack such discursive construction, its rationalities, discursive genealogies and complex agenda. It is essential that any researcher conducting such analysis makes evident emerging means, which are merely temporary truths, through revealing non-expression in what is said and

what can be done in actual practice; thus, a researcher must not situate himself/herself outside the discourse she/he is analysing (Jäger, 2001). Also, analysing such critical discourse is considered by Fairclough (2003) as helpful as historical and social context, and social relations and identities, are revealed.

Extracted policy texts were found to be what the current Royal Government of Cambodia, together with its development partners, are putting effort into toward reform, as is shown in the subsequent section on the genealogy of the direction of reform efforts. Combined with a critical reading of the main sections in each policy document, this analysis offered an avenue for an insightful conception of the major themes and direction that the Royal Government of Cambodia has geared their directions for HE. It is not too complicated to identify those discourse strands, as Sen (2019) states that, in his study, “Discourse strands were located in the opening or introductory section of a policy text. Discourse fragments were identified in the sub-themes or sections of a policy text, such as sub-headings” (pp. 517-518). Therefore, rhetorical means are often found under the sub-headings or parts of texts that highlight how that policy will be implemented. Rhetorical means and critical discourses identified in most policy texts were embedded to prepare the national HE system for the competitive free market and economic development under the unprepared and uncontrolled neoliberal environment.

My study also investigated ways in which rhetoric was used in those policy documents to identify the meaning from each policy discourse through broader means. Rhetorical means, namely the parts of texts or discourse fragments, allows the researcher to identify how power relations—subordination, and domination—work in the process of HE policy formation and practice. In a policy text, rhetorical means are the powerful messages, as emphasised by Sen (2019), who explains that “rhetorical means refer to forms of argumentation or logic, symbolism or ‘figurativeness’ in language use, or the presentation or positioning of players/persons/institutions in a policy text” (p. 518).

Also, critical awareness regarding the multifaceted influences that are manifested and exercised within such an environment is seen to “have a distinctive capacity for de-contextualisation and re-contextualisation, abstract ability and movement, across diverse social and cultural situations and spheres of life” (Collier & Ong, 2005, p. 11). Daniel (2019) describes such ‘phenomena’ as “a global form” and “are distinct from localised phenomena, such as kinship systems, which can be limited or delimited through a social or cultural field’ (p. 45). An important environment that gears social direction is neoliberalism which, as indicated by Peck (2010), is an imaginary free-market used to

maintain favourable conditions by the state that protects the market system from operating smoothly. In neoliberalism, the state often protects the rationality in which irrationality is manifested by free-market operations (Olssen & Peters, 2015).

It is not uncommon to see various sources of power that are locally induced and externally imposed in the initiatives and collaborations that establish the rules of the game for the market to adhere to profit maximisation. It is hard to control sources of such influence, such as those from the World Bank, the IMF, the ADB, and so forth, due to their power in both expertise and materials in the form of major grants or loans to dependent states. It is shaped under the notion of globalisation as a dominant movement where power relations are exercised beyond local control and only “specific technical infrastructures, administrative apparatuses, or value regimes” (Collier & Ong, 2005, p. 11) are able to limit or delimit its imaginary outreach. In this sense, development partners often convince recipient countries to accept grants or loan to build the human capital that could yield a higher rate of return to the local economy. Unfortunately, such ideologies have embedded the notion of treating HE as a platform to promote an economic dividend (Daniel, 2019), where HE reinforces a corporate worldview that invests in social inequality, the disparity of distribution, and the deterioration of academic freedom and social justice (Guion Akdağ & Swanson, 2018).

4.3.2 Theories adopted in this research

Two theoretical foundations and cross-perspective analytical techniques have been conceptualised into the context of post-conflict Cambodia: the governmentality approach in analysing education policy reform (Fimyar, 2008; Foucault, 1991a; Guion Akdağ & Swanson, 2018; Tikly, 2003); and the ‘roll-back neoliberalism’ and ‘roll-out neoliberalism’ proposed by Peck (2010).

First, utilising the Foucauldian conception of governmentality in analysing education policy formation and practice in post-conflict setting was expected to deliver interesting findings. I used the Foucauldian concept of governmentality to analyse the perspectives, beliefs and expressions of the research participants, and policy discourses from the data I collected from the fieldwork and available sources. Utilising this concept enabled me to identify the contextual realities of how the overall process of neoliberalisation influenced, manifested, and reinvested their ideology in certain stakeholders across a wide range of levels—global, international, national, and community of practice. In this section, I

identified three main contributions to the methodology, namely, **the use of an analytical lens, the approach to analysing the data, and fieldwork.**

It is crucial that studies in policy formation and practice in post-conflict settings look at the history of the present for the reform logics. In this sense, utilising a genealogy study and a governmentality approach through discourse analysis functions as a powerful tool to uncover the complexity of the local contextual reality of reform efforts. Specifically, their potential was to be able to unpack the interfacing power struggles, contingency, and interdependency influenced by history legacies along with the rising influences from the global technologies of the 21st century. In this study, I identified that the reform efforts reflect a terrain of multifaceted influences and power struggles which emerged when the nation strives for modernity, where the local long history interfaced with the growing global influences spearheaded by global projects of postcolonialism, globalisation, regionalisation. Participants from different groups expressed similar and contrasting perspectives regarding how the local history was influenced and shaped by geopolitics and global political struggles, specifically between the Western world and the Eastern European/Soviet Bloc. Amongst their perspectives, participants revealed that historical events strongly led to the conditions and rationales for neoliberalism in the nation, specifically the conditions of postcolonialism, globalisation, regionalisation, national contexts and the demand for modernity.

Secondly, the theoretical foundation regarding ‘roll-back neoliberalism’ and ‘roll-out neoliberalism’ proposed by Peck (2010) offers the following insight. In this notion, the former type of neoliberalism refers to making way for a new ideological base in which the target state will face destruction and the latter type of neoliberalism inserts ideologies that promote institutional infrastructure for neoliberal goals. Secondly, the theoretical foundation which is in line with this contextualisation was developed by Klein (2007), namely a blank slate situation arising as ‘roll-back neoliberalism’ takes place under the circumstances of an unintentional event such as a natural disaster. These two theoretical foundations are used by Daniel (2019) to contextualise how neoliberal ideologies are embedded and promoted under the reassembly of HE in the case of post-conflict Afghanistan. Taking this into consideration, these contextualisation lenses were seen as useful and relevant to the context of post-conflict Cambodia, specifically during and after the period of ‘Khmer Rouge’. As mentioned above, the Cambodian HE system was totally smashed during this regime, infamously known as a ‘ground zero’ (Duggan, 1997). After this regime, Cambodia was under an embargo from the international community for

almost two decades, such that the HE system was totally ignored (Duggan, 1997; Sen, 2019).

Finally, I used these two theoretical concepts to make a critical analysis based on a comparison and contrast of different groups of policy elites. Cross-perspective analysis amongst the participants as policy elites offered crucial findings and insights for the driving factors such as similar and different ideologies, mindsets, socio-cultural norms, and values amongst different groups of the participants. Most participants in this research have rich experience in working in senior positions and education levels, and possess socio-cultural knowledge—they range from elites as officers in the government ministry, educational institutions, a senior independent researcher, senior leaders representing development partners, a senior leader from private industry and companies, to leaders of student's associations and a head of graduate alumni. In this setting, this study has delivered important findings by revealing cross-perspectives between local policy elites and the external policy elites regarding logics for reform efforts and how the process of the reform should be implemented, achieved, and held responsible. Through this method, this study identified the determinants of different cultures and mindsets rooted amongst these policy elites, and that the determinants have strong influences on participants' logics of commitment to and their expectations of this neoliberalisation endeavour. In addition, these determinants were found to shape into different mode of policy governmentality, practice, and results. However, the external policy elites, such as the leaders from development partners, did not see the local history legacies as influential in the process of this neoliberalisation and tended to emphasise mainly the process of policy formation based on reports and statistical data. The context of policy formation revealed more inconsistency with the actual reality of practice when the reports and statistics are appropriated based on categories of national income and economic growth from different regional contexts. The application of this method as an approach to data analysis was, thus, fundamental for the study findings and theoretical discussion because post-conflict and developing states, generally, depend strongly on external funding for reform efforts.

In this study, I explored how Cambodian HE disintegrated between the 1980s and 2010s, before being reassembled along a narrow and neoliberal foundation. It is my belief that neoliberalism, particularly in postcolonial and post-conflict nations, has promoted and invested in the exploitation of academic knowledge value, causing greater inequality, has exploited violent conflict and caused the deterioration of the foundational pathways for national development towards long-term social-democratic progress. A neoliberal

agenda in such national conditions has the potential “to reorient the institution of higher education from serving functions of government, towards becoming an engine of economic growth built upon a neoliberal foundation” (Daniel, 2019, p. 47). As Klein (2007) and Peck (2010) have both claimed, neoliberalism has caused shock under the framework of a two-stage process within the neoliberal project.

4.4 Research methodology

4.4.1 Research design

This research was built on a series of methodologies: discourse analysis of existing policy papers, literature and reports from related institutions that are available from public sources. It also included in-depth semi-structured interviews with HE policy elites, HEI practitioners, and individuals from major funding agencies on Cambodian HE policy formation and practice projects. The selection of a qualitative methodology has been influenced by a constructionist worldview, interpretivism, genealogy, and Foucault’s approach to governmentality (Foucault, 1991a; Poole et al., 2016; Sen, 2019). The selection of the ontology of constructivism, based on the belief that the results of this research would be independent of pre-hypothesised assumptions and that findings can be unique and changing through time. This worldview offers the potential to explore the hidden reasons and rationale of Cambodian HE practices and policy development. An interpretive paradigm provided an opportunity for me to obtain in-depth analytical meanings through rhetorical or discourses as data from the policy documents and the conceptual tools. Such rhetorical meanings or discourses are socially constructed, complex and changing.

4.4.2 Policy documents

Which documents?

The research findings are based on the researcher’s critical analysis of the literature and secondary data obtained from selected existing policy documents and publications, and from development partners’ documentation (i.e., the World Bank, ADB, International Labour Organization (ILO), and UNESCO), as well as primary data obtained from the interviewees.

The study utilised relevant, accessible data sources such as policy discourse through digital databases/domains and publications from the Cambodian Government, MoEYS,

and development partners for conceptual reflection, critical analysis, triangulation, and justification.

Why analyse these documents?

The main aim of using ‘document analysis’ in this study was to explore how Cambodian HE policies have been developed, shaped, and implemented. Also, the aim was to identify the rationale for their success or failure. This document analysis method was used as a means to trace various influential factors (i.e., global, national, and local contexts) affecting the historical development of Cambodian HE practices and single out a unique analysis of those factors that have been ignored in previous studies.

4.4.3 Participants

In this study, I recruited participants during my fieldwork visit to the capital city of Cambodia and the provincial areas where the target policy elites as participants and the HEIs were located. A purposive sampling approach were used to guarantee that the sample chosen consisted of participants who could provide well-informed responses about research questions.

HE policy elites from seven key major groups were interviewed. These groups included various participants as policy elites from HE policymaking stakeholders. They included selected key professionals and academics from HEIs. The group consisted of the following:

- A rector and vice-rectors at HEIs, deans, an academic office head, and instructional staff who are working in HEIs in Cambodia.
- Leaders or key representatives from academic unions, such as the Cambodian Higher Education Association (CHEA).
- The Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC). These people were selected for this study because they have a broad perspective on the HE policy practice across a range of issues both at HEI level and the national evaluation and governance level.
- Leaders or key representatives from a major department in the MoEYS.
- Key education sector experts or other consultants representing development partners or international funding agencies. This group comprised a senior consultant, office head, and programme leader from the World Bank, and the ADB, through their representative offices in Cambodia, and other similar major HE funding agencies.

- Selected leaders or a key representative from the leader of the student association or student alumni.
- Selected leaders or a key representative from successful graduates. The participants were chosen for this study because they are amongst the HE policy consumers, and practitioners at times, through involvement with their learning, and in seeking employment, and supporting other students. These graduates have also impacted the choices in education and some activities for community development.

These participants were selected because they were seen to have been fulfilling their duties and responsibilities in the formation and implementation of Cambodian HE policies.

However, the research data collection plan needed some adjustment during the fieldwork. It was intended to interview two individuals from other HEIs, one located in a major province, and another in the capital city of Phnom Penh. I could not interview a senior member of the policy elite from the university in one major province as planned, even though there had been close personal networking with the rector of the university. The rector did his best to coordinate for his vice-rectors and deans to fill out the information in the interview questions instead. I learned that the private university had significant influence in politics because it was run by a high-ranking general police officer in the Ministry of National Defence of Cambodia. The university representative chose not to participate mainly to ensure the university's status quo in regard to the ruling elites, to maintain sustainable progress in the university's functioning, and in pursuit of the university's benefits, even though the university has attracted thousands of student enrolments over the recent years.

Another factor was an incident when a student in that university composed a song that criticises the ruling government party, just a few weeks before I arrived to conduct the fieldwork. Social media kept sharing and spreading out the song across the nation and public critics raised the issue of students criticising the ruling government. The rector had to deal with the situation to restore the social environment of the university. Otherwise, at worst, the university may be subject to a closure. Thus, I learned about the high pressure of work amongst the rector, vice-rector, and deans in the university. Yet, I did get some information from the completed interview sheets.

Overall, I completed 24 interviews with HE policy elites across the seven groups, as mentioned above.

How did I identify them? Sampling

I used a purposive sampling method to select research sites and participants, following discussions with a personal network (Creswell, 2005; Moore, Lapan, & Quartaroli, 2012). In this research method, more diverse purposive samples are essential. As noted by Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam (2003),

sample units are chosen ‘purposefully’ for the ability to provide detailed understanding [... p]urposive samples are designed to be as diverse as possible, including all key groups and constituencies, and units are selected on the basis of ‘symbolic representation’—because they hold a characteristic that is known or expected to be salient to the research study. (p. 107)

As qualitative research, it was initially planned for this study to use both the purposive sampling option and the snowball or chain sampling approach to select participants from the specified groups mentioned above (Berg, 2000; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Merriam, 2009). I used snowball sampling—also known as a chain or network sampling—to target policy elites in the selected groups. This method has been proved to be the most effective and efficient means to target policy elites because it is “a strategy in which each successive participant or group is named by a preceding group or individual” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 403). This method of research enables a researcher to target key participants who meet intended criteria because “this strategy involves locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria you have established for participation in the study” and “as you interview these early key participants you ask each one to refer you to other participants” (Merriam, 2009, p. 79). Once purposive sampling started, I gained a network from the initial interviewee to use to seek advice on or recommendations for prospective participants. Then, the snowball sampling method was utilised to reach out participants “[b]y asking a number of people who else to talk with, [so that] the snowball gets bigger and bigger as you accumulate new information-rich cases” (Patton, 1987, p. 56).

I used personal networks to recruit participants. The personal networks were able to provide valuable contact information and combined with my networks in the local universities, a contact list was established. Information about and contacts for some of the most influential policy elites saw the start of the snowball sampling method for further research participants. Contact with potential participants was made via emails, and phone calls, to invite them to participate in the research.

Once interest in participating in the research was established, the interview appointment was confirmed. Participants were emailed the participant information sheet (PIS) and the consent form to sign, and were asked to select a location for the interview. After the participants confirmed their consent, the researcher travelled to the selected locations to conduct the interviews. After each interview, participants were asked if they could recommend people who they thought had been influential in the work of HE policy formation and practice or who had been affected by HEI policies, and who may be interested in participating in the research.

Why do I refer to them as policy elites?

The policy elites, in this study, are those key persons working and holding responsibilities in the education sector, such as: the secretary of state and head of department of Cambodian MoEYS; HEI rectors; representatives or heads of the academic union, accreditation committee, student alumni, private companies, and development partners; and successful graduates. These groups of people have duties and responsibilities involving HE policy formation and practice. When there are updated policy releases from the government and the education ministry level, they are also the agents of change through information dissemination media such as online workshops, e-meetings, lectures, and daily work.

How did I recruit them?

The researcher purposefully selected universities based on their characteristics, geographical location, and capacity to absorb a large number of student enrolments. In this respect, they were mainly chosen based on aspects of context. These universities are Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), National University of Battambang, University of Heng Samrin Tbong Khmom, and Universities of South-East Asia. The rationale for choosing different university networks (city and the province) was to enable me to obtain data regarding practical challenges, perspectives, experiences, and knowledge from the contexts of HE policy practice in response to the neoliberalisation HE policy agenda for national human resources development, well-being, and social justice amongst students and HEI practitioners in different parts of Cambodia. Thus, this study included one top university in the capital city and three other HEIs from rural and provincial areas as the research network from which to recruit participants: HEIs practitioners, successful graduates (alumni), and representatives such as a student club leader. This has enriched the data to cover different HEI contexts of Cambodian HE policy formation and practice

and is considered to achieve the broader scope of the study, making it more generalisable to the context of the Cambodian labour market. In addition, research participants representing the policy elite from other organisations, companies, departments, and the national level union and associations concerned with HEIs, contributed perspectives and experiences at the next level of HE neoliberalisation in Cambodia, with the historical and ongoing influences at multiple scales of the geopolitics, socio-cultural transformation, global pandemic, and regional economic development demands in which Cambodia has inevitably become involved.

Another means of locating the research participants involved discussion with and roadmaps from the fieldwork coordinator, who acted as the ‘key informant’ for participants, once my needs from various groups had been identified. This ‘key informant’ offered contact information for a senior leader of an HEI, the academic union and associations, and development partner bodies. Creswell (1998) refers to key informants as people “who provide useful insights into the group [prospective participants] and can steer the researcher to information and contacts” (p. 60). I selected one key informant who has been working both at the top state university in Cambodia, and is a leader in one policy research unit of the education ministry in the country. The person was within my network, and has been identified as having broad academic experience, professional networks, and research output with fieldwork. Through face-to-face discussion, I gathered updated contextual information on local policy elites in regard to both their academic and professional work, and some initial contacts with my research participants. This key informant offered me the information and contacts of the most influential policy elites to begin my snowball sampling method for research participant recruitment. This start-up discussion and information fundamentally enhanced the trustworthiness of key policy elites as participants of my study.

Through my network, I could directly contact the participants and make appointments before my visit to each research site or interview venue. However, I found an unexpected reaction from the personal assistants or “gatekeepers,” referring to people with specific authority to forward a document to the rectors or vice-rectors of the universities. This reaction was a surprise to me as I expected to obtain welcome and positive collaboration for mutual knowledge sharing and development. This reaction does not match the general notion from Creswell (1998) as institutional consent required from the “gatekeepers” is so that they can “provide entrance to a research site” (p. 60). Consequently, I was flexible in approaching the participants by contacting the rector or key persons directly, using

contacts obtained from my network and the snowball sampling process. This modified method was more effective and time-efficient in getting to the rest of the research participants. I could build a higher level of rapport with the participants and, subsequently, promote more academic and professional network expansion with the policy elites into the future. Thus, making direct contact through suitable means (such as a phone call, email, or social media networks) with policy elites as participants was proved to be the most appropriate to the research context in a post-conflict and developing economy.

Research sites

The research took place in Cambodia. As this study focussed on participants as HE policy elites (i.e., those people who have influence on HE policy reform and practice), the central focus was both a vertical and a horizontal range of participant selections. I reached out potential participants from various relevant government bodies, ministries, HEIs (both private and state universities), the major funding agencies, multinational companies/corporations, academic unions of HEIs, the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC), students' unions/clubs, and successful university graduates. Amongst these institutions, I targeted key leaders or representatives and investigated their perspectives and ideas regarding their practical work and experience involving HEI policy formation and practice or employing university graduates, including participants who represent HEIs in both the capital city and some major provinces. Data collection took place in Cambodia, from May until the end of October 2019.

4.4.4 Data collection

As prescribed and agreed in the ethics protocol agreement, I began the fieldwork by sending an interview invitation and related research information through emails to the first few participants through my network. In the initial fieldwork progress, I also met the fieldwork key informant to discuss updates on situations and contexts regarding the potential policy elites in each target category. Then, the fieldwork and research data collection progressed until successfully completed.

At the beginning of each interview, I always made it clear to the participants in regard the PIS (including how the researcher identified the participant), and interview purposes. This explanation also included how much time the interview would last, how the interview data would be collected, audio-taped recorded and used. The introduction took

a few minutes before the interview started so as to ensure that participants did not feel any pressure in the interview. Once the participants confirmed their consent, they were asked to sign on the participants' consent form (they chose either the English or the Khmer language translation—see Appendix B) before the start of the interview questions.

As an insider researcher, I found that using open-ended questions with probes made the meanings of questions clearer for the participants. From interviews with members of broad groups of HE policy elites using in-depth semi-structured interviewing, multiple perspectives and broad experiences could be gained from the participants. Participants were recruited by putting out invitations (either through formal letter or emails). Such information and notice were made amongst relevant HEIs, and international funding agencies, either through exchanges in emails and social media networks such as, Skype conversations. After the participants confirmed their consent, the researcher went to each site and interviewed them directly. Snowball sampling was also be used. This study used snowball sampling method to help access quality participants during the fieldwork.

Data collection and transcription were conducted within 8–12 weeks of the research fieldwork. Thematic questions asked in the interviews included issues surrounding HE policy formation and practice; how neoliberal ideology has shaped the HE system; factors that caused the Cambodian HE framework to be neoliberalised; the extent to which the transformation of the Cambodian HE system has addressed the nation's needs in terms of the neoliberal agenda; the effects of the colonial past on the HE policy framework; the effects of globalisation on the HE policy framework; and the possibility of developing a more democratic/socially just HE policy framework in the neoliberal era.

I combined two means of contacting the prospective participants to invite them to participate in this project: making a phone call and sending out emails regarding the research purpose and the PIS. In the Cambodian context, an adequate desktop computer is not provided to all policy elites, and the internet service is sometimes disconnected for weeks or months. Thus, phone calls are more accessible and a mutually convenient method of communication with the participants. After the interview consent was offered, I sent out emails to provide information on the research and PIS to participants. I used to contact about 50% of the participants. These people were the policy elites from the development partners' institutions, the rector of the university in the capital city of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and the senior academic researchers both local and overseas. When making a phone call or sending out an email invitation to potential participants, I

explained to the participants the study purposes, the key themes and types of questions that would emerge in the interview. Rather than the number of participants and the generalisability of data amongst participants, this research focussed only the quality, content, and discourses obtained through the perspectives of each research participant. Thus, the study targeted only key leaders or representative as participants from each policy elite group.

The ontology and epistemology of a qualitative study emphasises the importance of the context and the interactive relationship between the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2005). Qualitative researchers set out to understanding the researched phenomenon in-depth and uncover the realities through engaging in a natural setting, and various methods of data collection. Four methods of data collections are mainly used in the qualitative study. These methods are identified by Marshall and Rossman (2011), that consist of “(1) participating in the setting, (2) observing directly, (3) interviewing in depth, and (4) analysing documents and material cultures, with varying emphases” (p. 137). In my study, I mainly use the data collection method of in-depth semi-structured interviews in depth and policy documents analysis.

Interviews

All interviews were conducted individually, and face-to-face with each participant, except for one interview done through a Skype conversation. This online interview was conducted because the participant was working overseas from Cambodia. All interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between under one hour and 90 minutes. With this amount of time and the direct interactional situation, participants felt encouraged to express themselves freely and candidly share their experience and perspectives. During each interview, I also took notes alongside each session.

Interviews were conducted either in English or Khmer language. Depending on each participant's characteristic language interests, I asked if the participants would be comfortable speaking in English or Khmer language. Thus, about nearly half of the participants were interviewed in English as they prefer to talk about the direct terminology and their daily work context using that language. While all the policy elites can speak English, though at different proficiency levels, some participants preferred to use the Khmer language for the interview. These participants found using their mother tongue made it easier for them to understand the questions and to express their views, experiences, and perspectives. Another thing is a cultural value; as even they have

advanced English proficiency through their international publications, some policy elites still chose to use the Khmer language for the interview. The reason that they preferred to speak in Khmer is that they felt it was both more natural to express their opinions and perspectives in Khmer and that the Khmer language should be valued for use where there is a choice and it is convenient. Hence, as an insider researcher, who is fully aware of the local context, norms, and values, I had built a healthy rapport with the participants not only through communication repertoires but also through the use of their preferred language for the interview.

Semi-structured interviews

This study used in-depth semi-structured interviews to understand and elicit the views of each participant. Deeper perspectives and positions can be identified with face-to-face dialogue with each participant (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008; Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). The interviews were conducted across different groups of HE policy elites.

Interviews were completed over a period of 12 weeks. Interviews were between under one hour to 90 minutes long and were audio recorded and transcribed. Thematic questions in each interview focused on:

- issues surrounding, HE policy formation and practice;
- neoliberal ideology in the Cambodian HE system;
- the transformation of Cambodian HE system and the nation's needs
- the effects of colonial past on the HE policy framework;
- the effects of globalisation on the HE policy framework; and
- the development of a democratic/socially just HE policy framework under the neoliberal era.

This type of personal interview offers an avenue for both interlocutors to exchange ideas and perspectives in a more flexible way, as Merriam (2009) noted:

all of the questions are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions. ... the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. (p. 90)

In this interview method, participants can express their ideas, experiences, and perspectives with ease and flexibility. At the same time, I asked my interview questions guided by the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study. I developed the interview questions based on the main ideas and key words/phrases from the three research sub-questions. In doing so, I broke each sub-question down into parts that covered specific key words as the main ideas for interviewing the participants. As noted in Creswell (2005), this interview method enables participants to “best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (p. 214).

In particular, Cambodian HEI practitioners’ knowledge remains limited, in terms of the key terminology used in my study such as neoliberalisation, globalisation, social justice, well-being for all, and so forth. These terms, once directly translated into Khmer language, would limit participants’ capacity to comprehend and express their views and perspectives to their full potential. Together with an interactive communication process, the researcher elaborated the meanings and contexts of the terms and discourse in the questions to the participants as the interview progressed. Sometimes, the participants asked for additional clarification or explanation of questions that were new to their knowledge. Overall, interactive, open-ended questions and probes have enhanced the quality of my research interview during the whole process of data collection.

In-depth semi-structured interviews in this study enabled me to obtain primary data and in-depth understanding of individuals’ perspectives and experiences concerning the practicality of HE policies, and the rationality for quality relevant to Cambodian HE policy formation and practice. I decided to utilise this research method, together with a theoretical overview of hybrid governmentality and Foucauldian discourse analysis (or genealogy) through the perspectives/concepts of postcolonial theory and the dependency of governmental conditions and HE policies. This is because I am interested in the ‘history of the present’ in relevant key documents regarding HE policy formation and practice under neoliberalism. During the interviews, the participants revealed their perspectives and issues concerning the neoliberalism of the HE system, through open-ended conversation, discussion, and in-depth interviewing, where I could flexibly add more relevant questions to explore specific issues in detail. Open-ended questions were critically developed and used in the interview as a means to obtain subjective perspectives on experience and knowledge from the participants. As a characteristic of qualitative inquiry, open-ended questions work very well with follow-up or probing questions.

During the interview, I avoided giving any cues or expressing personal ideas but rather I asked only question to obtain authentic perspectives and opinions from the research participants. In addition, I used probing questioning techniques while interviewing the research participants such as short ‘Wh-’ questions, confirming expressions/key words, and so forth, to not only elicit deeper perspectives and insights from the interviewees but also to give them a chance to reiterate and reaffirm their opinions and supporting expressions/examples on their key ideas. This is because probing questions are “responsive, follow-up questions designed to elicit more information, description, explanation and are usually verbal, but non-verbal probes—such as pause, a gesture, a raised eyebrow—are also highly effective” (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003, p. 148). Specifically, probing questions (or probes) are a crucial feature of qualitative data collection to:

generate comprehensive accounts of the dimensions or factors involved in an issue, for detailed exploration of a particular attitude, motivation, behaviour and so on, to check views on some features across the whole sample or to generate examples or illustrations. (S. Arthur & Nazroo, 2003, p. 124)

Transcription and coding

I made all interview transcriptions, English and Khmer alike. At the beginning of the fieldwork, I employed one local Khmer transcriber for support with some Khmer documents, typing and translation regarding the interviews and appointment-related documents, and Khmer language transcription. All interviews, English and Khmer alike, were translated directly into English and then transcribed in English. At the final transcription stage, I needed to double-check and do all the interview transcription directly into English. It was necessary to go through all the transcription work at least three to four times to ensure original meanings and ideas were retained in the transcribed texts. The transcription into English was also finalised through the Grammarly checking online service and sent back to the participants in case they wished to add or make changes to their ideas. This was helpful as the final transcription could ensure appropriate equivalent meanings and views (both in Khmer and English translation). This stage was also complicated as I needed to send the transcription in the Khmer language to some participants who have limited English capacity. This process is called the ‘member checking’ of the data before it is finally used for analysis. So, this stage took more work and time. The entire fieldwork process took about six months to complete successfully.

I became more alert with data as the fieldwork progressed, especially when data interpreting stage began.

In the next stage, I worked on thematic analysis and coding of the data from the transcripts, field notes, personal reflections, and collected documents from the fieldwork. Approaches to coding vary; Merriam (2009) defines coding as the “process of making notations next to bits of data that strike you as potentially relevant for answering your research questions” (p. 178). In this study, the approach to sorting and organising data was guided by Moore et al. (2012), who described it as a process in which “the researcher sort[s] and organize[s] the data, just as file folders can help with organizing a stack of papers” (p. 263). This stage was crucial for the study to be able to identify the key, foundational perspectives in the data analysis and deliver the overall research findings.

Secondary data

Secondary data, such as selected policy documents, which are accessible through the existing websites of the Cambodian Government and the education ministry, were also used. Information sources from documents are considered to be a fundamental element that can help a researcher with text data in generating better knowledge “ready for analysis without the necessary transcription that is required with observational or interview data” (Creswell, 1994, p. 219). There were some key documents that I collected from some interview participants, the education ministry, and the development partners, and from my personal network during the fieldwork visit in Cambodia, and used for this study. These were the policy documents that I analysed in this study. The policy documents included: Royal Decree on Legal Status of Public Administrative Institutions (RGC, 1997); Royal Decree on Accreditation of Higher Education (RGC, 2003); Education Law (RGC, 2007); Policy on Research Development in the Education Sector (MoEYS, 2010); Research Development in the Education Sector 2011–15 (MoEYS, 2011); Royal Decree on Professional Ranking (RGC, 2013b); Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2014–18 (MoEYS, 2014a), Policy on Higher Education Vision 2030 (MoEYS, 2014b); Policy of Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023 (MoEYS, 2019); Cambodian Digital Economy and Society Policy Framework 2021-2035 (RGC, 2021) and other major policies developed with support from the national think-tank and international consultants, mainly supported by the World Bank and ADB (MoEYS, 2003, 2010b, 2014a, 2014b, 2019b). Also, I included some documents that were available through the websites of development partners, HEIs, relevant research documents that are available online.

Challenges

Several challenges emerged during my fieldwork. One of the difficulties was getting interview appointments with the participants. First, it took me several weeks to get the first interview consent from some of the participants, especially those in HEIs in the capital city of Phnom Penh and provincial areas. And when the approval was made, the time available for the interview was limited to less than one hour. So, I had to focus on the timing and prioritising the flow of the semi-structured questionnaire and the major key questions, and move on to the in-depth questions and the rest of the questions during the interview. This was because these people have many responsibilities in their daily schedules, including high-level meetings, and chairing events at both local and international missions, which especially applies to those working in state institutions. This time-consuming communication made my fieldwork progress take a little longer and become more complicated than I expected.

Another difficulty I encountered during my fieldwork was my travelling to the provincial areas. During my fieldwork, the main route to my research site was under major construction for almost a hundred kilometres, with just one side lane open, while the bumpy surface all along the way caused the travelling time to almost triple in duration. On top of the difficult road, unfortunately, the old van broke down halfway, due to some leak in the water tank and there was no car garage open at midnight. However, with efforts and slow driving, the driver could bring all the passengers in the van to the destination by around 5am the next morning.

