

History of instructional leadership in Cambodia: A comprehensive literature review

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Article info

Article history

Received: December 29, 2025

Revised: April 21, 2026

Accepted: June 03, 2026

Keywords

ASEAN

Educational reform

Instructional leadership

Post-conflict education

School leadership

Teacher development

Article type

Narrative review

Abstract

This paper explores the evolution of instructional leadership in Cambodia from the period preceding 1975 to the current day. The analysis encompasses historical trends, policy changes, and present challenges. The research analyzes the evolution of leadership frameworks from colonial hierarchies to post-conflict rebuilding and contemporary changes, using peer-reviewed journals, governmental documents, and publications from international organizations. It highlights the importance of administrative support in educational institutions and the ongoing professional development of educators. It highlights the significance of administrative support within schools and the continuous professional growth of teachers. The main challenges identified were limited autonomy, inadequate leadership development, and ineffective monitoring procedures. The analysis highlights areas requiring further examination, such as the limited number of empirical studies conducted in rural areas, inadequate data regarding the influence of leadership on student performance, and a lack of comparative research involving ASEAN countries. The findings suggest that Cambodia necessitates relevant legislation and professional development programs to improve educational quality and promote instructional leadership.

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1. Introduction

Instructional leadership is crucial for school, teacher, and student success (Hallinger & Bryant, 2013). Cambodian educational leadership has been shaped by colonial governance, post-independence administration, the Khmer Rouge, post-conflict reconstruction, and current reforms (Chandler, 2008; Clayton, 1998; Hallinger & Truong, 2014). You must understand school leadership evolution to identify issues, evaluate policies, and plan for future changes (Hallinger, 2003). This paper provides a comprehensive evaluation of the historical development of instructional leadership in Cambodia, emphasizing current challenges, government initiatives, and prospective avenues for research (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport [MoEYS], 2005, 2013).

1.1 Background information

The Khmer Rouge destroyed infrastructure, trained staff, and institutional memory in Cambodia's education system (Chandler, 2008). After the 1979 earthquake, schools were reopened, but funding from outside sources caused leadership and teaching issues (Ayres, 2000). Since then, MoEYS has promoted school-based management (SBM), teacher development, and instructional leadership through strategic adjustments (MoEYS, 2024a, 2024b). These changes reveal leadership history, current issues, and opportunities to improve educational governance (Veth & Bon, 2026; Veth et al., 2026).

1.2 Research gap

Despite policy changes, Cambodian instructional leadership research is scarce. Research on the effects of leadership and rural schools on student outcomes is scarce. The lifestyles of school directors are rarely studied, and comparisons between ASEAN nations are rare. By using qualitative research techniques, like in-depth interviews with school administrators, future studies should examine the ways in which leadership affects teachers' self-efficacy and performance. The effectiveness of leadership may be affected by gender and cultural issues, and comparisons with nearby nations may reveal the best practices.

1.3 Objectives of the paper

This paper aims to examine the historical development of instructional leadership in Cambodia by exploring the influence of major political, social, and educational changes on school leadership practices across different historical periods. It also seeks to analyze the evolution of leadership roles and responsibilities, identify gaps and limitations in the existing literature, and provide recommendations for future research and policy development to strengthen instructional leadership in the Cambodian education system.

1.4 Significance of the study

This paper is significant because it provides the first focused historical synthesis of instructional leadership in Cambodia, filling an important gap in the literature and offering a clear understanding of its development across different periods. It also supports policymakers in designing context-sensitive leadership training programs and assists educational researchers by serving as a baseline reference for future studies. This research enhances comparative studies of educational leadership in Southeast Asia by chronicling Cambodia's distinct experience.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical foundation

Before 1975, the way schools were run was based on both colonial rule and the practices established after independence (Ayres, 2000; Clayton, 1998). Leaders were more concerned with maintaining peace and ensuring compliance with government orders than with improving instruction (Clayton, 1998; Dy, 2004). The majority of decisions were taken at higher levels of administration, and the leadership structures were quite hierarchical and centralized (Clayton, 1998; Duggan, 2003). Since this was the case, there was little room for schools to develop new concepts (Ayres, 2000). Because the emphasis was placed on control and bureaucracy, it was difficult for the instructional leadership approaches that are currently in use to develop (Dy,

2004; Hallinger & Truong, 2014). This time around, official leadership roles were established; however, the emphasis placed on administration rather than pedagogy limited the opportunity for teacher development and learning that was oriented toward the student (Duggan, 2003; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2011).

The Khmer Rouge destroyed the Cambodian education system during their time in power (Ayres, 2000; Chandler, 2008). Schools were shut down, and there were no longer any formal leadership structures (Duggan, 2003; Dy, 2004). This led to the complete breakdown of the educational system (Chandler, 2008). Intellectuals, educators, and educational leaders were systematically targeted and murdered, resulting in a catastrophic leadership void (Chandler, 2008; Kiernan, 2002). During this time, all traditions of instructional leadership were completely broken, making it impossible for school management, pedagogical supervision, or teacher development to continue (Ayres, 2000; Dy, 2004). The lack of leadership and institutional memory made it hard for the country to rebuild its education system after 1979 (Duggan, 2003; UNESCO, 2011). They had to start from scratch with both infrastructure and people who could lead (MoEYS, 2019; UNESCO, 2011).

