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EDUCATION IN THE 'NEW SOCIETY' AND THE PHILIPPINE LABOUR EXPORT POLICY (1972-1986)

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Abstract: *The 'overseas Filipino workers' (OFWs) are the largest source of US dollar income in the Philippines. These state-sponsored labour migrations have resulted in an exodus of workers and professionals that now amounts to approximately 10% of the entire country's population. From a temporary and seasonal employment strategy during the early American colonial period, labour export has become a cornerstone of the country's development policy. This was institutionalised under the Marcos regime (1965-1986), and especially in the early years of the martial law period (1972-81), and maintained by successive governments thereafter. Within this context, this paper investigates the relationship between Marcos' 'New Society' agenda, the globalization of migrant labour, and state sponsorship of labour exports. In particular, it analyses the significance of attempts made to deploy education policy and educational institutions to facilitate the state's labour export drive. Evidence analyzed in this paper suggests that sweeping reforms covering curricular policies, education governance and funding were implemented, ostensibly in support of national development. However, these measures ultimately did little to boost domestic economic development. Instead, they set the stage for the education system to continue training and certifying Filipino skilled labour for global export – a pattern that has continued to this day.*

Keywords: *migration, labour export, education reforms, Ferdinand Marcos, New Society*

Introduction

This paper extends a historical analysis begun with an investigation of early Filipino labour migration to the US and its role in addressing widespread poverty and unemployment (Maca, 2017). That paper argued that it was during the colonial era that, for the first time, labour migration was employed as a palliative economic strategy by the state and co-opted local elites. Early colonial education policies and practices were found to have abetted, albeit indirectly, this migration. Half a century later, in an independent Philippines under military rule, labour export was deployed once again, on a far larger scale, as a political and economic strategy, eventually becoming a full-blown state enterprise. This time, education was treated by the state as a critical lever for promoting labour migration.

The analysis proceeds in three stages, examining the interconnection of politics, economics, education and labour export policy under the Marcos administration. The first section investigates the nature of the post-colonial Philippine state (1946-1965), particularly the consolidation and emergence of a 'national oligarchy' (Anderson 1988), the implications of the neocolonial relationship it has maintained with the US, and how the expanding post-colonial education system was managed. It traces the country's developmental strategy through the early decades of independence to the 1974 Marcos edict on labour export. The second section focuses specifically on Marcos and his 'New Society' experiment (1972-1986). It discusses the origins of the associated proposals to radically transform Philippine society and the performance of the Marcos regime in pursuing these.

The third section looks into the educational reforms designed to align schooling to the economic development agenda. Extant literature on this topic focuses principally on major reforms to higher

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education – i.e. post-secondary streaming, expansion of public higher education – and has mostly been conducted from a narrowly functionalist human capital perspective (cf. Alba, 1979; Dubsky, 1993; Gonzalez, 1989,1992). I argue here, however, that under the New Society scheme, the whole education system was subjected to sweeping reforms that need to be understood in the context both of the regime's attempt to maintain political control, and of its relationships with foreign agencies and creditors. These reforms extended to curricular policies (civics and history education, technical-vocational education expansion, bilingual education), governance in higher education (*laissez faire* and decentralised) and funding (foreign loan-funded).

The Post-Colonial Philippines (1946-1965)

The US-Philippines Neo-Colonial Relationship

The post-American colonial Philippines has retained the structural features of the pre-war Philippines: a landed elite class, a semi-feudal land tenure system, and a heavy reliance on agricultural production for export (de Dios and Hutchcroft, 2003; Litonjua, 1994). Post-independence governments before Marcos also pursued development strategies dictated by the neocolonial relationship with the US, inaugurated with the ratification of two major treaties in 1946 – the Military Bases Agreement and Philippine Trade Act– as preconditions for the release of 260 million US dollars (USD) in rehabilitation funds (Abinales and Amoroso, 2005; Constantino and Constantino, 1978). The trade act established a lopsided 'tariff-free' trading arrangement that privileged American exports as well as some agricultural imports from the former colony. The most controversial provision involved the granting of "parity" to Americans and Filipinos in rights to property in land, natural resource exploitation, and other commercial ventures. Whilst hosting the US bases provided additional state revenue, technology transfer and other benefits for the Philippine military, this policy attracted domestic criticism for entangling the country in Cold War geopolitics.

Post-War Economy and Development Strategy

Aside from ensuring the economic and military dependence of their former colony Litonjua, 1994), the Americans had also effectively rehabilitated most pre-war power brokers by suppressing the issue of wartime collaboration (Constantino, 1975). But Anderson (1988) has suggested that family business interests in the Philippines were related to MacArthur's reluctance to break up the feudal system of land tenureship there, in contrast to the reforms introduced at American instigation in post-war Korea, Taiwan and Japan itself (where MacArthur headed the occupation authorities). This coincided with the consolidation of a 'national oligarchy' (ibid), as provincial elites congregating in newly developed gated villages in Metro Manila, some taking their places as elected officials following the reestablishment of the Philippine Congress. Anderson dubbed the post-independence, decades prior to the Marcos era as the heyday of 'cacique democracy',[1] when ruling dynasties manipulated state institutions to expand and or create new monopolies as they diversified from agriculture into urban real estate, hotels, utilities, insurance, the mass media, and so forth (Anderson, 1988 p.16)

Nevertheless, the Philippines became Asia's second biggest economy next to Japan from the late 1940s until the 1960s, partly because of favorable trade relations with the US and aid inflows linked to the Military bases Agreement of 1946 (Constantino, 1975). But with landholdings largely retained by oligarchical families, and a post-war economic strategy focused on exporting plantation crops tying the economy to the US, the country's commercial position remained fragile. The 1949 crisis triggered by the increasingly negative balance of trade with the US resulted to import and foreign exchange controls that lasted until the early 1960s (Dolan, 1993). This turn in policy helped to jumpstart manufacturing industry, which grew from 10.7 percent of GDP in 1948 to 17.9% in 1960 (de Dios and Hutchcroft, 2003), making it the flagship sector of the Philippine economy until the 1970s. But only a favoured segment of the cacique class who diversified into manufacturing from cash-crop production benefited from this short-lived increase in economic productivity.

Educational Development

A continuing dependency on the US and oligarchical control of the economy resulted in conflicting development strategies by a succession of pre-Marcos governments. The impact of this on the expansion of education, as elucidated below, was further compounded by chronic budget deficits associated with the growing public school sector. This hobbled the education system, making it difficult for the state to address increasing demand beyond elementary schooling. The task then fell to the private sector dominated by Catholic schools (now ultimately accountable to American rather than Spanish chapters), joined by newly arrived Protestant missionaries and a few enterprising returned pensionados from oligarchic families. The general absence of a centralized, state-directed educational expansion, along with a generally laissez-faire attitude towards the education sector, meant that the law of supply and demand prevailed as Gonzalez (1989) further noted. However, supply was actually controlled by the profit-seeking private institutions, which created programs designed to yield high return on minimal investment. The unhampered proliferation of programs in the liberal arts, education, and business courses evoked another wave of 'mass education' reminiscent of the early decades of American colonization, but this time in higher education.

In an earlier study, I discuss how the Philippine state, unlike those of the East Asian tigers, did not adopt a sequential approach to developing the system during the post-war period; in other words, tertiary education was rapidly expanded before elementary and secondary education had been universalized and subjected to rigorous standardisation (Maca and Morris, 2012). Carnoy (1974) viewed this pattern as problematic for a largely agriculture-based developing country like the Philippines, which had yet to achieve industrialization – generally seen as a prerequisite for the competitiveness of an emerging economy in the global capitalist system. With college education deemed as critical social capital by majority of Filipino families, the heightened demand reinforced the monopolistic behavior of the private education sector. The absence of government regulation and a conscious strategy to match manpower needs of new economic programs resulted to disastrous result of, paradoxically, overeducation in non-technical fields on one hand and continued lack of skilled technicians and engineers for the manufacturing industries.

This education-industry mismatch further deteriorated with the import substitution industry stagnating by the early 1960s. With the domestic labour market unable to absorb the products of an expanded higher education system, the 'graduate unemployment' phenomenon first noticed in India began to cause alarm (Gonzalez, 1989).The rapid growth of the private market for tertiary education was being blamed for the failure of the government to 'regulate' the sector. Table 1 below shows the rapid progress of privatization in the Philippine higher education system, making it one of the most highly privatized in the world (Gulosino, 2003). Marcos made a few attempts to reign over this sector as discussed below.

Table 1. Tertiary School Enrollment by Public Versus Private Institutions, 1946-1985

	Institutions			Enrollments *			
Year	Public	Private	Total	% Private	Public	Private	Total
1946	5	498	503	99	1	45	46
1955	26	351	377	93	7	177	184
1965	26	440	466	94	59	468	527
1975	126	628	754	83	106	660	766
1985	319	838	1,157	72	230	1,274	1504

Source: Data from Philippine Statistical Yearbooks and Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission adapted from Ruiz (2014) p. 101
*Data for 1946 in 10,000 and from 1955-85 in 100,000

Marcos Government (1965-1986), 'New Society' Experiment (1972-1981)

Ferdinand Marcos was the sixth post-independence president of the Philippines and the longest-serving: from 1965 to 1986. First elected in 1965 and re-elected in 1969 amidst allegations of election irregularities (Wurfel, 1988), he declared martial law in 1972, a year before he was due to step down under the provisions of the 1935 Constitution, which banned presidents from standing for a third term. Marcos justified this move with reference to the 'communist threat', at a time when the movement's influence was spreading both in the countryside and in urban areas. Successive US governments accommodated his regime as a bulwark against the further spread of communism in Southeast Asia following the 'loss' of Vietnam and Cambodia. Having issued Proclamation 1081 on September 21, 1972, Marcos assumed dictatorial powers under a system of government he called "constitutional authoritarianism" (civilian government was notionally restored on January 17, 1981). Furthermore, throughout his 21 years in power, the Philippines was in practice ruled as a 'conjugal dictatorship' (Mijares, 1975/2017) due to the enormous influence of Marcos' wife Imelda over affairs of state – as elucidated below.

The 'New Society' Programme

Under his 'New Society' experiment, Marcos sought to implement a coherent economic development strategy without the complexities of democratic institutions of the old political structure. He overhauled the bureaucracy, introduced tax and budget reforms (including foreign borrowing) and institutionalized long-term economic planning which resulted in the crafting of the 1972 -82 Philippine National Development Plan. A national survey of education by the Presidential Commission to Survey Philippine Education (PCSPE) was also conducted in1970 resulting to the formulation of the first 10-year Education Development Plan in 1972, highlighting human capital formation and manpower development as key objectives.

Most Filipinos welcomed the early years of the New Society and Marcos' military rule due to subsequent improvements in peace and order, cleanliness and the generally more disciplined behavior of the people (Bello, 2009). Massive beautification and greening projects undertaken by Imelda Marcos in her role as Governor of Manila also contributed to an initial optimism regarding the promised changes under the New Society program. However, unlike its Asian counterparts (particularly South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and even Indonesia), the Philippines' pivot towards authoritarianism was not associated with the creation of a strong foundation for sustained economic growth but rather degenerated into blatant kleptocracy by the ruling family and their associates. In the end, Marcos and his technocratic advisors did not really consider as models the 'developmentalist' forms of authoritarianism practiced in neighboring countries (Katayama, et al 2010), but perpetuated instead the patrimonial exercise of political power which has typified Filipino leaders since the American colonial era (Hutchcroft, 1991).

Perhaps one redeeming feature of the New Society era was the so-called 'golden age' of Filipino technocracy, which saw Marcos recruit into his government an array of talented individuals from academia, industry and the military (c.f. Tadem, 2012, 2014, 2015). As technocrats, they were regarded as professionals and experts in their fields, and more importantly, "apolitical" (Katayama et al 2010). Their main concern was to make sure that economic policies and development strategies they formulated were implemented, which during Marcos' rule involved battles on many fronts. During the martial law period, they were looked upon, particularly by the Philippine business community as well as by the country's major lending institutions – i.e. the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (IMF/World Bank) – as a bulwark against corruption, crony capitalism and patronage politics (Tadem, 2015). These technocrats were the post-independence or modern incarnations of the US *pensionados*. Like their colonial-era counterparts, most were also scions of the oligarchy, who had received education and training from US Ivy League universities through American scholarships.

## Labour Export as an 'Emergency' Development Strategy

Officially, the labour export program was launched as a stop-gap measure to deal with domestic unemployment due to the inability of the local economy to provide for the 700,000 or so new entrants into the labour force every year. But privately, for Marcos and his technocrats, the program from the outset had an important political dimension. According to senior technocrat and former Prime Minister Cesar Virata, the voice of the educated, young, urban and unemployed population became a major problem for President Marcos (Sicat, 2014). This suggests that concerns to maintain political control and limit dissent informed the adoption of labour export as an economic strategy. As I have argued elsewhere, this can be seen as a revival and expansion of a strategy first employed by the American colonial state as a temporary remedy for political and socio-economic maladies during the early 20th century (Maca, 2017). In 1972, two years before the labour export policy was implemented, unemployment was highest among urban youth (50% of the unemployed were 20-24 years old and 30% 25-44 years old). The first stirrings of protest amongst these unemployed youth precipitated the so-called First Quarter Storm from January to March 1970, led by leftist groups and activists (Doronila, 1992). Labour export was thus in part a tactic calculated to stem or divert growing dissent by finding work for under-occupied urban youngsters.

The labour export pivot also benefited from favorable US immigration policies reminiscent of the early decades of American colonization. Almost a decade before the New Society initiative was launched, the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act was passed in 1965 abolishing restrictions on particular nationalities (including Filipinos) and replaced it with a preference-based immigration policy focused on immigrants' skills and family ties with current U.S. citizens and permanent residents. Between 1965 and 1966 there was a near-doubling of annual Filipino immigration into the U.S. (from 3,130 to 6,093); by 1977, this number had climbed to more than 40,000.

The new Labour Code of the Philippines was officially signed into law on May 1, 1974. This sought both to reform labour policies to mitigate the worsening unemployment situation and to systematize the program for overseas employment of Filipino workers. It led to the creation of new state agencies to manage the labour export business, including the Overseas Employment Development Board (OEDB) and the National Seamen Board (NSB), later (1982) consolidated as the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA). POEA initially had the task of promoting, monitoring, and regulating overseas employment. In 1987, the organization's regulatory functions were expanded to include the licensing and monitoring of private recruitment agencies, market development, skills enhancement and testing, and accreditation of foreign employers (Asis, 1992). In the same year, the Welfare Fund for Overseas Workers was renamed the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA). This administrative body was in charge of welfare issues facing workers and of providing support to their families and dependents. A variety of incentives were also simultaneously implemented to lower the cost of emigrating: tax was reduced, one-stop shops for processing travel papers were created, and customs duties were lifted. Finally, labour attaches (under the Foreign Affairs Ministry) and labour welfare officers (under the Labour and Employment Ministry) were deployed in Philippine embassies overseas.

The labour export program expanded exponentially. Within its first four years, the Overseas Employment Development Board had job orders from over 1,500 employers in the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. Figure 1 show how the number of OFWs increased from 3,694 in 1969 to 47,754 by 1976.

It also shows that even before the labour export policy formally began in 1974, a rapid rise of labour migration – managed by the private sector – was already well underway. By harnessing and institutionalizing this growing trend, the Marcos regime sought both to extract a surplus and gain relief from the social and political pressures caused by rising domestic unemployment. The government takeover and eventual monopoly of the sector meant additional fee revenues from prospective migrant workers – from documentation fees (i.e. birth certificates, police clearance, etc) to insurance and placement fees (some partly paid by foreign employers). The government further decreed that overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) could only remit their dollar earnings to families back home through government banks.

Figure 1. Annual Deployment of Filipino Overseas Workers (1969-1989)
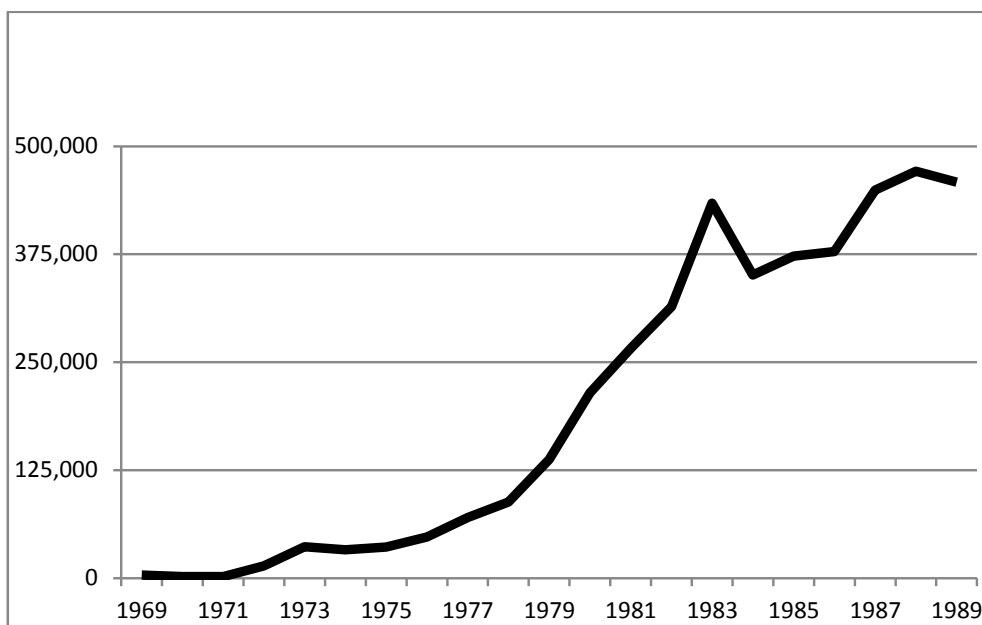
Source: for 1969-1976 data, Ministry of Labor as cited in Abella (1979, p.8); for 1977 to 1989 data, POEA in Asis (2008, p. 80)

Whilst the bureaucracy was reorganized and new agencies were created to support labour export, educational support to the new state enterprise was indirect and nonspecific (based on the detailed reading of policies formulated on the same period).[2] To avoid unwarranted scrutiny on the new labour export policy, the Marcos regime avoided explicitly linking education to Filipino overseas work. Policy statements and political rhetoric seldom strayed far away from prevailing conservative orthodoxies on the role of education in Filipino society. Nevertheless, political solutions to lingering issues like language of instruction, regulation of private education, and expansion of technical-vocational education, among others were carried out. These became critical levers in the deployment of education in support of the labour export strategy as elucidated in the following sections.

Education Under the New Society

One of the ostensible aims of Marcos' grand vision for the New Society was the pursuit of a more egalitarian social order of a kind that previous regimes, from the American colonial period onwards, had failed to establish. He criticized the prevailing orthodoxy that state provision of education to all citizens would, of itself, bring about benign social change – equalising opportunity and accelerating social mobility:

> Almost a century ago, it was said in the Western world that there would be no need for a scheme of economic redistribution as long as an egalitarian educational system assures to rich and poor alike a competence in those things which are the riches of a human being - his learning, his skills, his opportunities in life! . . . But history unfolds itself in ways that defy the most confident of our assertions. Rather than as an equalizer in society the transmission of learning has often reinforced the inequalities of society. The pursuit of education can lead along paths that prove inimical to the realization of national government (Marcos 1974 in Manalang, 1977 p. 66).