After waiting for several weeks for the interview consents and appointments, on one occasion I was invited to join an overnight minivan trip with a group of key HEI key personnel, including rectors, vice-rectors and deans, travelling from the airport at the capital city of Phnom Penh to a remote province of Cambodia. This was due to their ongoing conferences and campuses visits to partnership universities across Australia, Europe and the US, and their schedule for more local high-level meetings and workshops, as well as class instruction in the following days and weeks.

At their suggestion, the opportunity arose for me to join the six-hour trip with them, which was to be most convenient with a chance for a broad informal discussion and an opportunity to make interview arrangements in the following days in their province. It was a first-time experience, however, when the van broke down in the middle of the night after almost an hour's drive from the capital city. All garages were closed at the time,

and the road was quiet, dark, and many parts along the way were under construction. After the driver dealt with the problem for about half an hour, the van could go on but at a speed of not more than 30 to 40 km/h. This was due to some leak in the water reservoir; also, the van needed to stop for a water refill after every 20 to 30 minutes' drive. It was quite a shock for me to experience such a situation, as I was unfamiliar with this sort of trouble before. To deal with the situation, the researcher made himself more resilient through maintaining trustworthiness and sympathy to the kind-hearted research participants who, despite being tired from long flights from overseas, and tight schedules for upcoming work, committed to contributing to the research project. Eventually, I could overcome the hardship and explained the research project to them.

Contacting potential participants for the interviews was also another issue. It was quite surprising to receive an unreasonable denial for an interview; at times, no response from one senior academic researcher; and unfamiliar behaviour and attitude from a leader of a HEI and, as mentioned above, a personal assistant to one HEI leader in the capital city of Phnom Penh. In response to the denial of an interview from a director of an institute in the capital city of Phnom Penh, I contacted my network for an interview appointment with the director through a phone call. Upon arrival at the institutional administration office, I offered an envelope with the necessary research information and PIS to the director through the administration staff and the deputy director there. After waiting for about 30 minutes, at the campus, the director came out and sat down talking quite informally with me. Other students and staff were around doing their registration and new students' enrolments during the time. Holding a cigarette in one hand and a lighter in the other, he presumably appeared unwelcoming towards an external researcher conducting an interview. The director at first invited me to ask him any questions there, even though it was in a noisy environment with students and staff around. As I suggested that the interview should be conducted in an office or room without distractions from other people, the director mentioned that he had no ideas to offer for the interview and, thus, no interview should be carried out with him.

4.4.5 Research ethics

This study was conducted under the requirements stated in the approval from the AUT Ethics Committee (AUTEK). The ethical approval for this study was strictly evaluated by AUTEK before the commencement of data collection and fieldwork in Cambodia. The study obtained ethics approval from AUTEK on 9 May 2019 (see Appendix A) with the ethics reference number 19/99. This ethical protocol was required in this study as it

involves human subjects to ensure “that participants are fully informed and that they consent to voluntarily participate in the research” (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 37).

Interview procedures also reflect my transparency and ethically responsible actions with the participants so that they had more confidence in sharing their perspectives freely during the interview

4.4.6 Limitations of the study

Despite its significance in several ways, this study also had some limitations. First, the scope of this study only focuses on HE policy formation and practice at the tertiary education level, specifically the post-secondary education sector in Global South Cambodia. In this sense, the data being used in this study involves the secondary documents of the HE policy framework and policy papers that are available from the publication media of the MoEYS and the RGC. Secondly, this study only includes the relevant policy documents and papers on the national adoption of neoliberalism into the education sector from the institutions mentioned above. Finally, this study utilised in-depth semi-structured interviews amongst 18 carefully recruited participants, and despite these individuals representing the targeted institutions, a more varied method of interview or data collection could supplement or enrich the research findings. Overall, despite generating empirical research findings, discussion, and interpretation, this research could benefit from more evidence obtained using other data collection methods and analytical tools.

4.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have elaborated on the research design used in this study. The research design was primarily based on a qualitative research methodology under the umbrella of a constructionist worldview and its epistemology with the interpretivist paradigm. As elaborated in this chapter, I selected the epistemology of constructionism with the interpretivism paradigm because I believed the research finding could be unique and could change over time. Thus, it was crucial that I utilised the constructionist epistemology and the interpretivist paradigm to explore in depth the hidden rationales and issues in this study. In addition, I also elaborated on the analytical tools I used to analyse the research data and generate discussion and interpretation towards empirical findings in this study. Specifically, I utilised the analytical lens of critical discourse analysis in this study. In the rest of the chapter, I explained the research method, which offered a step-by-step data collection procedure, the choice of data collection method, participant recruitment, sampling method and rationale, and the data analysis method employed in this study.

Chapter 5 The Logic of Practice of Higher Education Policy: Policy Document Rhetoric and Perspectives of Policy Elites

Historical materialism in the age of informational capitalism finds its premise in power that is the effect of discourse/practice. By the same token, the logic of discourse/practice finds its justification in the proliferation of information technologies. (Poster, 1984, p. 54)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter achieves four main objectives. I explain and discuss, first, the findings from selected policy documents, followed by a short discussion; second, nine emerging themes from the policy elites' perspective; third, the cross-perspectives amongst the policy elite group; and finally, I develop a theoretical overview that has emerged from the nine key themes which connect to the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2.

As explained in Chapter 1, this study explores the question 'Why has the HE policy framework in Cambodia become neoliberalised?' Specifically, it strives to identify: (1) the extent to which the transformation of the HE system in Cambodia addressed the nation's needs in terms of the neoliberal agenda, (2) the effects the colonial past has had on HE policy in Cambodia — and what effects globalisation has had on HE policy in Cambodia, and (3) how Cambodia might develop a more democratic/socially just HE policy framework. As explained in Chapter 3, I adopted interpretivism as the research paradigm and utilised a qualitative research methodology which best suits the study objectives, and the research theoretical framework. As the conceptual framework, I considered that it is essential to add the thin-communitarian concept to neoliberalisation in the Global South Cambodia context. The thin-communitarian concept is based on the idea that HE policy formation and practice in the Global South context requires mutual powers of control and responsibilities shared amongst the state, the private sectors, and the non-state actors. In addition, as described in Chapters 1 and 2, the thin-communitarian theory has been expanded by adding the concept of 'affinity space' aiming to raise the pastoral power within the community of practice of the neoliberalisation framework. The findings and selected theories arise from a qualitative approach to data analysis and interpretation of the data employing the genealogical method of Michel Foucault's (1991a) theory. From this interpretive standpoint I introduce and explain how the local

'culture of practice', came to light from the theoretical framework of thin-communitarianism (Olssen, 2002, 2017).

Using the interviews, I analyse the meanings and rhetorical discourse of official policy documents and research participants' perspectives to compare the data. In this analytical procedure, I go through each policy one by one, and compare the discrete ideas, beliefs, and perspectives of each research participant. I unpack the continuing struggle that can be observed between the historical legacies and current reform efforts that are hidebound by a culture of 'governmentality'. I also elaborate on the multiple rationales for policy implementation that have emerged from within the policy elite groups' community of practice. This is because, as described in Chapters 1 and 2, specifically in developing my conceptual and theoretical framework for this study, the neoliberal environment reflects the multifaceted influence of postcolonialism, globalisation, and contested ideologies resulting from historical and geopolitical legacies.

5.2 Cambodian higher education policy documents: What does the policy say?

This section comprises a discourse analysis of the selected HE policy documents from the past three decades. This period marks the neoliberalisation of Cambodia's HE system, a system which reflects the primary desire to upskill human resources to serve the developing economy of Cambodia.

5.2.1 A rationale for why these policies were selected

Since the first private HEI in Cambodia was founded in 1997, the number of HEIs has increased from under 10 (in 1997), to 127 HEIs (by 2019). As elaborated upon in the discussion of dependency theory, the reform policies in Cambodia have been pushed by key funding agencies, such as development partners and international aid networks, who authorise major grants and loans for the restructuring of HE based on aid and project conditions. The selected policies in the table below mark the key events in HE system reform and regulation to ensure the national adoption of neoliberalism in the education sector since 1997. These policies are directly referred to by the interviewees and also marked the RGC's major efforts to ensure a successful reform outcome through the endorsement of key Royal Decrees and strategic policies that set expected aims and objectives for improvement in the education sector. As a result, the selection of key policy documents was made from this period of time.

Table 3. Cambodian HE policy texts selected directly referred to by the interviewees

Policy (and year of adoption)	Aim/Strategy	Reference
Royal Decree on Legal Status of Public Administrative Institutions (1997)	To promote the autonomy of public HEIs and their governance and management.	(RGC, 1997a)
Royal Decree on Accreditation of Higher Education (2003)	To ensure and promote the quality of HE in line with regional and international standards.	(RGC, 2003)
Education Law (2007)	To provide a legal instrument for the effective and efficient reform of governance and management of the education sector, including the HE subsector.	(RGC, 2007a)
Policy on Research Development in the Education Sector (2010)	To improve the quality of HE through the promotion of research and knowledge dissemination at a HE level.	(MoEYS, 2010b)
Royal Decree on Professional Ranking (2013)	To improve the quality of HE by focusing on assessing the educational qualifications, experiences, knowledge production and dissemination of lecturing staff.	(RGC, 2013b)
Policy on Higher Education Vision 2030 (2014)	To identify the long-term direction and provide a clear roadmap for developing HE in Cambodia in the era of a knowledge-based economy.	(MoEYS, 2014b)
Policy of Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023	“A broad and ambitious scope that refers to equitable, quality, inclusive and life-long learning. This is within a comprehensive framework covering all types and levels of education, in line with developmental perspectives for reaching upper-middle-income status by 2030 and high-income status by 2050.” (p. 15)	(MoEYS, 2019b)
Cambodia Digital Economy and Society Policy Framework 2021-2035	The Cambodia Digital Economy and Society Policy Framework sets out the vision of “ building a vibrant digital economy and society to accelerate new economic growth and promote social well-being based on the path of new normal ”.	(Supreme National Economic Council, 2021)
	This vision is to be achieved in 15 years, from 2021 to 2035, and in line with three principles: “ Building Digital Foundations—Digital Adoption—Digital Transformation ”, in which all policy measures need to be implemented simultaneously while prioritising the measures that correspond to individual principles.	

Source: Sen (2019, p. 6) and author’s additional policy compilation

5.2.2 Findings from the selected education policy documents

In this section I explain and elaborate upon the findings from the analysis of policy documents. As mentioned in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3), I selected key themes that emerged from the policy documents and which convey the discourses that the policy documents set as aims and goals for policy reform through neoliberalisation in Cambodia. Discourses in the policy texts are crucial for interpretation of the meaning through which the policy functions as the direction of policy reform and practice in the education sector. I now begin the policy document analysis through themes and discourses that I found to stand out in the selected policy documents.

The HE system is premised on a neoliberal agenda through the discourse of ‘quality improvement’ and ‘international standards’.

The Royal Decree on Legal Status of Public Administrative Institutions (RGC, 1997) states the RGC’s intention is to direct educational reform and raise standards to match regional and international benchmarking. To meet this demand, governments have endeavoured to compare the existing education system with the global and international agenda for development. Accordingly, the Royal Decree of 1997 established the ACC to oversee quality issues amongst HEIs during a period of rapid expansion. As indicated by the Royal Decree on the Accreditation of Higher Education (RGC, 2003), the ACC was seen as a means to monitor all Cambodian HEIs. The relevant article in the Royal Decree stipulates:

The purpose of this Royal Decree is to establish a legal mechanism for managing the accreditation and quality of education in higher education institutions (HEIs). ... to ensure international standards define its structure, role, function and duties for those institutions issuing bachelor and higher degrees in the Kingdom of Cambodia. This legal mechanism is the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia, also known as ‘ACC’. (RGC, 2003, p. 1)

The discourse foresaw the economic context, the higher ‘quality of education’, and in turn a raising of ‘international level standards’. The RGC wished to ensure that learners attained the prescribed curriculum following the direction of the ‘quality’ discourse that reflects the dominant vision and goals of moving towards a skilled labour force. However, as explained in the literature review in Chapter 2, the horizon of a skilled labour

force encompassing specialisations in science, technology and engineering addresses only the needs demanded of the market, rather than a broader notion of education.

The emergence of a discourse on ‘scientific, technical, cultural and social research’, ‘skills’ and ‘enterprise’

As noted above, the part of the education law from the Cambodian Government policy revealed that the purposes of HE serve up-to-date changing market needs. These discourses emerged through ‘scientific, technical, cultural and social research’, ‘skills’, and ‘enterprise’ which stood out in the existing education policy documents. Although the policy aimed to build human resources to promote economic development, the language was couched in neoliberal rhetoric. The notion of serving the neoliberal rhetoric here requires state intervention to ensure a standardised distribution of market benefits amongst university graduates and individuals in society. As extracted from the government policy:

Higher education shall teach learners a personality and character to promote scientific, technical, cultural, and social research to achieve capacity, knowledge, skills, morality, and seek inventive and creative ideas for developing the country. (RGC, 2007a, p. 7)

This policy text shows how reform efforts were striving to cultivate human resources for life in a modern democratic society by adopting a discourse that aligned with the international community and an agenda for democracy. While the text seeks to cultivate learners and graduates, the prescription adheres to the promotion of economic dividends. The rhetorical descriptors ‘promote scientific, technical, cultural and social research’ **promoted the uncontrolled free market driving profit maximisation, at the cost of the well-being of other citizens.** The discourse on globalisation that transpired in the Policy on Research Development in the Education Sector (MoEYS, 2010b) justified the necessity of improving human resources for the benefit of the economy. In this part of the policy, the government adheres to the development of the education sector towards producing graduates with a balance of skills in both working for the market economy and aspects of socio-cultural development. The vision of the policy simply states:

To build capacity for human resources in terms of knowledge, skills, ethics, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, and to maximize long-term development and globalise Cambodia’s economy. (MoEYS, 2010b, p. 2)

The following extract from the Policy on Higher Education Vision 2030 (MoEYS, 2014b) promotes economic dividends as the long-term national roadmap for developing HE in Cambodia. The skills set required for economic potential can be seen as an adaptation to changing market demands, which undermines the need for a broader concept of HE and long-term social-democratic reform. The vision of the policy is:

To build a quality higher education system that develops human resources with excellent knowledge, skills and moral values, in order to work and live in the era of globalisation and knowledge-based society. (MoEYS, 2014b, p. 3)

The goal of the policy is:

To develop a system of governance and mechanisms for higher education, that ensure qualified students have the opportunity to access quality programs which respond to the needs of the labour market and socio-economic development. (MoEYS, 2014b, p. 3)

In this view, HE promotes graduates as the future workforce of the labour market, rather than as non-economic dividends, which aligns with the hegemonic discourse. The policy also revealed the state commitment to establish a governance mechanism system to ensure quality practice in the education sector to build the country's economy, in this era of a knowledge-based society, through the education sector.

The last policy selected for this study is the Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023. This policy emphasises the response of the education sector to the external local economic growth. The policy reports that:

Cambodia has reached a new development in its education sector response to global and regional contexts. Its strategy is broad and ambitious and refers to equity, quality, inclusiveness and life-long learning. This is within a comprehensive framework that covers all types and levels of education, and is in line with developing perspectives for reaching upper-middle-income status by 2030 and high-income by 2050. (MoEYS, 2019b, p. 15)

Based on this rhetorical discourse, the government believed the role of education was to serve national economic growth and eventually bring about 'upper-middle-income' and 'high-income' status. In other words, the policy emphasises the essential role of education in promoting economic growth. However, the policy ignores quality

development, and the importance of social justice assisting local needs in the education sector.

Findings summary on policy documents

Findings from this section have contributed essential analytical aspects of the answer to the key research question of this study, ‘Why has the HE policy framework in Cambodia become neoliberalised?’. There are policies which serve the needs of economic development and socio-cultural development through the influence of globalisation and the postcolonial agenda from the hegemonic world. As mentioned in the theoretical framework (in Chapter 1), this study assumes specific theories are at play in Cambodia’s neoliberal HE system. These neoliberal notions are not difficult to identify in the extracts from government policies set out above. These policies include: the Policy of Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023; and the Cambodia Digital Economy and Society Policy Framework 2021-2035. As elaborated above, from the extracts taken from the selected (higher) education policies above, there are multifaceted influences from the colonial past and external funding agencies shaping the local system into a ‘hybrid-governmentality’ mode. The shortage of teaching staff for nearly two decades after the Khmer Rouge period (Ayres, 2000a; Clayton, 2006; Duggan, 1996; Fergusson & Masson, 1997) meant there was an urgent need for funding from the development partners.

The development agenda came along with the hegemony of neoliberal capitalist discourses, to function as the technological vocabulary for the reform agenda. One of the major funding sources is from the World Bank offering US\$92.5 million to support outstanding HEIs in Cambodia. This was in addition to the US\$23 million funding for the Higher Education Quality and Capacity Improvement Project 2011–2015 (WB, 2010). The Policy on Higher Education Vision 2030 (MoEYS, 2014b) incorporated phrases such as: ‘skills in order to work’, followed by a sub-policy theme, ‘socio-economic development’, ‘globalisation’ and the ‘labour market’. This highlights government commitment to develop human capital for incoming foreign investment, in the name of the national economic interest serving the labour market.

Unfortunately, a discourse for reform is held under the ideological influence of external stakeholders, at the behest of the receiving government. As the annual university intake nationwide in Cambodia attains about 11% of graduates from high school (S. Un & Sok, 2018, p. 1), it is important for other education sectors to train and prepare human resources for different levels of the labour market. Rather than serving predominantly the market, the

primary role of HEIs should be considered as building a democratic society and maintaining social justice for all. University education can cultivate a broader concept of knowledge, skills, ethics, and character in graduates to build frameworks for improving society, fighting for social democratic reform, or becoming a person working towards sustainable peace and development.

These findings from policy documents connect to Dirlik and Tikly's theories (Dirlik, 1994, 2018; Tikly, 2001), and Frank's dependency theory (Frank, 1979, 2018). The dominant discourses are clearly influenced by postcolonialism and globalisation, and serve the global hegemonic economy, rather than develop the local economy and human resources, as argued by Hobson (1996) and Olssen (2017).

I now turn to supporting this study with findings from fieldwork interviews conducted with the selected participants engaged from policy elites. As already explained in Chapter 3, I selected my research participants as policy elites because they have been involved in the process of policy formation and practice at the local and nation level in Cambodia. They are key people who have influence through their work and opinions in various meetings and workshops relating to HE policy formation and practice in Cambodia.

5.3 Findings from policy elite groups

In this section, I introduce findings from policy elite groups derived from the interview data obtained from the fieldwork. I want to explain the different cultural positions that emerged through the participants' beliefs. The findings reveal the continuing influence of historical legacies on human resources, materials, and infrastructure. There are common beliefs showing the influence of Cambodia's colonial past on policy elites, while recognising the regional and international dimension of development agendas in both positive and negative terms. As asserted by Dirlik and Tikly (Dirlik, 1994, 2018; Tikly, 2001), and Frank's dependency theory (Frank, 1979, 2018), the influences of the colonial past are multifaceted. There are historical legacies through administrative structures and beliefs, the dependent economic context, the socio-cultural environment and, particularly, psychological insights amongst the local policy elites and their citizens. The participants believed that regional and international agendas for development could bring about both positive and negative consequences for the local system. At the regional level, reform efforts resulted in using the ASEAN framework for reference, which sets the benchmark and standards for HEIs. Meanwhile, at an international level, policies for structural adjustment drive the neo-liberal agenda.

In analysing the interview data, the nine key themes that have emerged are discussed in this section. These themes are:

- The colonial/neo-colonial mindset,
- Symbolic policy,
- A more effective mechanism for a career pathway,
- Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) as a career prospect,
- Public-private-community engagement,
- Human resources inadequacy and multiple ideologies,
- Social value and career through an HE degree,
- Research culture incentives through the professorship scheme, and
- Contested terrain of professionalisation amongst HEI practitioners.

These nine key themes have emerged as the rationale for and root causes of the neoliberalisation of the sector, and as pathways toward social justice and individual well-being. In the following analysis, I explain each key theme using evidence from interview data.

5.3.1 Emerging themes across all policy elite groups

1) The colonial/neo-colonial mindset

All policy elite groups believed that the past geopolitical ideology and civil war had left the education sector in ruins. The historical legacy also existed amongst the hierarchy of administration through management styles and leadership, in the bureaucratic system across the educational ministry and HEIs organisations, and on into the community of practice. The historical legacy has influenced and become embedded amongst the research participants (i.e., local policy elites, policymakers, and the community of HEIs practitioners), and is reflected through the cultural position of their beliefs and rationale when implementing the neoliberal agenda. This had led to the rehabilitation of education under the aegis of foreign funding and the terrain of power struggles amongst differing cultural positions held by the current leaders and policymakers in the education sectors. These people are mainly appointed to positions and responsibilities for steering and managing policy formation and practice in the education sector under both national and international funding schemes, and they are known to be the emerging policy elites.

Some of the research participants mention the historical legacy as follows:

After the war, ... nothing else left besides one or two buildings. ... higher education rehabilitation emerged through the effort and hard work of the government after January 7, 1979. All the buildings were depleted of human resources and was reopened in 1979 only for pedagogical training² ... the institution was upgraded during the 1980s into the university and mainly funded by the Russian and Vietnam. The latest year... in 2013, there were lots of remaining of chemical substances which is left over from the Russian funding period. Thus ... what remains as resources, there were almost none. (Participant from HEIs and then state role).

You have France, the Soviet Union, the U.S. and others. You have a leadership now in the position of authority and power at the ministry from the Soviet Union and someone at rector level from Japan. ... Cambodia is a land of comparative education, but we have a mix-up of everything. (Senior academic researcher)

Leaders around my age about 65. We have the French model in our mind, and the same for the current top leadership, and at ministry level; many of them have been educated in Eastern Europe and Russia. (Academic union deputy head)

The adoption of neoliberal ideology, followed as a policy condition of nation building projects under structural adjustment, has led to the government anticipating quality reform to be successfully implemented. The funding condition required the nation to adopt the structural adjustment policy which based on the neoliberal agenda for national development, specifically development in the education sector. Unfortunately, neoliberalism reflects local dependency on external funding and technical support despite partial government funding, as mentioned by a research participant:

The government have all those plans for HE policies, but does not have enough resources to implement it; and just expects funding to arrive from their development partners. (Senior academic researcher)

Meanwhile, donors or development partners may also face constraints and provide unstable and insufficient funding. Depending on external funding, a developing nation

² The term 'pedagogical training' raised by the participants here refers to a professional teacher training programme (conducted by formal teacher education institution) that educates teachers to know and understand the approach to teaching. In the Cambodian education context, the participants refer to pedagogical training as a teacher's set of knowledge including teaching method, and techniques to educate students in a professional way. It also includes a teacher's knowledge on theories of learning, understandings of students, and individual students' backgrounds, needs, and interests.

like Cambodia may face the risk of policy reform being adjudicated according to the political interests of donors. This can undermine the long-term needs of the nation. As a research participant from the development partner side stated:

Well, having good policy is one thing, but ensuring effectiveness and efficiency of the higher education is another issues, and it is even more important than having the policies. And it is issues that happens not only in Cambodia, but also in other countries. Why? Because your policies have to be aligned with other, i.e. responsive to local market need at regional, global needs. But at the same time, when you face with human resources constraint, the implementation is critical. So, to answer your question, I mean it is not yet enough. It is not yet efficient, or reach the level of our young generation, even have reached the level of employer or industry's expectation yet. And we have to do more. ... the quantity is not matter, the matter is quality and relevance that face all these challenges. (Development partner head of education development division)

Another participant also reflected sceptically on the reform efforts for long-term local needs:

it is essential that our country has ownership of financial and human resources for national reform and development; otherwise, it will be very difficult to guarantee funding by relying on external funding. This will be easy to obtain but will be dependent on meeting certain conditions. (Senior academic researcher)

In these circumstances it would not be uncommon to witness psychological trauma, and for the traumatised experience to remain embedded amongst the local policy elite, including high-ranking officers. These psychological insights remain entrenched in the reforms being implemented by local administrators and policy elites, such as a contrasting mindset, contested ideologies and a misplaced concept of a working culture. One participant described psychological legacies from the colonial and civil wars:

Amongst the intellectuals who remained after the 'genocide regime' 'ground zero', most of them now work for the government. These officials reinforce a culture of hesitation and inferiority towards external policy consultants, mixed with a sense of self-mistrust and irresponsibility towards policy formation and practice. ... This practice has been exercised throughout colonisation and the genocide regime (Industry leader)

Interview data confirms that senior academic researchers and academic union representatives who have endured the civil war have a mindset that has evolved ‘social structures’ and responsive ‘behaviours and/or attitudes’ towards the expectations of colonisation and the traumatic periods of past regimes. This legacy has a ‘trickle down’ effect on subordinates including HEI leaders, (administration) staff, lecturers, and students/learners working within the system. The following remarks demonstrated a ‘culture of inferiority’ (i.e., conforming to and obeying the opinions of those in superior status and position) from the legacy of work amongst the policy elites:

French colonisation shaped the Cambodian people’s mindset, so that attaining education is for social mobility, and to upgrade your status; such as a civil servant working to get out of farming. All these ideologies continue to influence the current generation and, so far, it is still a part of the impact of the French. (Industry executive leader)

In our parents’ generation, they experienced the horrors and hardship in life from either the colonial past or civil war. Consequently, they continuously advised their children to be fearful of self-confidence and to learn to listen and follow influential figures, or others in the society for survival. ... This reflects their fearful psychology and the experience from the colonial past and civil war. (Industry executive leader)

Most participants saw neoliberal goals as ambitions in the official policy documents but unrelated to practice, and lacking reliable mechanisms for evaluation and assessment. As supported in the interview excerpt below, the participants saw the issues of policy practice reflect failures to both implement agendas (i.e., the stated objectives) and attain quality results (only seen in reports, but not quality achievements):

When the annual congress for policy evaluation is held, various stakeholders make checklists in terms of having developed certain policies, not caring to what extent policies have been implemented or achieved. (Senior academic researcher)

The colonial legacy from the grassroots to bureaucratic administrators has led to the local ‘regime of truth’ where the essential purpose of HE has been shaped into a different rationale—for example, the policy framework for post-COVID-19 pandemics and the digital economy policy, where all policy actors and institutions are expected to transform their practice for a new pathway through a digital framework and to achieve higher

productivity (RGC, 2021)). These practices have been exploited by powerful individuals serving the market rather than social well-being. As in the following excerpt, the historical legacy disrupts modernisation by diverting policy formation from the original neoliberal intention of the global funding community:

The curriculum looks good on paper but, when it comes to implementation, the quality, and the competency of the teachers or professors, the equipment, the class size, the quality of the examination, the quality of the graduation process is seriously flawed. (Industry executive leader)

2) *Symbolic policy*

Policy formation and practice for HE amongst developing countries is often understood to be a failure due to the contextual reality of multiple weaknesses and shortages, such as a lack of resources, inadequate teacher training, and the problem of policy coherence (Jansen, 2002). The influence of the colonial past and the global agenda has played a crucial role in the rationale for national governmentality, especially in maintaining economic growth and national political stability. As a post-conflict setting, the neoliberalism in Cambodia's HE sector reflected the fragility of the HEI system and was seriously impacted by geopolitical and national political stability, economic recovery, and socio-cultural attitudes amongst citizens across the country. It could be argued that, culturally, political governmentality dominates national reform and development pathways through a symbolic policy where the reformed policies are not adequately relevant to national context.

The participants' accounts resonated with the experience of state failures during time of a skewed distribution, HE expansion, and growing unemployment leading to social unrest and civil war. The education sector, in colonial times, was meant to produce staff to work for 'their' administration. Only a marginal few affluent local people who could afford it could access the education service, whereas the mass of the poor was exploited through oppressive laws and heavy taxation. Simply put, the colonial administration established a social notion in which education was seen to serve the colony, while maintaining a social divide between the affluent merchant and the mass of the poor and peasants. This led to problems within the education sector after the colonial period, as indicated in the following:

In the Sihanouk era, there were efforts to develop higher education, especially infrastructure development. ... But ... policies such as curriculum did not make any significant progress. Usually, in our Khmer culture, we tend to value ‘form’ rather than ‘meaning’. We value observable images through what is seen, such as buildings or equipment, but what we see less value in is meaning, content, or what is invisible or abstract. (Senior academic researcher)

It does not mean that the mushrooming number of HEIs will guarantee quality education as an outcome; I mean, we have more quality people. So, there are two things, there are more choices, and people can have access to higher education, but it will limit their ability to measure, or to inspect, or to look at the quality, not purely from the paper point of view. (Industry executive leader)

The extracted voices of the research participants presented above emphasised the appearance of symbolic policy in HE sector policy formation and practice. The education sector experienced dramatic progress during the post-French independence period of the early 1960s and the recent decades of late 1990s up to the present day mainly through the surface appearance of student enrolments and HEI numbers. However, this development has not yet been marked by significant quality standards for both the human resources and policy implementation.