This heralded a serious (and partly successful) attempt to align education and the political agenda under the auspices of the New Society experiment. Although there has been little recognition of Marcos as the only post-war Philippine leader strongly linking education to the country's development strategies (Maca and Morris, 2012), extant literature from education scholars (c.f. Manalang ,1977; Doronila, 1996 and Gonzalez, 1989) and recent publications about Marcos technocrats (e.g. Landingin, 2017 ; Sicat, 2014) highlight efforts by the regime to synchronize education reform with economic strategy. Three years before declaring martial law, Marcos created the PCSPE (as discussed in the preceding section) with the mandate to analyze the performance of the educational system and its relevance to development goals (PCSPSE, 1970). Marcos' efforts to overhaul the country's education system were the first substantial program of this kind since the establishment of the public school system by the Americans in 1899. According to one contemporary observer, he was guided by the "belief that the economic and social survival of development of the nation was dependent on education" (Clarke 1977, p.61).

The resulting PCSPE recommendations were immediately translated into programs and projects, with seed funding from multilateral agencies like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Under martial law, the state had the opportunity to redirect, adjust, and experiment with education and manpower development policies (Ruiz, 2014). In 1972, directly under the Office of the President, Marcos created the Education Development Projects Implementation Task Force (EDPITAF) through Presidential Decree 6-A. This special office was mandated to coordinate and manage most of these foreign-funded education development projects as shown in the table below. The extent of the direct 'inputs' these lending institutions were given into the formulation of Marcos-era education programs and policies remains unclear.[3] However, recent studies of the elite group of US-educated Marcos technocrats argue that their reputations as foreign-trained 'experts' lent legitimacy to the Marcos regime while channeling ideas dominant within the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Katayama 2010; Tadem 2012, 2014, 2015).

Table 2. Loan-Funded Education Development Projects (1973-1989)

World Bank	Years of implementation
1. Second Education Project	1973-1978
2. Textbook Project	1976-1982
3. Agricultural Education Project	1976-1982
3. Communication Technology on Education Pilot Project	1978-1981
4. Fishery Training Project	1980-1987
5. Sector Program for Elementary Education Project	1982-1988
Asian Development Bank	
1. Engineering Education Project	1981-1989
2. Technical Vocational Education Project – (TVEP)	1981-1989

Source: Nationalist Resource Center (1982) and EDPITAF (2016)

How the results of the 1970 study of the PCSPE and the blueprint of the 1972 National Education Development Plan were translated into education policies and structural reforms in support of the labour export program is elaborated below. Three reform areas emerge as critical – governance and funding of education, revival and expansion of technical and vocational education and a political solution to the language of education policy.

Curriculum Reforms

History and Civics Education

Under Marcos, the 'national curriculum' underwent two cycles of 'redevelopment' – first in 1972 at the onset of the New Society experiment, and again in 1982 under the re-branded 'New Republic,' although this second attempt remained uncompleted at the point of Marcos' overthrow in 1986. Major elements of New Society thinking found their way into the area of social studies – particular history and civics education (see Maca and Morris, 2015). Key concepts and messages about the New Society were also tied to government-wide initiatives in moral education, food production and the promotion of the 'Green Revolution', a 'Buy Filipino' campaign and education on the dangers of illegal drug use (Manalang 1977, p.64). Additionally, Marcos had his speeches and writings compiled, published and distributed nationwide, although no study has been conducted to date regarding the extent to which they were used as teaching materials in schools.

Education under the New Society also engendered a hybrid conceptualization of Filipino citizenship. It signaled the construction of Filipino labour migrants as an archetype of the model citizen – a trend which eventually culminated in their celebration as 'modern-day' heroes by officialdom in the 1990s. Lesson themes on 'working abroad' began to feature in textbooks such as the widely used Grade 6 text *Araling Panlipunan – Pambansang Kaunlaran* (Social Studies-National Development) (MEC, 1980a). A utopian vision for *Bagong Lipunan* (the New Society) is discussed therein, highlighting how the state is actively addressing employment issues facing ordinary labourers, through measures that include scouting overseas work opportunities:

> Many of our workers are getting employment inside and outside the country. Various agencies under the Ministry of Labour actively seek placements for our workers. The Public Employment Office manages local placements. The Overseas Employment Development Board facilitates the securing of work opportunities abroad. From the previous lesson, give examples of countries where our workers are deployed (MEC 1980a, pp. 194-195).

> Unemployment in our country went down due to work opportunities abroad. Remittances by our overseas workers provide additional revenue for the government. At least 30% of their income is required to be sent through government-accredited banks. Aside from these benefits, what do you think is the impact of overseas employment on the social condition of our workers? (MEC 1980a, p. 195)

The Marcos regime put a high premium on the production and distribution of textbooks as these were seen as playing a critical role in communicating the vision and achievements of the New Society.[4] Each book bore an introductory message under the signature of the President. Practically all subject areas (except for Mathematics and Science) featured themes explicitly related to nation building, civics, citizenship and the New Society. Education – and hence school textbooks – also became a vehicle for the personality cult of the Marcoses. A 1980 Grade 4 Communication Arts (Filipino) textbook for example, featured Imelda Marcos as *huwarang Filipino* (model Filipino) and portrayed her as *Ina ng Bayan* (Mother of the Nation), also mandating the study of a poem *(tula)* where she is further compared to the mythical Queen Esther of Persia (MEC 1980b, p. 112). During this period, schooling was the most potent platform for political socialization of most Filipinos. With resources available in schools severely limited, the textbook often formed the principal (or only) source of lesson content for both teachers and students (Hornedo, et. al. 2000; see Doronila, 1989: Segovia 1997; Constantino, 1982 for more detailed content analysis of Marcos/martial law era textbooks). Although New Society messages also permeated the modern mass media (radio, television and cinema), most rural inhabitants lacked electricity. Textbooks were rivaled in terms of reach and coverage only by comics, which the regime also harnessed and utilized extensively for propaganda purposes (San Juan, 1978).

Language in Education/ Bilingual Medium of Instruction Policy

Aside from the pre-war leader Manuel Quezon (1935-1942), who initiated an articulation of Filipino national identity through a policy of using Tagalog-based Pilipino as the national language, and promulgated code of ethics for Filipino citizenship, Marcos was arguably the only twentieth-century leader with a clear vision for nationhood and citizenship formation (Maca and Morris, 2015; David, 2002). As part of his efforts to promote a cohesive sense of national identity, he sought a political solution to the lingering issue of medium of instruction in basic education. This resulted in the controversial bilingual education policy (Tagalog-based Pilipino and English) promulgated in 1974. However, eminent linguist and former Education Secretary Andrew Gonzalez (2000) has criticized the bilingual policy as just another exercise in transactional politics. Gonzalez portrayed the policy as an 'attempt at compromise between the development of the national language and its use as a medium of instruction to facilitate learning, and the continuing use of English' (p38). Since the 1960s, the private schools attended by the country's elite have resisted abandoning the use of English as medium of instruction as 'they base much of their reputation on their supposedly superior ability to teach English" (Hunt and McHale 1965, p.69). Nevertheless, Marcos, by inserting the bilingual policy in the 1973 Constitution (Article 15 Section 3.3), sought to resolve decades of inertia regarding the legislated 'national language' among academics, politicians and regional leaders.

Gonzalez (1980), in his seminal study linking nationalism and language in the Philippines, identified two major factors behind the failure to instate Tagalog (called Pilipino after 1959 and finally Filipino in the 1987 Constitution) as a functional national language: continued refusal by non-Tagalog speakers to accept Pilipino, and the government's lukewarm propagation of the language. Perhaps Gonzalez himself, a US-educated linguist and former President of the private Catholic De La Salle education system, where English was (and still is) the medium of instruction from the early years to tertiary level, was himself unconvinced of the pressing need for an 'official' national language or languages'. Not discounting class interests in the maintenance of English, he was nevertheless cognizant of its benefits, highlighting how 'Philippine socio-economic development thus far has been achieved using a borrowed common language (Gonzalez 1980, p. 154).'

The use of English as medium of instruction (MOI) in higher education and largely- private secondary schools was reaffirmed by the 1972 constitutional provision on the two 'national languages'. This legislative fiat further increased academic programs delivered in English as a demand for overseas work expanded rapidly. Evidence further suggests a concerted effort by the Marcos government to promote the policy, with the issue dominating the 1976 Educators Congress. Even the Minister of Economic Planning, the last person expected to comment on the issue, was at pains to defend the bilingual policy (Sicat, 1976). This was bolstered by rhetoric in academia about English language competency, portraying this as a distinct advantage for Filipinos vis-à-vis their largely monolingual Asian neighbors (Gonzalez,1998).

In the same session of the 1976 Educators Congress, buoyed by the initial gains of New Society's education reforms in basic education, Marcos proudly declared how the Philippines ranked second to the US in college or university enrolment and how **'**educated manpower constitutes one of our exports to other countries' (Marcos 1976, p. 31)**.** This public declaration of pride in the ability of the state to train and supply Filipino labour internationally was an affirmation of English-based instruction, a practice long-established since the US colonial period. By engineering a political solution (1973 Constitution; PD 6-A series of 1972; Department of Education and Culture Order 25 series of 1974) to this issue, the state effectively (if indirectly) appropriated an integral component of the labour export machinery: continuous English-based training by Filipinos.

Expansion of Technical-Vocational Education

Marcos made the case for the revival of technical-vocational education by highlighting the mismatch between the output of the education system and the manpower needs of the economy. He also

highlighted the fact that economic development was lagging behind educational development, which was inimical to a developing country like the Philippines,

> The introduction of education in the Third World, which in the colonial era initially began with a conception of education as something that confers ease, proved disastrous to the very effort of the society to advance. It bred as in our case a large group of graduates trained for white collar jobs. But the level of economic development was not such as to absorb this group in the modern sector of society. Here we have the supreme irony of education proceeding much faster than economic development, and creating difficult burdens for the country in terms of an educated unemployed (Marcos 1976, p. 29).

The reorganization of the educational system by virtue of Presidential Decree 6 in 1972 resulted in the creation of the 13 administrative regions and the expansion of the National Manpower Youth Council (NMYC) to address the need for middle-level skills development or labour institutions, four science educational centers, and the upgrading of 11 agricultural schools to improve farming programs (Marcos, 1976).

This policy reform accomplished two things; it democratized access to post-secondary education by offering a more affordable route towards obtaining certifiable skills; and it ensured a steady supply of new technical skills needed for the export industrial zones in various parts of the country and supply the overseas demand for technical labour. Figure 2 below reflects the increasing trend in OFW deployment from 1975 onwards but the occupational classification system (types 1 to 7) designed by Philippine authorities blurs the demarcation lines on the supposedly hierarchical nature of educational qualification and training obtained by a departing overseas worker. Nonetheless, the case for the expansion of technical-vocational education was partly enacted due to the difficulties encountered by the Marcos government in regulating the private sector which has grown unhampered since after WWII. Dumping the labour market with manpower incompatible to the economic requirements of the country, the Marcos government sought to re-organize and redirect post-secondary schooling in the country as elucidated below.

Figure 2. Overseas Filipino Workers Occupational Types
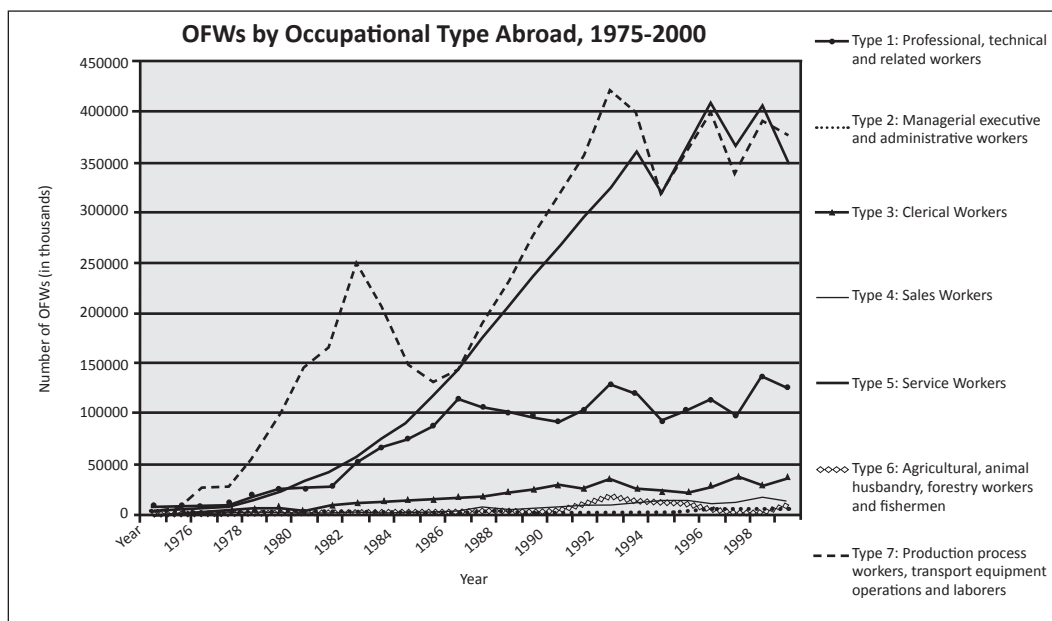
Source: Survey on Overseas Filipinos, 1993-2001 and Philippine Statistical Yearbooks, various years (in Ruiz, 2014 p.147)

Governance and Financing of Education

Aside from the aforementioned curricular reforms, re-engineering the Philippine education system became the test case or model for further bureaucratic changes under the New Society (through Presidential Decree No. 1 Series of 1972). Marcos and his technocrats introduced reforms to overhaul the planning (and targeting), financing and regulating functions of the education bureaucracy. By integrating education in the centralized planning grid of the National Economic and Development Authority, human capital forecasting and allocation to key economic sectors were, in theory, rendered more efficient (Alba, 1979). The industry players, mediated by different associations of private schools, were also closely involved in education forecasting (and planning).[5] Planning services were installed at different levels of education governance, simultaneous with the creation of Ministry of Education satellite offices in the newly created 13 administrative regions. All these were ostensibly part of the efforts to align manpower needs of the economy and educational outputs as reinforced by other policies discussed below.

The Marcos government's attempts to redirect the education system culminated with the streaming of secondary education graduates as they moved to higher education. In 1972, the National College Entrance Examination, a national school leaving examination, was introduced. This was aimed primarily at addressing the rising problem of a surplus of college and university graduates and the imbalance between labour market needs and the training of graduates (Cardozier, 1984). But early critics (mostly nationalists and anti-capitalist scholars and activists) of this means of 'control' feared that the government could steer the nation's manpower where it wished (Clarke 1977, p.60), which was partly confirmed when Marcos decreed the labour export policy in 1974 (Tupas, 2011). But a few evidence also suggest that this measure was imposed on the Marcos government, that the NCEE implementation was a response to a World Bank mission finding which 'was convinced that the Philippine education system was not focused on the needs of a rapidly growing economy. Education is regarded more as a constitutional right than an instrument of economic progress' (Clarke, 1977:61).

Even with the NCEE in place, there was no slowing of the expansion of private higher education (see Table 1). The Marcos regime did not effectively rein in the private education sector. Instead, the laissez faire attitude of Marcos' predecessors, whom he had blamed for the 'overdevelopment' of higher education in particular (Ruiz 2014), was effectively maintained. The highly privatized and deregulated institutions operated by church-based organizations and influential family corporations were allowed 'self-regulation through voluntary accreditation by private groups. As Ruiz (2014, pp. 126-127) argues,

> the tension between state and elite interests continued to thrive when the state was heavily involved in transforming the postsecondary educational system. Instead of closing down schools and removing tax incentives for opening private tertiary schools, the state adopted indirect regulations for quality control by pushing the use of private accreditation associations

In other words, the Marcos regime accommodated the business interests of the elite in the education sector and made no attempt to close private schools that were oversupplying degrees and fueling graduate unemployment. Instead, the Marcos government developed the Professional Regulation Commission in 1973 to institute Board Exams and licensing of professions, rather than 'dictating the number of degrees private schools could grant per school year,' what a migration scholar recently posited as the most radical action Marcos could have taken to rein over this sector (Ruiz, 2014 p. 126).

Further, the promise of a decentralized and region-specific development failed to materialize when reforms essential to modernizing the agricultural sector (e.g. land distribution, farming and fishing subsidies) were effectively abandoned when Marcos cronies were awarded monopolies from sugar to coconut and even banana and pineapple production (traditionally controlled by the Americans). Education support for agricultural modernization came largely through multi-million dollar loan packages from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, which included

training facilities and programs for the workforce that would be needed if and when the regional industrialization strategies bore fruit.

The failure of strategies for domestic industrialization meant that these new training institutions ended up as de facto training centers for prospective migrant labourers. Eventually, skilled technicians and craftsmen joined the ranks of the educated unemployed with college diplomas discussed earlier. Whilst archival materials (especially the FAPE Review series for the 1970-75 period) and recent studies appraising economic policy-making in the Marcos years suggest that well-crafted plans and strategies were being spawned within the governing bureaucracy, these were strangled at birth by entrenched vested interests.

Conclusion

More than fifty years after his ascent to power, narratives on Ferdinand Marcos and his New Society experiment highlight achievements in the areas of national security, civic consciousness, cultural renaissance (e.g. Lico, 2003; Baluyut, 2012) and a few bright spots in the economy (e.g. Paterno, 2014). Marcos succeeded in recruiting bright, US-educated technocrats from academia and industry, which lent some degree of legitimacy to his authoritarian rule, especially in the eyes of the international community. The New Society also ushered the 'golden age' of Filipino technocracy, which laid the foundations for a more modern and professional bureaucracy. Economic and education planning was systematized, government codes were formulated across all sectors (i.e. tax code, insurance code, labour code) and management of international financing for development programs instituted in national agencies (i.e. EDPITAF in the Department of Education). As part of this administrative overhaul, Marcos and his technocrats in the labour department also formalized the labour export strategy, creating new agencies and codifying protocols for this state enterprise. Today, the Philippines is hailed as a model in 'managing' labour migration by the global community (Asis, 2017).

The Marcos-era oral history project (Katayama, et al 2010) and recent biographical accounts (e.g. Sicat ,2014) have supplied critical historical evidence partly confirming labour export strategy as political solution to the growing discontent of the young, educated working (and middle) class towards the abuses and excesses of the Marcos regime. But Anderson (1988) had recognized earlier that labour export promotion was a masterstroke by Marcos (whom he branded the 'Supreme Cacique'), suggesting that the state had effectively facilitated the exodus of many of those who constituted the most significant potential threat to the Marcos regime: educated and politically conscious Filipinos. Had they not permanently emigrated (almost a million by 1980, especially to the US), they might have played a major role in Philippine politics as Anderson (1988) further underscored. The historical analysis generated in this essay validates this early (yet speculative) assertion.

This essay has exposed what was then the tension between the 'New Society' vision of broad-based domestic prosperity and national renewal, and the reality of domestic economic failure leading to labour export. The divergence between rhetoric and reality can be traced to the political and institutional order that Marcos inherited (and eventually reinvented) for his own ends. Meanwhile, the kleptocratic tendencies of the Filipino oligarchy reared its ugly head on the way the education sector behaved all this time, ensuring in particular the unregulated expansion of cheap college courses and raking profits from it. It can be argued that this singular education policy alone had directly contributed to the growth of labour for export.

In ascertaining the role (and influence) of external actors for the direction that Filipino policy in labour export has taken, the prevailing 'neo-colonial' relationship with the US at that time becomes suspect. The whole PCSPE survey alone which supplied the basis for the educational reforms implemented and identified in this essay as critical levers (whether intentional or otherwise) in the success of the ensuing labour export policy was premised on the whole idea 'to interest the World Bank in Philippine educational improvement' (PSCPE, 1970). However this warrants a separate investigation altogether especially with emerging new materials (i.e. biographies, interview transcripts, diaries among others) from Marcos' inner circle.

Whilst some sectors in Philippine society blame Marcos and his technocrats for initiating (and exploiting) export of Filipino labour, it can be argued that they only systematized this exodus, which started in the colonial period. This relates to the socializing role of education in the Philippine context (Maca and Morris 2012, 2015), which involved schooling and other institutions (especially the church) emphasizing the essentially private or familial nature of morality, and downplaying or ignoring the civic or public dimension. In other words, education in the Philippines has overwhelmingly been seen as involving the acquisition of skills, which one then deploys for individual benefit or for the sake of one's family. Its role in fostering or promoting engaged, participatory notions of citizenship that might lead to searching social or political critique has tended to be downplayed or ignored. Instead, education under Marcos (and since) has sought to minimize any popular expectations of the state (e.g. in the realm of welfare provision or domestic job creation) - even while ostensibly trying to foster patriotism.

Notes

[1]   In the Philippine context, a *cacique* is the local political boss, and oftentimes also the local landlord. Before its incarnation in Spanish Philippines, *cacique* was originally the traditional clan or tribe leader in the Spanish colonies in Mexico and the West Indies.

[2]   Archival research covered a review of: a) the 12-volume PCSPE report, b) presidential decrees and executive acts penned by Marcos 1972-86 and c) Department/ Ministry of Education and Culture issuances (1972-86).

[3]   I would argue that aid agencies inputs into the framing of this document were more indirect; Marcos technocrats with experience of the international financial institutions 'milieu' did the drafting (Tadem,2014; Katayama, et al, 2010). However nationalist scholars like Doronila (1989, 1992) and Constantino (1982) have argued otherwise which is partly validated by Jones (2007) historical study on World Bank's foray into education – including a criticism on the WB's interventionist stance towards pioneer borrower-states like the Philippines.

[4]   For this essay, a total of 37 Marcos-era textbooks (elementary and secondary levels) produced by the Department/ Ministry of Education and readily available in the libraries of the Department of Education- Central Office and the University of the Philippines-College of Education were reviewed. The absence of proper and comprehensive archiving of textbooks and other curriculum materials produced by the education system is a severe limitation to educational studies similar to this undertaking.

[5]   Archival review of publications of Fund Assistance to Private Education (FAPE) between 1970 to 1980 reveal a healthy dialogue between education stakeholders- government, industry and private education sectors . FAPE Review (one of FAPE's official publication), for example have a published special editions which unbundled the findings, issues and recommendations of the massive 1969 education survey conducted by the PCSPE.

[6]   This is the second paper from my doctoral research project, *Education for migration: schooling, development policy and the Filipino aspiration to emigrate*, with funding support from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS)- Ronpaku Fellowship Programme. I am grateful to Professor Edward Vickers for his guidance during the long process of drafting the original manuscript. I also wish to thank two anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

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Classroom Practice and the Quality of Teaching: Where a Nation is Going?

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Abstract: *This article reports the findings on classroom practice in Malaysia, as the nation attempts to transform the education system to better prepare children for the 21ˢᵗ Century. The goal of the study is to describe an overview of classroom practice in Malaysia, to provide essential empirical data to inform discussions in one of the most important areas in education – what happens in the classroom in relation to national aspirations, policies and practices. A random sampling of 24 secondary schools from across the country led to a sample size of 140 teachers. Lessons facilitated by these teachers were video recorded and analysed. The findings revealed that classroom practice was largely the same throughout the country, and lacked the kinds of activities widely associated with creating engaging and thinking classrooms. Systemic issues and possible ways forward are discussed in light of these findings.*

Keywords: *classroom practice, pedagogical practice, instructional practice, assessment practice, curriculum implementation practice, national video study*

Introduction

While the quality of teachers' practice in the classroom is critical within a formal schooling system (e.g., Hanushek, Kain, O'Brien, & Rivkin, 2005; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Singh & Sarkar, 2015), not enough is known about what actually goes on in what is sometimes referred to as the black box of education (Black et al, 2004; Long, 1980). As Black et al (2004) put it, inputs are fed into the schooling system and some expected outputs are to follow. What is often most discussed in the public and policy-making spheres are these inputs and outputs. What is often least discussed is what happens inside the classroom – where much of the learning process is expected to take place.

The purpose of this paper is to present data about classroom practice in Malaysia to better inform policy discussions about the aforementioned inputs and outputs, as well as how to support the teachers and learners in raising the quality of learning. A recent government-initiated study cited in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013) broadly identifies issues of practice in Malaysian classrooms but does not adequately describe and conceptualize specific aspects of teacher practice for development. This paper reports on a large scale, nationwide study which aims to describe with a greater specificity the practice patterns that are deemed most pertinent to the system today, namely: 1) What instructional, assessment and curriculum implementation

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practices are present—or otherwise—to help students develop thinking skills? 2) Are there discernible differences in these practices based on teachers' years of experience?

Background: Malaysia

Malaysia has a population of 30 million, with a primary- and secondary-level (Year 1-11) student population of more than 5 million students (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Malaysia gained independence from the British in 1957, and since then, has dedicated significant resources to develop its education system. In the period immediately after independence, a majority of the population did not have any formal schooling, with only 6 per cent of the people having secondary level schooling (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). By 2010, Malaysia had an enrolment rate of 96 per cent at the primary school level, and 91 per cent at the lower secondary school level. Despite the recent growth of private schooling, an overwhelming majority of Year 1 to 11 students – about 90 percent of school-going aged children – are enrolled in the national public-school system (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

In the early decades after independence, the focus was on capacity building and increasing access to schooling. By the 1980s, the focus was on helping Malaysia shift from its dependence on agriculture and mining to manufacturing. By the turn of the century, the primary concern was to help Malaysia to be better prepared for a knowledge-based and globalized economy. The goal was to become a developed and high-income nation by 2020. Malaysia committed consistently large allocations for education from its national budget. Between 2000 and 2012, for example, the percentage expenditure on education as proportion to total federal spending was in the range of 14.2 to 18 percent (UNESCO, 2015). As a percentage of GDP, the spending was in the 3.1 to 4 percent range during this period.

While adequate financing is an important indicator of commitment to education, it is not enough in it of itself. Therein lies Malaysia's great challenge in education. Potential employers have expressed concerned about Malaysian students and graduates, indicating that high school and university graduates lack essential communication and higher-order thinking skills (Mustafa, 2015; The Star Online, 2012, 2014; World Bank, 2014).

The OECD (2013, p. 207) reported that "learning standards have declined over the last decade" in Malaysia. Results from recent assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) reaffirm Malaysia's struggles, as it remains stuck at the bottom third of the international league table. When details are compared against peer countries, the image gets even more disconcerting. For example, in PISA 2012, Malaysia had 1.1 percent of its students scoring at the advanced Band 5 level or higher in Mathematics, and 51.8 percent scoring at the Band 2 level or less. Singapore had 40.8 percent at the Band 5 level or higher, and 8.3 percent at the Band 2 level or less. Korea had 30.9 percent at the Band 5 level or higher, and 9.1 percent at the Band 2 level or less. Singapore was once part of Malaysia, up till 1965. In the early 1980s, Malaysia and Korea had similar GDP per capita. Other than regional proximity, these other countries also have a heavily centralized education system.

When compared to itself across time, Malaysia has also struggled. The country witnessed the largest decline in test scores of all countries participating in TIMSS between 2003 and 2011 (UNESCO, 2014, p.207). International assessments such as TIMSS are designed increasingly to measure higher order thinking capacities such as problem-solving.

In short, while Malaysia has made significant improvement in increasing access to formal schooling, the quality of the education system has come under greater scrutiny. The prevailing challenge today is improving the quality of education, particularly in terms of helping students develop higher-order thinking capabilities (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). To address this pressing issue, Malaysia's pivotal education planning blueprint (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013) explicitly addresses the importance of engaging students in types of learning experiences that cultivate higher order thinking. For example, as part of the blueprint plan, one of the stated objectives is to quickly

shift the national examinations structures to include a higher proportion of what is referred to as higher order thinking questions. This is being done with the intention to "refocus teachers' attention on developing higher order thinking skills" (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013, p. 4-6).

Framing this Study as the System Begins its Shifts

The operational framing of this study focused on classroom practice, an area that was identified in the *Education Blueprint* as needing a key shift from its present state (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Classroom practice can encompass many aspects, but the key aspects in focus in this study are instructional practices, assessment for learning practices as well as curriculum implementation practices. These aspects, while essential to research on classroom practice (which will be discussed in the next section), are also central to the systems shifts being initiated in Malaysia.

In 2011, the Ministry of Education Malaysia began a comprehensive review of the education system against historical and international indicators. As discussed in the preceding narrative, the conclusion of the review was that not enough was being done to prepare Malaysia's children for the needs of the 21st century. The review led to the pivotal preliminary blueprint to lay down the plans for transformation in the 2013-2025 timeframe (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

The blueprint identified the urgent need to ensure that every student has access to a high-quality education. The document recognized that "… Malaysian students have historically always excelled at reproducing subject content. However, this skill is less valuable in today's ever changing economy" (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013, p.E-11). It also states that "students need to be able to reason, to extrapolate, and to creatively apply their knowledge in novel and unfamiliar settings… (but currently) our students struggle with higher-order thinking skills."

It goes on to state that by 2016, higher-order thinking questions will make up 80 per cent of questions for UPSR (the Year 6 primary level national exam), 80 per cent of the Year 9 national assessment, 50 to 75 per cent of the questions for SPM (the Year 11 secondary level national exam). These changes were preceded by shifts starting in 2011 towards school-based assessments (SBA) from a highly centralized examination system. One of the key components of SBA was incorporating the use of assessment-for-learning methods to be carried "out continuously in schools by teachers during the teaching and learning process." (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2011, p.1)

The blueprint also recognized that for these changes to be made successfully, there must be effective groundwork to improve "classroom instruction to ensure that students develop higher-order thinking skills" (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013, p.8-3). Action goals as part of the first wave of planned change for the period 2013 to 2015 were put in place to improve the quality of classroom instruction, curriculum implementation and in-class assessment— these three areas became the focus of this study—alongside enhancing ministry and school leadership, and raising language proficiency levels.

A constructivist conceptual foundation was adopted to underpin the analysis of the three major dimensions of classroom practices: instruction, assessment and curriculum implementation. Existing evidence suggests that constructivist approaches would help the development of such skills (Bransford et al, 1999; Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Swartz, Fischer & Parks, 1998). This is consistent with Malaysia's needs to develop educational practices that are more conducive to the development of higher order thinking.

Method

This study used a video study approach (Janik & Seidel, 2009) to describe a birds' eye view of classroom practice in Malaysia. For each teacher, three lessons were recorded within a span of a week. This allowed us enough data sets to establish general patterns of practice for each teacher (Hugener et al., 2009; Praetorius et al, 2014; Seidel and Prenzel, 2006). For each lesson recorded, two video cameras and one audio recorder was used. The first camera was trained on the teacher,

and the second wide-angle camera was used to capture the whole-class perspective. The audio recorder was attached to the teacher to ensure clear audio quality. Additional microphones and cameras were considered to allow a closer look at student activities, but this was eventually ruled out due to budgetary constraints. Recording of all the lessons took place between March and September of 2014.

Video recordings were treated as a form of observation, with advantages outweighing disadvantages. Video recordings provide lasting records that make it possible to pause, re-scrutinize, and re-interpret teaching and learning processes by multiple researchers (Erickson, 2011; Klette, 2009a). Video also provides a visual representation of aspects of classroom processes that may escape the observer's gaze. In addition, Janik, Seidel and Najvar (2009) also point out that video studies allow researchers to code and re-code as required in order to capture the rich complexity of classroom practices. These distinct advantages made it possible for the researchers in this study to analyse classroom practice through at least three different lenses, namely instructional, assessment for learning as well as curriculum implementation practices. For further conceptual details of this video study, please refer to Tee, Samuel, Mohd Nor and Nadarajan (2016).

Sampling

This study randomly selected 24 schools from the list of 2000 public secondary schools in Malaysia. Note that 88 percent of secondary-level students attend public schools (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). At each of these schools, teachers teaching the four core subjects in Year 7—Mathematics, Science, English and Malay—were approached for their informed consent. In total, 140 teachers participated in the study. Also, consent from relevant authorities was obtained. Procedures to ensure confidentiality and privacy of research participants was also put in place.

Data Analysis Strategy

The use of *a priori* coding frameworks helps with reducing complexity in large-scale video studies (Klette, 2009b). Using an *a priori* coding framework as a template for analysis also allowed researchers to explore resemblances of practice against established good practices. The notion of resemblance is based on the notion that similar categories exhibit a gradient structure wherein some practices are better exemplars of good practices than others (Rosch, 1978; Smith & Strahan, 2004; Sternberg & Horvath, 1995). In other words, the greater the similarity of exhibited practice with the coding framework, the greater the probability that it belongs to the category.

After reviewing existing coding frameworks for studying classroom educational practices (e.g. Danielson, 2007, 2011, 2013; Grossman et al., 2010; Hill et al., 2008; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Kane et al., 2013; Klette, 2009b; Lingard, Hayes, & Mills, 2003; Luke, Freebody, Cazden, & Lin, 2004; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008; Tedlie et al, 2006), the decision was made to adopt the Framework For Teaching or FFT (Danielson, 2011), because of its constructivist underpinnings which is consistent with both the project and the national goals. The FFT also has an established track record, has been widely used in different research projects, and has been found to be robust (Kane & Staiger, 2012). It was then adapted to analyze instructional practice of the recorded lessons.

As for analyzing assessment practices, the research team had to develop its own coding framework based on the Assessment for Learning conceptions (Black et al, 2004; Black et al, 2006). A key reason for this decision was because Malaysia had just began implementing school-based assessment (SBA) —which emphasizes the use of assessment for learning approaches—in secondary schools nationwide in 2012. The data collection of data began in 2014 – third year into the SBA implementation.

The coding framework for analyzing curriculum implementation was adapted from two sources, namely Brown's (2009) and Lingard, Hayes and Mills' (2003) characterization of how teachers use the written curriculum. Brown's work provided the foundation to answer a key question in relation to how

teachers in Malaysia implemented the national curriculum i.e. did they offload, adapt or improvise the curriculum as they carried out the lessons? Lingard et al.'s productive pedagogies framework, on the other hand, provided the lens for the project to study if teachers in Malaysia connected the formal curriculum to other disciplines as well as students' real world experiences. Both frameworks were essential in helping us understand how teachers were adjusting their practices in relation to the centralized national curriculum.

Fundamentally, the coding frameworks were decided based on what was deemed essential to Malaysia's current context, including its aspirations and on-going challenges. The national aspiration to help students develop higher level thinking abilities keyed the constructivist underpinning for the initial coding frameworks. This constructivist underpinning formed a cohesive lens for studying Malaysian teachers' classroom pedagogical practices, including their instructional, curriculum implementation and assessment practices.

Validity and reliability procedures were carried out at multiple levels. Firstly, three 1-day pre-coding sessions were held over a span of two weeks—involving about 20 researchers and research assistants—to qualitatively calibrate, or "get on the same page" in the way the coding framework was used to make judgments against pilot videos. Secondly, a paired-coding system was installed. Two coders would watch the same video, and then coded the video by consensus. Thirdly, a quantitative post hoc approach was used to measure reliability score. The correlation between coding by experts and the research assistants were statistically significant at $p<.0001$, based on the Single Measures Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (.631).

Findings

Based on the analyses of video recordings of classroom proceedings of 140 teachers teaching Mathematics, Science, English and Malay, we found significant confluence in their practice. The practices seen in the classroom were surprisingly very similar, regardless of the experience of the teachers. A summary of the findings is presented in Table 1, followed by a more detailed discussion based on the three focal areas in classroom practice: instruction, curriculum implementation and assessment.

Instructional Practices

In terms of instructional practices, three broad clusters emerged from the findings (refer to Figure 1). The two practice dimensions in the first cluster were the most positive, where more than 80 per cent of "proficient" practice were in the median (refer to Table 1). The second cluster included five practice dimensions where more than 50 to 96 percent of "basic" practice were in the median. And the final cluster had 3 practice dimensions where more than 50 to 81 percent of "unsatisfactory" practice were in the median.

First cluster. The two practice dimensions in this cluster, where the median level of practice was 'proficient' were Classroom Procedures (81.4%; C.I. 75.0% - 87.9%) and Manage Behaviour (85.7%; C.I. 79.9% - 91.5%). In managing student behaviour, most teachers established somewhat clear standards of conduct and did so without acrimony between teacher and students. The teachers demonstrated general awareness of students' conduct, reinforced positive behaviour and dealt with misbehaviour effectively, proportionately as well as respectfully. Consistently distinguished practice was absent in large part due to several missing good practices, namely: proactive preventive action without getting distracted by misbehaviours as well indicators of a classroom culture where students actively and respectfully regulate each other's behaviour. There were a number of delays at the start of class, but once the lessons got started, it was apparent that most routines were well established.