The neoliberal exploitation of the education system produced a social stratification through its reinvestment cycle amongst the power elites by means of double standards of service. Participants believed that those who were from poor families would waste time enrolling into poor quality HEIs, learn few potential skills for job opportunities, and would eventually work in low-paid part-time jobs, despite the rapid expansion of HEIs. Due to resource constraints, while a multifaceted neoliberal ideology shifted attention from the national to the international labour market, the state actors could convince the international community and the local citizens that the reform effort was moving forward. However, current policy elites support neoliberalism and reflect on the ideology and practice through the exploitation of academic intellectuals, academic freedom, and the role of promoting public good, as in the following:

Even nowadays, many people have become rich without even getting a high level of education. Rich people in Khmer society are not from those who possess high levels of knowledge and capacity to be creative or inventive, as in other advanced countries namely the USA. (Senior academic researcher)

Actually, this research participant as a senior academic researcher commented that most rich people in the present day in Cambodia have become affluent because of their capital investment and right connections with rich people. Most of these people focus on business and investment rather than the high quality of HE. Participants also emphasised the gap between the commitment in official policy and the limited resources at HEI level. In the following excerpts, participants discussed the lack of congruence between the policy commitment to a credit system and lecturers with doctoral degrees, yet in actual practice the system remains in deficit:

We announced that we have credit system in our higher education system, but the system remains unclear, as well as other technical issues. (HEI rector)

A university lecturer should possess a doctorate degree, but we have an acute shortage with just less than 20% to 30% of the people who work at our university who could obtain doctoral degrees. (HEI rector)

3) A more effective mechanism for a career pathway

A career pathway functions as a bridge that HEIs provide which allows students get a career upon course completion, and these students could return to further their education to master their knowledge and skills for their prospective career. Through a career pathway, students could better prepare themselves for prospective employment opportunities upon graduation, along with satisfactory payment. This theme emerged as neoliberalism in Global South Cambodia requires stronger state responsibilities through quality regulation to achieve quality policy implementation. All participants perceived most students enrolled in the HEIs received little information about labour market needs. They perceived that a career pathway is essential information for students to decide on their reasons and the preparation required for enrolling into tertiary education and to become successful graduates. In the interview excerpts below, the participants realised that not having career pathway information resulted in low-quality education, unemployment, and high dropout rates amongst university students:

I think society must demand information from employers and industries—even individual students and parents must demand this. You know, we are all dependent and independent individuals without pressure nothing will happen. We need to demand much more. (Development partner and head of education division)

The mindset of our students is that it is, and it is usually influenced by his parents in selecting learning programme/major. Actually, it is because there is not enough market information for them to make a decision on their choice of study. If there is enough information, the students would be able to analysis for their education major decision by themselves. ... In other better countries, they have a mechanism to prepare education pathway for their students since grade 9, such as who should go on to the university and who should go to technical vocational education and training (TVET). Our education system has only tracked towards those who should go for social science and those for pure science. However, the students changed their minds when they come to the university and choose the other field of science instead. This also resulted in some students drop out as they don't have enough foundational knowledge to cannot catch up with their study. Thus, it is important to provide enough market information for the students to make decisions on which major they should study. (Academic union deputy head)

A clear mechanism that offers guidance for the students' career pathway is essential for HEIs quality achievement due to numbers of graduates unable to get careers (especially for their selected study majors). Participants spoke of the lack of any mechanism to manage career pathways as reflecting the limited capacity of HEIs and governing bodies to steer policy implementation towards quality achievements. This reflects the context of the education sector failing to play a role in social justice, academic freedom or higher skills development, and the lack of capacity of graduates to grow the local economy and, in turn, the inability to attract foreign inward investment. As evidenced below, the participants perceived the rapid increase of HEIs has brought about deterioration of the values and essence of the education sector. This has occurred through the education 'industry' serving the interests of the market economy and private individuals, rather than national development by enhancing the public good of the nation by moving towards social democratic reform, and making improvements to the well-being of all individuals. In this regard, the policy elites realised there is career pathway adopted by the RGC policy framework, yet they perceive that this policy framework could not prepare the national development goals for social justice and well-being for all individuals for the long-term needs of postcolonial Cambodia's development. As a participant explained:

our education system nowadays prepares the pathway for the students from school to the university, which is the reason why we do not have labour forces to serve for the work in the labour market. Our current education system would expect all

the students to centre their times and resources invested in getting higher education services upon their graduation from the high school level. Our current demands for the national economy is technical skills. This means that not all high school graduates are expected to go to the university, but should only the top-performing learners to go on straight to the university as they have more potential to make more productive research work and to become leaders for the nation. (HE policymaker—senior bureaucrat at ministry level)

Participants perceived a career pathway would allow students to work and maintain their academic credits and obtain their university degree later in life. Through a career pathway, all the participants expected that post-secondary education services can also offer a greater variety of skills for immediate job market needs through vocational training courses at non-university institutions. In the interview excerpt below, a member of the policy elites sees a quality mechanism for a career pathway as essential to achieving their neoliberal vision of Cambodia:

Technical departments can identify the needs of the local economy in terms of the required skills, labour market needs and the flow of the markets. (Senior bureaucrat at ministry level)

4) STEM as a career prospect

Neoliberalism has become a competitive advantage for the local education system. All participants believed that Cambodia faced an eye-opening opportunity to update knowledge, skills, and curriculum to participate in global markets. Participants contended this was a result of having modernised the curriculum to match STEM majors, as the global nature of work has shifted from industrial revolution towards industrial revolution 4.0 and digitisation. They believed that most jobs and business activity require knowledge, skills, and innovation in modern technology and artificial intelligence. They believed these skills were essential for graduates to both compete for prospective employment and absorb new knowledge, skills, and experience in modern society. As shown below, research participants also felt optimistic about neoliberalism. They believed the neoliberalisation of the HE sector has led to curriculum modernisation towards STEM majors amongst local HEIs:

Meanwhile, the labour market has been influenced by modern technology, and that is why the employment market requires STEM-related skills. (Academic union deputy head)

When our national economy is being shifted from agriculture towards industrialisation, from services towards industrialisation, then it is time that STEM becomes essential. (HEI rector)

The participants saw neoliberalisation linked to the education sector in a STEM-focused curriculum, due to market demands at national, regional, and global levels. The participants also expressed enthusiasm concerning current reform commitments as they believed the education sector enhanced the quality of human resources through study exchange, skills and experience attainment, as well as research and development cooperation across borders. Finally, the participants believed that local HEIs could develop greater competitive advantage by cultivating quality graduates if policy practices were of a high standard:

Now there is an ASEAN university network (AUN), and our current Royal University of Phnom Penh is registered in this network too, which is considered an excellent university. ... We have an international community in which each member country can learn and share experiences with each other. (HEI rector)

However, participants from the senior academic researcher and academic union group felt scepticism about the rapid policy alignment with the global and regional framework under the neoliberalism. One perspective is that the neoliberal agenda is geared towards majors with a heavy emphasis on sophisticated technology research/skills, so as to aim for alignment with the labour market needs in advanced nations, while there are widespread deficits in both educational infrastructure, facilities, and resources. A comment from a research participant from the academic union group resonated with the deficit in the education sector:

In general, almost 100% of HEIs base their income only from student fees. If education is based on one resource, it is impossible to do anything; it is not even enough to pay for the teacher. In education, it is not only about the teacher's spending; there is an expenditure requirement of other sectors, such as on their professional development, etc. If he just comes to finish the teaching, his knowledge is not updated. As there are much recent evolution of technology,

HEIs have to offer professional development and training on the teachers as well. However, they do not have enough budget for that training. In addition, they need resources for facilities to be equipped to support the teaching and research of students to meet the market needs. Thus, the universities in our country cannot support all these needs. (Academic union deputy head)

With such discrepancies, participants perceived that this aspect of neoliberalism tends to overlook the actual needs of the labour market in the postcolonial Cambodian context. Policy elites also revealed bleak prospects arising from neoliberal reform, particularly deficits in human resource capacity to carry out the duties and responsibilities required to achieve expected policy goals:

It is a big issue, though, because these candidates must have gone through some courses in education foundation and some pedagogical foundation before they want to become teacher trainees, or to be eligible for working in the profession as educational staff or lecturers. (HEI vice-rector)

I think it is just that our country needs to join the global movement. ... we are talking about 4.0 industrial revolution in our society, but I doubt this would be happening in our country yet. 4.0 industry would need robots and more advanced technologies and these sorts of production systems do not exist in our country yet. ... I think it is just a 'buzz' word, the UN or ASEAN use the word for their alignment to the regional and global policy. (Senior academic researcher)

From the extracted quotes above, there are different perspectives amongst the research participants regarding the focus on STEM in the education sector. Both participants above perceive that neoliberalisation in the HE sector faces many challenges due to the lack of qualified human resources, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, and lack of policy coherence. The participants were also sceptical about an 'emerging model' from a regional soft power. They perceived that the local education sector had to conform to 'observable indicators' imposed by a regional or global framework of reference, through comparative standards focusing on infrastructure, percentage of student enrolments and resource inputs. They perceived that the 'observable indicators' twisted the evaluative interpretation because it lacked the quality aspect of the local context:

The negative part is there are too many advisors. ... globalisation is an issue when you have those big UN organisations ... coming to influence Cambodian higher

education and sometimes at the expense of our own need, so there are negative parts. (Senior academic researcher)

... there is no need new alternative of thinking or model but just follow their consultant and adjustment policies and ensure good implementation of that. ... our country has many overseas graduates to return back but due to lack of incentives and supporting income, they eventually have to find way to go back and live overseas. So, the enabling environment is crucial. We only have good words to say that building human resources, but no actual incentives. (Senior academic researcher)

I think we have both benefit and loses. If we look at each university in Cambodia nowadays, due to the lack of internal funding, we depend mainly on the international funding. So, this means that we are well-connected to universities across the world. For instance, there are rigorous action amongst universities, specifically the state universities ... they have signed lots of MoU with universities overseas, almost every day. I think such MoU would only benefit to a small group of their interest groups to go to visit foreign countries and see how those advanced countries have been developed. However, this is just a visit, and it could not actually make those commitment into real actions. (Senior academic researcher)

Overall, policy elites expressed pessimism about the current reforms, seeing them act in the interests of one particular regional soft power, rather than serve the long-term needs of the nation for public good at large. Neoliberalisation was a political project implemented through an external ideology that emanated from regional and international bodies. Yet, specifically, in the ideas which resonated in the above remarks by the research participants, lots of funding now links local development to foreign cultural politics within the tool of a bluntly imported education model. When visiting graduates return home from studying overseas, they bring along business connections, knowledge, and experience that can be reinvested in Cambodia. This leads to the promotion of global and regional benchmarking agendas.

5) Public-private-community engagement

This theme emerged from participants' views on neoliberalism in Global South Cambodia in enhancing quality collaboration between public, private, and community sectors.

Participants perceived that the current policy implementation reflects discrete projects and activities in each sector rather than engagement amongst the policymakers and policy practitioners. The notion of engagement here includes the HE policy practitioners such as HEI rectors, (senior) academic administrators, HEIs staff and lecturers, and the people at grassroot levels, namely students and their parents, in their respective communities. In other words, they are people who witness as well as implement policy. These uncoordinated activities of policy practice cause students great difficulty. Consequently, some students are unable to complete their university course and leave their course with no credits. The participants across groups acknowledged that the HEIs had no discernible initiatives for collaboration with the private sector to strengthen quality teaching and learning. For their part, the private companies and industries maintained that HEIs did not want to talk to them, as they shared no initiatives or did not want to invest in more resources. In the interview excerpts below, participants reflected on how effective joint initiatives between HEIs and the private sector can contribute to apprenticeships, research enterprise and development outputs:

There should be more a kind of integrated, the exchange with corporation between the private sectors, the market, and the institutions. So, there should be a mechanism that allows the demand side [and] the supply side to interact with one another so they can, from the market perspective, they can provide the feedback to the institutions. So they should do this, should give this kind of skills, for example, and then you should allow this group of people to come to the exchange program or the internship within those organisation. So I think there should be such kind of facilitation. (Industry leader)

Some universities request support from the private sector for internship or apprenticeship opportunities for their students, as well as small research projects. However, there are only few projects that are ongoing. (Senior bureaucrat at ministry level)

The stakeholders need to get involved, together, to strengthen the quality of HEIs that produce qualified graduates so as to enable them to create jobs or run a business. This involvement ... refers to building linkage between HEIs and the industrial sector ... to allow students to do internships and study working life in a company. (HEI dean)

I mean the whole system see themselves as suppliers. ... They just see themselves as: “I am the school [university], I just produce [students], and that’s it and my job is finished, and if you want people, you come to me and talk to me.” I think there should be a change in the mindset. (Industry leader)

First is the requirement for financial budget such as organising meeting or workshops so that they can participate. There is very little industrial linkage with the HEIs, especially the private HEIs. Actually, for the HEIs to effectively carry out their duties and mission, they have to build a good connection with the industrial organisation, so-called industrial linkage. However, it is seen that such industrial linkage has not been any successful outcome. (Academic union deputy head)

The participants believed in building a community of practice involving other stakeholders for implementing quality policy. They perceived that stakeholder engagement including the HEIs, private sector enterprise, donors, and researchers, as well as those at community level (i.e., students and parents) could develop professional knowledge, skills, and experience through working and sharing expertise with each other. This involvement would include working with quality research projects, supported by the donors, the private sector and other sources of funding, as shown in the following interview:

First, the students can express their opinion. ... It is also vital that everyone lives in freedom and dignity without being suppressed, as this allows people to be able to express their voices. (Senior academic researcher)

The participants believed that wider partnership for policy formation and practice requires input from the community of practice. The belief expressed was that policy development must, first, include critical research for a needs analysis amongst the community of practice, such as students, HEI staff, instructors and parents of the students, and then amongst the elites at the top of the hierarchy, including employers, labour market agencies, business owners, researchers, technical experts, and policymakers.

Once established, participants felt, any new policy must undergo experimentation to ensure quality work in practice, and it must be updated according to changing demands arising from socio-cultural needs, the market economy and global shifts, for social and economic development. This was reflected in the following:

The government needs to conduct more research into the demands from the labour market so as to prepare the curriculum for a teaching and learning environment relevant to labour market needs. (HEI leader and key practitioner)

Robust industry collaboration was seen as essential for the neoliberal agenda to cultivate soft and hard skills, creative value-added input, and research capacity amongst students and HEI practitioners. By establishing and strengthening this liaison body, it would attract more incoming investment, and merge stakeholders' ideas, and generate collaboration amongst stakeholders at different levels. In this way, HEIs could obtain additional funding sources from private enterprise, foundations, and business partnership projects for research, innovation, and development, as noted in the following:

Building an excellent linkage between HEIs and the industrial sector can allow students to undertake internships and study about working life in the company. (HEI dean)

We train them how to run a small business and we incubate them with an office, to strengthen their business until the business becomes big enough, to be able to leave the centre, and run their own office. (HEI rector)

6) Human resources inadequacy and multiple ideologies

This theme arose from the policy elites' conviction that issues resulting from reform efforts in the education sector have led to widespread deficits in quality human resources, financial support, and the socio-cultural, economic, and political context. The participants observed that the neoliberal agenda surfaced only a few years after the country had held its first national election in 1993 when national political stability remained fragile, and the country was acting under significant restraint while struggling to rebuild institutions.

Participants felt that complex issues resulted from human resource deficits. They spoke of neoliberalisation being unable to control and monitor the local HEI practitioners in running their business through profit-maximisation. These HEI owners reinvested in the education sector in the hope of making a profit through tuition fees along with other campus enterprises such as food stalls, meeting room rents, and parking. In fact, these HEIs were unable to generate income besides student fees, and quality rapidly deteriorated when each HEI competed with the others by lowering the cost of tuition.

The participants often referred to not having a mechanism for ‘research and development’ amongst poor quality HEIs, and not having wider collaboration with private companies and the government sector. To survive, these HEI owners avoided investment in more infrastructure such as laboratories, advanced teaching and learning equipment. Instead, they focused on less expensive social science degrees, while some HEIs managed to avoid obtaining an evaluation from the education ministry representative (i.e., the ACC), as explained in the following remark:

Our observation is that most of the time, particularly for private universities, they cut and paste a certificate from the website and put that up ... nobody cares, and nobody understands how to implement any regulations to stop us doing this. (Senior academic researcher)

In relation to the local context, the participants from groups of senior academic researchers and senior bureaucratic officers at ministry level believed that policy formation and practice was driven by external ideology from the donors, which resulted in a lack of fact-finding analysis, or feedback from grassroots-level practitioners, and their socio-cultural context. Most participants’ groups, except the development partners, perceived that the neoliberal ideology underpinned the hegemonic interests of stakeholders. They saw emerging policy elites across borders investing in the reform process within their economic strategy, while the practice was inevitable due to the national reliance on the private sector and foreign funding. Hence, most policy frameworks aligned to a prescription of structural adjustment policy agendas:

Our consciousness and responsibility is more essential; I think all these policies are developed just to please the donors to obtain a grant or loan approval. The government has all those plans for HE policies, but does not have a budget, or resources to implement it. They just expect funding to come from the development partnerships. ... Looking at the university fees, students would complain if it was more than \$US500 per year. ... Thus, it is impossible to ensure quality amongst Cambodian universities based on the current situation and university fee structure. (Senior academic researcher)

The participants’ views demonstrated a global neoliberal perspective within education with the reliance on external funding and ideology. This practice serves the dominant interests of powerful individuals undermining local needs at the national level and across borders. Participants revealed that reform can become a copy of western educational

practice, complexifying an emergent regional model. Thus, policy implementation neglects local tradition, socio-cultural values, and cultural, political and economic needs. As evidenced in the interview excerpt below, neoliberalism has led to rapid expansion, but poor quality standards in HEIs, resulting in graduates working in low-paid part-time jobs:

Globalisation, when we are not ready, carries the risk of neoliberalism and neo-colonialism, you know. We have the models from abroad ... the challenge for the top policymakers is to design a policy that provides Cambodian students with a solid foundation ... in science, the liberal arts, and a balance of the two. (Senior academic researcher)

The participants also saw potential danger in this arrangement:

[Country A] uses higher education as soft power. Now, [Country A] offers a lot of scholarships and the new university of Kratie [a remote province in Cambodia] is co-founded by a Cambodian foundation with some support from the [Country A]'s government, and one university of [Country A]. (Senior bureaucrat at ministry level)

From a 'market-driven' perspective, the participants recognised that development in the education sector was dominated by a free-market competition model. Participants saw that the state allowed the private sector to join with the government in operating universities, while perceiving this practice will continue to reflect a discrepancy between policy commitment and actual practice if it is done without reliable state regulation and control mechanisms:

Most of the time, particularly in a private university, they cut and paste policy visions from the website, and they put it there. There is a huge discrepancy. Nobody cares, nobody understands how to implement the policy, as there is no proper measurement. Also, if people talk about the quality of ACC, it can be doubtful how much the measurement has achieved, and whether what it would do was valid or invalid. (Senior academic researcher)

Policy development itself is just developed without actual consideration for the long-term needs of the nation, and how much could potentially happen. We are meant to report the number of policies in existence, yet when the annual congress

for policy evaluation is held, stakeholders simply invent checklists in terms of having developed certain policies. (Senior academic researcher)

7) Social value and career through a higher education degree

This theme emerged from the social structure within HE which has a strong influence on the neoliberal experience. There is a social rationale that a community of practice maintains educational values in tertiary education. These include choice of lifestyles, social status, the social value of educational quality, and the potential for employment. The participants discussed their experience and observations in a society which emphasises materialistic success and the power of interest groups. It was found that students lacked confidence in their study because of scepticism about HEIs' quality, and the scarcity of employment opportunities. Instead, they expected a degree would enable merely a career entry as opposed to the notion of a personal capacity for the development of quality soft and hard skills, and a critical mindset to deliver a better lifestyle and family life in the long term in the context of the changing labour market forces.

The participants, however, identified with the social values of the education sector in seeing a university degree as a sign of social status. They believed that those attending university obtained a degree rather than quality knowledge and skills that could lead towards employment and social well-being, as shown in the interview comments below:

We cannot assume that everyone wants the same level of social justice or equity, as they may feel that it is unnecessary. It is a question of social needs. (Senior academic researcher)

... in a developing country like Cambodia, or Africa, a degree is most of the time perceived not only as a qualification but as a sign of status. (Senior academic researcher)

We need to prove to society that those who have real capacity and knowledge could have the opportunity to get good job. ... some Cambodian intellectuals were sent to France to be educated, but they did not get employment when they returned to their homeland. This shows that getting a good education did not make their life any better ... (Senior academic researcher)

... students do not believe that obtaining a higher education degree will help them find employment ... They also think that the quality of Cambodian higher

education is not good enough to enable them to get suitable jobs, and there is no justice within the system of job offers or employment recruitment. (Senior bureaucrat at MoEYS level)

8) Research culture incentives through the professorship scheme

This theme emerged as the participants believed the neoliberalisation in the education sector desperately needs effective mechanisms for incentives and development. This would include a professional quality knowledge base, skills level, and experience amongst HEI practitioners and students. They supported the current neoliberalisation of education but were sceptical about the achievements of policy practice to date. In particular, participants from the senior academic researcher, HEI deans and staff (HEI practitioners), and academic union groups considered the shortfalls in policy implementation resulted from a lack of incentivisation for professional HEI practitioners, and high-quality intellectuals. As shown in the extracts below, there were many high-quality human resource personnel and intellectuals who had graduated overseas; however, they left the profession due to low salaries and insufficient incentivisation:

... the parents are not willing to pay... more than that \$US500 per year. However, they still pay for the private school in general education ... about \$US3000 per year. This reflects their mindset of undermining the resources needed for higher education service provision. (Senior academic researcher)

... in our country, most HEIs are teaching-oriented universities ... some professional staff and lecturers contribute to research publication, but still, the average output remains very low compared to other universities in advanced nations. (HEI leader and key practitioner)

This made me endorse a balance between teaching hours and office hours to do research. Actually, this neglect of attention to research is the weakness in Cambodian higher education system. (HEI leader and key practitioner)

Every year, students fee are as low as about \$US400 to \$US500 per student, which is not enough to support any operation for the higher education services. Therefore, based on this amount of money, we can imagine how the quality of higher education is. (Academic union deputy head)

When these HEIs has less budget, they could only hire low-quality staff or teachers. Thus, they can't compete in the market to generate other sources of income in the market. As you already know, most HEIs owners are business-oriented, so they do not understand much about other means for the university's development and are not critical enough about the essence of long-term development vision of the universities. Even now, these HEIs owners claim that they have graduated with a PhD, it is doubtful how they got it and from where? It appears that it is a kind of nominative PhD degrees, which does not possess valid qualifications or capacities. (Academic union deputy head)

These research participants believed that HEI practitioners require adequate support and incentives to promote better policy formation and practice under neoliberalism. As part of the Global South, Cambodia faces many resource constraints, and HEI practitioners in the education sector would prioritise monetary and social status benefits rather than quality skills and knowledge. In the following paragraphs, I explain the final emerging theme from the interview data, the contested terrain of professionalisation amongst HEI practitioners.

9) Contested terrain of professionalisation amongst HEI practitioners

Professionalisation here conveys the integrated activities and processes for which HEI practitioners require more competences, skills and qualifications through additional training and further education. Professionalisation under neoliberalism means that HEI practitioners require multiple skills, interdisciplinary qualifications and knowledge, specifically related to business, entrepreneurship, and management. The research participants, especially those from the senior academic researcher and HEI practitioner groups, also revealed that the neoliberalism reflected an intensive contest amongst HEI professional staff/practitioners and emerging policy elites from corporate backgrounds and mindsets. This intensive terrain of competition underpinned neoliberal affinities where policy elites, HEI practitioners, and emerging policy elites appeared from multidisciplinary source professions, such as the external field of education sectors—corporate/business, investment, political and military backgrounds, and even from less qualified certified backgrounds.

The policy practice reflected state-corporate-professional interests through enhanced symbolic political power effects. These interests were fostered by policy elite hierarchy effects within the emerging governmentality, and new public management that allows

affinities for hybridised professional intermediation amongst the emerging policy elites. This emerging policy practice has enhanced neoliberalism's cultural-political belief with a robust and complex neoliberal governmentality that benefits neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberalism benefits emerging policy elites who treat the education sector as a commodity to be exchanged through a calculus of profit-maximisation. Under this neoliberal advance, many professional staff and students have experienced exploitation by corporate HEIs, through reinvestment and deterioration within the education sector. The owners of the HEIs expect profit maximisation by maximising the number of students enrolments and the fees whereas the professional staff and other policy practitioners are employed on sub-standard payments. This resonated with the ACC deputy head:

I think that most private HEIs would choose short-term benefit of profits (money as income) rather than quality, even though there is a tendency that the better quality of the university, the more enrolment rate come into the university. Take for example, one leading private university in Cambodia nowadays, ... the institution charges the students' fees as much as about five times compared to the price of other universities. This conveys that most private HEIs do not want to invest enough capital such as hiring more qualified staff, teachers, and promoting more facilities due to either their hesitation of bankruptcy with huge capital loss or lack of capacity and vision in long-term investment. Thus, their low standard remains the same, and they instead try to compete with each other through lowering the students' fees and hope to attain a short-term profit. (ACC deputy head)

Such an unsuccessful connection is mainly reflected through their capacities. For some universities that are capable, they can make such collaboration happen. For instance, at Institute of Technology of Cambodia (ITC) and the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP). However, due to lack of resources, private HEIs could not make all those industrial linkages or connections. In addition, due to lack of financial budget, those private HEIs cannot afford to make such connection because that would require them to recruit more capable staff, and teachers or lecturers. It also requires a budget when getting an evaluation; thus, those HEIs would choose not to make the connection in the industrial linkage. (ACC deputy head)

Participants also disclosed that the neoliberal environment had promoted HEI practitioners from multiple disciplines where professional knowledge and knowledge development power have been shifted to those emerging elites from outside the educational science background, so as to exploit the education sector. Those emerging policy elites also have influential power that potentially streamlines and expands their network into governmental technology spheres. As opposed to working for public spheres, HEIs have pursued dominant market interests, promoting self-seeking individuals, and risking the charge of returning to neo-colonialism. As in the interview extract below, participants understood that neoliberal policies allowed for HEI leaders and practitioners with qualifications from outside an education background or profession to invest their own capital into an HEI:

It got the influential trend from generation to generation. ... Moreover, the concept of quality is new for Cambodia. And we know that those who run the universities are mainly businesspeople, who are not from an education background. Thus, it is quite difficult to see when these people are coming from an outside background of education field; they do not have a concept in education to manage the HEIs. It is because managerial leadership requires knowledge, specialisation skills, soft skills, and human knowledge, etc. It is not the same system; it is mixed, and it is difficult to work together. (ACC deputy head)

... people realise that education can bring about economic growth through attaining income and wealth. However, it promotes 'individualistic thinking', rather than promoting ideas of democratic citizenship or collective interests. (Senior academic researcher)

The issues lie in the capacity of the staff and lecturer. These people do not have the professional or qualified capacity and skills to bring in consultant work, doing research to collaborate with partner enterprises. When these HEIs has less budget, they could only hire low-quality staff or teachers. Thus, they can't compete in the market to generate other sources of income in the market. As you already know, most HEIs owners are business-oriented, so they do not understand much about other means for the university's development and are not critical enough about the essence of long-term development vision of the universities. (ACC deputy head)

In this sense, the short-term goal of profit maximisation is the priority amongst these corporate-interest HEI practitioners. Student fees have now become important for the

education business community. Many HEIs, especially the private ones, have substandard services, reflecting a practice much like a ‘diploma factory’. The interview below exposes the issue of deficits in professional skills amongst HEI leaders and practitioners:

We need to upgrade the instructional staff or lecturers and deploy them to needy universities in the rural and provincial areas, so that we can strengthen the quality of teaching and learning in HEIs. (HEI rector and a senior academic researcher)

Participants comments resonated with the idea that many emerging corporate-interest policy elites have entered the education business through neoliberal capitalist governmentality and the free-market competition rationale. In the interview excerpt below, the participant refers to the gap between official policy and practical achievement in relation to curriculum quality, HEI practitioner capacity, and staff/teacher capacity:

We cannot fulfil the expectations from the existing higher education policy due to the lack of material resources, buildings, classrooms, laboratory equipment, and so forth. I see so many shortages in our higher education sector, especially financial and human resources. (HEI rector and a senior academic researcher)

5.3.2 Emerging discrepancies in cultural positions

This section explains emerging different cultural positions in the participants’ perspectives through the similarities, differences, and contrasting views gathered from the research participants. Findings concerning different cultural politics and beliefs amongst policy elites have significant implications for this study. From the ‘social construct’ theory, outlined in Chapter 2, different beliefs amongst participants were shown to have a powerful influence on attitudes, reactions, and performance concerning policy formation and practice in the local context. Here I explain how they appeared and their effects on the (local) community.

Similarities

Each participant from the policy elite groups reflected similar cultural beliefs. Participants across groups shared common perspectives regarding a need for updating the education curriculum, facilities, and higher capacity and standards amongst HEI practitioners. Another similarity existed in the understanding of the need for equitable access to HE, more subject choices, and more course schedule options. Similar beliefs

emerged on issues regarding low-quality educational services, disparities of equity and access in the education sector, widening gaps of policy commitment and practical achievement (reflecting symbolic policy), the lack of ‘public-private-community’ partnerships, and a lack of student career pathways. Most participants, except those representing the development partner side, shared a common belief that there was a shortage of attention to local needs for social justice and well-being amongst all individuals, yet a plentiful supply of funding for projects serving the interests of market capitalism and foreign investors and their ideology.

Differences

Participants who were representatives from the professional academic union adjudged low-quality education and gaps in practical achievement resulted from funding deficits to private HEIs. They accused the government and funding agencies of tipping the distribution of support to private HEIs, leading to social stratification and double standards in the education services. Private HEIs expected to increase their income through the number of student enrolments. It is unsurprising, though, as this union was established and led by the group of private HEIs. Alternatively, senior academic researchers understood that issues were rooted in the local socio-cultural traditions and political practice. As for successful graduates and alumni, they expressed hopes for quality involvement with community activities, building experiences together throughout their study. They believed that current practice serves influential individuals, rather than developing students’ practical skills and experiences for a professional career and social mobility.

Different cultural positions

Findings revealed an emerging discrepancy in cultural ‘*belief*’ and mindset amongst the domestic and external policy elites, which offers essential findings on the practice of neoliberalism. I refer to domestic policy elites as all research participants who are Cambodian citizens and have been involved with key duties in the process of policy formation and practice in the education sector. External policy elites are those people working for the projects of development partners (i.e., funding agencies) through their areas of expertise in the education sector, who believed there was less influence from the legacy of the past in the current sector reform efforts, apart from the destruction of infrastructure. However, local policy elites strongly believed that the legacy of the past remained influential.

These contrasting beliefs offer an insight into community of practice of neoliberalisation in the education sector being shaped by different cultural positions when implementing a neoliberal agenda that is shaped by the historical legacy both horizontally (the community of practice dimension) and vertically (the governmental technology dimension). Within the practice community, the historical legacy is embedded in bureaucratic hierarchy in terms of the ideology, mindset, and working culture amongst HEI practitioners. At the national level, the historical legacy influences the state's rationale for political practice through government technology thresholds, mindsets, and experiences amongst the policy elites. At a global cultural-political level, the historical legacy manifests global technology through postcolonialism, cultural imperialism, technology discourses, and power relations within the geopolitical and global spheres of neoliberalism.

First, external policy elites have overlooked the essence of cultural position/beliefs in practice, specifically the historical legacy, socio-cultural norms, and traditional political practice in the country. This skewed perception has severe impacts on Global South Cambodia as the development partners represent significant power when forming and evaluating the neoliberal agenda. This cultural position emerged through horizontal spaces amongst the community of practice. The historical legacy was also embedded within the vertical spaces of power relations from the top government hierarchy in the education sector down to HEIs.

Secondly, the historical legacy is also reflected through postcolonialism's influence at a global level. As a strong political project, neoliberalism reflects the potential for neo-colonisation, postcolonialism, and cultural imperialism, where the neoliberal capitalist agenda reinvests in Global South Cambodia through different forms of practice of the former colonial purpose (Andy Green, 1997; Guion Akdağ & Swanson, 2018; Hoogvelt, 2001; Rizvi et al., 2006; Yang, 2013; Young, 2003). Aided by global government technology in the 21st century, this historical legacy also existed through the neoliberal universe that manifests and shapes neoliberal practice within 'affinity spheres' of neoliberal transformation. Neoliberalism is guided by powerful political discourses and economic theory through social media and modern technology (Giroux, 2005, p. 14), and fostered by the 'affinity spheres' of the historical legacy to secure and gear privileges and benefits to the capitalist world.

Finally, the discrepancy in cultural beliefs amongst policy elites reflected neoliberalism as a sphere of competition between the historical legacy and the ideology of modernity

oriented towards corporate interests. The advance in neoliberalism, thus, brings the shift in professionalisation towards corporate interests (Larson, 2013; Peck, 2010; Reed, 2018). Global South Cambodia's current neoliberalism reflects an increasing drive for state-corporate-professional interests in neoliberal practice through which emerging policy elites have reinvested in deterioration in the education sector.

5.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I elaborated the research findings in regard to the logic of practice of HE policy amongst the community of HEI practitioners. I analysed this logic through meanings from the data I had obtained as policy documents and interviews from the research fieldwork. First, I offered a description of the implications of neoliberalism in Global South Cambodia through a review and analysis of the existing HE policy documents from the MoEYS and the RGC. The findings reveal that neoliberalism in Global South Cambodia reflected the reform agenda geared towards serving dominant interests in the emerging policy elites and interest groups throughout multiple (influential or powerful) poles across the globe. Nevertheless, these emerging policy elites and interest groups have an interdependent relationship throughout the neoliberal sphere that range across levels of practice—the community of practice, the national policy agenda, and global policy agenda levels.

Secondly, in this chapter, I elaborated meanings from data obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews with the study's research participants. What stands out from the interview data reflects a greater complexity in HE policy formation and practice under the neoliberal environment in Global South Cambodia. I explained the complex meaning that emerged from the interview data through nine emerging themes frequently commented on by the policy elites as research participants in this study. In addition, I also highlighted the emerging key contrasting and similar cultural positions and mindsets amongst policy elite groups, which I classified based on local policy elites, external policy elites, and the global network of aid agencies involved in reform efforts for neoliberalism amongst the Global South nations. Through the similarities and cultural discrepancies amongst the perspectives of the policy elite groups, these emerging themes stand out as crucial findings to support the conceptual framework in this study.

Chapter 6 Contextual Realities of Neoliberalisation in Higher Education

Recent postcolonial insistence on the hybridization of identities has revealed the irrelevance of the search for national identity that was prominent in the postcolonial thinking of the 1960s. Nationalism itself, the essay suggests, is a version of colonialism in the suppression and appropriation of local identities for a national identity. All identity, historically speaking, is a product of one or another form of colonialism, and hybridization of identities is an ongoing historical process. (Dirlik, 2002, p. 428)

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings relating to the first research sub-question: ‘What effects has the colonial past had on HE policy in Cambodia — and what effects has globalisation had on HE policy in Cambodia?’ In this chapter, I outline discrete key findings within a larger picture of the neoliberalisation of the education sector by presenting three main findings. First, I explain how the findings connect to the existing theory of neoliberal governmentality, postcolonialism, and globalisation transformation geared to an emerging governmentality and a ‘regime of truth’ towards which the community of practice drastically shapes the rationale of policy practice. Secondly, I present how my findings could relate to the theoretical and conceptual framework of my study to shed light on its usefulness and relevance (or lack thereof) as the application of this study. Through this analysis, I contribute knowledge from this study to the field of HE studies in policy formation and practice. Finally, I explore how my study could contribute to methodological knowledge that is relevant to the study and analysis of policy elite participants in the Global South context, for the interviews contribute to methodological knowledge of in-depth semi-structure interviews with policy elites.

This chapter focuses on understanding state’s rationale for governmentality in neoliberalisation through the lenses of genealogy, governmentality, postcolonialism, and globalisation theories. HE policy formation and practice in Global South Cambodia reflects a complex terrain of ideological contestation, power struggles, and power relations. Findings revealed the historical legacy remained influential in the

government's adoption and development of the neoliberal agenda; HEI practitioners inherited a colonial and traumatised mindset from their history and were systematically shaped by the interplay of globalisation and postcolonialism. Neoliberal governmentality demands state apparatuses in the technology of governmentality are appropriate for a dynamic context in which the historical legacy of traditions of socio-cultural and political practice match the agenda and political economy of modernity. Problematisation, genealogy, conceptualisation and discourse analysis are powerful tools for finding out how state apparatuses for technologies of governmentality make rationales for policy choice and practice (Fimyar, 2008; Foucault, 1991a, 1991b; Hodgson, 2019).

The study identified that policy elites' perspectives reflected contrasting, distinct, and similarities perspectives regarding the rationale and drive for the neoliberalisation of the education sector. Neoliberalism was manifested, shaped, and reinvested by emerging policy elites across global and national levels, and the community of practice, through ideologies and ongoing manifested logics, driven mainly by the market and the state's resource deficits. Neoliberalisation, thus, was carried out through the hegemonic ideologies and discourses from the West and was reinvested and shaped during policy implementation by the emerging policy elites, and the community of practice. This contextual reality reflects the neoliberal environment as a terrain of ideological interplay and power dynamics amongst the emerging policy elites and the community of practice, where the state's apparatuses reflected an emerging governmentality rooted in the 'governmentality culture'.

Likewise, this chapter elaborates on the four discussion themes: postcolonial contingency, globalisation transformation, the local 'governmentality culture', and the geopolitics of ideological contestation. These themes are predominantly rooted in the local 'culture' mindset and community of practice, namely the local administrative system, the bureaucratic hierarchy, human resource capacity, and HEI infrastructure. The community of practice adopted and developed rationales that are shaped by the socio-cultural norms and their inherited mindset and experiences, together with external influences (i.e., the hegemonic ideologies) and ongoing power dynamics at play amongst the emerging policy elites. I now begin the discussion by revisiting the findings.

6.2 Conceptual findings

To date, research on neoliberalisation has indicated a range of issues, including symbolic policy practice, double standards in education services, deprivation of professional values

and academic freedom, political interference, deficits in human resources, facilities and funding, and socially divided access to tertiary education leading towards social stratification amongst citizens (Guion Akdağ & Swanson, 2018; Olssen, 2002, 2017; Sen, 2019; Tikly, 2003). In this study, however, I strive for the next level of critical logics within which I can draw on several scenarios, including neoliberal governmentality, ideologies influence, technologies of power, and appropriation across levels—the global and national levels, and the community of practice.

In Chapters 1, 2, and 4, I illustrated how the neoliberalisation agenda was influenced by worldwide hegemonic ideologies, emerging policy elites and a network of global funding agencies manifested through various spaces. In addition, neoliberalisation was geared under state apparatuses of emerging governmentality manifested by the emerging local policy elites with networks reaching across borders. Findings revealed that, for the community of practice of neoliberalisation policy practice, the dominant themes emerged as terrains of state apparatuses through the ‘governmentality culture’ and the ideological interplay amongst policy elites across borders. This neoliberal environment, however, has been reinvested and geared to serve the dominant interests of the market and powerful individuals. I now move on to the elaboration of the rationales of the contextual realities of reform.

6.2.1 Postcolonial contingency

Findings from this study reflected the postcolonial theory of Dirlik (1994, 2002) and Tikly (2001). Postcolonial influences existed in the form of global transformation within the capitalist world economy manifested in the global relations and political organisation of global capitalism, exchanges of trade and investments, and flexible production (Dirlik, 1994, 2018); this is the process of global exchange of economic commodities where the relations are comprehended by such global binaries of political organisation as the hegemonic nations and the nations of the periphery, or the Global North and Global South. Fanon (1963) argued that reform efforts remain influenced by the colonial legacy.

In Cambodia, the genealogy of the neoliberalisation and the rehabilitation began after the war, when the national stability and infrastructure emerged from scratch when the first state university, Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), was reopened from one or two empty buildings and almost-zero human resources. The university’s roles during this rehabilitation period were only in training in pedagogy and educating a handful of political administrators funded by the socialist bloc nations, namely Soviet Union and

Vietnam. The contextual reality reflected the nation's desperate need for support in both funding and economic activity from the advanced/powerful nations. The tragedy of colonisation and civil wars, however, left behind a historical legacy amongst the survivors. Psychologically, they have suffered mental problems through traumatising experiences, despair, and remorse. As for domestic intellectuals and administrators, there are emerging bureaucrats who got professional credentials through ad-hoc local training or overseas short-course training during the rehabilitation stage, and those with high capacity survive through being obedient to the new regime, as articulated by one participant:

After the war, ... nothing else left besides one or two buildings. Regarding the human resources, it was almost zero. ... higher education rehabilitation emerged through the effort and hard work of the government after January 7, 1979. All the buildings were depleted of human resources and was reopened in 1979 only for pedagogical training ... The latest year... in 2013, there were lots of remaining of chemical substances which is left over from the Russian funding period. Thus ... what remains as resources, there were almost none. (HEI leader and key practitioner)

Findings also revealed policy elites across borders treated Cambodia as a terrain for their reinvestment in a neoliberal environment; this reinvestment required Global South Cambodia to adopt the hegemony discourses, experiences, and ideologies from the West and their regional alliances through their conditions for aid and the structural adjustment policy agenda. Moreover, the policy practice is guided and benchmarked by the regional and global framework of references and standards for quality measurement and evaluation with less relevance to local aspects of socio-cultural contexts. Thus, the neoliberalisation agenda reflects an ongoing mission where the nations of the periphery strive to operate within an unlimited benchmarking framework for excellence under the reinvestment of global inequality and social stratification through global exchanges of trade, culture, and organised political economy that serve the dominant interests of the hegemonic ideologies of the neoliberal agenda. As participants revealed,

Policy development itself is just developed without actual consideration to the long-term needs of the nation and whether how much achievement has been successfully made. ... Then when annual congress for policy evaluation, various stakeholders make checklists in terms of having developed certain policies, not

caring to what extent those policies have been implemented and achieved. Policymakers just count for the number of policies that have been developed. (Senior academic researcher)

I reviewed those policies which were developed during the 2000s or 2010s ... there are policies when the World Bank offered grants to the government a few years ago during 2010-2011 and the recent ones 2015-2016. Since then, they have been developing policies regarding good governance and financing. ... strengthening research capacity ... When the help is gone, the research has finished too. (Senior academic researcher)

According to Dirlik (2018), all national identities of the colonised are the products of colonialism. Through an ongoing historical process, colonialism has transformed local identities into versions of colonialism and the hybridisation of identities, through either the suppression or the appropriation of local identities, for a national identity (p. 428). In Cambodia, postcolonialism is rooted in the colonial legacy that has powerfully shaped the local culture, mindsets, experiences, human resource capacity and national values of the education system. As a participant stated,

We have seen that in Cambodia, those who lived through the colonial era had suffered more or less with mental problems. As myself, I also received suffering influences due to loss of the family member. The higher education system itself is not something we should take note of as a bad influence from the previous regime, but only influences on human's psychological insights and trauma. (HEI leader and key practitioner)

The postcolonial legacies remain strong in the top levels of the bureaucracy and the community of practice, including the governing and administration hierarchy, legal system, and mindset found amongst senior bureaucrats from previous regimes. This community of practice mainly includes those involved in the HE policy practice at the ministry bureaucratic departmental level, in HEIs, and in the local community of HEI consumers, such as students, parents, and others in the community. The historical legacy remained embedded in their mindsets, capacity, and socio-cultural lifestyles that shaped the policy practice and expected it to move towards certain practice and forms of civilisation based on the existing contextual reality of resources and environment. In fact, the past French colony has built a foundation for administration and an education system following their model to train local human resources in Cambodia that led to social

stratification and the suppression of the local people through colonisation. As a participant explained,

French colonisation shaped Cambodian people's mindset that attaining education is for social mobility and to upgrade their status as a civil servant and to get out of farming. All these ideologies continue to have influence until the current generation, and so far, it is still a part of the impact of the French generation. (Senior academic researcher)

6.2.2 Globalisation transformation–cultural hybridisation

The globalisation agenda has dominated world development projects by supra-national funding agencies through direct collaborations, and their alliances (in the region) to reinforce the neoliberal transformation in HE reform worldwide. These agencies include giant international organisations, such as the IMF, the World Bank, the ADB), and other international treaty organisations such as World Trade Organisation (WTO), General Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS), and other United Nations' charter organisations. Tikly (2001) classified globalisation into three schools of thought—the hyper globalist approach, the sceptical approach, and the transformationalist approach. According to the 'hyper globalist', globalisation has already been spread all over the world through the triumph of the global capitalist agenda and has governed as a global culture and civil society. Andy Green (1997) noted that the power of national governance could hold fundamental responsibility and became a terrain of contestation and power struggles amongst the emerging elites across borders through the global governance network and technologies in the information superhighway and global market. In addition, social inequality surges amongst the low-income countries, resulting lives of the poor being fragile and miserable. As for the 'sceptical' thinkers, the globalisation movement reflected uncertainty in the creation of influences on trade, politics and regionalisation, but has caused more global crises as a result of capitalism and a greater polarisation between the 'developed' and 'developing' countries (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999). Widespread policy borrowing became the means for education development through 'partial internationalisation' funded by multilateral agencies, and this resulted in complex issues in a worldwide reinvestment of inequality in national societies (Tikly, 2001) and between the advanced nations and those of the periphery (Andy Green, 1997). In this study, the contextual reality of neoliberalisation

reflected fundamentally through the transformationalist approach, thus, this aspect will be further elaborated upon in the following.

Globalisation transformation

From the perspective of the ‘transformationalist approach’, globalisation is believed to have substantially transformed the education model worldwide, specifically through the agenda of neoliberalisation. Hence, the influences of globalisation and neoliberalisation are interdependent, bringing a hegemonic education model from the West to the periphery nations, whereas the neoliberalisation process itself was manifested in globalisation influences through structural adjustment policies, internationalisation, global and regional benchmarking frameworks, and educational exchange activities amongst the developing and advanced nations (Andy Green, 1997; Tikly, 2001). In particular, the major impacts of globalisation on the neoliberalisation of education systems amongst the developing countries are mainly seen under the conditions of a political project, where multiple policy elites emerge across borders worldwide. Neoliberalisation in Cambodia was manifested in a range of globalisation transformations such as trade liberalisation, education system internationalisation, and development projects funded by the global funding agency network. Through the neoliberalisation framework, not only the policy elites, but also international scholars, HEI practitioners, and investors have become deeply involved in policy formation and practice processes. Globalisation transformation and neoliberalisation emerged to have an interdependent relationship and allowed spaces for policy elites across border to join in shaping the local community of practice that serves the dominant benefits to the hegemonic market and powerful individuals. As participants indicated

So, globalisation, when we are not ready, there is carry of risks of neoliberalism and neo-colonialism, you know? We have the models from abroad, the ways of teaching, the ways of thinking that of the Cambodian may not be always consider. ... the negative part is too many advisors. You have international higher education task force, the World Bank and other donors came to help. And then for political reasons, the World Bank left Cambodia pushing on human rights. (Senior academic researcher)

And globalisation also carries the risks. Number one, the positive side is that it is always good for our students and lecturers to get exposed to the outside world, either outside Cambodia or foreign visitors to come, for onside exposure to

foreign influenced. However, globalisation may suppress the emerging model that is reflecting the real need of Cambodia. (Senior academic researcher)

However, rather than naively felt optimism about the rapid expansion of the globalisation movement worldwide, scholars supporting globalisation transformation were pessimistic if the globalisation movement has led to a global era of economic, political, and cultural integration because they see there are reinvestments of historically engendered forces. One of the forces is postcolonialism or neo-colonialism, where social transformation is geared towards serving the dominant interests of the hegemonic capitalist world. With the rise of globalisation transformation, postcolonialism remained to ameliorate the situation and was manifested by the hegemonic interest groups of the global aid agency network. Postcolonialism emerged through the influences from globalisation manifested in the political-economic agenda that has been constructed, offshore trade exchanges, historical legacy, and the emerging structural adjustment policy with funding conditions and free-market competition on the neoliberal agenda. Reinvestment of postcolonialism is fostered through globalisation and geopolitical influences by the hegemonic nations from the Global North world and formed as a 'regime of truth' that means social reform under the neoliberal agenda is geared towards serving dominant interests of the hegemonic world rather than the local needs. As Guion Akdağ and Swanson (2018) articulated it, neo-colonialism concerns the previous settings of economic interests with the former protectorates, and remains to ameliorate various forms of colonial control over the peripheries (p. 72). In the neoliberal environment, the education sector reflected a dependency on foreign funding, while also creating disparities amongst a population wishing to attain tertiary education with quality standards. In fact, globalisation has reinforced postcolonialism in creating a new form of global stratification, inequality, and deterioration of the well-being of the lives of the mass of people (Held et al., 1999), as participants explained:

Higher education reforms policies have been made under donor support, which can be said to be donor driven. ... this means that the World Bank could have the opportunity to embed the neoliberal discourses within the policies as well due to their requirement for structural adjustment policies and conditions made when offering funding. (Senior academic researcher)

Students from low-income family usually could only afford to study at low quality university, whereas those from rich family can afford to study in better

universities. This reflects that there was no social justice amongst students because the current higher education system has become a machine that divides social status amongst students. ... the job market today is mostly based on the name of the university; they give job priority to those who graduated from a good university. (Senior academic researcher)

Furthermore, the transformationalists believed that globalisation brought forward the emerging (policy) elites amongst the poorer nations, elites who have a strong influence on the core of global economy and the social relationships. As participants revealed,

When there is a need for policy development, they search for consultants. They need those who obtained PhD overseas and are knowledgeable regarding the issues to support in policy formation. The education ministry faced limitation in both the capacity of policymakers and qualified human resources. ... external consultants are needed to support the work. (Senior academic researcher)

Disparities and inequality emerged at national and global levels. The poor and socially excluded emerged not only in the developing world, but also amongst the advanced nations. As far as neoliberalism has gone deep into the social structure, social disparities have increased. It is the tyranny of the market, where all forms of social services and institutions are perceived to have potential for investment and are utilised for profit maximisation when being regulated into neoliberal environment. Under rapid growth of globalisation transformation, neoliberalisation has become the catalyst for vibrant market and social services development, where the governance power of the local government has been weakened because it is rationalised to let the market play. Instead, the state is rationalised to regulate only spaces where the market cannot perform or to enable the environment/regulation for market to enter such spaces. Instead, emerging international institutions take the predominant roles through international laws to influence and govern the national government, as there has been mistrust in state's transparency and efficiency in redistribution to the market and society. Transformationalists believe that globalisation has substantially influenced the world, specifically through education policy, but also established more complex issues through multiple levels of inequality globally, regionally, and nationally. As participants revealed,

The integration of this country into the global community, starting with ASEAN and the other international organisations ... allow us to learn something from those

outside worlds, and allow the policymakers to experience what is happening outside there. (Representative from private company/industry)

I would say the private investment, the privatisation is good in that sense because they bring resources, they bring modern technology, new perspectives, which is good, but it is still very expensive. So, if that continues, that will create a gap within the country: those who are highly educated and those who are educated in a different level. (Representative from private company/industry)

In this global movement of change, education's role became the terrain of free-market competition, conditioning schools to be 'star' or 'sink' schools and creating widening social stratification and greater burdens upon the poor and less powerful in society. This practice, unfortunately, has dramatically affected education services in Cambodia, where HEIs suffered from budget constraints imposed by the state and require the framework of neoliberalism to achieve self-funding through student fees and other business opportunities.

In the neoliberal environment, HEI services in Global South Cambodia experienced rapid expansion; however, there is widespread poor quality, and endless comparisons and benchmark-matching frameworks. This phenomenon is fostered by globalisation transformation worldwide; the globalisation of education has resulted in differentiated environment where a top tier of HEIs will become globally competitive, a middle tier become just 'good', whilst the majority are third tier institutions that are marginally competitive and produce graduates for low-skilled jobs (Ilon, 1994, p. 102). Moreover, this educational practice has deteriorated and been exploited by powerful individuals across borders. Participants mentioned as follows:

So there are two things, I mean, there has more choices, people can go and they can have access to higher education but will limit the ability to measure or to inspect or to look at the quality, not purely from the paper point of view. That means the investment that the parents made, the students made, financial investment such as school fee or whatever that they invested does not result in the output that is deserved. (Representative from private company/industry)

As now the trends from the ASEAN community, the pattern from the globalisation, the emphasis of major of study moves towards STEM. They consider that STEM subjects have high potential in the employment market. Few

people studied these majors, which require practical labour work with the machine and in the open air. ... The global market now lacks people with STEM-related skills, and there is less demand emphasised in social science such as, accounting, economic, and marketing, and so forth because they also have labour forces with these skills. (Head of academic union)

Globalisation also demands HE plays a more flexible role. These flexible roles aim to improve the education services to produce graduates who become employable as well as to live in the changing labour market environment. This is because the global economy has more or less positive or negative effects on education reform at different times (Tikly, 2001), which requires government mechanisms to maintain education's roles that are in opposition to the status quo so that marginalised constituencies can be protected (p. 166). The globalisation movement has had significant success in influencing change with the periphery nations and is the cause of the drawbacks resulting from the complex nature of the globalisation transformation and the neoliberal agenda manifested by the emerging policy elites. As participants revealed,

The Western world system was imported later, which is difficult to be implemented as the overall system has been heavily dominated by the communism system. This requires more work to do. Moreover, the concept of quality is new for Cambodia. And we know that those who run the universities are mainly businesspeople, who are not from an education background. Thus, it is quite difficult to see when these people are coming from an outside background of education field; they do not have a concept in education to manage the higher education institution. It is because managerial leadership requires knowledge, specialisation skills, soft skills. It is not the same system; it is mixed, and it is difficult to work together. (Representative from academic union/committee)

This exemplifies how should the application of STEM education project into HEIs in Cambodia be conducted in response to the needs of local people's culture and way of life. Considerations are the required STEM facilities, qualified trainers, the market demands, and how should the education of STEM be conducted in relevant to the way students, instructors, and private sector in collaboration to produce graduates that can fulfil the needs for practical skills for the market needs. (Head of academic union)

Despite the bright sides of globalisation transformation, a major challenge of the neoliberal agenda is that it has been increasingly geared to providing services predominantly to the market and individuals from elites rather than to providing the public goods to enhance social justice and well-being amongst all individual (Andy Green, 1997; Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 2000; Hoogvelt, 2001). In addition, the transformation in education reflected the ‘cultural imperialism’ that potentially brings about cultural hybridisation due to the ‘localisation of globalisation’ into regional and global frameworks of reference (Robertson et al., 2002). These agendas and other forms of knowledge production and circulation of cultural commodities foster a knowledge-driven economy rather than the national interest for knowledge production. This means that it is not the neoliberal system itself that has implemented these changes but key players in the community of practice who have claimed to become HEIs’ professional leaders and practitioners in the education sector.

In Cambodia, most of these people got into power to invest in knowledge production through capital and networking with elites in power, and based on degrees obtained from local substandard HEI services. Based on the neoliberal logic of free-market competition, these elites have become the owners of HEIs and influence the rationales for HEIs’ practice. For instance, unprofessional HEI practitioners could not find vibrant income generation activities beside expecting student fees to be a means for operating the HEIs in the free-market competition environment. Thus, the issues of widespread poorer-quality HEIs services are common in these societies, as one participant described:

... almost 100% per cent of HEIs base their incoming only from student fees. ... it is not even enough to pay for the teacher. In education, it is not only about the teacher’s spending; there is an expenditure requirement of other sectors, such as on professional development, etc. ... However, they do not have enough budget for that training. In addition, they need resources for facilities to be equipped to support the teaching and research of students to meet the market needs. Thus, the universities in our country cannot support all these needs. (Representative from academic union/committee)

It was not long after independence in 1953, during the Sihanouk regime, that Cambodia’s human resources, as well as HE facilities for quality development, were growing rapidly. The colonial legacy, civil wars, and multiple shifts of ideologies remain influential in the existing system until mid-1990s. Then, the arrival of the neoliberal ideology brought in

structural adjustment policies and the neoliberalisation agenda was applied to the tertiary education sector, and the first private university was established in 1997. Due to pressure from the international community and the funding agency network, this paradigm shift occurred after a decade of a state of embargo that had been in place since 1979. Since then, the process of neoliberalisation reflected a terrain of contest between tradition and modernity, the historical legacy and drive of hegemonic ideologies from the globalisation and neoliberalisation agendas. As Ayres (2000a) noted, “tradition and modernity are effectively enmeshed in Cambodia, with the weight of the past (tradition), associated with the local sociocultural milieu, mediating the development imperatives of global modernity” (p. 448). Fergusson and Masson (1997) observed that Cambodian education practice was severely impacted by the influx of multiple ideologies from civil and regional wars from 1970 to 1975 and was destroyed during the genocide regime from 1975 to 1979. A participant revealed that,

Specifically, the hybrid form of governing means that we received some influences from western ideas through development discourses imported by donor organisations as well as other international organisations that provide funding to Cambodia. Those discourses include promoting ‘freedom’, autonomy etc. are embedded in current Cambodian education policies. (Senior academic researcher)

In fact, the original intention of the RGC in adopting the neoliberal agenda was to align with structural adjustment policy in the early 1990s endorsed by the development partners and the major funding agencies. The neoliberalisation agenda, then, contributed to rapid growth in tertiary education enrolments and system expansion. The reform effort reflected a typology of global strategies through the dominant international aid network and the application of the neoliberal education model from the West onto nations across the world, such as in Africa and East Asia (Daniel, 2019; Fimyar, 2008; Gyamera & Burke, 2018; Jansen, 2002; Mamdani, 2018; Manuel, 2015; Tikly, 2003) and in advanced nations (Durazzi, 2018; Guion Akdağ & Swanson, 2018; Heraud, 2017; Olssen & Peters, 2005).

Hence, neoliberalisation reflected government logics for reform based on a multifaceted rationality and a symbolic policy geared towards a practice of social stratification and services for dominant interests among emerging elites at global and national levels. While there is a commitment to improving the system, the neoliberalisation agenda reflected the practice that HEIs are geared towards serving the dominant interests of the

market and the hegemonic development/reform agenda of the West. The practice was manifested by the community of practice of unprofessional HEI practitioners treating HEIs as investment entities for profit maximisation. As explained by a participant,

The issues lie in the capacity of the staff and lecturer. These people do not have the professional or qualified capacity and skills to bring in consultant work, doing research to collaborate with enterprise partners. When these HEIs have less budget, they could only hire low-quality staff or teachers. ... most HEIs owners are business-oriented, so they do not understand much about other means for the university's development and are not critical enough about the essence of long-term development vision of the universities. (Representative from academic union/committee)

6.2.3 The state's emerging governmentality

Discourse is essential for government to lead national policy because it involves political power and expressions. Olssen (2004a) argues that policy is the voice of the state and that our analysis of the discourses gives us the power to conceptualise government's relation to social settings as a form of state political apparatus in the wider picture. In Cambodia, there are multifaceted rationales for the neoliberalisation; the scenarios explored here exhibited gaps between the policy and expected quality implementations, as described by a participant:

For me, implementation is still lacking, but the policy is not of any shortage. The current policies are correct; it has right perspectives and visions, but there are always shortages in the actual implementation. (HEI leader and key practitioner)

The existing gaps in neoliberalism in the education sector in Cambodia reflect the imagination of the symbolic value of policy (Jansen, 2002), and are geared under the imaginaries of postcolonialism and globalisation transformation (Andy Green, 1997; Olssen et al., 2004; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Rizvi et al., 2006; Tikly, 2001). Neoliberalism also resulted in a reinvestment of social disparity, and global inequality serving dominant interests in the market and powerful individuals (Guion Akdağ & Swanson, 2018; Held et al., 1999; Hoogvelt, 2001). Despite the established neoliberal policy agenda being enforced into practice, the policy implementation within the community of practice reflects significant gaps. There are gaps regarding resource inputs, and implementation

effectiveness such as substandard education services, insufficient collaboration amongst stakeholders, and access disparities. This is described by a participant as follows:

This is the time that we need more support from the development partners, especially ... 1) send the students to study overseas and get qualification, or 2) allow foreign experts or professor from overseas university to come and train students or staff at our university locally. ... So, I think it is essential that support need to be made on help the policy implementation in Cambodia become successful. ... The biggest shortage in my university is budget because we need more amount of finance to support all facilities such as classroom, research activities, etc. So, I think budget for HEIs is the key for successful neoliberalisation in Cambodia. (HEI leader and key practitioner)

This finding also reflects the ‘emerging governmentality’ theory of Manuel (2015) where the government imposes a hybrid governmentality mode through the power and ideological dynamics from the old regime interfacing with the modernised views. In the context of Global South Cambodia, the state apparatuses have shaped the local political environment to drive reform efforts through a hybrid-governmentality. In fact, the government technologies under the neoliberal environment reveal a terrain of ideological contestation and power struggles between the local bureaucratic hierarchy and the modern ideologies. Such practices emerged from the historical legacy through the local tradition and socio-cultural environment, and were even normalised into the state bureaucratic hierarchy of the education administration and the community of practice. And, simultaneously, the policy practice was systematically shaped by the external influences of globalisation transformation and the neoliberal agenda that are manifested/reinvested by emerging policy elites.

Simply put, the community of practice of the neoliberalism reveals a terrain of contestation and power struggles between the existing regime and the foreign conquest for modernisation through emerging policy elites; they have geared governmentality towards diverging interests based on, first, the rationales of governmentality (culture) they attained from the historical legacy; and secondly, the influential logics of global forces for development and reform through the neoliberal capitalist agenda, and globalisation forces (under the effects of postcolonialism). As a participant noted,

... those who run the universities are mainly businesspeople, who are not from an education background. Thus, it is quite difficult to see when these people are

coming from the background outside of education field; they do not have a concept in education to manage the HEIs. It is because managerial leadership require knowledge, specialisation skills, soft skills, and human knowledge, etc. It is not the same system; it is mixed, and it is difficult to work together. (Head of academic union/committee)

... the implementation faces many challenges. For instance, talking about the HEIs owners' capacity, they cannot clearly understand those policies well enough because they are not from an education background and they are far less critical about those concepts, such as learning outcome, and other scopes of expectation in the national qualification framework. ... We have 14 parents ministries which runs the university, ... ACC could supervise mainly on the current state universities which compose about only nine HEIs, whereas the other HEIs are under the supervision of their respective ministry in charged. ... It is difficult for ACC to decide on standard as those HEIs are under the authority of their parent ministry and it involves some political power to expect for certain evaluation result. (Head of academic union/committee)

Technology of power to maintain peace and the political-economic environment

Government technology is essential for state apparatuses to move towards national development and economic growth. Official policy is one of the tools that the state uses to govern social progress, and the reform and policy discourse is political because it is the voice of the state (Olssen et al., 2004). The neoliberal agenda in Cambodia revealed government technology through official government policy for a reform agenda in the education sector as a guideline regarding the state's strategy to use sovereign power. The disciplinary power, then, got enforced by pastoral power within the community of practice, where policy practice reflected both the contextual realities of practical achievements and progress, and a terrain of contestation brought in by emerging policy elites/actors coming into play across national and global network spaces.

What stands out from this contextual reality is that the original intentions and rationales of the policy were shaped, manifested, and even utilised by the community of practice to build another level of rationales or practice that maintained the reinvestment of the interests of these emerging policy elites. Such emerging rationales or practice, thus, often serve the dominant interests of the market or powerful individuals rather than the public or less powerful individuals. Thus, neoliberalism in Global South Cambodia reflected

Foucault's theory of 'governmentality', where the state exercises a 'technology of power' through the uses of discourses to maintain national sovereignty for peace, and the political-economic environment. According to (Friedland & Boden, 1994, p. 87), discourse is language concerning power, where "the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralisation of knowledge", and where the play of signs defines the anchorage of power.

The contextual reality of policy practice in Global South Cambodia also revealed the theory of emerging governmentality (Fimyar, 2008; Manuel, 2015; Tikly, 2003), the government technology threshold as a means for state apparatuses under neoliberal governmentality (Dean, 2010; Foucault, 1991a), and emerging policy elites/actors functioning through global networks, where the state's power became structurally adjusted towards fundamental responsibility for policy formation and practice (Andy Green, 1997; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Rizvi et al., 2006). In this sense, the neoliberal agenda in Global South Cambodia reflected a new mode of governmentality where the state imposes governing rationales for political economy and national stability through a hybrid governmentality system. Meanwhile, this neoliberalisation is increasingly geared towards serving the dominant interests through the hegemonic discourses of globalisation transformation, postcolonialism, and a dynamic geopolitical economy.

Hybrid governmentality mode arising from the old regime interfacing with modernised views

A strong foundation for the local socio-culture and political economy shaped the reform efforts under local 'governmentality culture'. This governmentality was fundamentally influenced by the historical legacy, mindset, local tradition, socio-cultural aspects, and multiple paradigms shifts. Looking at anecdotes offering an overview of Cambodian HE from a historical perspective is like a philosophical excavation. Deep in the most ancient time, the model was pioneered by the religious belief of Hinduism and Buddhism, and later the French model was implanted under the colonial agenda. The system was influenced by multiple ideologies from the Soviet model of the communist blocs and North American model in the half-century of the postcolonial era, experiencing rapid growth in the beginning and mass ruin by 1979.

The postcolonial era exhibited ideologies from the communist bloc and experienced an international embargo for over a decade, with the national rehabilitation period funded by political administration of socialist and communist bloc nations. Nowadays, the model

is taken from Anglo-Saxon countries and the West with heavy dependency on external funding. The current reform models are not entirely imported by experts from Anglo-Saxon countries and the West, but mainly through transactional technical agencies. The nature of this reform is complex, multifaceted and hybridised once implanted into Cambodian university system, reflecting a kind of neo-colonial distribution model. This neo-colonial distribution allows the developing nations perceive their local university model as inadequate and need to adopt the superior education model from the West.