Second cluster. In the second cluster, there is a significant drop-off from "proficient" practice to a more "basic" level. The first of these dimensions is the Respect and Rapport dimension with 50.7% (C.I. 42.4% - 59.0%) of teachers who were found to be at the "basic" level of practice. For the

Table 1. Teachers' Practices in Malaysia

	Classification of teacher practice (in %)*					Classification of teacher practice (by median)		
	A	B	C	D		Level*	% in Median	C.I. at 95% confidence level
Instructional practices:								
PA- Respect and Rapport	0 (0)	67 (47.9)	71 (50.7)	2 (1.4)		C	50.7	42.4 - 59.0
PB- Culture of learning	0 (0)	6 (4.3)	118 (84.3)	16 (11.4)		C	84.3	78.3 - 90.3
PC- Classroom procedures	0 (0)	114 (81.4)	25 (17.9)	1 (0.7)		B	81.4	75.0 - 87.9
PD- Manage behaviour	0 (0)	120 (85.7)	19 (13.6)	1 (0.7)		B	85.7	79.9 - 91.5
PE- Organize physical space	0 (0)	5 (3.6)	135 (96.4)	0 (0)		C	96.4	93.4 - 99.5
PF- Communicating with students	0 (0)	5 (3.6)	130 (92.9)	5 (3.6)		C	92.9	88.6 - 97.1
PG- Questioning	0 (0)	2 (1.4)	25 (17.9)	113 (80.7)		D	80.7	74.2 - 87.2
PH- Engagement	0 (0)	1 (0.7)	68 (48.6)	71 (50.7)		D	50.7	42.4 - 59.0
PI- Assessment for instruction	0 (0)	2 (1.4)	33 (23.6)	105 (75)		D	75.0	67.8 - 82.2
PJ- Demonstrating responsiveness	0 (0)	2 (1.4)	126 (90)	12 (8.6)		C	90.0	85.0 - 95.0
Curriculum implementation practices:								
CC- Intra relationship	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	100 (100)		D	100	-
CD- Inter relationship	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	100 (100)		D	100	-
CE- Real world connection	0 (0)	0 (0)	8 (5.7)	132 (94.3)		D	94.3	90.4 - 98.1
Assessment-for-learning practices:								
AA- Share learning target	0 (0)	0 (0)	24 (17.1)	116 8(2.9)		D	82.9	76.6 - 89.1
AB- Recognize success criteria	0 (0)	2 (1.4)	74 (52.9)	64 (45.7)		C	52.9	44.6 - 61.1
AC- Assessing students thinking	0 (0)	1 (0.7)	36 (25.7)	103 (73.6)		D	73.6	66.3 - 80.9
AD- Descriptive feedback	0 (0)	6 (4.3)	55 (39.3)	79 (56.4)		D	56.4	48.2 - 64.6
AE- Self and peer assessment	0 (0)	1 (0.7)	9 (6.4)	130 (92.9)		D	92.9	88.6 - 97.1
AF- Flexibility to assessment	0 (0)	2 (1.4)	27 (19.3)	111 (79.3)		D	79.3	72.6 - 86.0

*Note: A = Distinguished; B = Proficient; C = Basic; D = Unsatisfactory

Figure 1. Teachers' Instructional Practices in Malaysia (in percentage)
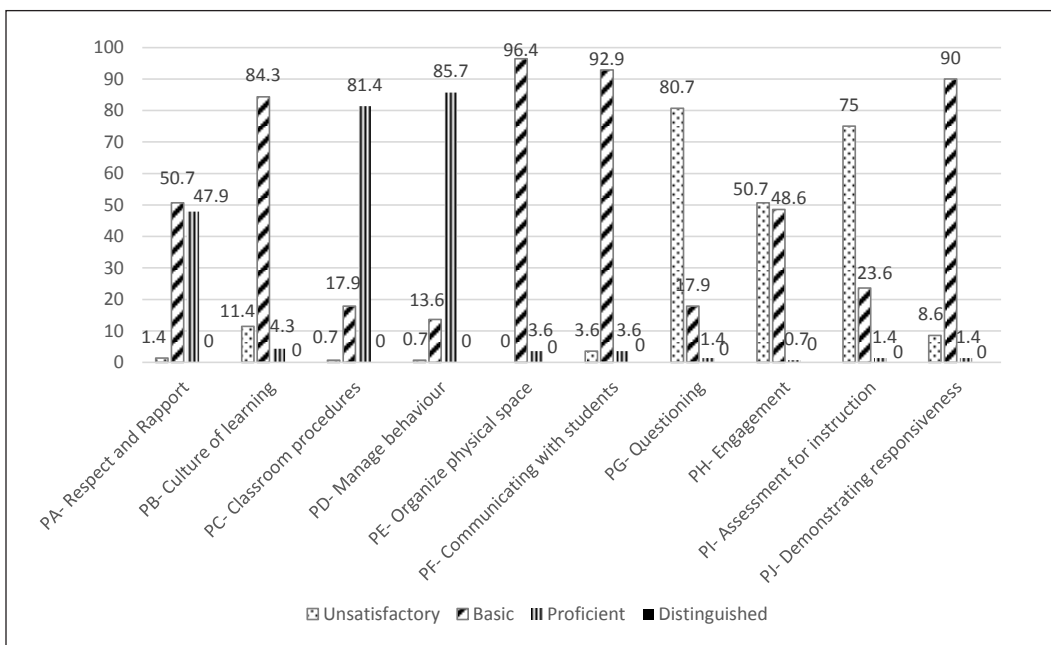
dimension of Culture of Learning it was found that 84.3% (C.I. 78.3% - 90.3%) of teachers were at the "basic" level of practice. For the dimension of Organize Physical Space, 96.4% (C.I. 93.4% - 99.5%) of teachers were deemed to be at the "basic" level of practice. For the dimension of Communicating with Students, the study found that 92.9% (C.I. 88.6% - 97.1%) of teachers were at the "basic" level of practice. For the dimension of Demonstrating Responsiveness, it was found that 90.0% (C.I. 85.0% - 95.0%) of teachers were at the "basic" level of practice.

The classrooms typically had a traditional setup – desks and chairs neatly arranged in rows facing the teacher. Even when the furniture was arranged in clusters, collaborative learning by design rarely took place. The goals of learning were not always clearly communicated, and most of the times the teaching going on in class were not situated within broader learning objectives or linked to students' interests and experiences.

In terms of cultivating a vibrant culture of learning, a large number of lessons saw teachers "going through the motions" with cognitive energy not clearly evident. The teachers did not create a sense that what was happening was important and it was essential to master it. Few of the classes observed exuded positive energy or the urgency to learn or understand something. Teachers' expectations for the students, and the students' expectations of themselves, did not seem very high. In terms of responsiveness, the teachers merely made perfunctory attempts to incorporate students' interests and questions, drawing on a limited repertoire of strategies.

Third cluster. The third and final cluster was mostly classified in the "unsatisfactory" range of practice. For the Questioning dimension, 80.7% (C.I. 74.2% - 87.2%) of teachers were found to be at the "unsatisfactory" level of practice. For the dimension of Engagement it was found that 50.7 % (C.I. 42.4% - 59.0 %) of teachers were at the "unsatisfactory" level of practice. For the dimension of Assessment for instruction, 75.0 % (C.I. 67.8% - 82.2%) of teachers were deemed to be at the "unsatisfactory" level of practice.

In terms of engaging students in learning, most class activities involved passive listening as well as rote tasks. Most of the learning activities were teacher-directed, driven by facts and procedures

and required minimal higher order thinking. Students seem more compliant than cognitively engaged. The practices in this third cluster contrast sharply with those in the first cluster above. While the practices in first cluster emphasise ordering or structuring of learning experiences, the practices in cluster three focus more on the cognitive or intellectual demands of deep or higher order thinking.

Malaysian teachers also seemed to be teaching based on the assumption that the students understood what was being taught, as there was very little evidence of proactive monitoring of students' progress. The most commonly used monitoring strategy was to ask questions to elicit evidence of student understanding. However, this was only performed in a global and general sense without substantive impact to the instructional approach. The use of other strategies such as self or peer assessment was also conspicuously absent.

There was also a general absence of high quality questions and discussions. Questions and discussions, when effectively planned and facilitated, should cause students to think and reflect, to deepen their understanding, and to test their ideas against those of their classmates. Instead, most of the questions and discussions were narrow and almost entirely teacher-directed, with little room for students to contribute meaningfully to the discussion. Exchanges tended to brief and somewhat superficial, and cognitively unengaging. Questions revolved around a single right answer, and discussions generally did not require higher order thinking.

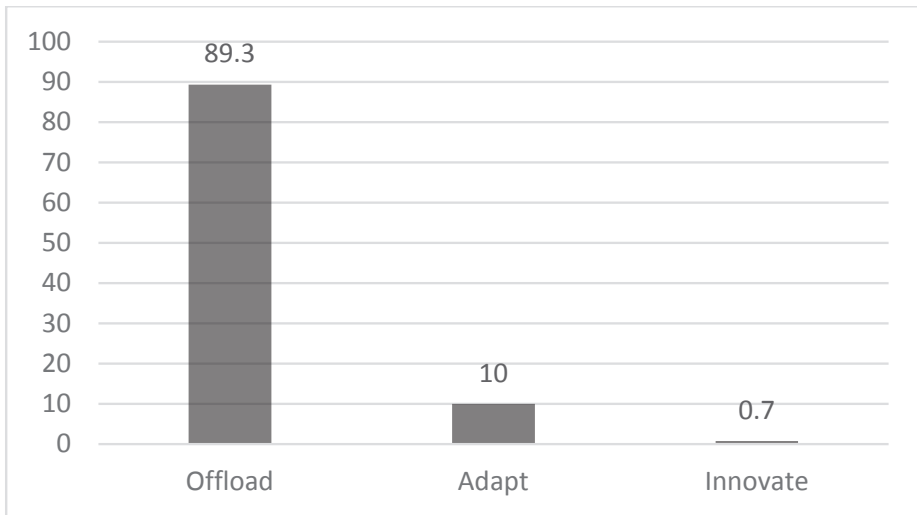*Curriculum Implementation Practices*

In terms of curriculum implementation practices of teachers, the analyses of the video data was used to determine whether teachers had offloaded, adapted or innovated the recommended curriculum and the supporting curriculum materials when implementing the curriculum in the classroom. Figure 2 below shows that 89.3% (CI 84.2% - 94.4%) of teachers were found to have offloaded instructional responsibility by relying significantly or entirely on existing recommended curriculum and the supporting curriculum materials. About 10.0% (CI 5.0% - 15%) of teachers adapted from the existing curriculum by adding their own design elements. The remaining 0.7% (CI 0.7% - 2.1%) of teachers had innovated in their classroom implementation practices, using the existing curriculum as a "seed" but eventually implemented the curriculum in novel ways.

Analyses were also conducted to determine the level of curriculum implementation practice when teachers offloaded, adapted or innovated in the classroom. Figure 3 below presents the results of the analyses.

Figure 3 shows that for teachers who offloaded and adapted the curriculum in the classroom, the median level of practice was "Basic". A total of 80.8% (CI 73.9% - 87.7%) of the teachers who offloaded were at the "Basic" level of curriculum implementation practice. These teachers were found to have delivered unchanged the content from the available curriculum materials, accurately but ineffectively. The Figure 3 also shows that about 71.4% (CI 47.73% to 95.07%) of the teachers who adapted were at the "Basic" level of curriculum implementation practice. These teachers adopted certain elements of the curriculum materials but also contributed their own design to classroom instruction, accurately but ineffectively. There was only one teacher in the sample who had innovated but this teacher was found to be at the "Unsatisfactory" level of curriculum implementation practice. This teacher was found to have delivered the content mainly with materials of his own but it was delivered inaccurately.

The analyses of the video data were also used to determine if the teachers' practices help students become more aware of the Intra-disciplinary Relationship of the curriculum, the Inter-disciplinary Relationship of the curriculum, as well as Real-world Connections (refer to Table 1). Virtually all teachers were at the "Unsatisfactory" level of practice for these curriculum implementation dimensions. The results indicate that 100% of the teachers were at the "Unsatisfactory" level in helping student be more aware of the intra-disciplinary relationship of the curriculum. These teachers' practices had not displayed any understanding of how the content was related to the

Figure 2. Curriculum Implementation Practices: Offloading, Adapting and Innovating (in percentage)

Figure 3. Levels of Curriculum Implementation Practice by Types of Curriculum Implementation Practices
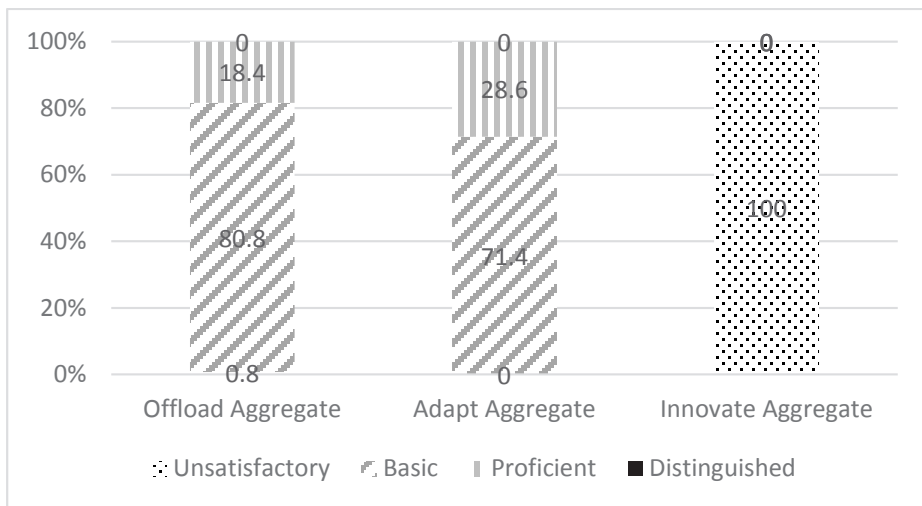

prerequisite concept. The teachers were familiar with the discipline but did not help the students to see the conceptual relationships of the various topics within the subject area. For the dimension of Inter-Disciplinary relationship of the curriculum, 100% of the teachers were at the "Unsatisfactory" level. The teachers did not help students to see how one topic could be connected to other subjects. Table 1 also shows only about 5.7% (CI 1.8% -12.4%) of the teachers were at the "Basic" level for the dimension Real-World Connections which means that they had attempted to connect the lesson topic and activities to students' experiences and contemporary external situations.

Assessment Practices

As presented in Figure 4, a majority of teachers' assessment practices were in the "unsatisfactory" and "basic" clusters and a minuscule number of teachers showed practices in the "proficient" cluster (generally less than 5 %). For example, 92.2 % of the teachers showed "unsatisfactory" practices in terms of self- or peer-assessment. Similarly, 82.9 % of the teachers did not share their learning targets with their students. About 19.3 % demonstrated flexibility and responsiveness to the results from in-class assessments and activities in the "basic" cluster. Similarly, 26.4% of the teachers used questions that assess students' thinking. Other assessment-for-learning practices were present but mostly in basic forms. For example, more than 50% of the teachers communicated the criteria of success but only did so orally and in rather superficial manner. More than 40% provided feedback, but mostly in a general way.

Figure 4: Assessment Practices (in percentage)
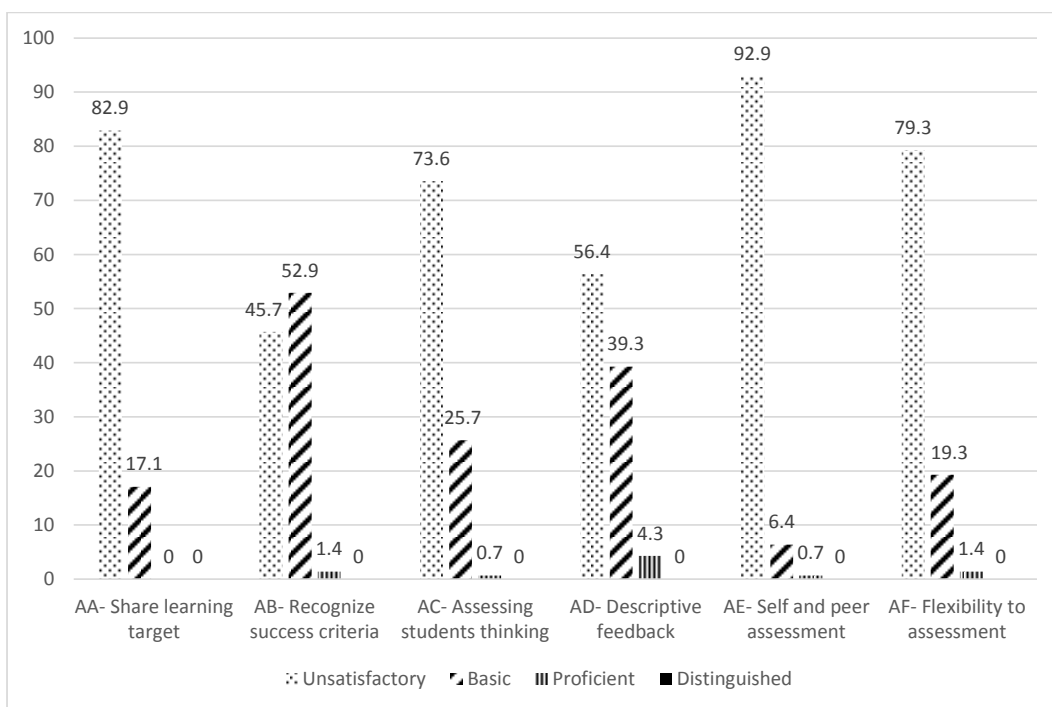
Differences in Classroom Practices by Teachers' Experience

The data of classroom practices were analysed to ascertain if there were significant differences between instructional, curriculum implementation and assessment practices across levels of teachers' experience, as measured by years in the teaching service. Table 2 below reports on the Kruskal Wallis test scores for instructional, curriculum implementation and assessment practices by teachers' teaching experience.

Table 2. Instructional, Curriculum Implementation and Assessment Practices by Teachers' Teaching Experience

Instructional Practices							
Teaching experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Chi Square	Df	Sig.	η²
1-5 years	29	1.94	0.254	1.194	2	0.550	0.017
6-15 years	64	2.01	0.247				
16 years and above	43	2.03	0.227				
Curriculum Implementation Practices							
Teaching experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Chi Square	Df	Sig.	η²
1-5 years	29	1.46	0.150	0.632	2	0.729	0.008
6-15 years	64	1.43	0.096				
16 years and above	43	1.43	0.120				
Assessment Practices							
Teaching experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Chi Square	Df	Sig.	η²
1-5 years	29	1.94	0.254	1.194	2	0.550	0.017
6-15 years	64	2.01	0.247				
16 years and above	43	2.03	0.227				

A Kruskal Wallis was conducted to determine differences in pedagogy based on teaching experience. The Kruskal Wallis test was used because of the number of sample in one of the groups based on teaching experience is less than 30 (Pallant, 2005). The table reveals that there was no significant difference between more experienced and less experienced teachers for instructional, curriculum implementation and assessment practices. This is occurring in a context where teacher preparation has supposedly gone through significant changes over the years. Constructivist practices have been emphasized more overtly in the last decade, but despite that, the findings indicate that teachers who have been teaching for less than 5 years are teaching no differently than teachers who have taught more than a decade. Continuous professional development is currently quite widespread, with a large majority of the teachers more than meeting the 7-hour-per-year in-service training requirements. Unfortunately, neither pre-service or in-service development as well as significant increases in resource allocation has transformed classroom pedagogical practices particularly in relation to developing higher order thinking.

Discussion

The analysis above points to a striking paradox: while the Malaysia Education Blueprint (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013) emphasizes the need to promote student thinking and while changes have been introduced to national examinations to increase the number of problem solving and higher order thinking questions, teacher practices do not seem to reflect these policy imperatives and emphases. In fact, the opposite is the case. Teachers show an overreliance on teaching directly from the textbook. There is scant evidence of intellectual engagement and the use of higher order questioning. And the use of assessment for learning is negligible. Not only that, there seems to be little variation in classroom pedagogical practices between teachers who have fewer years of experience and those who have more years of experience. So, the picture that emerges of Malaysian

classrooms is that there is a conspicuous homogeneity of teacher practices, and that too, of practices that are not positive.

Given this scenario, two pertinent questions arise: first, how can we explain this homogeneity across the system? And second, what future actions can change the trajectory of this present state?

How Can We Explain the Absence of Teaching Practices Associated with Thinking?

What is striking about the convergence of teacher practices in our data is not just the homogeneity across the board, but more crucially that the practices that are dominant do not encourage thinking. This seeming paradox merits closer scrutiny. First, focusing on macro-level policies, we can ask what aspects of these policies contribute to the resultant homogeneity at the micro-level. We know for instance, that Givvin et al. (2005), have argued that 'national' patterns do exist, especially in more centralised education systems. They point to the likelihood that a country can have distinctive patterns of practice as its teachers and students adapt to national expectations, cultural beliefs and values, including assumptions about the nature of a subject and how students learn. This seems to be the case for Malaysia. Key elements of Malaysia's education system including national policies, teacher training, curriculum planning, national examinations, key performance indicators for students as well as teachers, school administrative structure, architecture of school buildings and school uniforms are largely decided at a central or national level. This centrality may potentially shape and be intricately linked to distinctive national patterns of practice. However, the high degree of centralization of the Malaysian education system per se does not in itself explain the patterns of practice that show up in the data analysed above.

This is because, on one hand, the national policy aspirations and documents are seen to be pushing towards thinking classrooms, but yet on the other hand, the teachers' practices continue to be antithetical to the thinking classroom. For instance, the *Malaysia Educational Blueprint* explicitly places a high premium on student thinking. Another example of this commitment is reflected in the preamble to the newly launched 2017 national curriculum for primary schools (known by its Malay acronym KSSR, for *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah,* translated Standardised Curriculum for Primary schools) and the new national curriculum for secondary schools (known by its Malay acronym KSSM, for *Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Menengah,* translated Standardised Curriculum for Secondary schools) place strong emphasis on higher order thinking. Still, these macro-level aspirational goals in national plans and curriculum documents in a system that is highly centralised does not match with the micro-level practices at the classroom level. In actual fact, they seem to be diametrically opposed.