The multiple paradigms shifts which had taken place within a terrain of ideological interplay did not fade away without remnants. Most human resources involved in policy formation and practice for the recent regimes are those local people who survived through the tragic and traumatising period for the nation; the policy practice therefore reflected the leadership styles and mindsets of those people. Thus, the state's commitment to a neoliberal agenda for the education sector is logically based on the national development context and state political apparatuses. As explained by a participant,

So, during the colonial time the France has decided not to open any university in Cambodia but they have opened ... in Hanoi because Hanoi was kind of a capital of colonial in Indo-China. But Cambodia ... the universities and colleges were opened after the Independent ... during the ... 1953 to 1970, there were about no more than 10 universities ... all public universities. And then, during the Republic time (1970-1975) because of the war, the development of the university in Cambodia was stop. And during the Khmer Rouge, as everybody known, they erased everything. And then 1979 to 1993, the State of Cambodia (SOC) they tried to recreate university's life for Cambodia ... with the supported from Vietnam and USSR, Eastern Bloc and Cuba as well. And then after 1993 Cambodian universities become very, very, diverse in term of models. (Senior academic researcher)

6.2.4 Geopolitical power and economy

Desire to sustain national political stability

Through the governmentality lens, neoliberalism reflected multiple rationales and strategies to carry out governmentality, following Dean (1996), with a 'technological

thresholds'³ to sustain national political stability and economic development that reinforced government apparatuses. No different from other post-conflict settings, Cambodia cannot be viewed as completely independent from geopolitical influences, specifically under the globalisation movement for international relations, socio-cultural and trade exchanges, and a foreign-direct-investment-driven economy. This relationship reflected national contingencies in the context of geopolitical influences manifested by emerging policy elites from the regional alliances, and the different blocs of the superpowers.

In fact, one of the rationales for neoliberalism in Global South Cambodia is the emerging state governmentality to maintain harmony and peaceful relationships with the regions and the world, so as to maintain national peace and economic growth. This mode of governmentality revealed an interdependent relationship between historical legacy and external influences/relations that continue to struggle in the process of implementing national stability, political economy, and social progress agendas. The highest government technology threshold for utilising neoliberal agendas is to serve for national 'sustainable peace', whilst the state is dependent on external funding and ideologies exhibited in the power dynamics throughout the reform agenda (Ayres, 2000a; Sen, 2019). As two participants explained:

Cambodia was completely destroyed, it was beyond word can describe ... under the civil war and there was no existing system or facilities in place, not even to mention about the control of Vietnam Army and the embargo from the international community. What I mean here is not to compliment the current government of Cambodia but I have to say the truth for the sake of education development. (HE academic union officer)

Since 1979, or 1980, ... It is a fact that higher education has played its role to build up human resources in our country after the war with some Khmer

³ Technological thresholds for government are understood as 'conduct of conduct'. These thresholds, following Dean (1996), do not mark stages, nor particular order, and are not consecutive. Government has become technological through these technological thresholds emerging through several indicators, including a threshold of assemblage, a threshold of system, a threshold of force, and a threshold of the orientation of government. While a technology of government, following Foucault, presupposes the art of government using some form of relatively systematised knowledge, and by addressing the practical problems of the exercise of authority through practical rationalities, know-how, expertise, and means of calculation. Dean (1996) notes that technologies of government are the multiform instrumentation of the constitution of particular locales that are powerful or authoritative and potentially unlock, harness and store certain powers and capacities; and, over time and space, these technologies enable authorities and development partners to act and to co-ordinate with the activities of other locales.

professors, together with consultants, experts and trainers as Vietnamese, and Russian teachers to help us strengthen our higher education and to enable us to stand on our own. Now amongst their current staff of more than 1000 staffs and officers, this [HEI A] has about 70 to 80 foreign professors who are entitled to work for the long terms. (HEI leader and key practitioner)

Reinforcing a regime of truth

From the political environment perspective, neoliberalism was manifested under the national logics for governmentality and increasingly geared towards providing services predominantly to the market and interest groups. This neoliberal environment reflected the theoretical findings of emerging governmentality (Manuel, 2015) and, following Dean (1996), technological thresholds that explain how the state utilised political strategy incorporated into the government technology as a complex means for state apparatuses to implement the reform agenda while maintaining the national priority for peace, social stability, and economic development. As participants explained,

So as a specialist, I have to look at a nice principle at the university play a social rule, not academic role. If you don't have any university, the kids have nowhere to go. So, if you go to university for four years, I am thinking of all student who attend all classes ... even if the qualification is not right, they learn something after four years. That would be useful for their future's life. But they may not qualify to find the proper job that is demanded by the economy that we try to aim to enter the knowledge economy. This is something that you cannot close the university, if you close the university the kids are in the street. ... I sincerely cannot blame the parents; I cannot blame the government. (Senior academic researcher)

If we look at each university in Cambodia nowadays, ... we depend mainly in the international funding. ... they have signed lots of MoU with universities overseas ... I think such MoU is just a representative but could not put into fruitful result yet, beside the management team who could have study visit to those advanced countries. ... and could not enable them to bring change into their respective HEIs practice. (Senior academic researcher)

Through emerging governmentality rationales, a 'regime of truth' emerged through the technology of power which reinforces social stratification and is increasingly geared to

providing services predominantly to the market and powerful individuals. As Manuel (2015) argued, the national and transnational interests are under the control of the local government for governmentality through the ‘technology of power’, in which they can regulate certain political, legal and institutional conditions to further their interests, and their political and administrative mechanisms (p. 96). The contextual reality of social stratification, consequently, emerged through the way in which education serves the predominant interests of the market and private individuals (Manuel, 2015, p. 96). A participant described this as follows:

Because of the lack of resources and when you come out from the war and the genocide, the government has other priority ... private university will go beyond the number of the public university. ... because you open up the numbers of university, the quality will drop. This is true. And when the quality drops you need an accreditation system ... ideally should be independent but considering the tradition of social and political practice ... it was under the council of minister, now became under the ministry of education which you can understand the conflict of interests as the ministry of education implements program in higher education to manage university and at the same time, they assess the university. (Senior academic researcher)

In this sense, the government utilises various tactics and strategies to operate state apparatuses through governmentality at a ‘technological thresholds’. In these apparatuses, the government opts for certain forms and tactics for implementing the neoliberal agenda. M. Dean (1996) emphasises this governmentality is a particular orientation of government rooted in its strategic rationalities and aptitudes for the state conduct of government technologies (p. 48). One participant revealed that

The government has done a lot of supply particularly for the last two government terms and this new one; there is the tremendous effort to increase the funding for university, to diversify and to introduce science technology. Yet, another major issue is not about the policy, is the graduates from high school in Cambodia; the majority even if they pass are the poor quality that they poorly qualify for the university. So, the university play a role for remedial of the weaknesses are found in primary and secondary school. (Senior academic researcher)

Simply put, state power technologies cannot exclude the political measures needed to maintain the national political environment and lead the nation through the professional

and practically organised development of knowledge and skills. Thus, a range of organised strategies are essential to guide human conduct and practice to meet certain objectives and goals of governmentality. As a participant explained,

... if you look at the current Cambodian higher education system; in a post-colonial time you have a kind of neo-colonialism distribution of models. If you look at the leadership for higher education system, you have the leadership style, the mindset is related to the age of leader. Leaders around of my age about 65, we have that France models in our mind and the current top leadership, and the ministry level, many of them have been educated in Eastern Europe or in Russia. And when you go down to the level of university president/rector particularly in public university, I think ... six out of those eight or nine, the Rector got PhD from Japan. So, then you have another player here, the Japan got their models from Europe, British, a little bit from France ... and later on American models. So then, ... you have France, Soviet, Anglo-Saxon and a mixture; you have leadership now in position of authority and power at the ministry from Soviet and rector level from Japan. So, the keyword to me, Cambodia is a land of comparative education, we have a mix-up in everything. (Senior academic researcher)

In fact, utilising the ‘technological thresholds’ is essential in the context of neoliberalisation in such postcolonial and post-conflict nations where multiple actors emerge from multiple sources of social networks during policy implementation. While the state’s neoliberal agenda strives to respond to local needs and the well-being of the mass population, these expectations are often shaped and manifested by the complex nature of the community of practice. This complexity involves power dynamics/struggle amongst the emerging policy elites, together with the contextual deficits in Global South settings, and has increasingly resulted in ‘neo-illiberal governmentality’ (Manuel, 2015).

This emerging neo-governmentality often incorporates a regime of truth into the state’s sovereign power, the disciplinary power to reinvest the pastoral power that is closely linked with the historical legacy (i.e., the tradition of social and political practice), and has been reinvested by the political-economic rationales of the globalisation transformation. Some emerging policy elites, unfortunately, are innocent due to their unprofessionalism and they, instead, feel that it is justified by their investments. They also feel important, superior, noble, and benign in reinvesting in their practice. Thus, these unprofessional elites often believe that their practice is promoting local human

resources, and are indifferent to commodity production for profit maximisation taking precedence over the impacts of the deterioration of the system. As explained by participants,

... as the quality assurance committee (i.e., ACC) cannot exercise adequate evaluation and supervision, it reveals students could attain high scores even they do not work hard. This is because those universities are highly challenged by market competition. ... Therefore, the circumstance is worsening the quality of the university. (Head of a multinational company)

The challenge is that the policy is on the paper but if you want to promote STEM education in higher education, you need to be qualified in sciences, math, physics, and chemistry when you leave high school. Assuming that a lot of Cambodian young people will go to STEM, who going to teach them? ... I think that the government has achieved the major achievement in popular acceptance that STEM is important. ... So, it is the right policy framework, but the resources are not there yet. And we cannot blame the government for the budget, we have too many kids, we are a young nation. (Senior academic researcher)

Regional alliances

The reform effort has been diffused through the globalisation movement bringing to the reform agenda the dominant model through discourses for reform and development from the hegemonic world and regional soft powers. This reform effort has increasingly neglected the local needs for socio-cultural development and well-being amongst all individuals, but instead has been geared to providing services predominantly to a superficial multiculturalism. The hegemonic discourses in the agenda of neoliberalisation often reflect hidden biases of knowledge because they have ignored the balance in power relations (Guion Akdağ & Swanson, 2018, p. 78). Aspects of HEI curriculum reform also revealed some biases geared towards disruptive labour market demands. This change often adapted the imported curriculum model and reflected the intention to treat local HEI practitioners and students like a memory device, waiting to be over-written with data input. Participants described this as follows:

We also have an ASEAN qualification reference framework, which is developed for all the ASEAN members to use as their benchmark. Those references are for us to have a standard so that we can show with other ASEAN member for

benchmarking with the ASEAN qualification reference framework. And another principle is called ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework. All quality assurance agencies have to be aligned with the ASEAN quality assurance framework. (Representative from academic union/committee)

Yeah, China uses higher education as the soft power. Now, they got a scholarship, so the scholarship ... also influenced the way we think. You get scholarship from Japan, from Australia; these are the two main players. But now China offers a lot of scholarships and the new university of Kratie is the co-founded by a Cambodia foundation with some supported from the government of China and one university of China. So, you see an emerging model in Cambodia. (Senior academic researcher)

In such a ‘regime of truth’, anything other than progressivist modernism and economic development is deemed to be inferior by the prospective international students or development partners who benefit from the new system. The investment in the education sector is, thus, unlikely to build quality generations who can develop critical thinking and become quality independent learners, researchers, practitioners, and citizens for the long-term needs of the nation. Instead, the development is geared to dominant interests of the hegemonic world, the market, and private individuals. As one participant explained,

We need a lot of people with skills, with entrepreneurship, with specialists. Because at this development level, I would say that there are a lot of investors that want to come into this country. They want a specialist; they want people who can contribute through certain skills. If we don't do that, we miss the opportunities to contribute to the development of the country. (Head of a multinational company)

6.3 Revisiting the literature

Overall, the findings supported Foucault (1991a) theory of ‘discourse’ governmentality; the idea of governmentality through a ‘technologies of power’; Jansen (2002) theory of ‘political symbolic’; Tikly’s (2003) concept of emerging ‘neo-(il)liberal governmentality’; ‘hybrid-governmentality’ (Manuel, 2015; Sen, 2019); Dirlik’s (2018) concept of postcolonialism theory; Frank’s (1979, 2018) dependency theory, and the theory of social redistribution developed by Rizvi et al. (2006). What stands out from this study context is an emerging ‘governmentality culture’ that is rooted in the state’s rationale for a governmentality strongly influenced by the historical legacy. The state

governmentality prioritises power technology for ‘peace’ and a prevailing political apparatus threshold for the socio-cultural environment, national stability, and a political economy that is increasingly driven by the globalisation transformation.

The findings support Foucault’s (1991a) theory of ‘discourse’ governmentality. The adoption of the neoliberal agenda emerged as a joint agreement between the national government and the development partners that committed to reform in the education sector through a range of discourses including, ‘economic development’, ‘peace building’, ‘human resource development’, ‘internationalisation’, ‘modernisation of the system’, ‘quality standards’, ‘efficiency’, and so on. These discourses are utilised in the structural adjustment policy documents as the requirements/conditions of the development partner to be fulfilled by the RGC in order to become officially approved.

In addition, the findings also support the idea of Foucault’s (1991a) governmentality through ‘technologies of power’. To ensure the reform agenda is executed, both the development partners and the RGC utilise various strategies, tactics, and flexibility in the overall process of policy development and implementation to target the achievement of the expected policy objectives. These strategies and tactics are the use of education laws (as in the Royal Decrees) and guidelines for punishment and encouragement (through funding and promoting statuses of HEIs practitioners), and the systematic assessment of the outcome of policy practice amongst the HEIs.

The findings also support Jansen’s (2002) theory of ‘political symbolic policy’. At different stages of policy implementation, expected objectives are not always achieved. These failures can be said to be the domino effects from of the multiple constraints of the national government resources including budget, human resource capacity, institutional infrastructure, socio-political conditions, and so on. Jansen (2002) notes that state often develops policies promising to achieve milestones toward outcomes, but only to attract the attention of the citizens rather than make policies that are based on the practical contexts of national background and people’s needs.

Furthermore, the findings support Tikly’s (2003) concept of an emerging ‘neo-(il)liberal governmentality’. It can be said that neoliberalisation also creates opportunities for the policy elites to make investments in the education sector to serve dominant interests of private individuals, rather than serving the public good of the general population. In the neoliberal environment, policy elites use various tactics and techniques of governmentality to join in the state operation of HEIs through attaining status as Public

Administration Institutions and maximise their profits, rather than commit to quality standard for the benefit of the education sector in the long-term.

Moreover, the findings support the notion of ‘hybrid-governmentality’ (Manuel, 2015; Sen, 2019). Despite policies being developed following the requirements/conditions in the structural adjustment policy, the implementation of the policies exhibits the contestation of power relations, the dynamics of powers between the drive for modernity and aspirations for national culture and traditions conservatism. This power contestation brings forward the state governmentality approach through ‘hybrid-governmentality’ which requires national government to maintain sustainability through a balance between adopting modernisation and the practical context of human resources, finance resource, local market needs and the socio-political environment of the country.

Also, the findings support Dirlik’s (2018) conception of postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory maintains that the hegemonic world can continue its colonisation of the peripheral world through a new form of colonisation. The hegemonic world, particularly from the West, influences ideology, knowledge, and innovative ideas in the less developed economies through discourses of endless competition for world standards and modernisation. It can be said that such endless benchmarking for global standards and modernisation provides for the dominant interests of the hegemony world through the business of data, ideas, and the usage of related materials.

The findings also supported Frank’s (1979, 2018) dependency theory. As the neoliberal reform require a lot of finance to modernise the education sector, the periphery world had no choice besides seeking for funding or loans from the development partner and their agencies network. Moreover, as the national constraint amongst the less developing countries concerning human resources with high capacity to form education policies, it is the rationale for the hegemony world to provides technical and consultancy assistant. This potentially lead the less developing economies to become dependent on the hegemony world.

The findings support the theory of social redistribution developed by Rizvi et al. (2006). Under the rationale for freedom of choice amongst individuals in society, the education sector is open for the public to be responsible for self-finance as one’s own willingness to invest in oneself. This practice enables those with more capital and resources gain privileges to attain better quality services in the education sector, and expect better job opportunities and higher paid positions, and potentially maintain their high social status

background. However, those students with less resources, capital and networks are more likely to gain sub-standard education services and potentially end up with fewer job opportunities or low paid jobs. This, in turn, creates the cycles of social redistribution amongst and social gaps between the wealthy and the poor.

Moreover, as emphasised by Olssen and Peters (2005), neoliberalism is an independent discourse influenced by the dominant political ideology from the West, and it should not be confused with globalisation influences. Neoliberalism in Global South Cambodia is more a political project driven by the hegemonic world through conditions for state legitimacy and funding from the international communities. However, the policy implementation process reflected a terrain of power dynamics and contestation amongst emerging policy elites within the community of practice. Power struggles exist between the traditions of social and political practice and the drive for modernity through the hegemonic discourses of the neoliberal agenda from the West.

Consequently, the community of practice revealed an emerging neoliberal governmentality that is shaped and manifested by the emerging policy elites across borders reinvesting in social disparity, a deterioration in quality, and intellectual exploitation in the education sector. Simply put, neoliberalism helped to expand the number of HEIs and local human resources with qualifications, but it also allowed unprofessional practitioners to disguise themselves as ‘know-it-all’ experts in order to influence the community of practice. This context is similar to the environment of neoliberalisation in Angola (Manuel, 2015), Ukraine (Fimyar, 2008), and South Africa (Tikly, 2003). A participant described the situation as follows:

In general, almost 100% of HEIs base their incoming only from student fees. If education is based on one resource, it is impossible to do anything; it is not even enough to pay for the teacher. In education, it is not only about the teacher’s spending; there is an expenditure requirement of other sectors, such as on their professional development, etc. If he just comes to finish the teaching, his knowledge is not updated. As there are much recent evolution of technology, HEIs have to offer Professional Development and Training on the teachers as well. However, they do not have enough budget for that training. In addition, they need resources for facilities to be equipped to support the teaching and research of students to meet the market needs. Thus, the universities in our country cannot support all these needs. (Representative head of ACC)

As neoliberalisation is the right choice for the education reform agenda, the policy goals also strive to improve national human resources to attract the labour market, specifically from foreign direct investments. In this sense, the education sector is strongly influenced by the national political environment and the external influence of the disruptive job markets. Neoliberalism in Global South Cambodia, thus requires amendments to become practical to the contexts of national resources, the historical legacy, the tradition of socio-cultural and political practice, and geopolitical influences. As one participant put it,

We lack 'soft skills'. Cambodia has technical skills, but remain unable to fulfil the labour market demand. There remain gaps in the labour market in our country, and that is the reason why there are more imported of skilled-workforces and experts from overseas to come to work in this country while unskilled workers in Cambodia migrate to work in other foreign countries. (Senior bureaucrat at MoEYS)

6.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have elaborated the logic of HE policy formation and practice and the neoliberal transformation in the education sector in Global South Cambodia. I have explicated how the technology of governmentality reinforced the *national stability* and *economy development* logics as the dominant discourses and state apparatuses. This study identified four main rationales emerged from the dynamic contextuality of neoliberalisation in Global South Cambodia, namely **postcolonialism, globalisation, governmentality culture, and geopolitical influences.**

First, neoliberalism in Cambodia is essentially a complex political project fostered and manifested by hegemonic discourses from the West to promote foreign trade and investment, spearheaded by a global funding network consisting of, e.g., the World Bank, the IMF, the ADB, and the development partners of the periphery nations. The neoliberal agenda is, thus, not globalisation itself but a catalyst project to increase the speed of global exchanges of trade and investment, specifically foreign direct investments. With the logics of structural adjustment policy to make the state expenditure more efficient and rationally effective, neoliberalism has become the state's weapon for government technology and global technology in the 21st century, where dynamic free-market competition in the neoliberal context is believed to enhance the exponential growth of the national and global economies.

Secondly, neoliberalism and globalisation are crucial tools for building a global network for trade, foreign direct investment, and government technology in this era. Being fostered by the advanced internet along with digital technology platforms in the internet of things, neoliberalism and the globalisation transformation have leapfrogged rapidly to operate at an unprecedented speed. Nevertheless, these superhighways of global and national governmentality technology reflect emerging complexity and power dynamics at a critical level and speed, which has become the global and national thread and crisis in regard to growing disparities of growth, income, justice, and well-being amongst the less powerful societies, groups or individuals.

Secondly, neoliberalism also reflected the state's emerging governmentality. As a means for governmentality, the state requires a government technology threshold to perform state apparatuses. **Post-conflict settings** are generally fragile and require peace as the foundation for development, while power struggles persist through the interplay of ideology amongst the emerging elites, globalisation, and the neoliberal capitalist agenda.

This terrain of power dynamics was strongly shaped by the local political environment and the international influences.

Thirdly, reform efforts through such contextual realities require the local government to maintain national sovereignty to implement political agendas that incorporate mindsets from the historical legacy and merge them with the drive for modernity. State governmentality revealed the complexity—maintaining national peace/stability and state legitimacy from the international community at the same time—that brings along the mindsets from the historical legacy and modernity. Thus, neoliberalisation reflected the policymakers' mindset that implemented the 'technology of power' for both national political stability and economic growth as the priorities for building social progress and reform. The local government utilises technological thresholds in a state strategy for technologies of power that is strongly influenced by local cultural legacies consisting of administration styles, mindsets, socio-political experiences, and national contextual realities of deficit in power relations with external policy elites. This 'governmentality culture' predominantly shapes the overall reform logics as the national priority of the reform effort, and this contextual reality reflects Jansen's (2002) theory of the 'symbolic value of policy' where the local 'governmentality culture' rationalised the reform under state's conditions and political discourses for national 'stability and sustainable peace'.

Finally, from the perspective of geopolitical influences, neoliberalism in Cambodia is shaped and manifested through state logics of building harmony with geopolitical influences, regional international cooperation agendas, and the globalisation movement. The neoliberal agenda requires state regulation on government technology to develop power relations with the development partners and emerging policy elites for a harmonious environment for relationship between the state and nations across the region and the globe. This neoliberal logic reflected interdependent relationships amongst the nations across borders through exchanges of culture, trade, and socio-political harmony. The geopolitical agenda also has strong impacts on neoliberalism, leading to contingent power inequalities, dependency on foreign funding, political tensions, and a reliance on trade and investment network.

To sum up, this chapter linked the research findings to existing concepts of postcolonialism, globalisation, and governmentality which explain how certain goals of the neoliberalisation agenda are overseen by a state 'governmentality culture', the geopolitical context, postcolonialism, and the globalisation transformation.

Chapter 7 Neoliberalism Towards What End(s)?

What we can do is to create, not a counter-programme, but a structure for collective research, interdisciplinary and international, bringing together social scientists, activists, representatives of activists, etc., with the social scientists being placed in a quite definite role: they can participate in a particularly effective way, because it's their job, in working parties and seminars, in association with people who are in the movement. (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 56).

7.1 Neoliberal higher education towards what end(s)?

This chapter presents findings relating to the second research sub-question: ‘To what extent has the transformation of the HE system in Cambodia addressed the nation’s needs in terms of the neoliberal agenda?’ The chapter explains the rationale for a more socially just HE policy framework, premised on the themes in Chapter 4, juxtaposing neoliberal governmentality and socio-cultural aspects of the Global South. This incorporates arguments drawn from postcolonialism, global transformation, neoliberalism, and neo-colonialism. The chapter perceives an emergent conceptual distinction between the Global North and the Global South which contributes to a theorisation of neoliberalism in the education sector at individual, institutional, social, and national levels.

This chapter has four sections. First, it presents the meaning and purpose of neoliberalism in the education sector, with reference to the narrative revealed by the participants. Secondly it elaborates the neoliberal goals of the education sector, and how individuals perceive those values and goals. Thirdly, a narrative will be explained regarding neoliberalism and the creation of a more socially-just reform agenda. This will be subject to my criticism and modification, so that thin-communitarian theory becomes more responsive, robust, and vibrant in the context of Global South in the form of Cambodia. Finally, there is a narrative for the suggested framework for the neoliberalism policy practice.

7.2 Expected agreement amongst participants on neoliberalism

7.2.1 Better curriculum and quality standards

Different views were held regarding neoliberalisation leading towards social justice. All participants considered it contributed to improved social and economic development. One participant revealed that she pursued university education to obtain a better position at her workplace:

As for myself, I obtained a scholarship to study a specific major in a private university after I graduated from high school where most students were awarded a scholarship. At that time, I wondered about other students who did not obtain a scholarship, but wanted to study my major, and were even capable and qualified to do so. I thought it was mean that they lose the opportunity to study my major. Ideally this should not be a concern, however if there were no tuition fees, the university would not have the supporting budget to pay for staff, lecturers and renovate buildings. Universities cannot rely only on scholarship students. (Successful graduate)

It is because the university recruits so many scholarship students, that they have to spend more on the students. For instance, each student costs about \$US2000 for four years. But each scholarship student would pay only 20 dollars per year. So, that means if the universities recruit more scholarship students, they have to pay more for the other non-scholarship students. (Senior academic researcher)

It is interesting that the findings from the participants' perspectives revealed both the rationale for the neoliberal agenda in the education sector and the transformation that emerged under this neoliberalism. The overall perspectives from all the participants reflected insights for optimism towards neoliberalism despite the dilemma of dual changes effects into the education system. For one thing, they believe in a range of (dominant) benefits—the system expansion, wider access and equity, changes towards modernisation in the system's leadership and management structure, wider collaboration amongst stakeholders across borders, and a higher standard for a quality HE system.

In contrast, they perceived the neoliberal agenda have increasingly cultivated a deterioration in the education sector. Key issues emerged, as the participants explained, in the community of practice such as low-quality services, social disparity, and equity disparity amongst students. At the HEIs' structural level, as the participants reported, the

role and value of the HE system has increasingly deteriorated, and the academic profession is being geared predominantly towards a state-corporate-profession rationale. What stands out, from participants' perspectives, is that the systematic deterioration in the education sector has resulted from the interplay of hegemonic ideology from the West with regard to their political economy for ideological influence on education reform models in the periphery, and emerging policy elites who manifested the reform agenda through their logics for business or a profit-maximising mentality. As explained below by participants as head of a multinational company and a senior bureaucrat at education ministry, neoliberalism is considered to be a great opportunity for the country to modernise curriculum standards and allow for more choice. They considered an improved curriculum could enhance quality in the education sector, to better prepare students for a career upon graduation:

For me, I see this as expansion. It means the opportunity for more choice for the consumers, that is students and parents, so that is good for the country, good for the consumers, good for the parents so they can have options. But, with that, comes the limited ability to manage quality in the institutions. More HEIs will not guarantee quality education as an outcome. There has to be more choice, so people can have access to higher education, and we must address how we measure educational quality. (Head of a multinational company)

We lack 'soft skills'. Cambodia has technical skills, but we remain unable to fulfil labour market demands. There are gaps and that is the reason why skilled workers and experts come from overseas to work in this country, while unskilled Cambodian workers migrate to work in other countries. My research has identified a substantial shortage of 'soft skills' amongst Cambodian students and workers. Cambodians are good at teamwork, yet very weak in communication skills, including foreign languages, and technical skills. (Senior bureaucrat at education ministry)

The participants perceived the competition in the education sector would sort out quality, as each HEI had to compete for a 'higher quality' rating to increase student enrolment. Those HEIs that could not adapt to the competition would eventually become bankrupt. As a participant commented:

Some public institutions who maintain quality and some private HEIs who can offer better quality of service are still very small in number. We need to change

this and make sure those public institutions are of good quality and can allow more people to be part of that institution. Private institutions must offer more affordable tuition, so that we can have students of high quality and quantity go on to compete in most markets. (Head of a multinational company)

Unsurprisingly, all the research participants believed neoliberalism was essential to achieve higher standards. Neoliberalisation led to international academic exchange, improved rates of graduate employment, more subject choice for students, and more equitable access for low-income groups. Similarly, participants noted that neoliberalism supported universities in sustaining business operations.

It is clear that the neoliberal agenda reflected the dilemma where the adoption and adaption of neoliberalism is inevitable for Global South Cambodia as a strategy for national progress and political development. Neoliberalism aligns national development and geopolitical strategy development approaches through the conditions of the international community, while it has increasingly become the tool for state governmentality which is manifested in delivering benefits predominantly to the market and private individual interests.

7.2.2 Foreign direct investment inflow, employment, and technology skills

Emergent key ideas from the participants also revealed that neoliberalism has the potential to build the local human resources with higher capability, skills and modern knowledge. Based on their perspectives, mainly those from the head of multinational corporation, senior academic researchers, and HEI leaders, the perception is that the neoliberal agenda modernised the education system. They mainly believed that neoliberalism contributes to the inflow of large private companies, multinational corporations, and others akin to private stakeholders. They revealed two-fold expectations: the rise in local labour market demand through employment opportunities, and better-quality education for students with a clear direction for their prospective careers.

All participants observed that high-quality human resources could boost the local economy through foreign direct investment. They considered a high-quality skilled workforce could attract multinational corporations through a local human resource supply, as a high-quality workforce could grow the local economy faster (ADB & ILO, 2015; P. Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2010; Peters, 2009a; Shin et al., 2016; WB, 2011). A participant commented:

There are a lot of investors, such as multinational corporations, who want to come into this country, but they are hesitant due to the lack of local skilled labour. This is a direct result of the quality of education. We are not growing fast enough. Those who are investing strongly in certain skills allow a country to move very fast. We move fast, but the scale is still too small. If we cannot attract those investors or establish [multinational corporations] in this country, it is because of these skills. In the future, we will be left behind. (Head of multinational corporation)

I think there will a positive development for the country because private organisations have certain resources and capabilities. Any development and any major change will require certain investments in resources and technical capability. That means a positive development for the higher education environment in this country, and there are some international institutions coming here. I would say private investment is good in that sense because they bring resources, they bring modern technology, new perspectives. (Head of multinational corporation)

Participants considered the growing interdependent relationships between the quality of the local workforce and the inflow of large multinational corporations or companies into the nation. They believed that students as well as the community of HEI practitioners lacked information about the potential local labour market. Instead, they noted that students pursue tertiary education hoping to attain a degree, but have no idea about which major skills, and careers they will follow after their university education. A participant commented:

There isn't any adequate programme or policy to fast-track vocational skill development or training for many high school graduates. We do not have enough trained staff. People just go straight to university to learn something that is not needed by industry. They just go to university to follow their peers and learn something that might not be relevant in the next five or ten years. Another problem is that we don't have many business institutions and big investors in this country yet. We, as a country, have to make sure we can provide the opportunities for investors from the political, economic, and tax point of view, to make it more favourable for them. That is the government's role. (Head of multinational corporation)

The opportunities for young people are not there and they don't see the opportunities even when they are in the class. The industries are saying, we are looking for people, with these skills, and the educators are saying we have a lot of students who do not have a business opening. So that's why I stress that schools should see themselves as suppliers, and then have a unit (department) that is focused on building relationships with the private sector. (Head of multinational corporation)

Emergent key ideas from the participants revealed that neoliberalism in the education sector creates more opportunities for graduate employment. They perceived that with a modernised curriculum, and more vibrant academic collaborative activities, students could acquire modern knowledge and skills that prepare them better for employment prospects. Specifically, the participants who were the head of a multinational corporation and the head of the student union believed that attaining a university degree could improve a student's chance of gaining a job. Nevertheless, they believed that access to employment varies and mainly depends on each student's efforts, circumstance, and social network capital. They considered that many jobs are available but obtaining employment would depend on an individual's capability gained from their study programme. The participants perceived that even if the students could pass the exam for a government scholarship, academic success at the university in the context of Global South Cambodia depends on the family values that have influenced the individual mindset and commitment to putting in the effort. As they explained, graduates could get employment opportunities depending on their capacity to reach the standard required by the labour market. For instance, a successful graduate commented that:

I think the market demand is there, but this depends on a student's capability. There are many job opportunities, due to high demand, in work related to technology skills; these students will be able to get the job they want if they are capable enough. Graduates will be able to find employment if they are qualified. But I doubt whether these graduates have learnt sufficient skills learnt during their programme of study. (Head of student union)

The student from a poor family could have less time to study as they have to find job. They have to prepare a budget to pay university fees and cover living costs. Alternatively, students from a well-off family do not have to work as they get support from their parents and all they have to do is study hard. Their education

will progress smoothly. Another group of students who come from rich families, do not focus on their study. Another group of students coming from low-income family background perform better in their study due to their commitment and clear mindset to overcome their hardships in order to gain success in their studies and their life. (Head of student union)

These are complementary factors that help in the pursuit of higher education. The first is to attain the knowledge to get employment. At this level of education, we can learn about the society, various challenges in living and how to communicate with others. Then, we can make more critical judgements, and look towards the future. Students can have more options in life, meaning that they can either seek employment or set up their own business. All this knowledge and creativity is supposed to be developed through attending higher education institutions. (Head of student union)

In addition, emergent main ideas from the participants revealed that neoliberalism has allowed chances for students to learn more knowledge based on their aspirations, and critical choices for tertiary education especially relate to modern skills in STEM subjects. Participants, especially a senior academic researcher, the head of the student union and the head of a multinational corporation, believed that obtaining a university education could enhance a student's critical thinking, which correlated with an enhanced lifestyle and the ability to make informed decisions, have a successful career, and even create their own job/business in time, to earn more income.

However, while accepting that neoliberalism in the education sector promotes technology-related subjects such as STEM, all the participants considered integrating the subjects into the curriculum faces many challenges from the early stages. These participants mainly perceived that local HIEs are not really ready to exercise their role in modern subjects related to STEM due to widespread deficits amongst the community of practice (i.e. HEI practitioners, stakeholders, students and their families) (E. Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). They perceived that neoliberalism in the education system in Cambodia needed immediate solutions, which meant an increase in the numbers of qualified teaching and lecturing staff, mentors, and the necessary facilities and resources:

The future is science and technology, and people have now started to see that the policy framework is right. The challenge is that the policy exists on paper, but if you want to promote STEM education in higher education, you need to be

qualified in mathematics, physics, and chemistry. But who is going to teach these subjects? We have the right policy framework, but the resources are not there yet. (Senior academic researcher)

HE should focus on both and should lean more heavily on the skills, the practical skills required by the new wave of development, the new economy. I think that should be a big focus. In Cambodia, we need a lot of people with skills, with entrepreneurship, with specialist knowledge. If we don't do that, we miss the opportunity to contribute to the development of the country. (Head of multinational corporation)

When our national economy is being shifted from agriculture towards industrialisation, from services towards industrialisation, then it is time that STEM becomes essential. This is because industrialisation requires more technology skills. As our economy, within the three sectors—agriculture, services, and industry—grow the demands for STEM majors grows higher too. (HEI leader)

As elaborated in this section, the neoliberalism in Cambodia reflected interdependent relationships between the local needs for tertiary education development and the external drive (globalisation transformation) of the hegemonic neoliberal agenda and rationale for HE modernisation towards international standards, advancement, and higher quality. The local rationale for neoliberalisation is to cultivate more local human resources with higher capacity and skills to respond to the growing labour market needs and to attract an inflow of foreign direct investment, whereas the modernity agenda of the international community is to expand their hegemonic globalisation transformation projects through the hegemonic ideology of neoliberal capitalism amongst the periphery states so as to promote economic growth and democratic societies. Unsurprisingly, neoliberalism raised scepticism and major concerns amongst the domestic policy elites due to apparent local resources deficits, such as in human capacity and infrastructure, and discrepancies amongst the local socio-cultural and political practice tradition that is interfacing with the drive for modernity of the neoliberal agenda.

7.2.3 International academic network exchanges

All participants considered the globalisation transformation associated with neoliberal reforms as opening doors for local HEIs to develop overseas academic networks, while they also revealed their scepticism about whether the mechanism for collaboration is

effective or sufficient. They noted that there were international academic exchanges, study tours, and wider collaboration amongst staff, students, and other high-quality professional researchers. Participants as leader of HEIs and senior academic researchers perceived that collaborations such as Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between the local HEIs and HEIs overseas are beneficial in facilitating the exchange of students and lecturers or professors and developing a higher capacity through updated knowledge, skills, and experience. This was regarded as an enhancement of the quality of education for HEIs and students, as described by a participant who is an HEI leader:

I think Cambodian higher education system nowadays has responded to the need for human resources development in our nation quite well as **we have produced lots of graduates nowadays** to serve for the economic growth. Since 1979, or 1980, we have not had any scholarships for our students to study overseas and only the Cambodian higher education could help building our national human resources. It is a fact that higher education has played its role to build up human resources in our country after the war with some Khmer professors, together with consultants, experts and trainers as Vietnamese, and Russian teachers to help us strengthen our higher education and to enable us to stand on our own. Now amongst their current staff of more than 1000 staffs and officers, **this [University A] has about 70 to 80 foreign professors** who are entitled to work for the long terms. Moreover, **we have hundreds of exchange staff, lecturers and professors who come to work** on short-term basis. Thus, it reflects the identity of Cambodian higher education being able to stand on its own nowadays. (Leader of HEIs, emphasis added)

In line with the perspectives of the senior academic researchers, successful graduates also perceived that collaboration between local HEIs and overseas institutions offers benefits to Cambodian HEIs. A participant who is a successful graduate noted that one project offered benefits to the local HEI as it provided not only an opportunity for students and staff to build knowledge, skills and practical experiences within a research project from a world-class university, but also desktop computers and internet services for students in her department to use in their studies. Another research project did not offer real benefits to those involved with the project. She reflected that some research projects, served only the dominant interests of the external stakeholders and specific individuals:

Each project offered benefits depending how you look at it. Projects that provide more benefits are those that, for example, set up a **laboratory** for students with creative ideas such as a social enterprise. The projects that were successful **offered facilities** such as computers, and other electronic tools for students to use for their study and research. Other projects offered little benefit, although sometimes the opportunity arose for some students to earn **some income** through working as research assistants or undertaking **practical experience** in doing fieldwork research. (A successful graduate, emphasis added)

Alternatively, different opinions emerged amongst the participants regarding the quality of collaboration. Different from HEIs leaders' perspectives, senior academic researchers perceived that the current form of neoliberalism lacks a quality mechanism for international academic exchanges and networks, noting that an MoU existed only as documentation, with little being achieved. A senior academic researcher claimed that most MoUs covered study tours where the local key HEI practitioners were sponsored to make a tour, yet very few students were exchanged with universities overseas. The participant emphasised that no significant achievements had occurred to enable this development. In addition, those visiting did not learn very much from a short-term study tour. Two participants commented as follows:

If we look at each university in Cambodia, they have signed lots of MoU with universities overseas, however, these result in just a visit. They cannot actually make any commitment with so little being achieved. I think such MoUs simply allow a representative from the management team to visit those advanced countries. It is just like a tour and photo shoot and does **not enable them to change** their respective practice. (Senior academic researcher, emphasis added)

We also have an ASEAN qualification reference framework, which is developed for all the ASEAN members to use as their benchmark. Those references are for use to be able to have a standard level so that we can show with other ASEAN member for benchmarking with the ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework. And another principle is called ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework. All quality assurance agencies have to be aligned with the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework. (Representative from ACC)

Put simply, there are positive and negative views amongst the participants regarding the ability of the current neoliberal agenda to bring about positive change amongst the local

HEIs in Cambodia. As explained by the participants in the quotes above, international academic networks and exchanges has increasingly benefited the local HEIs through more quality (lecturing/supervising) staff, curriculum modernisation, and student exchanges. These benefits are mainly raised by the participants as HIE leaders, successful graduates, and senior bureaucratic officers. Nevertheless, these benefits are seen by participants such as senior academic researchers as symbolic practice, that could not really bring quality benefits to the whole education sector, just a few HEI practitioners or HEIs. In the quote above, a senior academic researcher stated that the practice of international academic collaboration and exchanges reflected petty results, despite there being mushrooming numbers of MoUs. Instead, this senior academic researcher considered that MoUs reflect more symbolic practice and could not bring real change or sufficient benefits the HEI practitioners and the education sector as a whole.

7.2.4 Community-wide collaboration

Another main point from the participants' perspective reflected the neoliberal agenda as having potential for HEI to reach out in community-wide collaboration, which would enable the local education sector to become more robust and vibrant, towards becoming more competitive in the international standard framework. This notion is crystal clear, emerging through the participants' perspectives mainly on the increasing numbers of collaborative activities between the HEIs and the community, namely the private sector, investors, local community, and the international experts among current HEI practitioners. Having said that, all the participants believed that the current practice within the HEI community lacked vibrant and productive collaboration amongst these stakeholders. What stands out from their pessimism on the current progress with collaboration is not only the unsustainability and lack of congruency amongst the collaboration activities and the less accountable achievements amongst the HEIs community of practice.

The participants believed that the neoliberalisation process needs vibrant collaboration amongst stakeholders for a university to improve through the development of soft and hard skills amongst graduates, to better prepare them for employment. Participants perceived that quality collaboration requires HEIs to be involved with relevant sectors—private companies, non-governmental organisations, researchers, and communities of practice. Specifically, they expected quality collaboration to cultivate activities and achievements through long-term projects, and to provide market information and

guidance regarding student learning so they could be well-prepared for employment upon graduation.

As indicated in the following narratives, the participants considered that neoliberalism required all stakeholders to collaborate and commit to sharing their challenges and needs. From the narratives, HEIs generally centred only on producing graduates, not supporting mechanisms for employment. The participants quoted, the leader of a multinational corporation, leaders of HEIs, and a senior bureaucratic officer at education ministry level, generally believed that industry links with HEIs and a sense of engagement amongst all stakeholders could promote a vibrant environment for policy implementation in the community of practice in Cambodia. These participants noted that such collaborations provide quality enhancement amongst graduates and create a positive educational environment for the HEIs. As in following quotes commented by the participants:

As for the higher education policy formation, it requires participation from the teachers, the students and the private sector. There should also be information on learners' skills, their background, their learning needs. That would require input from the private sector, the government, the HEIs, HEI staff and lecturers, so that the policy can fulfil the vision and mission towards the achievements of the long-term 'needs' of the nation, and well-being for all individuals. (Senior bureaucratic officer at education ministry level)

... the focus on this policy and intention from HEIs, as a whole, should see themselves as suppliers. So, they supply the workforces. So, when you see yourselves as the supplier, you change the mindset of some rectors, or some deans, professors, or maybe the whole Ministry of Education. ... When you see yourselves as suppliers, you want to produce a very quality product. You want to produce a product that will be needed by the market. To do that, you will force yourself to go out and talk to the market. ... what kind of skills you need ... I mean the whole system see themselves as suppliers. So, they create a kind of engagement between the private and the supplying institution. ... I think there should be a change in mindset. (Head of multinational corporation)

Based on the above comments, it is not difficult to understand that participants' perspectives explored in this section mainly support the neoliberal agenda, but they are disappointed in the current policy practice. It is clear the participants mainly perceived the current effects of neoliberal practice emerged in widespread issues in the community

of practice, especially rooted in deficits in quality collaboration and a mindset of responsibility amongst the HEI practice community. As elaborated above, it is crystal clear that all the participants saw both positive and negative effects of neoliberalism in Cambodia. They perceived with optimism the prospects for education sector improvement under neoliberal practice regarding opportunities for modernising HEIs' curricula and practice through wider collaboration within the HEIs' community of practice. By contrast, they mainly believed the current neoliberal practice has resulted in widespread issues of low-quality services, and a lack of quality market information and career pathways, which have caused social disparities amongst students due to the current widespread deficits of quality collaboration and the mindset of the policy elites within the education sector under neoliberal practice.

In brief, participants' perceptions regarding this aspect of neoliberalisation emerged to reflect their positional belief that national tertiary education is intended to serve to the market, corporation, or private sector through supplying a quality labour force. Meanwhile, this standpoint conveys the idea that participants' views overlook the side effects of this neoliberal practice of shifting the role of the education sector to serve changing labour market demands, through its sole devotion towards skills and capacity development serving predominantly the private sector. This position or belief can also reflect the local notion of conformation towards postcolonialism, and cultural imperialism where the national human resources development and the education sector is intended to serve predominantly the hegemonic discourse and political project of the West.

7.3 Social values and expectations for higher education roles

While all the participants believed that current neoliberal thinking brings improvements in quality standards in the education sector, almost all participants considered the current policy implementation has led to positive and negative transformation within the community of practice. As for the positive aspects, some participants believed that the current reform agenda allowed opportunities for students to choose the study majors that they wanted to take and to express their voice in their academic journey. These viewpoints mainly emerged amongst the participants who were HEI leaders, senior academic researchers, and the head of the student union. Interestingly, these participants believed that social justice in the education sector was rooted in the social structure and contextual realities that are not always commonly shared. Put simply, they meant that the social values of the education sector are predominantly determined by the whole of

society and the local community, specifically based on actual social needs and the practical benefits obtained through educational attainment.

On the other hand, all the participants also reflected a paradoxical contextual reality arising from neoliberalism, where the current policy implementation has led to a deterioration of the education sector, despite the increasing modernisation and expansion of the system. These issues were acknowledged by all the participants, mainly the senior academic researchers, the leader of an academic association, and the head of a multinational corporation; they mainly believed that the current policy practice has increasingly led to a widening of social disparities. Participants considered that the neoliberal policy implementation has resulted in social inequality such as the marginalisation of students from low-income family backgrounds who are not able to access high-quality services. Meanwhile, those students from elite families access pathways that lead to quality HE overseas. This practice, however, as noted by the participants, is leading society towards national deterioration and social disparity in the long-term. As a participant commented:

I think the recent policy document has contributed to a more socially just environment. First, the students can express their opinions, even though their ideas may not be acceptable. Everyone needs to live with freedom and dignity and without suppression, so this allows people to be able to express their voices. As for me what I can do is to share what I have learnt from Hong Kong with my students who are the younger generation. This means that while everyone needs to be fair, it is not always possible to have such situation in society. (Senior academic researcher)

The explosion of private university was not the resulted of policy. It was the resulted of supply and demand. You have, the last 15 years; more than a hundred universities in Cambodia are private, of poor quality because the input is poor the resources are limited, the output are poor. ... There is an imbalance between the number of university and vocational training, it should be a reverse. ... graduated are not appropriately qualified and the qualification does not respond to the market need. ... The government has done a lot ... the tremendous effort to increase the funding for university, to diversify and to introduce science technology. (Senior academic researcher)

All the participants noted that social values and expectations reflected a tendency towards greater materialism. They reported that successful people are idolised through their success in wealth accumulation. Nevertheless, participants added that most wealthy and influential people became rich due to social networking, a large inheritance, and being amongst the interest groups, rather than coming from the ranks of those who received a high-quality education. In the following statements, a senior academic researcher commented that social values have been dominated by the materialistic achievements. Social values and success reflected through the accumulation of wealth and public nomination through becoming *Oknha* (wealthy, flaunting material possessions) or donors who have offered large donation to society, rather than giving credit to high intellectual achievement or academic success. Specifically, achievements in the education sector are perceived as less valued socially, as a participant commented:

As I mentioned earlier, those who are **rich and powerful do not appear to come from well-educated backgrounds**. There is no role model for people with a good education to become rich and powerful in our society. (Senior academic researcher, emphasis added)

There is no evidence to prove that someone with a good education could become rich or ensure social mobility here, even though we acknowledge that having a higher level of education could help maintain a stable living, through working for the government rather than undertaking labour for work. Having said this, things depend on **different ways of thinking, and interests**, because those who work as taxi drivers, or *tuk-tuk* [tricycle] drivers could earn just enough money to support their family—in a simple way. (Senior academic researcher, emphasis added)

I think from my point of view, I would say that there has been a lot of discussion, but if you look at the real change, the curriculum, the policies, **I don't think there is much development**. This is because of current globalisation or because of the pressure... **but we might evolve into the new global world**, especially when the younger generation of policymakers ... have quite a lot of influence, but for now I would see them at the consultation stage. (Senior academic researcher, emphasis added)

As in the statements above, it is implicit that most participants perceived bleak prospects in the context of neoliberalism regarding expected quality standards and social justice. As for the low-quality standard, the policy practice revealed that the local context of

widespread deficits in resource inputs for the HEI system has inevitably resulted in poor-quality teaching and learning. Another determinant contributing to low-quality HEI practice is the systematic effect of low-quality learners streamed from the general education level.

Social justice issues are rooted in the local contextual reality of socio-cultural practice, and a way of life more or less accepted or constrained amongst social groups/individuals in the local society. As elaborated in the quotes above, there have been low expectations of the social value of the local education sector because of the local socio-cultural setting, and individual choice of (immediate) lifestyles. Part of the contextual reality of the local socio-cultural setting stemmed from two things: (1) the historical legacy, and (2) effects of globalisation transformation. Historical legacy effects reflected the time when highly educated people were meant to compete for jobs as civil servants for the colonial administration, and the period mainly during the first decade post-independence (post-1953) when such people were highly paid and respected by society. As for the globalisation transformation effects, the social value of education has been increasingly manifested and shaped towards materialistic value ahead of becoming highly educated. The social value of the local education sector has been even more depreciated, as noted by the participants in the comments reproduced above, through low salaries and a lack of a mechanism for incentives and social welfare. Thus, the neoliberal practice with low-quality standards has had deleterious effects in terms of a growing social justice problem which was also acknowledged (more or less) by all the participants and perceived as a major social justice problem with rapidly widening social disparity throughout the nation.

7.3.1 Personal prestige fulfilment and achievement

Participants' views generally revealed that attaining HE is a beneficial and prestigious achievement. They considered that attaining HE is a person's aspiration for social recognition, prestige, and achievement. Meanwhile, family background emerged as a key determinant of a student's hope to achieve tertiary education with different ambitions for those from different backgrounds. Those from a wealthy background could afford to study at a high-quality university and were able to consider education overseas. Those from an average or rural farmer family background expected to attain university education in the capital city, so that they could improve their social mobility to live in the city. Thus, it is not surprising to hear Cambodian students say that they pursue tertiary education in the hope of raising their living standard to one better than their parents' generation. As a participant commented:

I think that current rich families in Cambodia send their children to study at a high-class university in order that their children can obtain the means to migrate **to live overseas**. When they go to study abroad, they tend to settle there. However, students from rural areas could make their life chances better by going to study in the capital city. This is because they can get a good education in the city and **find good job**, which is not easy for those who living in rural areas, who usually end up in a cycle of farming generations. (Senior academic researcher, emphasis added)

It is crystal clear that tertiary education achievement is perceived to be an essential tool for one's hope of personal prestige in Cambodian society and for social mobility. These include one's dream of social recognition and a pathway to a secure well-paid job. Meanwhile, even though the local students aspire to HE attainment, their family background also played a crucial role in determining their dream. This social determination, thus, uncovers the social context of students' high reliance on family background/support when making choices for university education. Put simply, despite HE being an aspirational goal amongst students, it is seen that the local socio-economic setting and socio-cultural norms remain influential on students' lifestyles and decisions about their academic pathway. Hence, HE is an aspirational goal amongst students under the neoliberalism, despite the recognition of growing low-quality services. Attainment of HE is perceived to have social value and to enable one's chances of social mobility.

7.4 How neoliberalisation contributes to social justice

All the participants observed that neoliberalisation advances social justice in Cambodia but also brings dilemmas with regard to the current policy practice. On the bright side, neoliberalism is believed to advance social justice in Cambodia specifically by having more students access university education; the cost becomes more affordable for average-income and low-income families. Also, the participants considered that the neoliberal agenda is the right government strategy to improve the education sector and deal with growing demands for HE in the nation. In contrast, however, only certain students can access to quality services or attain access to university education. Also, neoliberalism is seen to have caused the deterioration of the education sector through the widespread low-quality education producing graduates who are unable to secure good jobs due to issues at the policy practice level. This deterioration in the education sector is also perceived by the participants as resulting in growing social disparity problem, as in the following statements by a participant:

So as a specialist, I have to look a nice principally that the university play **a social role, not academic role**. If you don't have any university, the kids have nowhere to go. ... But a young Cambodian girl or boy goes through university for four years, even if the teaching is poor, even if the qualification is not right, they learn something after four years. That would be useful for their future's life. But they may not qualify to find the proper job that is demanded by the economy... **if you close the university the kids are in the street**. ... Look at the number of bachelor's degree who works at the front desk at the hotel, the taxi driver, ... So, there is an inflation of diploma too. (Senior academic researcher, emphasis added)

Nevertheless, the research participants noted different perspectives regarding what they wanted and expected of social justice, and how it was to be achieved. As one participant remarked, the local people in general do not really have aspirational dreams, or a decent lifestyle or aim to become rich. Most people, as the research participants mentioned, expected only to earn enough for a family, have sustainable work, and achieve a lifestyle with dignity, as articulated in the following statements commented by senior academic researchers:

I sincerely cannot blame the parents; I cannot blame the government. ... For the people who are wealthy class, they have money; they can sell their land, sell their house, and they become billionaires. So, when you have an increase income, **they have aspirations**. (Senior academic researcher, emphasis added)

And in the country like Cambodia, **aspiration is to have the degree** because in developing country like Cambodia, what happen in Africa, a degree, most of the time, is perceived as not a qualification of the profession but **a sign of status**. So, there is a confusion of that also. So, all these contribute to the challenge of establishing a proper policy implementation. (Senior academic researcher, emphasis added)

Most Cambodians do not want to be rich but prefer **to earn just enough income to lead a life with dignity**. For example, one would get about \$200 per day when working as a consultant, and they will pay 15% income tax. But that work is not sustainable, and could just happen once every five months or so. As we do not have any social safety net to support the national think-tank or intellectuals this makes freelance work very difficult. (Senior academic researcher, emphasis added)

Overall, the complexity in the neoliberalisation framework for Global South Cambodia led to a dilemma reflecting a terrain of competing social expectations, personal aspirations, and labour market context. Neoliberalism in the education sector is seen as serving the obligation not only to build local human resources but also to maintain socio-political harmony. While all the participants were concerned about the widespread issues of low-quality and growing widespread social disparity in the education sector, neoliberalism in Cambodian HE is perceived to play its role to another level, which is perceived, by a senior academic researcher, as taking a step further to serve a social role. The senior academic researchers acknowledged and strongly supported the idea that tertiary education should play its social role ahead of quality strengthening. It appeared that neoliberalism contributes to dealing with both the growing demands placed upon the education sector and the prevention of socio-political problems. As mentioned in the quotes above, the growing demand for education is inevitable based on the rise in birth rate, and the aspiration for a sign of status amongst the emergent rich and middle-class population.

Meanwhile, this social trend and policy practice reflected how the education sector has increasingly deteriorated through its reinvestment in low-quality services that led to diploma inflation, and the unpromising prospects for the education sector performing its role in developing quality human resources to boost the national economy. Neoliberalism reflects a dilemma—at the surface it serves the immediate needs of social demand, while looking more deeply and to the long-term, it serves to grow the social divide and creates bleak prospects for social justice. The choice for the education sector is influenced by a legacy in people’s minds of the external funding agencies’ political agenda, and the imperfect social distribution embedded in neoliberalism. This dilemma reflects the complexity at the level of the policy implementation of reforms to achieve social democracy and justice relevant to the local socio-cultural and political environment, and the political economy, where social justice is premised on neoliberalism.

7.5 Potential challenges

7.5.1 More challenges for poor and women students

Another complex issue within the community of practice of Global South Cambodia is the situation of women. Within a neoliberal framework, despite more women gaining access to university education, there are also challenges regarding sources of finance to support university fees and living costs. In Cambodia, as in other similar societies,

women are under pressure from national traditions, socio-cultural practice, social risk, and their high dependency on family and social grouping. Despite neoliberalisation, the HE reform policy framework has not provided an adequate support mechanism for women. This is obvious to any observer in the context of Global South societies, where local field and habitus reflect boundaries of traditions, socio-cultural environments, and a postcolonial mindset.

Women students need both individual aspirations, emotional encouragement, dedication, and support, specifically at the university and in a community of practice where education is concerned. One of the female participants who experienced difficulties in her study commented:

When I first arrived in Phnom Penh, I did not know anyone, and since my family was sick, I had no financial resources available to support me. I had to work to help myself. I had to find a job, and sometimes the jobs were not good such as waitressing which was looked down on by the customers who were playboys. Others could get more suitable jobs with a higher salary. In brief, it depended on what the students knew about the location of types of work when they started to apply for jobs.

Some graduates could find a job easily, because they had good knowledge, skills, and communication with employers. For instance, in my case, I could get employment as I was doing my undergraduate programme. I had good communication skills so that everywhere people knew about the quality of my work and my attitude. These people could give me an opportunity for employment upon my graduation.

This narrative came from a poor woman from a broken family. Despite being offered a place in a top university in the capital with fee exemption, she was strongly discouraged by her family and the neighbourhood not to come to the capital city for her university education. However, this was her aspiration, and she was determined to migrate to the city to pursue her educational dream. The description of her journey reflects the span of four years of study, which many women in her community cannot endure. Her struggle reveals her commitment to study even if she had to work tirelessly after class to support herself. Through selfless sacrifice and dedication to fulfil her dream she attained success. Throughout her journey she was always in the margins of the city, working in risky, underpaid jobs that barely fed her. Eventually she was elected as a leader of the student

union and alumni. Upon her graduation, she was offered several jobs by private companies and state institutions, and attained a full-time office job in the university, fulfilling a dream bigger than she had ever dared to contemplate.

This anecdote reveals access to university education amongst women in Global South Cambodia has a complex setting. Most often, women, particularly in rural and remote areas, require strong commitment and determination, and must struggle over discouragement from socio-cultural norms and community expectations when deciding to pursue their HE journeys, specifically in moving away from their families to the capital city. As evidenced above, this particular woman's life story reflects similar experiences of many other women who choose to migrate to pursue their academic journey in the capital city, where mostly better-quality HEIs are located. One of the determinants is the socio-cultural norms and social expectations in Global South Cambodia that often add pressure to their choice to pursue HE, and more often discourage women from university education rather than encourage them. Having said that, neoliberalism reveals many more women could access HE services than ever before, although the ratio of women to men is still less than 50:50. Yet, unsurprisingly, they have to struggle in overcoming various challenges in both the discouragement of socio-cultural norms and the social risk throughout their academic journey, as well as the academic challenges faced by other male students. Simply put, women should not be concerned with socio-cultural norms or social tradition when considering pursuing tertiary education, as modernity and the progress in society has now shifted towards equality of tertiary education opportunities for all individuals, as long as s/he can overcome the challenges and move on.

7.5.2 Rising cost of tertiary education

Another major issue that emerged through the participants' perspectives revealed that the cost of tertiary education has risen and education has become less affordable, especially for those students from low-income family backgrounds or remote rural areas. Moreover, the rise in study costs, as the participants reflected, raised a concern about STEM majors, especially at the private HEIs that do not receive government funding. One participant disclosed that most private HEIs were not interested in offering majors related to STEM subjects, due to their limited capital and budgets for modernising the curriculum and institutional facilities. This is articulated in the following statements by participants:

... the negative part is that it is not affordable to many Cambodian people and while that might not be very positive, because that will create a gap, you know,

there is a much bigger gap between the elite and the lower middle class. Privatisation is good ..., as the private institutions bring modern technology and new perspectives, but it is very expensive. If that continues, it will create a gap within the country: those who are highly educated and those who are educated at another level. (Head of multinational corporation)

When we talk about the labour market, there is a mixture of skills needed. Any majors can find employment opportunities in the labour market. ... the trends from the ASEAN community, the pattern of globalisation, the emphasis of study majors is moving towards STEM. They consider STEM subjects to have high potential in the employment market. The global market however lacks people with STEM-related skills, and there is less demand in social science for accounting, economics, and marketing, because they already have employees with these skills. (Representative of the HE union)

Overall, the neoliberal agenda has led to notion of attaining tertiary education as an investment of monetary capital and of knowledge as a commodity to be exchanged for personal gain and private benefits. This emergent belief reflected that the neoliberalism in the Cambodian education sector reflected HE practice serving the dominant interests of business corporations and private entities, which has become a growing challenge amongst students from low-income family backgrounds and remote rural areas. Another issue emerged through the selection of subjects to be offered at universities, such as STEM majors, due to the lack of interest in investment or addressing resource deficits, particularly amongst the private HEIs. This HE practice amongst the private HEIs of offering only affordable majors has increasingly been seen to overlook the role of education in preparing local human resources to respond to the national long-term needs of the socio-cultural and economic environment, and civilisation for a more socially just society.

7.5.3 Towards more social disparity

Increasing social disparity emerged as widespread issue in the current form of neoliberalism in Global South Cambodia. The participants across groups, mainly the representative head of the ACC, a senior academic researcher, HEI leaders, and the head of student union, commented on the widening social disparity. The disparity emerged in three ways. First, there were disparities amongst those students in rural and remote areas and those in the city centre. Many students from low-income family backgrounds could

either not pursue or not complete a university education. Secondly, disparity appeared in terms of employment/lifestyle upon graduation for those who could attain only low-quality HE, due to the financial constraints on supporting their living costs and the related costs of their education level. Once they had completed their programme, they mainly could not afford to get suitable employment upon their graduation and had to work in any available second-rate part-time job instead. These (part-time/informal) jobs are unpredictable and insecure, and do not permit those people to earn a living with a sustainable source of income. Finally, those who are from well-off or rich family backgrounds could afford to attend high-quality HEIs and get good employment upon their graduation or even to seek opportunities to further their education overseas and prepare for a more sustainable source of income.

While all the participants considered neoliberalism offered advantages to the local HEIs, some revealed that the opportunities allowed dominant benefits to accrue to elite families, rather than be shared out fairly to all individuals. The participants maintained that privatisation allowed students from affluent families to access high-standard HEIs, and gain knowledge and skills, such as English language proficiency, to enable them to complete their education overseas. The participants perceived that some high-performing students from low-income families could access high-standard local HEIs, but the number doing so was very small; mainly, students from wealthy families could afford to attend high-standard local HEIs whereas the students from low-income family backgrounds chose to study in very poor HEIs as they cost less, or offered a partial university scholarship. The participants believed that the neoliberal agenda perpetuated HE practices that contributed to increased social disparity, as the following quote indicates:

Now there is an ASEAN university network (AUN)... with criteria for standard evaluations before any university is approved into this network. We have an international community in which each member country can learn and share experiences from each other. For instance, formerly, we did not have enough resources and implemented the policy of 'those who know much, teach those who know little; those who know little, teach those who do not know nothing'. This form of internationalisation allows those who have learnt from overseas such as Thailand, or Japan to teach local people, which contributes to capacity building in the country. It means that other universities that are modernised, can connect with our local universities through the form of MoU. (Senior academic researcher)

Put simply, at the immediate level, neoliberalism creates more social disparity amongst the students in terms of both access to quality HE services and prospects for employability upon their graduation. For the long-term, the current policy practice is geared towards a social divide between the rich and those from low-income family backgrounds and the poor. The elite and those from rich family backgrounds become wealthier by obtaining the dominant benefit over those from the low-income family background or the mass poor, particularly from rural or remote areas. Gaps in education access and quality has resulted in many people unable to complete quality HE and accept immediate jobs to secure personal and family's living costs. Also, this neoliberal agenda has increasingly led to social gaps not only at national level but also at intra-city levels. There is widespread inequality in access to quality HE services amongst those students living in the capital and those living in the rural provinces, although the students living in the city also experience social injustice in regard to accessing quality services as they are composed not only of those from wealthy family backgrounds but also those from low-income family backgrounds.

7.6 Chapter summary

This chapter answers the second research sub-question of the study. It reveals participants' insights regarding expectations from university education regarding the long-term needs of a nation, meeting social expectations, social justice, and a social democratic reform agenda. Optimistic insights from the research participants reflect what the neoliberal agenda offers: (i) better curricula and quality standards; (ii) foreign direct investment inflow, employment, and technology skills; (iii) international academic network exchanges; and, (iv) community-wide collaboration. Amongst the participants' insights, better curricula and quality standards were the most important outcomes from a neoliberal education reform. Additionally, foreign direct investment inflow, employment, and technology skills were accepted by all the participants, making this theme as the second most important goal. However, their pessimistic insights into the neoliberal agenda pointed to several conflicting issues, including the widespread poor quality of education, the education fee structure, and the challenges facing female students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds and from rural areas.

The widening gaps created by the neoliberal agenda revealed the impact on social justice. Mainly, this meant that children from affluent families could access high quality education and promote their social mobility upon graduation, unlike those from low-income families or disadvantaged social backgrounds. Local insights into social justice have been shaped by the local culture, the historical legacy and the mindset of the local people who did not dream of a great lifestyle (or social mobility) but only a life lived with dignity and a sustainable source of income, perhaps a step higher than their parent's generation. These attitudes and expectations in attaining tertiary education shape the social expectations for justice and well-being. Specifically, the community of practice in the Global South Cambodia is strongly influenced by its legacy of postcolonialism and global transformation.