The question that has to be answered then is: What is it about the micro-context that produces the epistemic tendencies, in terms of classroom interaction patterns and practices that are antithetical to the thinking classroom? And to what extent are these microlevel practices shaped by larger social (or some may argue cultural) forces at work in Malaysian schools. Without running the risk of stereotyping Malaysian classroom practices, implicit in these questions are an embedded set of complex, interrelated social and cultural forces that need to be unlocked and which we can only point or allude to at this stage. This is the question that Kishore Mabhubani asked in his provocatively-titled book, *Can Asians Think?* and argued polemically that modes of thinking or the display of such thinking may be different in societies that place a high premium on acquiescence to authority structures and certain value-orientations. Mahbubani argues that Asians do think, but in modes that are less antagonistic or less voluble than their 'western' counterparts. Hofstede's (2011; see also Kennedy & Mansor, 2000) concept of the high power distance in certain cultures or societies may partially explain acquiescence to authority that may be normative in local classroom settings. The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) study commissioned by the OECD (2013), which investigated teaching practices in 34 countries, noted that Malaysian teachers stood out in the sense that they reported spending more of their average lesson time on keeping order in the classroom compared to other countries in the TALIS sample. The time devoted to maintaining

social order may be symptomatic of practices that are valued in Malaysian classrooms, where social order is given a higher emphasis in teacher priorities than active thinking and engagement with content and learning processes.

This still, begs the question: what do teachers make of the official endorsement of thinking skills in the mandated national curriculum? One possible reason that may explain why teachers may tend to disregard policy reforms is that in recent Malaysian education history, there have been several instances of sharp policy reversals which contribute to 'mixed signals' to teachers at the chalk face.

One such instance is what has been known by its Malay acronym as the PPSMI policy. PPSMI is the acronym for *Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains and Matematik dalam Bahasa Inggeris* (translated 'Teaching of Mathematics and Science in English). The decision to begin the teaching of mathematics and science in English was announced in 2005, for implementation in 2006 in Year 1 (grade 1) of primary school and Form 1 in secondary school and Form 6 (grade 7 and grade 12 respectively). However, by 2008 the policy was reversed so that Mathematics and Science from then on were progressively taught in Malay, beginning in Year 1 and Form 1. These policy reversals were partly a reaction to political pressure from language rights groups and a response by UMNO, the dominant political party within the ruling coalition government (Samuel & Tee, 2013).

Likewise, to cite another example, in 2008 the government announced that a pass in English would be compulsory from 2016 onwards for the school exit, *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) examination at the end of grade 11. However, in 2015, a year before its implementation, the policy decision was rescinded. Similarly, in 2011, the Malaysian government introduced school-based assessment which was subsequently downplayed in 2015 in the light of resistance from teachers citing the added burden to teachers' workload.

Teachers and school leaders at the school level when faced with abrupt policy reversals may find it difficult to read the overall policy directions or may be sceptical of newer initiatives when they are announced. The announcement of new policy initiatives often with great fanfare – as in the case of PPSMI or school-based assessment discussed above -- did not always allow for adequate planning and prior teacher preparation for implementation nationwide. And reversals in policy – often again at short notice –when implementation problems were encountered or when there was political pressure, resulted in a lack of coherence in direction and emphasis. Thus, despite a highly centralised education system, there appeared to be a lack of policy coherence at the macro level resulting in a lack of investment on the part of teachers who had to cope with the fatigue of frequent policy reversals. The lack of policy coherence may lead teachers to fall back on their "tried and tested" practices which may in part explain the findings reported here.

What Future Actions Can Change the Trajectory of the Present State?

For curriculum and policy reform to be meaningful, they must ultimately manifest in improved practices at the classroom level. The crux of successful reform lies in substantive changes in teaching and learning practices at the classroom level (Klette, 2009a; Cuban, 2013). However, we seem to be mired in a paradox well documented in the reform literature (Sarason, 1982, 1991; Cuban, 1990, 2013; Tyack & Tobin, 1994; Klette, 2009a). The more the system has attempted the change, the more it has remained the same (Sarason, 1982). This also partly explains the conservatism of classroom practice that gave rise to the homogeneity discussed above. However, it is important to note that this conservatism may not be the root of the problem but instead maybe merely a symptom of a larger underlying issue. One way of unlocking this situation is to distinguish and develop a particularized understanding between the elements within each of the different levels of a larger system. These levels may include what Bronfenbrenner (1994) refers to as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. Through this lens, the microsystem is defined as a system where teacher-student interactions take place on a daily basis i.e. the classroom. The mesosystem consists of collections of microsystems that the teacher interacts with frequently, including the school administration and their peers. And these microsystems interact with the exosystem that may include the local and national

bureaucracy, as well as the governing institutions. These entities interact with the macrosystem, which includes the attitude and ideologies of the culture shaped by the historical and sociological development of the nation.

A deeper analysis that takes into account these different levels and the relationship between these levels will more likely lead to a more nuanced understanding of the complex interrelationships that go into shaping the eventual classroom practice seen throughout the country. The classroom can be seen as a nexus-like space instead of a self-contained space, independent from outside influences (Lefebvre, 1991). In this view, the classroom is seen as a "complex of mobilities" which highlights the numerous in and out conduits that shapes the space within. Lefebvre (1991, p.93) used the house as a metaphor, illustrating that this space is shaped by permeation from every direction "streams of energy which run in and out of it by every imaginable route: water, gas, electricity, telephone lines, radio and television signals, and so on."

In other words, what is needed here is for overall policy coherence and for the entities within the different systems (e.g. federal ministries, states and district education offices and schools) to become more informed about how each of the actions contribute to classroom practice. This would involve (a) close and coherent monitoring and sharing of essential practices and (b) supporting and sustaining the development of essential practices. In instances, where new policy directions may not be in line with current teacher practices, adequate time needs to be factored into the preparatory stage before implementation, so that radical policy reversals may at least be avoided due to implementational resistance midway through the reform period. In this regard, it may be too simplistic to apportion blame solely to teachers for their conservative practices. The systems that support the educational processes have a significant influence in shaping teachers' practices. Thus, teachers will not change their practices unless the cultures in schools in which they work, the education bureaucracy, and the society at large also change.

Conclusion

In this study, we sought to describe teacher's classroom practices in Malaysia, as the nation attempts to transform the education system to better prepare her children for the 21st Century. The data on teachers' classroom practices in Malaysia goes against the grain of stimulating student thinking, despite the official emphasis on developing student thinking through a highly centralized national curriculum reform effort. Teachers' practices in Malaysia's classrooms seem to contradict the needs of the growing knowledge society. While the teachers do relatively well in classroom management dimensions, they struggled with using pedagogical practices that are more conducive for cultivating thinking. These findings were consistent across experienced and less experienced teachers. We have argued that in order to change the way teaching is practiced in school, there is a need to take cognisance of the larger eco-system within which teachers operate, to address the "complex of mobilities" (Lefebvre, 1991) that impact classroom life.

Notes

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The Culture of Institutional Governance at a University in Laos: An Ethnographic Exploration

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Abstract: *This paper reports on an ethnographic exploration of the culture of institutional governance at one of the five public universities in Laos. Drawing on documentary materials, on-site observations made over an extended period, and semi-structured interviews conducted with 31 academic managers from across all management levels at the site institution, the paper seeks to throw light on the institution's embedded practices of internal governance, as well as on the beliefs, values and aspirations associated with those practices. A constructivist and interpretive methodology was employed to generate data. The picture to emerge is one of a university hemmed in by State controls and ideology, in which there is an overwhelmingly bureaucratic and managerial culture, and in which a governance structure that could potentially support institutional and academic autonomy does not do so. Resource constraints also contribute to the institution's limited capacity to exercise autonomy.*

Keywords: *Laos, higher education, governance, autonomy, management, culture*

Introduction

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), better known as Laos, is a large, landlocked country, much of which is mountainous and sparsely populated. With a population of less than 7 million, Laos tends to attract less international attention than its more populous neighbours – China, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar and Cambodia. Most people in Laos live in lowland areas adjacent to the Mekong River, where Vientiane, the national capital, is also located. The national level of GDP per capita remains low, at only US$2,353 in 2016 (The World Bank, 2018), and the economy relies heavily on agriculture. Over recent years, though, average economic growth rates of 7% per annum have been achieved, and a process of economic transition to enable more reliance on manufactured goods and the provision of services is well under way.

For 60 years, Laos formed part of the French colonial region of Indochina. Upon gaining independence in 1954, the country was plunged into a long and destructive civil war, the outcome of which was victory in 1975 by the communist forces. The Lao People's Revolutionary Party (hereafter referred to as the Party) assumed control and has remained in power ever since. It adopts a Marxist-Leninist political outlook.

The Party determined in 1975 that a Soviet model of higher education would be implemented in Laos (Noonan, 2011). This model privileged mono-disciplinary, teaching-focused institutes and colleges. In 1996, however, in a sharp reversal of this policy, the National University of Laos (NUOL) was established as a comprehensive public university with a research as well as a teaching function. It is the leading university in Laos and in 2015-16 had an enrolment of more than 21,000 students (Ministry of Education and Sports [MOES], 2016). Since 1996, four other public universities, each

modelled on NUOL, have been established. These universities are: Champasack University in Pakse, Souphanouvong University in Luang Prabang, the University of Health Sciences in Vientiane (it was formerly a faculty within NUOL), and Savannakhet University in Savannakhet. By 2015-16, these four newer universities had a collective enrolment of almost 15,000 students (MOES, 2016).

The higher education sector also includes 12 teacher education institutes and more than 80 private colleges. In 2015-16, the teacher education institutes had a total enrolment of 17,362 students, and the private colleges had a total enrolment of 36,310 students. Most private college enrolments in Laos are part-time, whereas nearly all public higher education institution enrolments are full-time.

The investigation reported in this paper addressed the culture of governance at one of the five public universities in Laos – its identity will be protected. In 2014 and 2015, one of the authors, who speaks Lao, undertook an ethnographic study of this university's governance culture, drawing on documentary materials, on-site observations made over an extended period, and semi-structured interviews conducted with 31 academic managers from across all management levels.

The investigation was instigated for several reasons. One concerned the need felt for university governance in Laos to become better aligned with international norms, especially concerning institutional autonomy. As Salmi (2009, p. 8) has observed, the autonomy of a university's governance is one of three important foundations for global success – the other two being the availability of ample resources and the availability of academic talent. Another reason for undertaking the investigation was curiosity about the extent to which a cultural perspective on the governance of a university in Laos could be insightful. In this regard, Tierney's (1988) account of the importance of culture as a force shaping what happens in higher education institutions provided a strong inspiration. He asserted:

> Institutions certainly are influenced by powerful, external factors such as demographic, economic and political conditions, yet they are also shaped by strong forces that emanate from within. This internal dynamic has its roots in the history of the organization and derives its force from the values, processes, and goals held by those most intimately involved with the organization's workings. An organization's culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it. It concerns decisions, actions, and communication, both on an instrumental and a symbolic level. (p. 3).

The literature on higher education in Laos is sparse. The only recent works appear to be chapters by Phou (2006) and Ogawa (2008), and an article by Moxom and Hayden (2015). None of these publications explicitly addressed the culture of institutional governance in the higher education sector in Laos.

This paper reports on key themes to emerge from the investigation. To begin, the investigation's setting is sketched, and both its conceptual perspective and its methodological approach need to be introduced.

The Setting

The Party owns the political landscape in Laos. At its peak is the Party Central Committee, which establishes a policy framework for laws approved by the National Assembly and for decrees issued by the Prime Minister. Ministers then make decisions and approve plans for their portfolios. Regarding higher education, a Department of Higher Education within the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) is primarily responsible for developing plans and policies for the higher education sector. Presidents of public universities interpret these plans and policies. They are expected to implement them in a manner that aligns with Party priorities and values. Party cells within public universities monitor the extent of compliance in this regard. Because of Party scrutiny, academic managers are generally reluctant to take risks. One way of doing so is by referring difficult matters to a higher level of authority for decision. Not surprisingly, this pattern results in both centralization and congestion

in decision-making. Stuart-Fox (2008) has described the political culture of decision-making in Laos as one in which "information flows up in the hierarchy, while decisions flow down" (p. 3). He has also observed that personal connections with a senior Party member can be a way of getting decisions made more quickly, but without appropriate transparency.

The Education Law authorises the Minister for Education and Sports to approve the higher education curriculum, establish academic standards, manage the appointment of staff, monitor and evaluate academic outcomes, and approve any international partnerships or forms of cooperation that may involve public higher education institutions. This authority means that, by international standards, universities in Laos have limited institutional autonomy. Tight (1992) identified six decision-making freedoms associated with institutional autonomy: freedom to exercise corporate self-governance; freedom to exercise corporate financial control; freedom to make staffing decisions; freedom to select students; freedom to determine the curriculum; and freedom to assess and certify student academic performance. Universities in Laos currently have access to only one of these freedoms, that is, the freedom to assess and certify student academic performance.

The Ministry has recently indicated a need to "strengthen ownership especially at university level" (MOES, 2015, p. 66). This statement has raised expectations that the governing boards of public universities, known as university councils, might soon be given more freedom to decide autonomously on a range of matters concerning institutional priorities, funding and administration. It is also possible, though, that the Ministry intends only to delegate more responsibility to university councils for supervising the application of the plethora of rules and regulations that currently apply to the functioning of universities in Laos. These rules and regulations derive from multiple Ministries within the Cabinet, and from the Party. They are not routinely updated and are of variable quality in terms of how well they have been drafted.

The governance structure for universities in Laos has the appearance of a corporate model of governance. Each university has a governing board, the university council, which is independently chaired, and which includes external members. According to *Prime Ministerial Decree 071/PM,* dated June 16, 2009, a university council is required to discharge the following responsibilities: approve policies, development plans and budget plans for the President to propose to the Government; approve rules, regulations and directives applying to institutional management; determine the appointment levels for academic and other members of staff; and implement regulations for quality assurance at the institution. Each university also has an academic committee, comprised entirely of members of academic staff. It is required to review the quality of teaching and learning at the university, having regard to standards specified in curriculum policy statements issued by the MOES.

In practice, however, a corporate form of institutional governance does not function well at universities in Laos. This point will be more fully developed later in this paper.

Conceptual Perspective

There is a vast international literature on higher education governance. Reviews of this literature by Hénard and Mitterle (2010), and by Austin and Jones (2015), are examples. Few of the studies undertaken have sought to explore specifically the culture of institutional governance, as found within individual higher education institutions. Kezar and Eckel (2004) could identify only three such studies up to the early 2000s. One of these was Birnbaum's (1988) exploration of the meanings given to the nature of 'good governance' by informants who were engaged with governance at different higher education institutions in the United States. Another was Lee's (1991) investigation of governance and leadership at eight higher education institutions, also in the United States. Lee found that past experiences of mistrust between academic staff members and senior academic managers impacted adversely on the quality of current institutional governance processes. The third was an investigation by Schuster, Smith, Corak and Yamada (1994) of planning and governance structures at different higher education institutions, again in the United States. They reported that institutional governance processes could be variously characterised according to the uniqueness of the institutional culture in

which they were transacted. Kezar and Eckel (2004) strongly recommended that more investigations involving a cultural perspective on higher education governance were needed, but there is little evidence in the recent literature that this recommendation has been heeded.

This situation is surprising because, as Smerek (2010) has shown, there is an influential body of higher education literature in which a cultural perspective has been adopted. He observed also that a cultural perspective "offers powerful ways to understand deep-level, partly non-conscious sets of meanings, ideas, and symbols" (p. 381).

Alvesson (2002) succinctly characterises the nature of a cultural perspective on organisations at large as requiring a focus on:

> . . . the meanings given by key actors to elements in their institutional environment, whether these elements are its social structures, its social behaviors or its characteristic forms of social relations. Culture, then, is central in governing the understanding of behavior, social events, institutions and processes. Culture is the setting in which these phenomena become comprehensible and meaningful. (p. 4)

Understanding the culture of governance at a public university in Laos requires an exploration of the institution's embedded practices of governance and of the beliefs, values and aspirations associated with those practices. It requires an understanding not only of how the institution is governed but also of how key actors perceive the governance of the institution.

Methodology

Lincoln and Guba's constructivist methodology of *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) provided a suitable framework for exploring the culture of governance at a public university in Laos. *Naturalistic Inquiry* requires that an investigation should be entirely discovery-oriented, as opposed to being framed by hypotheses and the manipulation of potentially salient variables. It also requires the researcher to be the primary data-gathering instrument. Guba and Lincoln (1981, pp. 129-138) identified characteristics of human beings that make them ideal as instruments for collecting and analysing data about social and cultural phenomena, including that, when collecting and analysing data, human beings are able to be responsive and adaptable, able to take account simultaneously of multiple layers of meaning, and able to process data at the same time as it is being collected. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 194) cautioned, however, that these benefits were lost if the data-gathering processes were not 'trustworthy', a quality which they identified as mirroring validity and reliability in positivist research. Operational strategies for establishing trustworthiness were said to include: prolonged engagement – spending a sufficient amount of time in the field to acquire a depth of familiarity with the phenomenon of interest; persistent observation – acquiring a depth of observational detail about the phenomenon; triangulation – using multi-methods of data collection concerning the phenomenon; peer debriefing – being able to report to knowledgeable peers about insights emerging from the data; and member checking – giving participants an opportunity to confirm both the accuracy of the data collected and the believability of interpretations given to that data by the researcher.

The site for the investigation was selected on the basis that its governance culture was likely to be broadly representative of the culture of governance across all five public universities in Laos. It was also an institution whose President expressed support for the proposed investigation. Academic managers (the president and Vice-presidents, Deans, Heads of institution-wide offices, Vice-deans, Heads of academic departments, and Deputy-heads of academic departments) from the site university were identified as the preferred participants in the investigation because of their greater likelihood of being able to provide rich information about the institution's governance culture.

A sampling technique described by Patton (2002, p. 45) as "snowballing" was employed, whereby academic managers selected purposefully for interviews were then invited to recommend other academic managers who might valuably be interviewed. By the time data redundancy became evident, a total of 31 academic managers had contributed to the investigation. These participants were interviewed at length, in some cases several times, and their accounts were triangulated by means of direct on-site observations of governance practices, as well as by means of the analysis of relevant documentary materials.

Data collection took place initially over an intensive ten-week period of fieldwork in 2014. Each participant was subsequently provided with an opportunity to verify the interview data collected and to contribute further to the investigation. Extensive follow-up interviews and email discussions took place in 2015. The participants appeared to enjoy reporting on their experiences. There were, however, some challenges to be overcome. English has a rich and sophisticated vocabulary which includes terms such as 'accountability' and 'autonomy', but the meaning of these terms in the Lao language, which is more limited in its vocabulary, can only be conveyed by means of extended phrases and sometimes lengthy explanations.

Interviews were conducted at times and in locations preferred by the participants. All interviews were conducted in person and in the native Lao language of the participants. Interviews were scheduled to be of one hour in duration, but most participants wanted to talk for longer. The procedures employed for collecting data for the investigation had received prior approval from the ethics committee of an Australian university.

Fictitious names are employed when reporting direct quotes from the participants. Also, the site institution is referred to simply as 'the University'.

Characteristics of the Institutional Governance Culture

The culture of governance at the site University was widely reported by the participants to be centralised, bureaucratic, managerial, financially constrained and ideological. These characteristics are now documented.