Chapter 8 ‘Contextualised’ Neoliberalism: Towards a Framework for a More Socially Just Higher Education

Education has now undergone the digital turn and to a large extent been captured by big data systems in administration as well as teaching and research. ... If education is equated almost solely with job training rather than a broader critical citizenship agenda for participatory democracy, we can expect the further decline of social democracy and the rise of populist demagogue politicians and alt-right racist parties.

(Peters, 2017, p. 565)

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings from the third research sub-question: ‘How might Cambodia develop a more democratic/socially just HE policy framework?’ This chapter has five main sections. First, it presents the state-regulated neoliberalism model in the context of the Global South. Secondly, this chapter explains the essential role of community of practice and beyond for HE policy formation and practice supported by evidence from the research participants’ voice in this study. Thirdly, this chapter brings the concept of semiotic social space and affinity spaces in which HE policy formation and practice work better under neoliberalism in the Global South context. Finally, this chapter presents how state-regulated neoliberalism function through the lens of ‘community of practice and beyond’, and affinity spaces for professional learning and development and incentives as the HE framework that enhances educational neoliberalism in Cambodia.

8.2 Suggested neoliberalisation framework in Global South Cambodia

This section argues for the neoliberal framework enhancing Cambodian HE policy formation and practice, based on the findings and discussions as explored in depth in Chapters 4 and 5. There are two objectives: first, I explain the theoretical context and the reality of the neoliberal agenda to support the framework. I present the ‘contextualised’ framework for the community of practice and beyond for the neoliberal agenda; and, finally, I offer a narrative of my epistemology to this study.

Employing Michael Foucault’s (1991a) theory of governmentality to highlight the need for development of a *pastoral culture* amongst the community of practice, and Olssen’s

thin-communitarianism (Olssen, 2002, 2004a, 2009, 2014, 2017), I build a ‘*state-regulated neoliberalism*’ framework for Global South Cambodia that emphasises a quality community of practice with the use of Gee’s conception of *semiotic social spaces* (SSS) and *affinity spaces* (Barany & Foster, 2020; Gee, 2005, 2017, 2018; Gee & Hayes, 2012; Whitton & Hollins, 2008). I make reference also to the Global South, aspects of the historical legacy, postcolonialism, globalisation, and emerging governmentality. In addition, the theory of thin-communitarianism is subjected to my critique by drawing on Global South scholarship, namely in regard to the historical legacy, postcolonial mindset, contextual realities of community (i.e., traditions and culture), and ‘governmentality culture’. This becomes an appropriate tool for examining neoliberalism within HE in the context of Cambodia. I label this scholarship expansion as Global South habitus, as this study is strongly embedded in the experiences, psychological insights, and mindsets of the local communities of practice.

The policy practice was considered under a ‘regime of truth’ in which its logic was shaped, transformed, and manifested during policy implementation amongst the community of HEI practitioners and learners. These multifaceted influences reflect an interdependent relationship between the internal and external aspects of the neoliberal grammar, where the former refers to policy content, and the latter refers to the available resources of policy practice. This contextual reality led me to adopt and develop a state-regulated model for the community of practice and beyond for neoliberalism. Rather than advance the current practice of neoliberalism, nor completely oppose the neoliberal paradigm, I argue for a ‘state-regulated neoliberalism’ that strives for enhanced pastoral power amongst students and HEI practitioners, through affinity spaces for the HEI community of practice. My theorisation of neoliberalism for Global South Cambodia aligns with Olssen’s (2002, 2017) theory of thin-communitarianism, adds Global South agency in terms of the historical legacy and emphasises the affinity spaces concept for a quality neoliberal community of practice and beyond.

Specifically, this model is premised on the neoliberal grammar and digital tools of knowledge exchange and dynamics (i.e., SSS and affinity spaces). My expanded theorising adds aspects of local traditions, culture, governmental culture, and the contextual realities of a contested terrain, involving ideologies and power struggles for emerging Global South agency, which is limited in Global North settings. This suggested framework is, thus, a practical, vibrant, and robust form of neoliberalism for Global South societies, involving emerging policy elites across borders and spatial interest groups in

building a more socially just society. In the following section, I present the critical elaboration of the essence of a state-regulated mode, as a framework for the neoliberal agenda in Global South Cambodia.

8.2.1 Towards state-regulated neoliberalism

Critics of the neoliberal agenda worldwide have called for a more prominent role for the state. These include: Tikly (1999, 2001) on postcolonialism and globalisation; Hoogvet (1997) on the emergent political economy of development; Dale (1999) on mechanisms of external effects theory; Green (1997, 1999) on policy convergence and structural difference in globalisation movements; Ilon (1994) on the educational effects of structural adjustment; and Marginson (1999) on the emergent politics of education. The emphasis for state-regulated mechanisms was emphasised by Olssen (2002) in calling for policy practice for social justice and social democratic reform. Here, Olssen explains how neoliberalism falls short in building social democratic reform and social justice. Olssen maintains that the neoliberal framework was re-emphasised and developed amongst policy elites as practical strategies to perform roles and responsibilities in mitigating growing social problems (Olssen, 2017). Thin-communitarianism does not provide support for any attempt at drawing conclusions for total control; instead, diversity is seen as complementary to development.

In brief, this framework emphasises a hybridisation process of policy practice, building ‘self’ development amongst practitioners and learners. This enables a new culture of policy practice towards a better mindset of excellence for quality local human resource development, as a means for social democratic reform and well-being. Specifically, it strives to create new awareness, knowledge, experience and skills amongst a community of practice at the top and bottom levels of practitioners.

I now conceptualise the new framework for a state-regulated neoliberal education for Global South Cambodia, leading towards a more democratic and socially just framework.

8.2.2 Community of practice

Communities of practice mainly involve groups of people sharing experiences and passion through interdependent collaboration for certain objectives/goals (E. C. Wenger & Snyder, 2000). From a neoliberal education perspective, a community of practice involves HEI leaders, HEI practitioners, investors, stakeholders from corporate/industrial sectors, donors, and students and their family community. To effect change, a diverse

group of people, with different expertise, duties, capacity levels, backgrounds and discipline, but with common interests and goals, need to work together to gain more quality outputs. They include executive officers, managers, knowledge officers, and community developers. The leaders and key HEI practitioners must be professional, with the capacity to run broad initiatives for institutional development. Collaboration and expert coordination throughout the policy implementation stage is vitally important to develop the strategic objectives while it is essential that the role of tertiary education is seen to cultivate both soft and hard skills, amongst students and practitioners, within a specific timeframe.

This community of practice is shaped by a ‘social construct’ that emerges from local practitioners through the technologies of government. This governmental technology reflects a ‘governmentality culture’, as manifested and shaped by the mindsets of local policy elites and, in this study, the community of HEI practitioners. Specifically, governmentality culture emerged through colonial shaping (by force and/or social examples) into socio-cultural norms and beliefs throughout the administrative hierarchy of HEI bureaucrats and practitioners. The ‘governmentality culture’ has directed the neoliberal agenda towards different rationales of policy practice. Moreover, conceptualising a ‘governmentality culture’ casts light on approaches to reform that improve the community of practice and local culture as the historical legacy struggles with the reform effort. The government embraces strongly the ‘technologies of power’, to establish the emerging ‘regime of truth’, throughout the overall process of policy practice.

From a competitive human resources standpoint, each nation expects graduates with knowledge and skills to build social progress and reform. The development of tacit knowledge requires a series of professional interactions and an informal learning process that includes explicating narratives/anecdotes, open dialogue, apprenticeship, deep understanding of cultural notions, and interdependent systems for dynamic responses to context-specific needs that favour development for the social good. As E. Wenger et al. (2002, p. 9) note:

the tacit aspects of knowledge are often the most valuable. They consist of embodied expertise—a deep understanding of complex, interdependent systems that enables dynamic responses to context-specific problems. ... Communities of practice are in the best position to codify knowledge, because they can combine its tacit and explicit aspects. (p. 9)

One of the limitations of a community of practice, however, is that it cannot control bias when forming certain groups for the community of practice. Although a community of practice has limitations to open participation with outsider expertise, it simply limits the potential of knowledge exchanges and learning through social events, social media, online learning platforms, and Internet tools which are crucial for a community of practice to attain independent and lifelong learning. Thus, the base of community of practice is problematic due to its lack of full capacity of participation, membership, and boundaries.

8.2.3 Beyond a community of practice

The contextual reality of policy practice in Global South Cambodia reflects ongoing power dynamics amongst emerging policy elites influenced by a historical legacy and an ongoing reform agenda. This power struggle requires policy practice to employ a strategy incorporating social structures of practice, including social games (spaces) and politics (government technology) emerging in the policy practice process. As E. Wenger et al. (2002) put it: “What managers have been missing so far is an understanding of the kind of social structure that can take responsibility for fostering learning, developing competencies, and managing knowledge” (p. 11). The policy formation and practice must go smoothly through systematic and strategic planning, and responsibility has to be adopted from the initial stage of policy development to the practical policy implementation stages.

8.2.4 Semiotic social spaces

To reflect the contextual reality of policy practice in Global South Cambodia, I utilise the *semiotic social spaces* (SSS) and *affinity spaces* of Gee’s (2005) theory. Gee (2005) identifies the community of practice with reference to the *Age of Mythology*, a ‘real-time strategy’ computer game. I conceptualise the community of practice, as open SSS and affinity spaces, to be vibrant, robust, and practical in relation to the reality of policy practice amongst the community of HEI practitioners. The concepts of SSS and affinity spaces are built from the grammar of a ‘real-time strategy’ game. In the game, the player competes against his/her opponent by building and developing a territory, such as town/cities, buildings, and settlements, based on a certain ‘civilisation’. At the social practice level of the game, workers are key to the development of resources and the civilisation; they are used to perform the labour necessary for resource accumulation such as collecting gold, doing farm work, cutting wood, and hunting animals. The growth of development and social production, and of buildings, are used to train different types of

warriors and military personnel, and create equipment (Gee, 2005, p. 217). Once the strength of a civilisation has become competitive enough to defeat the opponent, the player will begin the fight with the other side who has simultaneously also been building up her/his civilisation.

Timing and the decision making by a player to begin the fight are essential in this game. Each player must determine the right time to fight, based on the available resources rather than waiting, which may allow the opponent to become stronger. The level of complexity in the real-time strategy game is characterised through the complex and sophisticated 'civilisations', which each player must make to defeat their opponents. As explained in the grammar (the rules of the game), there are over 160 actions for building social development, each having consequences for other choices later in the game (Gee, 2005, pp. 225-228). The choices represent the game strategy to be utilised in defeating an opponent. These choices or 'signs' (i.e., competitive activities/strategies) are classified into two main sources—internal and external aspects. Internal aspects refer to the grammar context set in the portal and the core generator of the game, that range from the set rules, available resources, tools, tactics, and strategies the player uses to defeat their opponent. As for the external aspects, these are resources that enable players to learn about other opponents and gain experience from other players through a portal on the game's website. The portal allows ongoing and limitless opportunities for each player to build and master their competitive and gaming strategies in the game.

Conceptualising SSS and affinity spaces in a neoliberal context is crucial for policy practice in Global South Cambodia. Though similar to the theory of SSS, the policy practices the Global South context interfaces with a terrain of competing signs; the signs having interdependent conditions in which the local HEI practitioners bring their understanding, belief, mindsets, dreams and expectations. Differentiation between the internal and external aspects is based on the set of signs embedded in the policy content and the structure of social practice in which people are engaged. The set of signs is embedded in the policy goals, strategy and objectives, the institutional hierarchy of leadership and management, missions, and political networking with the outside environment. Specifically, the internal aspects include prescriptions and guidelines in the official policy, endorsed and delegated by the government. The external aspects refer to the policy content and contextual reality of the historical legacy, socio-cultural habitus, political-economic logic (i.e., governmental culture, and power technology thresholds), and global transformation (neo-liberalism, postcolonialism, and neo-colonialism).

Within the rationale for a neoliberal environment, internal aspects of policy practice are related through the content of the policy. This can incorporate a hegemonic order, and interplay between powerful emerging policy elites and the local government.

Going back to the real-time strategy game, the internal aspects of SSS refer to the situation when the player in real-time competition collects resources from the core generator or portal of the game to build their civilisation. This manner of resource generation is referenced to internal aspects of the knowledge content. On the other hand, when a player across the world also plays the game, either alone or with other players on the internet, they may also obtain ideas about the game from other players, through social media platforms, magazines, and internet sites related to the game. Players, thus, have information about other players; they know who is more adept in the game. In the situation when a player becomes oriented towards certain organised thoughts, behaviours, and practical actions with other people engaging in the platform in any real-time strategy game, we can refer to it as the external aspects of SSS.

The visualisation of the portal database of the real-time strategy game offers a powerful simulation model for policy practice in Global South societies, these policy practices being conditioned/influenced by socio-cultural practices, government technology, and political economy. Moreover, the community of practice manifested spaces amongst the emerging policy elites. Policy implementation is strongly determined by emerging policy elites (including those unprofessional capitalists) across borders. These policy elites came with historical legacies, ideologies, and rationales for their participation/investment. Today the process has become faster as a result of the internet. Hence, the neoliberal agenda in the context of this study has been shaped by the local interpretation.

8.2.5 State-regulated neoliberalism through the lens of ‘community of practice and beyond’

The HEI community of practice in Global South Cambodia reflects a terrain of contest, manifestation, and power struggle. The HEI community now involves multiple stakeholders and key players driving the education sector through either the state or privately funded (owned) institutions in pursuit of business operations through free-market competition. Emerging HEI policy elites now include professional intellectuals (appointed by the state), development partners (donors), neoliberal capitalist investors, philanthropists, academic researchers, and students and their communities. Specifically, through the advancement of a global network of digital tools/technology, the technology

of governmentality has been manifested and shaped by both the national community and the global governance network. These aspects are evidenced by the participants perspectives, as follows:

We also have an ASEAN qualification reference framework, which is developed for all the ASEAN members to use as their benchmark. Those references are for use to be able to have a standard level... (Representative from ACC)

Now amongst the current staff of more than 1000 staffs and officers, this [University A] has **about 70 to 80 foreign professors** who are entitled to work for the long terms. Moreover, we have **hundreds of exchange staff, lecturers and professors** who come to work on short-term basis. (Leader of HEIs, emphasis added)

Projects that provide more benefits are those that, for example, set up a **laboratory** for students with creative ideas such as a social enterprise. ... Other projects offered ... students to earn **some income** ... or ... **practical experience** in doing fieldwork research. (A successful graduate, emphasis added)

So, when you see yourselves as **the supplier**, you change the mindset of some **rectors, or some deans, professors**, or maybe the whole ministry of education. ... create a kind of engagement between **the private and the supplying institution**. (Head of multinational corporation, emphasis added)

As elaborated in the statements above, it is crystal clear that the HEI community of practice involves multiple policy practitioners, not only the educational professionals, but also the private sector, donors, researchers, and students. In addition, the community of practice was shaped through the framework for reference of quality standards beyond the national dimension. Moreover, the implications of this contextual reality of the HEI community of practice reveals that neoliberal practice is open for constant manifestation, adaptation, and refinement by the emerging policy elites. Even though HEIs operate through the state's official neoliberal policy, it is worthwhile emphasising that this community practice remains dependent on two contextual realities of practice.

First, HEIs community is led by and geared to emerging elites who run the HEIs through corporate mindsets/rationales as emerging policy elites who came into HEI businesses. The presence of the Cambodian Higher Education Association (CHEA) for the private HEIs is evidence of this. Although the (private) HEIs committed to human resource

development, these HEI practitioners/leaders came into the HEI community mainly for investment and with a profit-maximising mentality, which is inevitably supported by the neoliberal governmentality in sustaining their business operations. This practice has, however, resulted in the neoliberal grammar (content) potentially (and inevitably) being manifested and shaped by these corporate-professional practitioners to serve corporate and investment interests through the profit-maximising mentality ahead of maintaining education quality standard. In the following statements, participants commented on this contextual reality:

... private sector in our country only cares about their own income and the families. This is reflected through their limited educational background to see only the financial profits as their benefits. (Senior academic researcher)

... each HEI competes for profit and benefits from the student's enrolment. Private HEIs have to compete with the state HEIs. ... Also, private HEIs need to pay for all operating fees ... In contrast, the state HEIs have funding from the government. The private HEIs needs investment capital and get loans from the bank ... it is the sole responsibilities of the private HEIs ... to conform to the standard imposed by the ACC and CHEA. ... private HEIs base to survive through tuition fees, and this is also related to the GDP per capita of the people. Moreover, most private HEIs in Cambodia absorbs students from rural country areas ... the private HEIs can promote to a higher quality standard once they can charge higher tuition fees from the students when there is more GDP per capita increase. ... to see the improvement in the quality of private HEIs in Cambodia, we need just more financial input into the system. (Representative of CHEA)

Looking at the university fee, the students would complain if it were more than \$500 per year. ... It is not even enough for the dormitory fee. Thus, it is impossible to ensure quality amongst Cambodian universities if based on the current situation of university fee. In Cambodia, the private higher education sector gains less profit compared to the private sector in the kindergarten. (Senior academic researcher)

This price is set by the MoEYS, which means that the government concerns about the number of enrolment rate and expects higher education offer such level of quality. It shows that the government do not care about the quality of higher education rather than the politics. (Senior academic researcher)

Put simply, neoliberalism emerges as not only a global political project but also a local government political project to expand services in the education sector while the states are unable to support for the growing needs of HE services for students. The state enables free-market competition for private HEIs to offer choices for students and to complement the roles of state HEIs in offering tertiary education services. However, due to absence of (state) funding and fringe capital, the base income of private HEIs in Global South Cambodia only comes from students' fees. For their business to survive, each HEI needs to offer low-quality services with the available tuition fees standard being set by the government to help local students. The government guideline for the tuition fee benchmark truly reflects state's political reasons of social stability and distribution of local skills for workforces.

In this sense, double-standard education services are inevitable in the neoliberal sphere. This is because of growing number of students who are from low-income backgrounds also demand/need tertiary education services. The private HEIs need to charge lower tuition fees amongst students who are mainly from rural areas where GDP per capita is low. These HEIs struggle to operate and seek loans and other sources of finance once they need additional finance, such as to maintain the institutional standard demanded by the ACC or CHEA. Hence, as elaborated in the statements above, neoliberalism is essentially a state's (political) strategy for development in the education sector, while financial deficits amongst the neoliberal universities have led to widespread issues of low-quality services.

Another thing in the statements above is that the neoliberal agenda reveals the reinvestment of self-interested practice, through fringe investment capital from local businesses together with state's deficits in HEI funding. The business of HEIs is geared to serve the state's need for political stability, offering choices to the mass to gain tertiary education services, but with a double-standard system. Thus, the education sector serves government technology and the political economy predominantly benefitting interest groups and family interests ahead of the public good. This neoliberal practice is seen as driving the education sector towards state-corporate-symbolic-professional practice by the emerging policy elites with symbolic quality professional practice that reinvests in social disparity through double-standard services. Neoliberalism in Global South Cambodia, as explained above, reflects a platform of knowledge sharing and exchanges beyond the educational professional. This HE community includes domestic and international policy elites, and HEI practitioners from mixed discipline including highly

professional experts, academic professionals, researchers, donors, investors, and symbolic quality professional practitioners.

The neoliberal grammar was manifested and shaped at the level of the community of practice. Specifically, the community of practice reflected a terrain of contest involving hegemonic discourses serving the labour markets, emerging policy elites (domestic and international) driving HEIs towards corporate-symbolic-professionalisation (through neoliberal capitalism) and reinvesting for professionalisation towards a corporate rationale, and students and their families/community. In addition, the HEI community of practice is shaped by the external grammar of neoliberal agencies through supra-national bodies with regional and global benchmarking frameworks. These frameworks help to advance neoliberalism and the globalisation transformation, while they have powerful influences on the HEI community of practice in the nations, especially through their decisions about academic networking, collaboration, and the potential image of the overall HEI community being considered for funding by the major donor community. Thus, the neoliberal agenda in Global South Cambodia reflects the concept of the ‘HEI community of practice and beyond’.

8.2.6 Affinity spaces

The concept of *affinity spaces* is based on multiple aspects of development—knowledge, skills, experiences, and growing tacit knowledge—shared amongst learners and practitioners with common interests and goals through an open and dynamic portal of information sources. Affinity spaces reflect the community of practice that is open to internal and external aspects of knowledge and skills, through SSS and affinity spaces beyond the community of practice concept (Gee, 2005, 2017, 2018). In the metaphor of the ‘real-time strategic game’, the internal grammar as the core generator in the game portal is the game itself. The internal grammar in the game portal shapes the player’s behaviour, pleasures, and displeasure. The core generator is continually updated and developed, based on the players’ experiences when playing the game (Gee, 2005, pp. 217-221). This reflects the interdependent relationship between the internal and external aspects, and how the external grammar transforms the internal grammar in the core generator of the game. Conceptualising 11 features of the knowledge platform of the theorisation of affinity spaces (Gee, 2005, pp. 225-228), my framework argues for the incorporation of affinity spaces into neoliberal policy practice in Global South Cambodia.

8.2.7 State-regulated neoliberalism through the lens of affinity spaces

In Global South Cambodia, affinity spaces emerge through SSS adding onto the HEI community of practice where HEIs compete with and learn from one another through both internal and external sources of information, specifically through the neoliberal grammar of the official policy documents, and the knowledge/information they obtain from various social media platforms, on websites, and through social networks. Policy practice through this form of neoliberalism, thus, was influenced by emerging policy elites within the imperfect free-market competition incorporating a multifaceted rationale, state-corporate-symbolic-professional practice, and ideological interplay through the technology vocabulary.

In this neoliberal sphere, HEI practitioners, policy elites, including students and their community require quality collaboration through the notion of thin-communitarianism (Olssen, 2002, 2004a, 2016b, 2017) or the state-regulated neoliberal framework. In actual policy implementation, the government developed and endorsed the official policy with enabling resources provided to relevant ministry departments, HEIs, and various publics (HEI consumers/stakeholders). Once the policy agenda has been implemented across ministries and HEIs, policy elites and HEI practitioners shape practice according to the contextual reality of local resources. The rationale that shapes policy practice also reflects the mentality of profit maximisation and the opportunity for the expansion of the power of interest groups over the deteriorating education sector.

In the neoliberal sphere, these emerging elites form their associations claiming the justification of supporting the HEI community while demanding government protection of their interest groups. Also, these emerging policy elites are often backed by senior policy elites embedded within the mindset and experiences arising from the historical legacy, and powerful networks that obtain power despite being unprofessional (i.e., from outside the discipline). Without explicitly resisting, the HEI community of practice has adjusted the rules of the game (i.e., neoliberal practice) within the community of practice and shaped the rationale for and outcomes of the policy according to the logic of profit maximisation, at the expense of the education sector. Meanwhile, the intellectuals, naively, and short-sightedly, conform in order to protect their living.

8.2.8 Affinity spaces for professional learning and development

Central to my framework is a neoliberal community of practice, akin to affinity spaces, that strives for systematic development through professional learning and development.

Professional learning and development focuses on changing to a new culture of practice that is vibrant, where individuals within the community of practice play roles with high levels of responsibility and collaborate through open dialogue for quality excellence. The community of practice, hence, strives for a decolonised mindset, and a culturally responsive practice open to change, and quality human resources. How can a community of practice with a colonised mindset change to a culture of excellence, responsibilities, and open negotiation?

There are two points of emphasis to ensure quality policy implementation. First, professional learning and capacity development needs to be actioned through a wide range of stakeholder involvement. This requires interdependent relationships amongst the participants within the (professional) community of practice. If we regard practice as a community-wide collaboration, oriented to interdependent partnerships amongst stakeholders throughout the affinity spaces, the community has to promote quality academic output and shared advantages to the whole HEI community of practitioners. This necessitates an income related to value-added products and services that promote local productivity for the local and global market.

Secondly, enabling access to resources is critical. HEIs must equip standard facilities, including: laboratories for STEM students; apprenticeships; fields/farmlands for agriculture students; shopping, houses and offices for business students; and education-related amenities, namely sports grounds, libraries, parks, accommodation and cafeterias, for all students. These resources will be a catalyst for the creation of research and development sites and entrepreneurialism that aim for sustainable development for the long-term, rather than profit-maximising objectives. One of the collaborative projects fostered by industry/multinational companies could be the construction of entrepreneurial centres attached to every HEI campus that would enable local and international HEI practitioners to work together. Quality achievements could emerge gradually year-on-year, and the number of quality graduates would expand faster once the number of graduates has gathered into a critical mass.

8.2.9 Incentives

This community of practice demands an appropriate incentive mechanism. On top of quality control assurance, the state must maintain an incentives mechanism namely professorship ranking. A professorship framework is a systematic intrinsic motivation that promotes a professional research culture amongst the HEIs' experts, namely

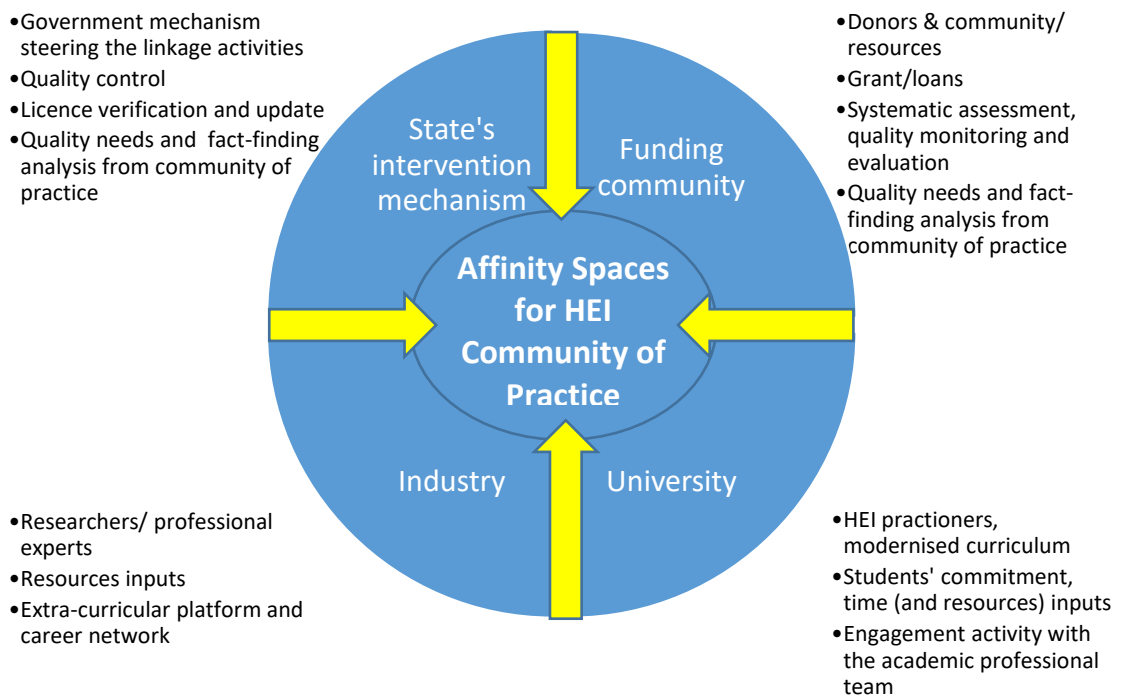
educational researchers, lecturers, and staff. A professorship framework functions to promote a professional community of learning, ensuring professional experts prove their capability and generate research output.

This framework could help limit the rise of unprofessional HEI practitioners who exploit the system through the profit-maximisation that undermines the system and the professional community at large. It could underpin value of academics to society, a value that is not to be exploited by the unprofessional elites, and would support an incentive scheme for a research culture. This kind of framework would develop pastoral power amongst local HEI practitioners in moving towards a new version of a 'culture' of practice, with income and professional quality development. This new culture of policy practice would strengthen human resources for the long-term.

Local policy practice reveals the local 'pastoral power' of policy practice (Blake, 1999b; Foucault, 1970) and is linked to a certain environment and civilisation that merely reflects a symbolic policy practice. Thus, it is essential that policy practice in the context of Global South Cambodia aims for an enhancement in 'pastoral power' in a community of practice as its long-term strategy. This will lead towards practical dynamic engagement, with resources being shared amongst the community of practitioners. This practice can be based on open dialogue, negotiation and collaboration so as to enhance social justice within the community of practice. Any totalising judgement on a community stereotype is a judgement on an illusion, and any conclusion only exists based on certain socio-cultural contextual realities (Olssen, 2002, p. 500). Rather than depending on immediate interests, an ideal education community sees professional ideals as a life in itself; the policy implementation will then promote the values of professional knowledge, skills, and experiences.

HEIs can cultivate academic and business projects that involve all the stakeholders in sharing knowledge, skills, experiences and creativity for the benefit of each institution through open dialogue that enables individuals with a sense of high trust that lifts their quality of life in a systematic and sustainable manner. Simply put, this neoliberal framework demands all policy elites become accountable for uplifting the norms of professional human resources rather than focusing only on policy formation and enforcement. The following figure offers a succinct explanation of the suggested framework for state-regulated neoliberalism through the theoretical lens of thin-communitarianism.

Figure 1. Suggested framework for neoliberalisation in Global South Cambodia



8.3 How the framework enhances educational neoliberalism in Cambodia

Some may doubt how the proposed framework will contribute to building social democracy, social justice, and well-being amongst all citizens. The means for social development and justice will emerge through the adoption of values amongst all individuals that mean that everyone can gain a maximum reduction in all forms of inequality in social participation (Craig, 2002, p. 672).

What is the alternative to this corporate model of education? Hobson (1996) suggests that well-being and human welfare should form the basis of society. That is not simply the exchange of wealth, but rather the intrinsic value/worth or social good as human welfare, known as “life sustaining properties” (Allett, 1981, p. 18). To prepare for all citizens to participate fully in social development, it is essential that the whole human race has access to resources for their development (Mackenzie, 1980/2006, p. 180). The inadequacy of welfare support marks a constraint for social democracy and social justice amongst all individuals. For Olssen (2009), any uneven development and social inequality can cause negative development because social organisation and institutional structures are the key for each and every person in society.

So far, neoliberalism has fuelled the global exchange of ideas, knowledge, and business transactions to an unprecedented level, yet the practice serves predominantly the private/market spaces and is fostered by global hegemonic technical discourses. Meanwhile, social democracy, justice, and well-being for all individuals have been undermined by interest groups who have become policy elites, as outlined in this study of HE policy reform. Those who are punished through social inequality, and poverty without formal (fair) justification, are unfairly exploited by those emerging elite/interest groups. Neoliberalism promotes global funding agencies, who invest in social 'inequality', or the mindset of corporate education, defining their 'product', or policy, as the solution for widespread failure in HE systems around the world (Guion Akdağ & Swanson, 2018). This has influenced HE reform in every aspect of policy formation and practice (Lingard & Sellar, 2013).

Enhancing the well-being of all individuals and adequate social structures are essential for individual development. According to Hobson (1996), the so-called production surplus has failed; cooperation is key to productivity, boosting both social and economic development. Welfare itself is an important social good that provides a platform for the well-being of all humanity. This implies establishing business partnerships that become involved in planning, developing skills, and enhancing resources in ways that can both command capital and social infrastructure. Seen in a wider context of people and work, creative energy for production and progress can be put in place. People can sustain life only if they can generate income; hence, without working, individuals and societies cannot make or produce and will not progress. To sum up, the unequal distribution of wealth results in a waste of productivity, and unequal development. Organised cooperation amongst individuals in a society can result in individual contributions as a form of 'productive power' that brings about increases in both productivity and well-being in that society.

8.4 Chapter summary

As the backbone of this chapter, I have introduced state-regulated neoliberalism through the theoretical lens of thin-communitarianism (Olssen, 2002, 2004a, 2009, 2014, 2017). I also conceptualise affinity spaces (Gee, 2005, 2017, 2018) for the HEI community of practice as the neoliberal framework that empowers and develops pastoral power throughout the community of practice.