Centralised

There was widespread agreement among the participants that it was the President who governed the University, and not the University Council. This situation appeared to contradict *Prime Ministerial Decree 071/PM,* dated June 16, 2009, which declared the University Council to be responsible for, amongst other things, approving policies, development plans and budget plans. When invited to comment on this apparent contradiction, various explanations were provided.

One of these explanations related to the fact that 15 of the 29 members of the University Council were also members of staff at the University, and most of these staff members were members of the President's Executive Board, an advisory body to the President with a membership that included the Vice-presidents, the Deans and various Heads of institution-wide offices. The President's Executive Board, which met on a monthly basis, and not twice each year as was the case with the University Council, served as the forum at which matters of importance to the University could be routinely decided by the President. At University Council meetings, therefore, a majority of members of the Council had already discussed the agenda items at meetings of the President's Executive Board, and so were already in agreement about how these matters should be decided.

Another explanation was that the 14 external members of the University Council (including the Chair) seldom challenged the President's recommendations. In part, this situation reflected a high level of respect accorded to the Office of President. It was also reportedly the case, though, that many of the external members (other than the Chair, who was a highly respected official appointed by the MOES) were irregular in their attendance at University Council meetings, had little apparent understanding of their role as members, and had no depth of appreciation of the issues affecting

the University. The external members included one representative from each of the three mass organisations in Lao society (the Lao Trade Unions, the Lao Youth Organization and the Lao Women's Union) and 10 other community representatives appointed by the MOES. As Mr Viengsavanh, a Vice-president, explained:

> Generally, the University Council does not function properly because members from outside the University don't have time to participate in meetings on a regular basis, and they don't understand very well the processes and circumstances of the University. A Council can't work properly if some of its members don't have the time to develop this understanding.

Mr Viengsavanh reported also that opportunities for in-depth discussion at University Council meetings were wasted because the community representatives had little or nothing to say. He commented: *"I could clearly see that it was like having a meeting of people from different nations. The communication process simply did not function effectively."* In his view, much of the blame for this situation was attributable to the lack of commitment of the community members.

It was the President, therefore, with advice from the President's Executive Board, who made the important governance decisions for the University. Even Mr Viengsavanh, who reported having worked strenuously to build the capacity of the University Council, acknowledged this fact:

> The President's Executive Board has taken over the role of the University Council, and the President is the ultimate decision maker regarding University matters, which is not normally correct.

His reference to *"not normally correct"* reflected his belief that in a corporate model of governance, as practised in other, more developed Southeast Asian higher education systems, the University Council, as the institutional governing board, should be the ultimate decision-making authority at the University. He could not see a corporate governance model ever being properly implemented at the University for reasons related to the strength of the President's Executive Board and the passivity of the external members of the University Council.

Meetings of the President's Executive Board were widely reported by participants to be orderly, systematic and businesslike. Mr Souchalid, a Vice-president, explained the culture of these meetings as follows:

> There is a meeting every month at which issues are dealt with comprehensively. The President's Executive Board checks monthly management plans, reviews monthly achievements, and sets objectives to be achieved in the future. It is a forum at which the President can answer questions, and it is a forum for making suggestions to the President.

Mr Ongard, the Head of an institution-wide office, confirmed Mr Souchalid's account. He referred specifically to the capacity of the President's Executive Board to make decisions without delay:

> Its strengths are that it has the authority required to deal with issues of concern to NUOL. It includes all the important managers at the University. They can talk and make decisions immediately when that is required.

Concerns were also expressed, though, about the extent of the President's personal freedom to dispense benefits and impose sanctions. Highly prized benefits in this regard included permissions to travel abroad and to serve on significant committees. These permissions conferred access to additional remuneration, mainly in the form of travel allowances and sitting fees. Some participants

hinted also at the existence of opportunities for cronyism. One Head of an institution-wide office commented, for example: *"Everyone involved with staffing appointments must act transparently. We must be able to recommend good people for advancement, whether the President likes them or not."*

The Academic Committee, which was reported to be responsible for assuring the quality of teaching and learning at the University (though no documentation to this effect was sighted), was referred to in much the same way as the University Council, that is, as a committee with a formal role but with negligible authority. The Academic Committee also met twice annually. The President chaired these meetings, though many participants observed that the President usually stayed for only a short period of time before handing over the chair role to a Vice-president. His standard practice in this regard was widely interpreted as symbolising the lack of authority of the Academic Committee.

More than one-third of the members of the Academic Committee were also members of the President's Executive Board, and so agenda items for Academic Committee meetings had often been decided in advance at meetings of the President's Executive Board. In any event, recommendations from the Academic Committee had to be approved by the President before being forwarded to the University Council. Mr Viengsavanh, a Vice-president, explained:

> *Once [the Academic Committee] makes decisions, these are then forwarded to the President for action. These proposals mainly concern new curricula and programs requiring approval. To have full academic autonomy, though, the Academic Committee would need to be able to make decisions itself about teaching and learning, and about the expectations of lecturers. However, that's not what happens, mainly because the Academic Committee's proposals always need to be approved by the President's Executive Board, and then they are taken to the University Council for ratification.*

Many participants referred to delays in the implementation of decisions taken by the Academic Committee. The most severe criticisms for these delays were directed at the MOES. Ms Sidsay, a Vice-dean, commented, for example:

> *The Academic Committee, and then the University Council, must wait for a long time for decisions by the Ministry, including on matters concerning professorial and associate professorial appointments, regulations concerning research, decisions regarding curriculum developments, and a range of other matters related to the development of teaching and learning. How can the University possibly catch up with the rest of the world when these kinds of delays occur?*

Mr Souchalid, a Vice-president, considered, however, that the Academic Committee had itself to blame for some of the delays. He claimed:

> *The Academic Committee's procedures need to be improved in several respects. First, members don't have enough time to study the contents of the agenda when they receive it only two or three days before an Academic Committee meeting. Second, Academic Committee members themselves tend to be very deferential when making comments in meetings for fear of inviting repercussions, whether from another faculty member or from the University leadership. The other problem is that, when the Academic Committee cannot reach a consensus about a matter being discussed, it simply refers the problem on to the President and the University Council.*

From his point of view, the Academic Committee lacked the will to make difficult decisions intended to uphold high academic standards. In these circumstances, higher-level authorities continued to justify the importance of their role in scrutinizing closely any recommendations made by the Academic Committee.

Bureaucratic

The culture of governance at the University could clearly be seen to be bureaucratic. It was a culture that resonated strongly with descriptions given by Baldridge (1971) and Birnbaum (1988) of bureaucratic cultures in the context of higher education. Baldridge (1971) characterised a bureaucratic higher education culture as one in which there is a well-defined hierarchy of authority with a clear chain-of-command, an insistence on the use of formal channels for the flow of internal communications, and the need for all decisions to be framed by a rigidly applied body of rules and regulations. This account matched perfectly the culture of governance at the University, where it was evident from on-site observations as well as from participants' reports that there was a formal hierarchy of decision-making authority, an expectation that communications should occur through formal channels, and a preoccupation with ensuring that decisions taken could be justified by means of reference to relevant rules and regulations.

This culture was so familiar to most participants that they could not easily describe it objectively. A small number of participants who had worked or studied abroad in more developed higher education systems were generally better able to point to the bureaucracy of the University's governance culture. One of these was Mr Souksavang, a Vice-president, who discussed at length the cultural distinctiveness of the University when compared with universities in Australia and France. He expressed frustration about the time-consuming and often useless nature of the processes having to be followed to obtain decisions at the University and within the Lao higher education sector.

Another participant who expressed frustration was Mr Thammavong, a Dean, who argued that important decisions were not being made quickly enough. He explained:

> The pace of social change is very fast and our governance mechanisms are not keeping up. For example, we [the Deans] cannot negotiate independently in forming collaborations with foreign partners. The existing process for obtaining approval is far too bureaucratic! We need first to develop a proposal, which then goes to the President's Executive Board, and then to the Ministry of Education and Sports, and then to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Our proposed partners need a quick response, but we can't give one. Some of these approvals take too long to process. In the meantime, we miss out.

Mr Thammavong also reported on the difficulty he and other Deans had in having to follow rules and regulations that sometimes were not clearly expressed and could even be contradictory. He referred specifically to the rules and regulations applying to PhD candidature:

> Our first PhD program was conducted by means of coursework, but the national curriculum refers to it needing to have a research base. However, the regulations issued by the Ministry about what a research base requires lack sufficient detail. How can we follow the rules when the rules have been written in a way that is not clear?

These kinds of contradictions, he explained, meant that the safest option for an academic manager was often to do nothing.

Mr Thammavong was not alone in feeling burdened by the responsibility of having to interpret regulatory details when making decisions. Most other academic managers expressed similar concerns. They reported that many authorities produced regulations affecting the operation of the University. These authorities were said to include including the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the MOES, the Ministry of Finance, the Bank of Lao PDR, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Party. Deans and the Heads of institution-wide offices were then placed awkwardly in having to interpret these regulations, with a serious risk of criticism from the Party if they failed to interpret them correctly. Yet the sheer volume of these regulations, and the many discrepancies found within them, made this role extremely onerous.

Managerial

Not surprisingly, in light of its bureaucratic character, the culture of governance at the University was also described as being highly managerial. Status at the University was said to be attained by being appointed to a managerial position. Many participants were critical of this aspect of the University's culture. Speaking strongly about the matter, Mr Saengmanee, a Vice-dean, claimed:

> *The current management system gives more benefit to managerial positions. This is the wrong signal to send because it means that many staff members aspire mainly to be managers. There are few who want to be researchers. Real academic leaders are those who achieve distinction for producing scientific research. It is through teaching and research [and not through management] that universities serve communities, the nation, and the world.*

Mr Thammavong, a Dean, also commented on the topic. From his point of view, academic managers very easily became entangled in management processes that achieved little more than to keep the institution running. In his opinion, there was no scope for them to address the more difficult issues affecting the academic community, especially issues affecting the quality of teaching and learning. He reflected:

> *We need to learn from others, but we are not generally all that receptive to new ideas. We do need to try to make our University more distinctive. There are some good things happening, and we should make use of our quality assurance system to identify them, as well as to identify the weaknesses. To achieve improvements, we need to focus on specific aspects of the University's performance, such as making sure that academic staff appointments are based on proven performance. We are mostly concerned with matters of quantity, such as whether we have enough lecturers, but there should also be a focus on whether the lecturers we have are sufficiently competent.*

Mr Phimma, the Deputy-head of an academic department, explained that academic managers at the University were kept busy with administrative matters concerning student numbers, student grades, staffing arrangements, and compliance with annual, monthly, weekly and even daily plans. He argued that they were, therefore, not easily able to address fundamental questions about the quality of the learning experience for students. He reported: *"Some lecturers can't even use PowerPoint, and so they teach without any teaching aids, simply by reading material from a book."*

Most participants shared a view that insufficient attention was being given to the development of leadership skills. Mr Vithaya, the Head of an academic department, reported how the process for appointing managers was often very reactive:

> *We will soon have two or three more colleagues [academic managers] who are about to retire. I don't think [the University] has given any attention to how they will be replaced in time for business to continue as normal. [The University] needs to have a mechanism that allows new recruits to be appointed a year or so before existing academic managers retire. Instead, it waits until there is a problem.*

A managerial issue of significance to the University's reputation concerned academic corruption. More than one-half of the participants made reference to the incidence of academic corruption at the University, but most declared the problem to be one that they could not individually do much to resolve. Mr Ongard, the Head of an institution-wide office, saw the problem to be related to a general acceptance of corruption in Lao society:

> *I wish to see corruption disappear from our country [said with laughter, indicating that he thought this wish was fanciful]. Corruption is a problem everywhere. Because of corruption, people working in public institutions do not behave ethically. I don't blame lecturers for*

not being ethical. They see other people in society as models. But it should be different at a university.

Some participants commented that they wanted to take a stand on academic corruption, but that they had to be careful not to appear to be showing up the deficiencies of their more senior colleagues. Some also expressed a sense of resignation to the fact that any initiative they might sponsor would achieve nothing because of a culture of tolerance of academic corruption at the University.

Financially Constrained

Various senior managers frequently expressed frustration about the way in which the Ministry of Finance could independently determine the University's income. Furthermore, the Ministry was reported to require that any unspent funds from annual budgets could not be carried over to following years. Mr Souchalid, a Vice-president, explained:

The operating budget the Ministry of Finance gives us must be spent within the year we receive it. If it is not fully spent, then any unspent funds are deducted from the following year's budget. Long-term financial planning is impossible under these circumstances. The existing budgetary arrangement will not allow us to show a profit.

The Ministry of Finance was also reported to have determined that any external earnings generated independently by the University should be deducted from the following year's annual budget. This meant that the University could do little to help itself in terms of generating more income.

The University was also reported to be in a straightjacket with respect to student tuition fee levels, which many participants viewed as being far too low, given that private colleges were charging three times as much for study programs which were widely regarded as being inferior to those offered by the University. Mr Souchalid stated, for example: *"We want to see an increase in the level of student tuition fees, which at present are very low, but we are not allowed to have that."*

The lack of funds was widely reported to impact adversely on morale, quality and opportunities to implement reform. Ms Chansopha, a Vice-dean, commented, for example: *"The curriculum requires us to teach both theory and its application, but we have no laboratory resources for the conduct of experiments, and so teaching about the practical applications of theory is almost impossible."* Mr Sengsoulee, the Head of an academic department, reported: *"We no longer have an adequate teaching wage. Many lecturers go outside to teach. It is difficult to stop them."* Mr Naphavan, a Dean, lamented: *"The state of the livelihood of lecturers in my faculty is almost too bad to admit."*

The problem of insufficient funds was so pressing for nearly all participants that it pushed other concerns, including concerns about the University's governance, into the background. Surprisingly, though, concerns such as those reported by Mr Sengsoulee, about the *"many classrooms that are simply unusable because the tables and chairs are broken",* appeared never to have been raised at meetings of the Academic Committee, even though it was principally responsible for addressing issues relating to the quality of teaching and learning at the University.

Ideological

The Party was clearly well represented at all levels of decision making at the University. Indeed, as reported by many participants, academic staff members serving on the University Council, the President's Executive Board and the Academic Committee could not conceivably have been elected or appointed to these bodies if they were not already committed Party members. In this way, the Party was intimately engaged with the governance of the University.

The influence of the Party on the University's culture was widely acknowledged by the participants, who reported that it played an especially important role concerning the appointment of academic managers. The legitimacy of its influence was not seriously questioned, though various participants expressed concern that, because of its ideological orientation, it contributed to a pattern whereby management appointments were based mainly on political considerations rather than demonstrated managerial capability. Ms Chansopha, a Vice-dean, who was an active participant in Party affairs, was nonetheless critical of the decision-making process:

> *Leadership appointments are made through open invitations to nominate for appointment, followed by a process of anonymous voting. But those who are appointed to these positions should be properly trained for the roles they occupy, and not simply be members of staff who have completed [Party] political courses and who know only how to comply with Party political morals and manners. Our University President and our Deans should be at least as competent as their ASEAN peers!*

Many participants reported that, as Party members, they were routinely required to attend Party meetings related to their level of management at the University. These meetings were intended to ensure that all decisions taken at the University reflected the will of the Party. The meetings were also reported to provide an opportunity for ensuring that anybody appointed to a managerial position remained subject to Party discipline. Many participants reported how Party committees functioned. Mr Sengsoulee, the Head of an academic department, reported, for example:

> *We meet regularly to discuss solutions for any behaviour that is considered 'off-track' in terms of Party ideology. We also appoint Party members to lead the three mass organizations. Our members nearly always belong to one or other of these three organizations.*

Deans who were participants in the investigation referred often to the need for them to adhere to the 'Principle of Democratic Centralism' in their decision-making. This traditional Party principle enshrines the dual need for leadership positions to be filled democratically and for persons elected to leadership positions to follow strictly the policies and directions of those appointed at a higher level of authority. Deans expressed a clear understanding of the role of this Principle in ensuring that political authority remained centralized. Mr Thammavong, a Dean, explained the operation of the Principle in the context of staffing appointments in his faculty:

> *Deans have the right to nominate an academic staff member for appointment to a position of responsibility. While we have this right, we must also base our decisions on the Principle of Democratic Centralism. Once we have selected a person for appointment, we must submit the selection for [democratic] approval by members of the Party.*

He proceeded to explain how the Principle impacted on his capacity as Dean to make decisions:

> *All decisions of this nature must conform to the policies of a higher authority. Suppose we wanted to have a research relationship with a foreign university. Before we could agree to be involved in any research projects, we must submit our proposal to the President for approval.*

Governance underpinned by the 'Principle of Democratic Centralism' meant inevitably that all matters of importance had to be decided centrally by the President, or in a manner that was consistent with the President's interpretation of Party ideology. His decisions were, of course, also subject to approval by a higher authority in the form of the Minister for Education and Sports, who could reverse them.

Discussion

Clark's (1983, p. 143) 'triangle of coordination' points to three possible sources of authority in the coordination of a higher education sector: the State, the market, and the academy. If the State is in control, then it makes all the important decisions concerning a higher education sector, including decisions about its programs, their delivery and their availability to students. These decisions are generally based on political priorities. Where the market dominates, the important decisions are made according to the forces of supply and demand, and economic priorities will prevail. If the academy dominates, then global academic norms and standards will determine how decisions are made. Across the area within the triangle, a mix of influences from all three sources eventually determines how the important decisions are resolved.

Based on the evidence available, it is safe to say that the decision-making environment of the site University was one dominated by the State. The participants reported at length how the MOES controlled most aspects of the curriculum, how the Party controlled most aspects of the appointment process for academic managers, and how the Ministry of Finance controlled most aspects of the budget. The State was, therefore, a dominant source of influence on the culture of governance at the University. Its principal agent was the President, who, through the President's Executive Board, exercised ultimate responsibility for all significant decisions taken at the University. The University Council and the Academic Committee, which in a corporate governance model might have constrained the extent of the President's authority, could not do so effectively because of the authority able to be exercised by the president, and because of the relative weakness of both the University Council and the Academic Committee.

Market forces had a negligible impact of the culture of governance of the University. Because of the financial control exercised by the Ministry of Finance, the extent of decision-making freedom able to be exercised by the University regarding its finances was limited. Various participants reported that the University had in the past been able to deliver a special English-language program on a fee-for-service basis. The program was subsequently suspended at the request of the MOES for reasons presumed to relate to concerns about its quality. Many participants wanted the University to have more freedom to be entrepreneurial.

The academy appeared also to have a negligible impact on the culture of governance at the University. The investigation did not focus specifically on the role played in the governance of the University by professors and associate professors, but none of the participants made any reference to them playing any role in the governance of the University. One reason for not referring to them may well be that there were relatively few professorial and associate professorial appointments at the University. Having a PhD qualification is an essential requirement in Laos for appointment as a professor or associate professor, yet less than 7% of all academic staff members at universities in Laos have a PhD qualification.

The University's corporate governance design seemed contradictory in light of the reality that the University was effectively a service unit of the State. Only a few participants were able to discuss this situation knowledgeably because most participants were not familiar with how a corporate governance model normally functions. One participant, Mr Viengsavanh, a Vice-president, who was deeply knowledgeable of corporate governance, and who wished to see a corporate governance model become operationalised at the University, expressed a sense of resignation that such a development was unlikely anytime soon. A major obstacle to the effective implementation of a corporate governance model was the extent of the control over decision-making able to be exercised by the President's Executive Board, which dominated both the University Council and the Academic Committee.

This situation was not, however, the only anomalous aspect of the University's culture of governance. Another was that it was the President's Executive Board, and not the University Council, which was regarded by most participants to be responsible for determining the University's priorities. This situation contradicted a provision in the official *Minimum Education Standards of*

Higher Education Institutions (MOES, 2013) that required the governing board of a university in Laos to play "an important role in defining [the] vision, mission, and goals, identifying priority issues to be addressed, and developing (viable) strategic plans and [a] master plan for the institutional development in compliance with existing decrees and regulations" (p. 2).

In fully developed corporate systems of university governance, a governing board normally has authority to appoint the university's chief executive office, together with other members of the university's executive management team. Nothing like this arrangement was even being envisaged at the site University. To many participants, the thought of the Prime Minister, and more broadly the Party, surrendering a capacity to appoint the University's President seemed fanciful. In short, the University remained to a large extent a traditional, State-controlled higher education institution.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has reported an ethnographic exploration of the culture of governance at a public university in Laos. The quality of governance of public universities in Laos is fundamental to their development and future regional significance. The existing culture of governance at one of them was important to explore for the purposes of establishing the current state of institutional governance within the higher education sector in Laos. Culture is an important phenomenon to explore. As Schein (2010) has observed: ". . . the forces that are created in social and organizational situations deriving from culture are powerful. If we don't understand the operation of these forces, we become victim of them" (p. 7).

The experiences of a selected group of participants who in 2014 and 2015 contributed to the present investigation suggest that the culture of governance at the site University is heavily bureaucratic and managerial, with decisions made in a 'top-down' fashion, and with power held by the President and centralized within the President's Executive Board. In this kind of setting, political priorities seem likely to prevail. Some participants who were familiar with how a corporate model of university governance functions expressed a wish to see this model properly applied at the University. The investigation reported suggests, however, that change from the current culture of governance, characterized by a traditional State control, will not occur in a rush in Laos.

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Governance of Higher Education in Malaysia and Cambodia: Running on a Similar Path?

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Abstract: *Cambodia and Malaysia are two Southeast Asian countries at dissimilar levels of socio-economic development. Their higher education systems are also on different developmental paths with varying motivations driving their respective development and progress, but the governance of higher education across these two systems has one striking similarity. Both systems see neoliberal principles and ideologies as a means to guide the development and governance of higher education, while the States, to varying degrees, still exert significant control and 'guidance' over the development and institutional governance. This similarity, albeit at varying degrees, can be seen through examining the issues and challenges concerning the governance of higher education in both countries such as reforms in autonomy and accountability as well as the state-university relationship. Beyond recognising this similarity, we argue the need for considering alternative paths of development for higher education in these countries, particularly alternatives that are more suitable and appropriate for the local needs and contexts in each of the two countries.*

Keywords: *Governance of higher education, Cambodia, Malaysia, neoliberalism*

Introduction

Malaysia and Cambodia embraced neoliberalism as an ideology to guide the development of their higher education (HE) systems almost simultaneously. While the more developed state of Malaysia has adopted neoliberalism to catapult the country into an advanced economic phase and takes HE development seriously (reflected in heavier investment in HE, the intensification of privatisation, the commercialisation of services and the adoption of neoliberal practices), the less advanced state of Cambodia adopted this new doctrine for a reactive reason, and thus takes HE development for granted and focuses more on reactive regulation and *ad hoc* interventions.

As a development ideology, neoliberalism promotes values of free market and faith in a lean government and its limited involvement in and protection of the 'self-regulating market' and social spheres. In order to achieve economic development, it is to promote maximization of economic growth, expansion of economic activities, and strategies for rapid, successful integration into the regional and global economies. There is thus a need for endless competition to stay competitive in the global system. The perception of endless competition and the promotion of one's competitiveness

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to improve economic gain also govern action and decision of every individual, and citizenship is understood as the 'homo-economicus, the ideal, entrepreneurial, self-made individual' (see, Fukuyama, 2004; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004; Weber and Duderstadt, 2008). Yet, interestingly, as Chomsky (1999) pointed out, there are varieties in ways in which neoliberal doctrines were introduced.

A general global trend is the increasing adoption and permeation of neoliberal practices and ideologies in higher education and its governance in recent decades, although the state still plays a significant role in the promotion (or lack) of higher education development, in many cases through the adoption or permeation of neoliberal practices and ideologies and/or state-led interventions in many Northeast Asian countries. Five distinctive neoliberal policy shifts in higher education include: the multi-facet retreat of the state (e.g. in terms of funding, service provision and regulation); privatization and promotion of private sector engagement and university entrepreneurialism; promotion of internationalization and international competition; adoption and permeation of neoliberal practices and ideologies into higher education (e.g. promotion of corporate-style managerialism), and a paradigm shift in curriculum focus (i.e. promotion of core sets of subjects facilitating transferability and employability of graduate skills and competencies to meet market-driven demand (see Boden and Nedeva, 2010; Lao, 2015; Locke, Cummings and Fisher, 2011; Mok, 2008; Radice, 2013).

Despite the different motivations of the two States, one striking similarity is that both see neoliberal principles and ideologies as a means to guide their development goals as well as HE governance. This suggests that HE development in both countries is following a similar path dictated by neoliberal cultures and influences, such as new public management (NPM), privatisation and marketisation, and efforts from the state (or a lack of such efforts) in shaping and dominating HE development and governance to achieve neoliberal development and its discourse. Governance is mainly 'shared' between and shaped by the varying relationship among the state, market and academic institutions, with declining academic autonomy and rising academic capitalism, and hence, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been transformed into quasi-corporate entities (see Henkel, 2007). This has given rise to many similar issues and a number of quite distinct challenges in governance, but both States are moving toward achieving a neoliberal end. The aim of this paper is to examine the issues and challenges. Importantly, it considers the possibility of alternative paths of development for these two countries that will ultimately alter how HE will be governed to achieve an alternative development discourse beyond neoliberalism.

Higher Education Systems of Malaysia and Cambodia

Cambodia and Malaysia are Southeast Asian countries but with vast differences. Cambodia is a homogeneous society, while Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society (see Table 1).

Table 1: Background Information of Malaysia and Cambodia

	Cambodia	Malaysia
Population	16 million – 97% Khmer	31 million – Malay, Chinese and Indians in Peninsular Malaysia and 80 ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak
Religion	>96% Buddhist	>60% Muslim; others have liberty to practice other religions
World Bank Classification	Lower-middle-income economy	Upper-middle-income economy
Colonial heritage	French; independence in 1953	British; independence in 1957

Source: World Bank, 2018

The Malaysian HE system was established following the formation of the University of Malaya in 1949. Since then HE in Malaysia has enjoyed uninterrupted development, albeit with changes in the societal roles of universities as well as in the relationship between universities and the State. From a single university, the system grew into two main sectors: public and private. The public system currently comprises 20 universities, 33 polytechnics and 91 community colleges, with an enrolment of 672,000 students and 43,271 academics. Conversely, the private system is made up of 70 universities, including 9 foreign branch campuses, 34 university colleges, and 410 colleges, with an enrolment of 485,000 students and 24,476 academics (Ministry of Education, 2015).

The system can be seen as dual since the public and private sectors are governed by different legislation. On the one hand, public universities are federal statutory bodies, which are semi- entities with a certain amount of autonomy but which are under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). In addition, they must subscribe to circulars, directives and rules and regulations issued by the Ministry of Finance and the Economic Planning Unit in terms of finance and allocation, by the MOHE and Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation in terms of research grants, and by the Public Service Department in terms of human resources. They are subject to audit by the National Audit Department, and are indirectly under the influence of the National Higher Education Fund Corporation through the provision of student loans.

On the other hand, private HEIs were established under the Companies Act 1965 and are concurrently governed by the Private Higher Education Institutions Act 1996 (Act 555). The Act enables the Minister to empower the Registrar-General to govern private HEIs, which will be elaborated in the later section. In addition to the Ministry, private HEIs may be subject to rules and regulations imposed by external parties, for instance if they are running franchise programmes. Moreover, as with public universities, their academic programmes require accreditation by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency.

While post-independence Malaysia has been relatively peaceful, with the exception of a bloody racial riot in 1969, Cambodia went through a difficult period of turmoil involving civil war and genocide, lasting from the late 1960s to the early 1990s; about 1.7 million Cambodians were killed during the Khmer Rouge regime alone (from 1975 to 1979). Predictably, HE was in a state of disarray. An entire generation of post-genocidal Cambodians grew up illiterate and most young people lacked basic education when the situation stabilised and order restored in the early 1990s. The entire education system has had to be re-created almost from scratch, with only 50 university lecturers, 207 secondary school teachers and 2,717 primary school teachers reportedly surviving the social and political upheaval (Ross, 1987). After the genocide, HE had to be rebuilt, which occurred with support from the Eastern bloc countries, organising the small number of surviving academics via central planning and utilising dilapidated infrastructures. HE was solely provided by public HEIs between 1979 and 1997, and their governance was in the hands of central Government.

In 1997, responding to an increasing demand for HE, and in light of the Government's inability to expand its supply to absorb high school graduates, HE was privatised. In practice, this meant two things: permission for private providers; and legal/de facto permission for public HEIs to offer fee-paying programmes to earn revenue 'for institutional development' (Un and Sok, 2014). Since then the HE landscape has transformed significantly, especially in terms of quantity. There were only 8 public HEIs and roughly 10,000 students in 1997. In 2017, there were 121 HEIs, of which 48 are public institutions. The gross enrolment rate was 217,840 in 2016. There were 12,916 academics in 2016, a significant number of whom were teaching at more than one HEI, but with only a very tiny fraction holding PhD degrees (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), 2017).

Legally, public HEIs can be classified into public administrative institute (PAI). Two key differences between public HEIs and PAIs are: that PAI HEIs, the Cambodian version of 'semi-autonomous' HEIs, with a good degree of financial, personnel and academic autonomy, are 'financial managers', who deal directly with the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) and are governed by its respective sub-decree, thus giving them more autonomy in managing the budget. Public HEIs on the one hand are institutions for which financial arrangements are made via the supervising technical ministry.

Legally, public HEIs are supposed to have less institutional autonomy, although in practice this is not always the case.

Unlike Malaysia, Cambodia is yet to create a law on private HE. In practice, private providers are governed by the same sub-laws covering public HEIs. Stipulations on financial matters are governed by the law on private firms. In terms of academic standards and criteria, they often follow those applicable to public providers, and they are required to be inspected by MoEYS or their respective technical supervising ministry, and accredited by the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC). Their administrative staff members are often full-time, while a majority of the teaching staff are part-time wage earners, many of whom work full-time at public agencies and HEIs. There are few foreign branch campuses or foreign-owned HEIs. The key shareholders of the providers are big businesses and/or prominent political figures.

Governance of Higher Education in Malaysia: Issues and Challenges

The understanding of HE governance in Malaysia needs to be contextualised in two major strategic documents: the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) 2007–2020; and the Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015–2025. The NHESP was first launched with the aspiration to transform "higher education towards producing human capital with first class mentality and to establish Malaysia as an international hub of higher educational excellence" (MOHE, 2007, p. 12). The focus on governance was to develop instruments to measure the readiness of the governance system of public universities to be given autonomy for self-governance (MOHE, 2011). Based on these instruments, 17 public universities have received this status. The then Minister of Higher Education outlined that the autonomous status would cover institutional, financial, academic and human resource aspects, and explained that universities with autonomous status would not be tied down by government rules and bureaucratic processes (Priya, 2012). However, when the MEBHE was launched in 2015, as a continuation of the NHESP, autonomy was described as giving universities "greater flexibility to terminate courses with low take-up rates, to implement enrolment management, to top-up staff promotion systems from self-generated funds, to increase the age limit for contract staff, and to apply for exemptions from the Ministry of Finance to relax procurement limits and tender procedures" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 6-3). Clearly, the autonomy to be granted to the autonomous HEIs had been watered down; autonomy as a concept is still evolving, as underlined by the differences between the point of view articulated by the Minister and the description outlined in the MEBHE.

Neoliberalism and New Public Management

Over the last two decades, HE has been permeated globally by the influence of neoliberalism. This influence has pushed universities, more obviously public ones, to become more entrepreneurial and market-oriented by emphasising income generation and production for an economic market in terms of students, research and services (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2009). Furthermore, NPM, a particular strand of neoliberalism conceptually derived from the philosophy of neoliberalism that has been a trend globally in public policy, turning the public sector towards a market-oriented management model similar to the private sector (Larbi, 1999), has become a significant part of public universities. The common nomenclatures used in public management, such as efficiency, effectiveness, delivery, flexibility, measurement and outputs (see Besosa, 2007; Larbi, 1999) are manifestation of NPM, and these terms have now become a central part of policy discourse in Malaysian HE (Wan, Morshidi and Dzulkifli, in press). The NHESP and the MEBHE further reaffirmed the influence of NPM and neoliberalism on the Malaysian system. The influence of NPM and neoliberalism has been further cascaded into universities, reflected in the dominance of (Key Peformance Indicators) KPIs and a focus on measurables, as opposed to consideration of intangible benefits.

Autonomy and Accountability

One key characteristic of NPM is the emphasis on accountability. In the MEBHE, accountability is a key concept underlying strategies to develop an 'empowered governance' for Malaysian institutions, where the need to balance autonomy with accountability is emphasised. The MEBHE has further stated the need to review existing laws and circulars to enable a transfer of decision rights from the Government to public universities. However, the full transfer of decision rights to universities will only include evaluating the performance of institutional leaders, setting pay schemes (salary designation), and making admission decisions (see MOE, 2015, pp.6-10). Seven other items will see a partial transfer, and the Government is expected to maintain the decision-making rights for monitoring universities and determining the number and profile of students.

However, even prior to the MEBHE, concerns were raised pertaining to the implementation of autonomous status without drastic reforms and changes to existing legislations and frameworks that governed public universities (Fauziah and Ng, 2014). Currently, public universities with autonomy continue to fully abide by all circulars and regulations issued by the Public Service Department and Ministry of Finance. Hence, without significant change to existing legislation and the frameworks that allow universities to exercise their autonomy, the autonomous status may only result in more audits and accountability assessments without real and tangible changes in the direction of autonomy.

Focus on the Measurables

According to the concept of NPM, the operationalisation of accountability typically leads to the use of performance contracts and KPIs (Larbi, 1999). While these two mechanisms may enhance the productivity, efficiency and effectiveness of an organisation in the private sector, the same criteria may not be suitable or applicable in the context of a university. Apart from KPIs, indicators such as key intangible performances (KIPs), which are unmeasurable items, can also be used to evaluate the performance of an organisation. Fundamentally, this poses a key question: Are KPIs and/or KIPs appropriate and suitable to be used in the context of HE and universities? As Cole (2009) argues, the sole use of measurable indicators to illustrate quality is inappropriate, as there are many important elements of a university that cannot be measured. For instance, contribution to society and humanity through education and research may not yield tangible, measurable and instantaneous outcomes.

The focus on measurable indicators did not begin with Malaysian universities. Since the 1960s, academia has been obsessed with measurable indicators (Fischer, Ritchie and Hanspach, 2012; Loyola, Diniz-Filho and Bini, 2012). In the most recent decade a major driver behind the focus on measurable indicators has been the growing importance of global university rankings, which has its roots in and is a legacy of the influence of neoliberalism (see Lynch, 2014). Hence, in addition to the pressure to compete for global university rankings, additional measurable indicators for the local context were added. The Rating System for Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (SETARA) is used to measure the quality and contribution of institutions through metrics and measurable indicators, and the Malaysian Research Assessment Instrument (MyRA) to measure research-specific performance. These measurable indicators have become some of the major mechanisms which the MOHE employs to supervise public universities (Morshidi, Azman and Wan, 2017).

Corporate Culture

The adoption of a corporate and market culture in Malaysian HE has become more explicit. Beginning with a corporatisation exercise in five of the public universities in 1997 (see Lee, 2004), university councils in public universities have been replaced with boards of directors. The emergence and rapid development of private HEIs have also to a large extent underlined the corporate and market influence in HE. Terms such as income generation, efficiency and profitability have become a major part of discourse not only in private institutions but also among public universities. Furthermore, the MEBHE has outlined the adoption of corporate governance as the guiding framework for HE

based on the Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance developed by the Securities Commission of Malaysia and/or the Government-Linked Company (GLC) Transformation Programme Green Book.

The adoption of corporate and market culture into HE has been treated as a rather straightforward and unproblematic process. This has disregarded the fact that universities have had their own traditions and cultures for centuries, whereby for instance, academic cultures and traditions that revolved around collegiality and democracy may be at odds with a managerial, corporate or market culture underpinned by a strong neoliberal ideology.

The Role of the State

Despite the embrace of neoliberalism, the State still takes an active role in HE, albeit one that is more strategic and visionary. The current role, as described in MEBHE, is one of a tight controller, which is described as encompassing the roles of funder, regulator, policymaker, overseer and controller, with additional involvement in the appointment of key leaders. However, it should be noted that the role of the State is slightly different in terms of its relationship with the public and private HE sectors.

With public universities, the State acting through the MOHE, assumes the role of a tight controller. Not only does the State provide funding to public universities for operational and developmental expenditure, but the Minister also has the authority to appoint the Chairman and members of the Board of Directors, the Vice Chancellors and Deputy Vice Chancellors. Through funding and the authority to appoint key leaders, the State enforces very strong and direct control on public universities.

Although the role of the State in private universities is not as controlling as in public universities, there are also elements of tight control. The Minister appoints the Registrar-General who has significant authority over private HEIs, and specifically controls them through licensing. The Registrar-General is empowered by Act 555 to approve the establishment of private institutions and other structural changes including mergers, partnerships and creating new branches, as well as take action to close down institutions or bar them from recruiting students. Importantly, the Registrar-General has authority over the use of languages of instruction and conditions related to academic programmes and requirements.

In terms of the influence of neoliberalism, the role of the State on HE development is significant when it takes an active role to ensure the performance and sustainability of universities, as well as in ensuring the accountability of expenditure of public monies, especially by public institutions. Hence, the influence of this ideology has allowed the State to assume the role of a tight controller.

Governance of Higher Education in Cambodia: Issues and Challenges

HE governance in Cambodia must be understood within the context of the adoption of so-called public-private partnerships and the introduction of PAIs in 1997.

Emergence of Neoliberalism

Cambodia's HE has felt the impact of neoliberalism too, although in a different way from Malaysia. While Malaysia attempts to adopt corporate culture and permits public HEIs to commercialise their services (including research and innovation) to reduce state funding, Cambodia simply allows HEIs to privatise their services (mainly teaching) to generate revenue for self-improvement. This practice is translated into the purchase of casual teaching services from (non-) civil service casual staff, many of whom are contracted for as short as one semester or one year. Many sign contracts to teach as few as one or two classes per semester. At many HEIs the on-contract staff outnumber the civil servants. This practice of short-term contracting is also seen in private HEIs, which are run like teaching enterprises, but without wider community engagement.

The manifestation of neoliberalism is also seen in *laissez faire* competition in this teaching enterprise. There is little formal state regulation of fees and teaching wages/salaries. The state institutional capacity to supervise and steer HE development is limited. Accreditation and assessment (an inexpensive neoliberal approach to ensure quality and inapplicable to neo-patrimonialism), for example, are well known for their pro forma and lack of rigour in practice. Institutional accreditation is yet to be put into practice, and since its inception in 2003, the ACC, the sole accreditation body, has only managed to accredit foundation year programmes (first year of an undergraduate degree). Internal quality assurance is yet to be carried out with rigour. According to the sub-decree on licencing, once they are licenced, HEIs will be legally permitted to run permanently with no risk of licence revocation, as there is no stipulation on re-licencing and de-licencing, which is a very sensitive issue. The lack of supervision and regulation has produced fertile ground for quality downgrading and cost-cutting to attract students. This has created a 'race to the bottom' in both fees and quality (Ting, 2014).