In addition, I added a concept from the Global South agency of ‘historical legacy’, ‘governmentality culture’, and ‘geopolitical economy’ as the keys for local relevance and a socio-cultural responsive model for effective neoliberalisation. Thus, the suggested framework is a robust, vibrant, and practical model for neoliberalisation in Global South Cambodia that builds policy practice for more social justice and well-being for all individuals. There are strong rationales that this framework brings about these ideals.

First, the framework focuses on promoting the culture of practice and work responsibility as a new version of ‘pastoral power’ (Blake, 1999b; M. Foucault, 1982; Golder, 2007b; Martin & Waring, 2018a) in the HEI community of practice. It targets the current neoliberal policy practice in the HEI community and moves it towards having greater responsibility for their work, profession, social well-being, and economic growth with a better quality social redistribution through state-regulated neoliberal tertiary education practice. It is crucial that pastoral power amongst HEI practitioners is formed through the HEI community of practice. This will enable the HEI community of practice, specifically HEI practitioners and learners, to be increasingly held responsible for professionalism in carrying out tasks that promote social justice and well-being for all individuals. This change could emerge, not only in their daily duties but also in their collaborative and independent learning, in multiple sources of knowledge sharing, research and development, and in sustainable income-generation activities amongst all stakeholders in the HEI community of practice. Put simply, by promoting the HEI community of practice as pastors, practitioners can internalise and normalise a better version of a ‘culture of practice’ in the neoliberal framework that is in resistance to ‘subjectification’ (M. Foucault, 1982). I base this change on professional HE services, quality, responsibility, bigger expectations/dreams, multiple sources of knowledge and collaboration that strive for personalised development, creativity, and self-reliant national development agendas.

Secondly, I added the conceptualisation of Global South agency into the state-regulated neoliberal framework, which is unique and responsive to the Global South Cambodia context. These aspects of Global South agency primarily consist of the national historical legacy, socio-cultural contexts, the tradition of socio-political practice, and gender-sensitivity-cultural aspects (particularly with regard to women). These aspects have not been discussed amongst the studies of the Global North, yet are essential for the neoliberal agenda in the Global South context, in countries such as Cambodia, where these local contextual aspects of agency have interfaced with and even dominated the flow of policy implementation in the HEI community of practice. The incongruence of the policy agenda (modernity) and the belief/expectation (historical legacy) emerging from the community of practice has hindered the flow of policy achievements and shaped the logic of the neoliberal agenda. Mainly, these hindrances reinvested the HEI community through 'subjectification' and power struggle geared towards widening social disparity, cultural imperialism, and neo-colonialism.

In a nutshell, this study neither rejects the neoliberal movement nor supports the current neoliberal agenda but suggests a framework for state-regulated neoliberalism through the lens of thin-communitarianism (Olssen, 2002, 2004a, 2009, 2014, 2017) and the community of practice through affinity spaces (Gee, 2005, 2017, 2018). Also, this theorisation of the neoliberal framework for Global South Cambodia focuses on the community of practice where affinity spaces are geared for the development of 'pastoral power' (Blake, 1999b; M. Foucault, 1982; Golder, 2007b; Martin & Waring, 2018a) amongst the HEI practitioners, stakeholders, researchers/scientists, and especially the learners/students. These ideals function through neoliberalism that raises its cannon at 'subjectification' (M. Foucault, 1982) within the HEI community of practice. Specifically, it opens an avenue for the state's quality regulation/control mechanism. It allows the HEI practitioners to function as pastors through affinity spaces that implement the neoliberal agenda through professional education-creativity, quality equity, accountability, responsibility, and collegiality.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

Historical materialism in the age of informational capitalism finds its premise in power that is the effect of discourse/practice. By the same token, the logic of discourse/practice finds its justification in the proliferation of information technologies. (Poster, 1984, p. 54)

9.1 Introduction

This thesis has contributed to the understanding of the discourse and practices associated with neoliberalism in the Cambodian HE sector. In this thesis I examined how policy elites perceive the world and make rational decisions in the everyday practice of the neoliberal agenda at the national level and as part of the community of practice in Global South Cambodia. In addition, the study shed light on how the contextual reality of policy formation and practice through the neoliberal agenda was manifested, shaped, and geared towards a certain regime of truth that is conditioned under multifaceted rationales including ‘governmentality culture’, postcolonialism, globalisation transformation, and geopolitical economic influences. At the end of the thesis, what stands out from this study is a suggested framework for state-regulated neoliberalism for the HEI community of practice to build education towards more socially just development and well-being for all individuals in Global South Cambodia.

9.2 Key findings

The overall findings supported Foucault’s (1991a) theory of ‘discourse’ governmentality; governmentality through the ‘technology of power’; the theory of ‘political symbolic’ policy (Jansen, 2002); Tikly’s (2003) concept of emerging ‘neo-(il)liberal’ governmentality; ‘hybrid-governmentality’ (Manuel, 2015; Sen, 2019); Dirlik’s (2018) conception of postcolonial theory; and dependency theory (Frank, 1979, 2018), as well as the theory of social redistribution proposed by Rizvi et al. (2006). There are multifaceted influences and rationales which brought the neoliberal agenda into reform efforts in Global South Cambodia. First, neoliberalism emerged as an international political project through which the countries of the periphery, specifically Global South Cambodia in this study, had the rebuilding of the national economy and political stability imposed upon them by the donor community in a form aligned with international community agendas. This neoliberal project has advanced through the donor

community's direct collaboration with national governments as a means for delivering state legitimacy to the international community, particularly for Cambodia as a post-conflict state undergoing rehabilitation. This advancement of neoliberalism in Cambodia revealed the pathway along which development links to postcolonialism and neo-colonialism through the education sector. As Collins and Rhoads (2010) emphasise:

In time, we came to center our concern about the relationship between the Bank and universities in the developing world on issues best described as neocolonial and neoliberal, the former conveying new forms of global hegemony advanced by powerful nations and their institutions, and the latter representing an economic ideology by which weaker nations may be brought into greater alignment with global trade initiatives. (p. 182)

The spread of neoliberalism into the Cambodian education sector advanced through the application and adoption of structural adjustment policy frameworks imposed by the international community in October 1993, specifically from the West through their agenda for the supremacy of globalisation and hegemonic discourses for national reform, skills and economic development, and peace building in the peripheral world. Funding through major grants or loans functions was one of the catalysts for the neoliberal agenda to leapfrog through Global South societies, in this case Cambodia.

The fact that Global South Cambodia is an aid-dependent nation revealed that policy formation and practice in the education sector depends mainly on the availability of funding. This national deficit emerges through most of the participants' perspectives, including a senior academic researcher, the head of the academic union, the head of a multinational corporation, and HEI leaders. The neoliberal agenda was fostered through the globalisation transformation along with hegemonic ideology and discourses from the West for neoliberal capitalism. The advancement of the agenda has spread it worldwide through the global technology of the 21st century, mainly geared by the West and their global funding agencies such as the IMF, the World Bank, the OECD, and the ADB, to name a few.

Secondly, the policy choice of neoliberalism reflects the national government's strategy for state apparatus and political-economic development. As shown in the findings and discussion chapters (Chapter 6 and Chapter 7), the government adopted the neoliberal agenda in the early 1990s to deal with the socio-cultural and political context, and with the growing demand for tertiary education amongst the local population. Also, the policy

choice reflected the wise decision of the government to access various funding sources to develop the education sector when the nation was in deficit in the aftermath of national destruction following the civil wars which had led the country to experience widespread deficits including in human resources, infrastructure, institutional systems, and finance. This policy rationale reflects the government technology threshold as a means for operating the state apparatus through neoliberal governmentality.

Policy formation and practice in the neoliberal sphere reflect a terrain of contest for ideological interplay and power struggles amongst the emerging policy elites worldwide. This terrain of contest requires the government to meddle through the mean of a hybrid governmentality for government technology so as to maintain effectiveness and quality enhancement in the education sector. What stand out from this hybrid governmentality is the emerging neoliberal governmentality that is predominantly rationalised through a 'governmentality culture' to prioritise socio-cultural and political practice for sustainable peace and political economy. In particular, this 'governmentality culture' exhibits a dominant mindset and tradition of socio-cultural and political practice influenced by the historical legacy and national context of Global South Cambodia. There are strategies the state employs to maintain a regime of truth through double-standard services so that a larger number of the students across the nation can gain degrees from the education sector while contributing to the state's maintenance of social stability through political economy and peace. This need for social stability is common amongst fragile states and the emerging developing economy of Global South Cambodia.

While it was not the expectation of the state, besides the enhancement of the quality and the expansion of equity and access in the education sector, neoliberal practice has been manifested and shaped by the community of practice into ways in which the system reinvests in social disparity through double-standard services, discrepancies in access and equity, and the exploitation of and deterioration in the quality and academic freedom of the academic profession. The current neoliberal practice, thus, has been geared to serve the dominant interests of private individuals, and the market, and has ignored the essence of public goods as a foundation for social justice and well-being for all individuals at large.

Finally, the rationale for neoliberal policy and practice has been driven by the globalisation transformation taking place through the regional and international cooperation strategy under the ongoing geopolitical power relations. Neoliberalism is an

ongoing global political project to advance a hegemonic ideology through a tertiary education model brought from the West to Global South societies, as shown in the case of Cambodia in this study. Neoliberalisation has advanced through the spread of globalisation transformation, within which there are global and regional frameworks of reference that demand each HEI in the respective aid-recipient country aligns with the suggested criteria and collaborative activities. These frameworks include external and internal references such as the ‘world class university’ reference frame, the ASEAN HE system framework of reference, and the national qualification framework of reference. The neoliberal agenda, thus, emerged to build cross-border power relations within the region and across the globe through a geopolitical and economic rationale. The geopolitical and economic rationale enables the national education system to gain licence to build networks with other HEIs across the regions and the globe while cultivating human resources towards higher capacity and producing more competitive labour, specifically for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC).

9.3 Contextual realities of neoliberalisation in higher education

In Chapters 1 and 3, I have explained how the neoliberalisation agenda influences worldwide tertiary education reform as a hegemonic education model from the West, manifested by a technological vocabulary and powerful discourses providing a rationale for political economy and state expenditure efficiency. Then, in Chapter 6, I critically discussed the contextual reality of neoliberal practice and advancement in the Global South Cambodian context. While the hegemonic neoliberal ideology was brought into Cambodia through the state’s rationale for the education sector reform, the policy practice in the HEI community reflects a terrain of contestation and power struggle. There are power struggles manifested and shaped amongst the emerging policy elites and the community of practice.

Despite appropriate official policy being in place, the complexity of policy implementation reveals an ideological contestation between the historical legacy embedded amongst the policy elites and the HEI community of practitioners who interface with the drive for modernity through the advancement of neoliberalism fostered through the globalisation transformation. The contextual realities of neoliberalisation, thus, became geared mainly towards an ongoing rationale shaped by the community of practice and the emerging policy elites within the nation and across borders. Neoliberalism in Global South Cambodia was fostered mainly by the hegemonic development agenda supported by the global funding agency network from the West, yet

the policy implementation was manifested, and shaped primarily by the emerging policy elites and the HEIs' community of practice. This form of neoliberalism was reinvested in social disparity and double-standard services, and was geared to provide services predominantly to the market and private individuals.

In addition, neoliberalisation in Global South Cambodia reflected the emerging neoliberal governmentality in which state apparatuses work through the government technology threshold. This government technology threshold is itself operated through hybrid-governmentality. This neoliberal hybrid governmentality reveals a state 'governmentality culture' amongst the (emerging) policy elites embedded in the historical legacy through a mindset, beliefs, socio-cultural tradition, and political practices influenced by the administration of the colonial past and the effects of civil wars. The historical legacy mindset, beliefs and socio-cultural values and the tradition of political practices evolve through the process of an emerging neoliberal 'governmentality culture' that dominates all the practices of neoliberalism to maintain social stability and peace as the utmost priority for the national socio-cultural and political-economic advancement. In fact, neoliberalism has been implemented as a means for the state apparatus to gain political benefits from the local people, through allowing more choice, access, and equity in the education sector to respond to the growing demand for tertiary education as well as to cater to more high school graduates engaging in more beneficial business or other activities rather than wandering the streets without secure employment.

Neoliberalism in Global South Cambodia reflects a terrain of contestation between the historical legacy and the transformation to modernity under globalisation and the neoliberal (political) ideology. This contestation led to an emerging neoliberal 'governmentality culture' in which state apparatuses are oriented through the government technology threshold and the rationale for neoliberalism in the education sector to maintain national stability and peace. Thus, neoliberalism is treated as a state government technology with political benefits for the local people, while it also aligns with the international community in the national commitment to gaining state legitimacy to obtain more funding support and international collaboration for modernity and political-economic development. Meanwhile, the policy practice was manifested and shaped in the HEI community of practice through the emerging policy elites (across borders) gearing the neoliberal agenda to reinvest in social disparity, and predominantly deliver benefits to the market and private individuals.

Despite increase numbers of people gaining access to tertiary education services, many people from low-income family backgrounds cannot afford tertiary education services, not to mention access to high-quality standard services, due to financial deficits, socio-cultural traditions, and limited social capital networks. In addition, policy implementation undermines public goods at large, but in turn reflects the state–corporate–symbolic–professional environment through which the academic profession is geared towards serving the dominant interests of certain families/interest groups. Simply put, the policy practice reveals a terrain of contest and power dynamics that brings the historical legacy of a colonial and traumatised mindset, and traditions of socio-cultural and political practice, into the community of practice when adapting to modernity through neoliberal capitalist logics for political economy in the national interest, but also for postcolonialism/neo-colonialism in the global space of the neoliberal sphere. The emerging neoliberal governmentality is shaped and manifested by the emerging policy elites across borders to reinvest in social disparity, in a deterioration in quality, and in intellectual exploitation within the HEI community of practice in the education sector. Neoliberalism has allowed unprofessional practitioners to disguise themselves as ‘know-it-all’ experts to influence the community of practice.

In this section, I have elaborated the logic of HE policy formation and practice and the neoliberal transformation in Global South Cambodia through which the government technology has reinforced the rationale for *national stability and political-economic development*. The contextual reality of neoliberalism in Cambodia reflects four main rationales: postcolonialism, globalisation, governmentality culture, and geopolitical influences.

First, neoliberalism in Cambodia is essentially a complex political project fostered and manifested by the hegemonic discourses from the West to promote foreign trade and investments that are spearheaded by global funding networks such as the World Bank, IMF, OECD, and ADB, and the development partners for the nations of the periphery. Through this project, the nation gains worldwide recognition and cooperation, support and funding from the hegemonic world/network, and better promote its national business and economy provided there are good quality local skills and human resources.

Secondly, the advancement of neoliberalism and globalisation transformation are crucial tools for building a global network for trade and investment, and for the government technology nowadays fostered by the advanced internet using digital technology

platforms and neoliberal capitalist logics. Nevertheless, these superhighways of global and national governmentality technology have allowed emerging policy elites as owners and investors to manifest and shape the policy practice, gearing it to serving benefits predominantly to the market and private individuals and leading to growing disparities and an undermining of public goods. In this neoliberal environment, a more accountable state role is crucial both to maintain the socio-economic development pathway built for the long-term benefit of the national population and for social redistribution towards social justice and well-being for all individuals in the nation.

Thirdly, neoliberalism has also reflected an emerging state governmentality threshold to operate state apparatuses to lift the nation from lower middle-income status (since 2015) to upper middle-income status by 2030. This commitment means Global South Cambodia requires peace as the foundation for the development in aspirations, leading the neoliberal practice to a terrain of power relations through a neoliberal hybrid governmentality rationale. Also, neoliberalism is perceived (by all the research participants) as essential for reform efforts in the education sector. Neoliberalism reveals a 'governmentality culture' that incorporated mindsets from the historical legacy and merged them with the drive for modernity—maintaining national peace/stability and state legitimacy the same time. However, due to power struggles and the ideologies at play amongst the emerging elites, neoliberal practice suffered from the power dynamics and was strongly shaped by local, regional, and global (political) influences.

Finally, from geopolitical perspectives, neoliberalism is shaped through the state's logics for harmony with geopolitical influences. This neoliberal practice requires government technology to build power relations amongst development partners and emerging policy elites across the globe through exchanges of culture and trade, and socio-political harmony. After the prolonged civil war, and until the first national election in October 1993, Cambodia was a poor developing world desperately needing support in all sectors for both basic infrastructure and legitimacy in international relations. Thus, the adoption of neoliberal reform in the education sector through structural adjustment policy alignment allows Cambodia to benefit from support from the funding agencies and development partners, as well as achieving its full legitimacy to promote trade, business, and economic activities throughout the region and the globe. Nonetheless, the attainment of funding and the flow of economic transactions in neoliberal conditions require government accountability in working with the market/private sector to regulate tertiary education investment to build the socio-political economy, human resource capacity

(especially with value-added skills), peace, and social justice for the long-term needs of the nation.

To conclude, the contextual realities of neoliberalism in Global South Cambodia reveal modernisation, an expansion in quality and services, and politically correct choices in the education sector. However, the neoliberal policy practice in the education sector is geared to undermine the essence of local needs, social justice, and well-being amongst all individuals. As briefly explained above, these issues have been exhibited through reinvestment in social disparity and a systemic exploitation of the academic profession through the hegemonic ideology of a political project from the West geared towards the logics of postcolonialism, cultural imperialism, national and global technology, and the interdependency of power relation in geopolitics and political-economic development.

9.4 Neoliberalism towards what end(s)?

This study shed light on the expectations and goals of the neoliberalisation of the education sector of Global South Cambodia. Analysis of the key findings from the participants' perspectives (as explained in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, above) reveals three major expectations of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is seen as a smart choice for the national government to improve the education sector, even though the ideology emerged in Cambodia through aid/funding conditions and structural adjustment policy of a hegemonic political project of the West for global economic expansion. Simply put, the neoliberal agenda is consented to by the government to help expand the education sector to respond the growing demand in the sector for more access and equity, modernising curricula for better quality standards, and providing more service choices for students to attain HE.

Meanwhile, what stands out from this study reveals neoliberalism is intended to serve as a win-win strategy for national development through the education sector. First, as emphasised in the senior academic researcher participants' perspectives, more people aspire to a tertiary education degree because they perceive it as a personal achievement, an investment for better employment opportunities, and a sign of status in society. Thus, more people are willing to pay for the education service, not only expecting better employment opportunities upon their graduation but also to gain a sign of personal prestige in society. Secondly, the policy choice is intended to keep students off the streets, as there are growing number of students completing general education year on year. As explained in Chapter 6, most of the participants, mainly the senior academic

researchers, believed that the neoliberal practice helps the government to maintain students at HEIs to improve their knowledge, despite the low-quality services, so that the graduates can survive by themselves through working in full-time or part-time jobs upon their graduation.

Having said that, this study also casts light on the policy formation and practice through neoliberalism that brings about both optimism and pessimism in the perspectives of policy elites. While the development of education policy through the neoliberal agenda appears to be uncomplicated, the policy practice reflects dilemmas, contestation, and incongruence in the contextual practice realities of the HEIs' community of practice. These issues resonate through the participants' perspectives in both optimistic and pessimistic insights on the neoliberal practice. **Optimistic insights** centre on: (i) better curriculum and quality standards; (ii) foreign direct investment inflow, employment, and technology skills; (iii) international academic network exchanges; and (iv) community-wide collaboration. As for **pessimistic insights**, these pointed to several conflicting issues, including: (i) widespread poor quality of education; (ii) the education fee structure; (iii) skills mismatch and quality mismatch; and (iv) the challenges facing those from low-income backgrounds and from rural areas.

From a historical legacy perspective, this mindset was oriented towards social values in and expectations of the tertiary education which can be traced back to beliefs from the colonial past, where the attainment of the HE level was intended to achieve social mobility in moving from being a peasant/farmer to working for the colonial administration/government, which was highly paid at the time. From the neoliberal perspective, the social values in and expectations of higher-level educational attainment are that it has become both a pathway for good career and a sign of social status and/or a personal achievement. Nevertheless, under the current neoliberal practice, educational values have become complex issues with double-standard services, which resulted in diploma inflation and more symbolic values. This is because social values have been dominated by materialistic achievement and capitalist investment to attain social status and a lifestyle that reflects a dominant position in society. As elaborated in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, the social setting is manifested in and shaped towards explicit wealth and material accumulation, and specifically fostered by various marketing platforms/strategies through social examples and idolised practice. The reinvestment in social disparity and injustices stems from the widening gaps in access to quality tertiary education services. Mainly, children from affluent families can access high-quality

education and expect better employment upon graduation, unlike those from low-income families or disadvantaged social backgrounds.

The current neoliberal practice is causing the deterioration of the education sector in two ways. In the short term, neoliberalism creates more social disparity amongst students in both access to quality HE services and prospects for employability upon their graduation; and in the long term, neoliberal practice is geared towards this social divide not only at the national level but also intra-city levels. Issues of social disparities emerge in the rural and remote areas, and in the capital city, as there are low-income families living in the capital city too. Given the socio-cultural expectations of neoliberal practice in Global South Cambodia, the ongoing reform effort in the education sector has undermined and increasingly causing the deterioration of the essence of tertiary education in its values and in its role in promoting social justice and well-being for all individuals. Local insights into social justice have been shaped by the historical legacy that still exists in the mindset of the local people who do not expect or dream of a great lifestyle (or social mobility) but only a life lived with dignity and a sustainable source of income, perhaps at a step higher than their parent's generation. Thus, higher level educational attainment is more about a good career pathway (for employees), and a sign of social status.

9.5 Towards a framework for a more socially just higher education

Finally, this study has shed light on a new framework for neoliberalism in Global South Cambodia to build a more socially just HE practice through state-regulated neoliberalism. In this framework, I have incorporated the theoretical lens of thin-communitarianism (Olssen, 2002, 2004a, 2009, 2014, 2017) and conceptualised affinity spaces (Gee, 2005, 2017, 2018) for an HEI community of practice that empowers and develops pastoral power throughout the community of practice.

In addition, in the suggested state-regulated neoliberal framework, the conception of Global South agency in the 'historical legacy', 'governmentality culture', and 'geopolitical economy' are the key for local relevance and a socio-culturally responsive model for effective neoliberalisation. This suggested framework is a robust, vibrant, and practical model for the neoliberalisation of Global South Cambodia that builds policy practice for more social justice and well-being for all individuals. There are strong rationales for this framework to bring about these ideals.

From neoliberal practical perspectives, the framework focuses on promoting the culture of practice and work responsibility as a new version of ‘pastoral power’ (Blake, 1999a; Foucault, 1982; Golder, 2007a; Martin & Waring, 2018b) in the HEI community of practice. The framework targets the HEI community of practice, specifically HEI practitioners and learners, to hold them responsible for *professionalism* in working in ways that promote social justice and well-being for all individuals. This change could emerge, not only in their daily duties but also in their collaborative and independent learning, in multiple sources of knowledge sharing, research and development, and in sustainable sources of income generation activities amongst all stakeholders in the HEI community of practice. Implementing neoliberalism through this framework will promote the HEI community of practice as a centre of pastoral power, so that HEI stakeholders can internalise and normalise a better version of the ‘culture of practice’ of the neoliberal framework that is in resistance to ‘subjectification’ (Foucault, 1982). I focus this change towards *professional* HE services, quality, responsibility, bigger expectations/dreams, and multiple sources of knowledge and collaboration that strive for personalised development, creativity, and self-reliant national development agendas.

To enhance the Global South’s contextual needs, I added the conceptualisation of Global South agency into the framework, which is unique and responsive to the Global South Cambodia context. These aspects primarily include the national historical legacy, socio-cultural contexts, the tradition of socio-political practice, and gender-sensitivity-cultural aspects. These aspects are crucial for the neoliberal agenda in the Global South context, such as Cambodia, where these aspects of local contextual agency have interfaced with and even dominated policy implementation in the HEI community of practice. Hence, the framework does not serve the neoliberal ideology, but aspires to balance, on the one hand, modernity and local contextual realities in moving towards a vibrant policy practice and decreasing widening social disparity, and, on the other hand, the cultural imperialism and neo-colonialism of the hegemonic concepts of the West.

In brief, this study neither rejects the neoliberal movement nor supports the current neoliberal agenda, but suggests a framework for state-regulated neoliberalism through the lens of thin-communitarianism (Olssen, 2002, 2004a, 2009, 2014, 2017) and a community of practice through affinity spaces (Gee, 2005, 2017, 2018). The study advocates for the development of pastoral power (Blake, 1999a; Foucault, 1982; Golder, 2007a; Martin & Waring, 2018b) amongst HEI practitioners, stakeholders, researchers/scientists, private

sector/industry, development partners, and especially learners/students through the state's quality regulation/control mechanism in the HEI community of practice.

9.6 Direction for future research

Despite insightful findings and contributions, this study also has several limitations. These limitations are shaped not only by the research scope and limitations of a doctoral research project, but also the specific focus of the research problem. Thus, I would like to suggest the following areas of further research. First, a study is needed to examine neoliberalism in the promotion of tertiary education funding sources from a local innovative, research and development platform with private sector or industry. Such a study would be crucial to further enhancing avenues for social justice through the community of practice amongst HEIs, educators, researchers and students that strives for a high-quality standard of education and graduate employability in moving towards a sustainable mission in the Global South context, especially Cambodia.

Secondly, a study is needed to examine how affinity spaces conceptualised in the HEI community of practice in the context of Global South Cambodia could better harness educational practice amongst HEI practitioners and learners/students. There are two prospective challenges when promoting the theorising of affinity spaces in the contextual reality of the Cambodian HEI community of practice: (1) the access, equity and affordability of internet, and technology tools; and (2) the precautions/training in the critical use of knowledge content on digital platforms, the politicisation of information flows in social practice, and the development of soft and hard skills amongst stakeholders and learners in the HEI community of practice.

Third, a research project is required to explore how the state could establish and regulate an effective mechanism for quality policy practice and achievements under neoliberalism. As indicated in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 of this study, policy practice reflects multifaceted challenges despite there being certain government mechanisms in existence. It is, thus, essential to establish a policy framework with an effective state regulation mechanism for neoliberalism, while the state must also ensure that the application of policy undergoes quality testing.

Finally, a study is needed to examine the role of governmentality technology for the regime of truth in knowledge development regarding social justice in the terrain of contestation between the historical legacy mindset and the influences from the

globalisation transformation to modernity. Specifically, this would be research that explores the roles of tertiary education through state–corporate–professional practice in the Global South context in terms of social justice and well-being for all individuals.

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Appendix A Consent Form

Project title: The Neo-liberalisation of Cambodian Higher Education: Perspectives of Policy Elites and Graduates

Project Supervisor: Professor Mark OLSEN

Researcher: Keun Im

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated (dd mmmm yyyy).
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes No

Participant’s signature:

Participant’s name:

Participant’s Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

.....

.....

Date: 20th March 2019

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on
.....

AUTEC Reference number

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix B Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

20th March 2019

Project Title

The Neoliberalization of Cambodian Higher Education: Perspectives of Policy Elites and Graduates

An Invitation

My name is Keun Im. I am a doctoral student in the School of Education, Faculty of Culture and Society, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. I am completing my doctorate, and my topic is: “Neoliberalization of Cambodian Higher Education: Perspectives of Policy Elites and Graduates.” The goal of this research study is to explore the neoliberalization process, and the impact on Cambodian higher education policy framework with regard to social democracy social justice, and well-being for all individuals.

What is the purpose of this research?

The study aims at understanding how the higher education policy framework in Cambodia has evolved. I want to identify how the colonial past, and globalisation, have influenced the formation and practice of the existing HE policy framework. This study has also set out to understand how the Cambodian HE policy framework, might be transformed, to build a more socially democratic, socially just system, providing well-being for all individuals. The research is expected to contribute to higher education development in Cambodia through an improved understanding of higher education policy formation and practice in Cambodia, as well as other developing economies that might better prepare society and workforce.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

Potential participants have been recruited through the researcher’s personal network, and from public websites where their contacts are available. The researcher will contact potential participants through emails and/or telephone calls based on the researcher’s personal network and public resources of contacts such as public websites, or contact lists. The researcher will ask potential participants if they could recommend/suggest other participants. This communication also allows the known contact passes along the invitation to others who can get in touch with the researcher if interested in participating, rather than being directly contacted by the researcher. The interview session will be approximately one hour up to 90 minutes. We will try

our best to maintain that identity and information of the potential participants will be kept to limited confidentiality only in this research.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice), and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed, or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, the removal of your data will not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

The interview will take place in a private room at the potential participants' work places or another location recommended by the participant. The researcher will also conduct Skype interviews with participants who are residing and working overseas.

You will be asked a range of in-depth questions. During this interview you will have an opportunity to express your perspectives and views. The interview will be recorded while you are sharing your opinions/thoughts. All of the data will be used for this study.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Participants in this interview are unlikely to experience any discomfort and risk.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

Since the researcher has experience in several fieldwork studies before, and has been working professionally in the HE sector for many years, he can manage the situation of any unexpected occurrence or emotional insight during the interview. The interview can be stopped at any time, and you do not have to answer any question that make you feel uncomfortable. At the start of the interview, the researcher will explain the interview protocol. The interview protocol consists of details about the aims of the research, the interview procedure, a guide of issues related to the study, and participants' rights in involvement in the interviews. The researcher will then present the consent form to be signed by potential participants.

What are the benefits?

To the researcher: It provides an opportunity to learn, broaden professional skills, and become a resilient academic researcher regarding HE development policy in post-conflict developing economies. This will be reflected by gaining a qualification and obtaining research data.

To the participants: This research will give an opportunity for participants to voice their opinions on relevant issues that matter to them. Their voices will contribute to the outcome of this research. The participants will have their perspectives analyzed, and considered in research that contributes to locally reform HE in Cambodia.

To the wider communities: This research will contribute to HE policy frameworks that adhere towards a socially just and improved society. The wider communities will be afforded access to research that leads to social democratic reforms in HE policy.

What compensation is available for injury or negligence?

It is unlikely that injury or negligence will occur as a result of your participation in this research.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your privacy is important to me. Only supervisors and myself will have access to your information. I will use a pseudonym in any publications and the thesis.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

You do not have to pay for any cost for being a research participant, except your own time for the interview session.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

Participants have two weeks to consider if he/she decides to join this project.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Transcripts will be shared with the participants for feedback. You will also be given a summary of the findings after the research is completed. This research is for completing a thesis, which is in partial fulfilment of the researcher's PhD study program.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

If you have any questions, you can reach me through:

My supervisor **Professor Mark OLSEN** through the mobile phone: +44 7983215269 (in the United Kingdom) or +6499219999 ext 7550 (in New Zealand) or/and e-mail: mark.olssen@aut.ac.nz or m.olssen@surrey.ac.uk,

My supervisor **Dr. Lynette REID** through the mobile phone: +64 99219999 ext 8206 (in New Zealand) or/and e-mail: lynette.reid@aut.ac.nz.

My mobile phone: +8122 4910 935 (in New Zealand) or (+855)12 707 526 (in Cambodia) and

e-mail: im.keun@gmail.com or imkeun_kh@yahoo.com or my supervisor,

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Keun Im

E-mail: im.keun@gmail.com or imkeun_kh@yahoo.com

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Professor Mark OLSEN

E-mail: mark.olsen@aut.ac.nz or m.olsen@surrey.ac.uk,

Dr. Lynette REID

E-mail: lynette.reid@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on the
.....,

AUTEK Reference number

Appendices C the ethics approval letter

9 May 2019

Mark Olssen
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Mark

Re Ethics Application: **19/99 The neoliberalisation of Cambodian higher education: Perspectives of policy elites and graduates**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 9 May 2022.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation then you are responsible for obtaining it. If the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all locality legal and ethical obligations and requirements. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,



Kate O'Connor

Executive Manager
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: imkeun_kh@yahoo.com;im.keun@gmail.com;Lynette Reid