The emergence of neoliberalism is also reflected in language use in national and sectoral plans and policies, especially since 2000, although there has been no systematic effort to operationalise these neoliberal concepts. Terms like efficiency, effectiveness and result-based planning are frequently seen in plans and policies and are well-used by technocrats and politicians – but ways to measure them are vague or absent. There is no requirement on KPIs or targets/outputs, and neither is there any commitment from the Government to fund HEIs based on these new initiatives. There has been talk of institutional autonomy and accountability in the past decade, but the operationalisation of these notions is sketchy, and there seems to be little will from top political leaders to grant meaningful or full autonomy to public HEIs. A skills mismatch and HE relevance to labour market needs is seen in all key policy documents.[1]

Autonomy and Accountability

Like Malaysia, Cambodia has been talking about institutional autonomy and accountability. However, the State remains reluctant to adopt this neoliberal ideology in its entirety, although perhaps for different reasons. Limited autonomy[2] and accountability is known to be a sticky issue, although variations in the degree of (de facto) autonomy and accountability exist and ad hoc reforms towards these ends have been implemented. In practice, HEIs have considerable substantive (i.e. academic) autonomy in selected areas. They have significant autonomy in curriculum design, research policy formulation, entrance standards, and awarding degrees. Nevertheless, autonomy in staff (i.e. civil servant) appointments, promotion and firing is still centralised and rigid, and full-time staff, who are civil servants, are on the Government payroll and have secure lifetime employment. Like many ASEAN countries, Cambodia is less generous with procedural (i.e. non-academic) autonomy, although both types of autonomy need to be aligned and are complementary (see Berdahl, 1971; Raza, 2010; World Bank, 2012). Financial management and procurement measures in public HEIs have to adhere to ministerial regulations, and line item budgeting is the norm. In principle, budget reallocation is hard and complaints of slow and cumbersome disbursement are fairly common (Un and Sok, 2014; Sok, 2016).

Because of its inability to fully finance HE, the Government has allowed public HEIs to generate revenues. Attempts to legalise this practice have resulted in establishment of some PAI HEIs later. Public HEIs have virtually full autonomy in managing the resources they generate and are allowed to spend their budgets as they see fit. The lack of supervision and oversight has nevertheless led to complaints and concerns about a lack of transparency and accountability in financial management and mismanagement of the self-generated revenues (from both concerned state agencies and university staff). With their budgets, public HEIs can purchase casual services from non-civil servant staff. This has created a de facto dual personnel system. HEIs also use the money to top up the salaries of administrative and management staff, including rectors and board members. It is important to note

that there is no legal basis for such top up exercise. This is why we see different practices across public HEIs in Cambodia.

The issue of 'incomplete autonomy' is accompanied by one of 'incomplete accountability' (see ADB, 2012; World Bank, 2012). This partial accountability manifests itself in the composition and selection of board members and all levels of university administrators. Governing boards are generally small, with as few as 5 to 7 members (Chan et al., 2008), and are narrow in their stakeholder representation (Un and Sok, 2014; Sok, 2016). Besides one or two staff representatives and the rector, external members are generally high-ranking officials appointed by concerned ministries to represent them on the boards. Voices from other important sectors of the economy and society, such as professional and academic societies, are generally absent. Although there is no golden rule on the best size and composition of governing boards, experiences from more developed HEIs in other parts of the world show that they are staffed with more board members, who come from more diverse spheres and not necessarily from state agencies (Fielden, 2008; Royal Irish Academy, 2012; Sok, 2016). The selection of public university administrators is likewise centralised, with top administrators appointed by the Government 'for life', and seniority (and political affiliation/loyalty) coming before competency, in actual practice (Chet, 2006; Ahrens and McNamara, 2013). This top-down recruitment may lead to upward accountability in relation to the Government and the political patron, and undermine downward accountability and transparency in relation to staff, students and wider communities. According to Mak (2008), HEIs still remain 'partly or wholly within the machinery of the government'.

Ten public HEIs were granted the status of PAI as of 2010 (Touch, Mak and You, 2014). With this status, they were given more autonomy in all areas. The reform enables PAI HEIs to have respective governing boards to which the rector is directly accountable. Although this arrangement theoretically allows for more autonomy and representation, a study by Touch, Mak and You (2014) suggests that the results are mixed at best, with the two institutions they sampled still very much adopting the old top-down governing style. In addition, governing boards, although varying in size and stakeholder composition, are still small and narrow, even though the decree allows PAIs to have up to 11 board members. Some external representatives are career politicians, which is against the spirit of the decree, and there are complaints about junior appointees on the grounds that they have limited knowledge and expertise especially in HE and its management (personal communication, 2015). Administrative and management positions at all levels are still appointed by the Government. The reform does not seem to improve institutional accountability and transparency either, especially towards staff and students, and does not necessarily enable more engagement from staff members in HEI governance. Nor does it allow representatives from non-state spheres in HEI governance.

Domination of the Institution by the Top Institutional Leaders

In the Western tradition universities are supposed to be academic communities, wherein the academics make key decisions and where collegiality rules. In Malaysia the academic enjoyed relative freedom for a few decades until the state attempted to corporatise HEIs in mid-1996. What this new practice means is that the state attempts to empower the top executive(s) and governing board(s) and to reduce the authority of the academics. In Cambodia, it is customary that power lies in a top institutional leader. Virtually complete executive power tends to be in the hands of the rector/director, although consultation with governing boards and other key institutional top administrators exists, especially regarding financial matters. According to a survey of 54 HEIs in 2011, however, there are some signs of a de-concentration of authority to departments or faculties. This is especially the case in academic affairs where no major financial decisions are involved; financial decisions are still more centralised at the university level. Financial authorisation at lower levels is virtually absent or permitted for petty cash at best. Private HEIs are operated mainly in line with the dictates of their main shareholders. The shareholders are generally the dominant figures in governing boards; indeed,

in some private HEIs the main shareholders/owners still act as both the president of the board and the university executive president.

Another sign of institutional domination by the executive(s) is the absence of a standing university faculty senate, a mechanism that can allow academics to engage in HEI management. Such senates, if properly established and nurtured, can play crucial roles in assisting top administrators and governing boards, and can be a good three-way institutional checks-and-balances mechanism too. They can help to create an institutional culture, whereby staff members get involved in institutional management. In Malaysia, for example, University Senates play an important role in managing and advising top administrators about academic affairs, including setting academic standards and faculty recruitment policy (see Sok, 2016). The absence of a standing academic council in Cambodia thus limits the involvement of academic staff in decision-making and reduces them to a teaching corps.

Government Domination and Limited Comprehensive Reform

Since 1997 neoliberalism has begun to seep into Cambodian HE, but the State still has a strong grip over HE and public HEIs and this presents a big challenge for inclusive HE governance. The idea of granting 'greater institutional autonomy' emerged 10 years ago in the second Education Strategic Plan 2006–2010. It was suggested that '[a]ll public higher education institutions [will be] transferred to become Public Administrative Institutions by 2008' (MoEYS, 2006, p. 40). Yet since that time no systematic reform towards 'greater institutional autonomy' has been conducted. The new Minister for Education in 2013 instigated yet another attempt to decentralise HE governance, but not much systematic structural and legal reform has been undertaken to ensure institutional autonomy and accountability. Green lights from the top political leaders for rigorous reforms are apparently absent at best.

Another issue is the chronic fragmentation of HE governance at the system level. The 121 HEIs are under the technical supervision of 16 Ministries, some of which supervise only one or two HEIs. The Supreme National Council for Education was supposed to be established to coordinate education development, but such a permanent coordination mechanism has yet to be established, and systematic cross-ministerial coordination is scarce (Sen and Ros, 2013). The fact that the number of supervising agencies has climbed from 9 in 2006 (UNESCO as cited by Chet, 2009) to 11 in 2008 (Mak, 2008) and 16 in 2017 is alarming. The lack of coordination and cooperation has had negative repercussions on the health of the HE system, but any impetus from top political leaders to create an effective supervisory system is yet to be seen.

Another related issue is the lack of comprehensive and proactive regulation of HE. The 2007 Law on Education has relatively few stipulations regarding HE. In practice, HE is governed by numerous sub-laws ranging from ministerial guidelines/notifications to issue-specific Royal Decrees. A first sub-law on HEIs was passed in 1992, and this is referred to now and then. Spanning a period of 25 years, some stipulations in some sub-laws are out-dated and even conflicting (see Un and Sok, 2014). In addition, the sub-laws are often reactive and issue-specific. Besides, unlike laws and to a lesser extent decrees and sub-decrees, some sub-laws are not binding across ministries, and hence coverage or jurisdiction is limited.

Higher Education in Malaysia and Cambodia: Running on a Similar Path?

This paper does not set out to present a like-for-like comparison of HE governance in Malaysia and Cambodia. Such a comparison would not be meaningful given the different contexts and levels of HE development. However, from exploring the governance issues above, there are more striking similarities than differences. The development of HE in both countries, dictated by the current governance system and structure, is following a similar path towards becoming a quality, world-class, and efficient HE system within the mould prescribed by neoliberalism. Thus, there are significant similarities in terms of the governance issues they are facing. The influences from neoliberalism

include the adoption of NPM, corporate culture and measurables within the HE setting to a varying degree in both countries, with the ultimate goal of answering to economic and privately driven demands.

Since the 2000s the intensification of regional and international integration has forced HE in both countries to be more outward-looking. A successful response to this demand will depend on how far neoliberal governance travels in both countries. The Malaysian government has played a more active role in adapting neoliberalism into HE through its two major strategic documents. Though less active than its Malaysian counterpart, the Cambodian government agreed to implement the first-ever comprehensive HE project intervention driven by the World Bank: the Higher Education Capacity and Quality Improvement Project (HEQCIP) 2010–2017. The language of neoliberalism is clearly evident in this project, especially the focus on results-based planning, effectiveness and efficiency, and autonomy and accountability.

Another similarity is the reluctance of the States to withdraw themselves from the affairs of public HEIs. Even Malaysia, which has a more advanced HE system and stronger state institutions to steer HE from a greater distance, is not willing to grant full rights to public HEIs. The appointment of institutional leaders and governing boards are telling examples. This reluctance can be witnessed in the UUCA and other key legislature on HE, which are generally restrictive and regulatory. The Cambodian state gets even more deeply involved in the affairs of public HEIs. A majority of governing board members are government representatives (ranging from a deputy prime minister to deputy minister), and rectors and vice-rectors are government appointees and generally politically affiliated.

However, there is also a significant degree of divergence. The Malaysian government has attempted, with a degree of success, to reduce the authority of academics in its effort to adopt NPM, to empower the top executives and the governing board, and to empower itself to steer HE development. In a sense, in the face of neoliberalism the State is still reluctant to allow the market force to be the major/sole actor to determine HE development, and thus it has continued to intervene quite extensively, as well as support the subsector financially to ensure that public HEIs contribute to a broader notion of national development and nation building (Morshidi, 2010). In this regard, the Malaysian state shaped its desired development of HE – i.e. towards the promotion of nation building – with a certain amount of success.

In Cambodia, on the other hand, the involvement of the State, especially in steering the development of HE and the provision of public funding to foster HE, is very limited. The intervention is more regulatory and reactive, and meaningful support to HEIs is weak or virtually absent. Public funding to HE is minimal – reportedly at 0.1% of GDP and 10% of the education budget (from the MoEYS) going to HE (Ting, 2014; Un and Sok, 2014). Paradoxically, some PAI HEIs receive virtually no public funding, and many large Phnom-Penh public HEIs get roughly 10-20% of their annual expenditure covered by the government budget (personal communication, 2015–16) and the rest is from self-income generating activities mainly tuition fees. Large-scale project intervention to HE solely funded by the State is non-existent, and the USD 23 million HEQCIP is the first and only large-scale intervention to date provided by the World Bank.

In a sense, the more developmental state of Malaysia has been trying to be 'proactive and supportive' as much as it can, especially in order to move HE towards a neoliberal end, but also in maintaining the role of HE to achieve broader national development. Meanwhile the less developed state of Cambodia is struggling as to how to systematically foster HE development, and is divided and apparently non-consensual (cf. Evans, 1995; Migdal, 2001; Myrdal, 1967). In the context of a much less capable state, Cambodian HE is more prone to be shaped or even dominated by its big donors and their agendas and ideologies, and hence more prone to neoliberalism. Systematic building of institutional capacity in state institutions to support HE development has never been taken seriously by the State and the 'development partners'.

Apart from recognising that HE governance is developing in the same direction, it is equally important to recognise and understand what preceded the current development in both countries. Prior to the adoption of neoliberalism, HE in Cambodia was relatively poorly developed because

of the extended period of conflict and genocide. Universities were not able to function properly, and a majority of academics were persecuted during the Khmer Rouge regime or fled the country afterwards. The fact that only 50 university academics survived the conflict (Ross, 1987) highlights the severity of the situation. Hence, academic culture has been neglected and is to a large extent non-existent. The lack of academic culture (e.g. collegiality, esprit de corps) is illustrated in the lack of research collaboration and culture in universities (Chet, 2006; Kwok et al., 2010; MoEYS, 2015a; MoEYS, 2015b) and the focus solely on teaching. Academics, as an institution, in Cambodia do not have much influence on the development of academic programmes and the direction of HE development more broadly, whereby the development of these programmes was dictated by central Government during the socialist period during 1980s, and since 1990s the State took a more *laissez faire* approach toward HE under the influence of the more liberal economy and market-driven demand facilitated by donors. Therefore, the current development of HE is not built upon a strong foundation that would be provided by an academic culture of excellence. The weak academic culture presents a big challenge to the development of quality HE, as well as to ensuring good governance and intra-institutional collaboration and the promotion of academic engagement in fostering the development of the broader community and society. The absence of academic culture has further been affected by the partial adoption of neoliberal principles, i.e. the privatisation of teaching services, to relieve pressure on the State and because of the limited investment to build a stronger academic culture and HE more broadly.

On the other hand, neoliberal governance in Malaysia has emerged with the State's facilitation of a strong academic culture and research capacity, which universities had enjoyed for quite a long time before 1996. During that period, HE developed without the influence of external factors such as accreditation or quality assurance, as well as a lack of requirements for universities to justify the employability and quality of their graduates. Within this context, the Senate of a university remains a powerful entity in terms of academic matters, with significant participation from the academic fraternity. This becomes the reference to understand the compromises and tensions underlying the changes influenced by neoliberal governance, which have corporatised public universities since 1996 (see Wan and Morshidi, in press). In this context, the promotion of collegiality, encouraging academics to provide their three core services (rather than simply teaching), and empowering academics to get involved in, let alone advance, the development of HE and their respective institutions are a far-fetched dream in Cambodia. While the Malaysian government is aware of the issues and is trying to reconfigure the role of the State in the midst of the global neoliberal trend, in Cambodia the State needs to be brought in entirely yet again.

Is There an Alternative Route?

Despite the significant differences in the local contexts and their respective levels of development and HE, the adaptation and permeation of neoliberalism has led the governance of HE in both countries to run along the same path, whereby academic culture is dying slowly in Malaysia and having difficulty to find a way into existence in Cambodia. Above all, the traditional role of a university, providing curriculum that is locally relevant and beneficial to the community it is supposed to serve and contributes to issues such as the public good, social justice, national identity, civic engagement, and nation building (see Un and Sok, forthcoming), loses weight in favour of the emulation of a world class university in the Western sense. Over the last decade or so the neoliberal model of HE in the West has been challenged in terms of its sustainability. For instance, student debts in the United States have exceeded USD 1.2 trillion, with over 7 million debtors in default (The Economist, 2014). However, at the same time, 76.4% of academics across HEIs in the US were holding adjunct positions, without the job security and benefit of tenured or full time academic posts (Curtis, 2014). In general universities have found themselves in a highly paradoxical situation, as Collini (2012) argues: while more public money has been spent on these institutions, they have become more defensive about their public standing; while numbers of students enrolled increased, there

has been increasing scepticism about the benefits of university education; and while universities are regarded as engines of technological growth and economic prosperity, they are simultaneously labelled as backward, elitist and self-indulgent. Similar underlying challenges facing the current model of HE can be attributed to the influence of ideologies and cultures embedded in the current governance of HE in Malaysia and Cambodia, which adopt 'neoliberalism' as the *modus operandi* and the ultimate measurement of success.

However, the current model is not the only path for universities to take. As the late Sir David Watson, the eminent scholar of HE, mentioned:

> I encourage universities looking at strategic options to return to their 'founding' purposes, as reflected in charters, legislation and the like. You will very rarely find 'prestige' as an objective there. Even if such concerns (and the drive for 'world-classness') have more or less overwhelmed today's dialogue. Returning to our roots can help generate a more profound sense of social engagement for a higher education institute (2013, pp. xv–xvi).

In considering alternative paths, it is essential to revisit the idea of a university, particularly in the local context within which an institution is based. Particularly for universities in (less) developing societies, as societal institutions they have a vital role in contributing to the sustainability and relevance of development in the local society and economy. As Wan, Morshidi and Dzulkifli (2015) argued, while the Western model of universities may have served the development of HE in Malaysia well, there is a need for universities to remain relevant and uphold the important mission of contributing towards growth and development, and if necessary, not to confine their thinking to a particular model but to be creative and bold in considering alternative models that meet the needs of Malaysia. This argument is even more important to Cambodia as it begins to rebuild its HE system. The major goals of HE should not only be to prepare the country for regional integration and turn out graduates for the labour market, but also to address the issues of public good, social justice, civic engagement and nation building – i.e. a broader notion of development.

However, if alternative paths are to be considered for the development of HE in both countries, importantly, HE governance should first begin to re-develop its academic culture. Specifically in Cambodia, the absence of sound academic culture in HE governance resembles the process of building a house without a solid foundation. There is generally limited esprit de corps among and within bodies of faculty members and supporting staff, as well as among administrators at all levels. With the tendency to halt the recruitment of civil servants to serve public HEIs and the common practice of hiring short-term casual staff mainly as teaching machines, with no clear career path, little engagement in other university-wide activities and uncompetitive remuneration, there is little hope that Cambodia will be able to build its academic culture and HE in general. In this regard, HE governance can be said to be in a deep crisis and in need of urgent surgery and reformulation. One way of doing this would be to reconfigure the engagement of the academic in order to create an academic culture.

Even in Malaysia, where some form of academic culture is in place, the influx of cultures and ideologies such as neoliberalism, NPM and managerialism, and their endorsement by the State, have eroded academic culture, and therefore a drastic realignment may be necessary before an alternative path can be considered. Ultimately, it is important to recognise that academics and academic culture must remain at the core of HE (Clark, 1998), and HE governance that attempts to downplay academics and academic culture will find that institutions will become organisations that bear the name of a 'university' but which are unrecognisable as such.

Notes

[1] However, this is not to downplay the fact that in the past few years there has been more consistent effort to operationalise key abstract concepts like autonomy, accountability and more advocacy to adopt performance-based funding.

[2] Institutional autonomy in this section is conceptualised in line with Hayden and Thiep (2007, p. 80), who adapted Berdahl's (1990), Ashby's (1966) and Tight (1992); i.e. it is divided into substantive and procedural autonomy and has six attributes: "freedom to be self-governing; freedom to exercise corporate financial control; freedom to make their own staffing decisions; freedom to select their own students; freedom to decide on their own curriculum; and freedom to assess and certify the academic performance of their own students".

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