Following the defeat of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia faced a significant challenge in the form of repairing the educational system that had been devastated (Ayres, 2000; Dy, 2004; MoEYS, 2019). There was a significant lack of human resources, as evidenced by the fact that principals and other school administrators frequently lacked the necessary qualifications (Ayres, 2000; Duggan, 2003). People in positions of authority during that time period were more concerned with ensuring that everyone had access to education, surviving, and rebuilding than they were with improving the quality of instruction or developing teachers (Brickell, 2017; Dy, 2004). Short-term training programs that provided school leaders with some but not all of the professional development they required were frequently funded and supported by international sponsors (Duggan, 2003; UNESCO, 2011). These initiatives were insufficient to establish long-term educational leadership, but they did help return the school to normal (Ayres, 2000; Brickell, 2017). Thus, the post-war period paved the way for the reopening of schools and the improvement of the system, although issues with the caliber of teaching support and leadership persisted (MoEYS, 2019; UNESCO, 2011).

The MoEYS has been working on strategies to improve schools and their leaders since 2005 through continuous policy reforms (MoEYS, 2019, 2021). These enhancements emphasize school-based administration, decentralization, and instructional leadership (Hallinger & Truong, 2014; MoEYS, 2013). This marked a shift from post-conflict leadership centered on survival to teaching and professional aims (MoEYS, 2013; UNESCO, 2015). The research implies that school leaders should be more involved in helping teachers grow, improving teaching, and preparing the school's future (Bush, 2011; Hallinger & Truong, 2014). Leader training programs have been established through collaboration with international funders, NGOs, and development organizations (UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, 2018). These programs prepare administrators to oversee, evaluate curricula, and assess performance (MoEYS, 2005, 2013; World Bank, 2018).

Despite these efforts, Cambodian instructional leadership is not changing consistently or extensively. Most school administrators receive limited professional development, which inadequately prepares them for effective educational management. Forms, reports, and other administrative tasks take principals' time away from observing classes, training teachers, and enhancing teaching methods. School leaders lack the freedom to adapt their strategies to their schools and communities (Hallinger & Truong, 2014). Thus, while policy reforms have created

instructional leadership frameworks, structural and capacity-related barriers limit their impact on teaching and learning (Veth & Bon, 2026; Veth et al., 2026).

Table 1. The theoretical foundation and evolution of instructional leadership in Cambodia

Period	Years	Leadership characteristics	Key challenges	Notable developments	Source
Pre-1975	Before 1975	Centralized, hierarchical, bureaucratic; focus on administrative compliance	Little teacher development, innovation, or top-down decision-making	Official leadership responsibilities were developed; instructional leadership was not prioritized.	Ayres (2000) and Clayton (1998)
Khmer Rouge	1975–1979	Leadership structures destroyed; schools closed	Complete collapse of the education system; targeting of educators and intellectuals; no instructional leadership	Complete system rebuilding was required.	Chandler (2008), Kiernan (2002), and MoEYS (2019)
Post-conflict reconstruction	1979–1999	Limited professional competence; focus on survival and access to education	Underqualified leaders, short-term training is insufficient; teacher development is neglected.	Reopened schools, fundamental administrative tasks, and international training support.	Ayres (2000), Brickell (2017), and Dy (2004)
Modern reform era	2000–Present	Emphasis on SBM, decentralization, and instructional leadership	Limited professional development; administrative burden; constrained flexibility for leaders	Training programs for leaders on teacher growth, curriculum supervision, and performance evaluation; policy frameworks.	Ayres (2000), Hallinger and Truong (2014), and MoEYS (2013)

Since 2005, Cambodia’s MoEYS has implemented several significant reforms and policy frameworks to enhance the educational environment in schools. The education strategic plans (ESP), the establishment of school director standards, the continuous professional development (CPD) policy, and the revised teacher professional standards constitute these initiatives. The strategic plan for teacher education reform in Cambodia enhances teacher training and professional development. These policies jointly augment the effectiveness of Cambodia’s educational institutions, strengthen instructional leadership, and promote continuous educational progress (MoEYS, 2016, 2017).

Table 2. Key Cambodian policies on instructional leadership

Policy/guideline	Year/period	Focus/key provisions	Relevance to instructional leadership	Source
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ESP	2019–2023; 2024–2028	SBM, model school standards, quality education	Promotes school autonomy, governance, and leadership capacity	MoEYS (2019, 2024a)
CPD policy	2017	Lifelong learning, CPD management, training for teachers and school leaders	Supports school leaders' professional development and instructional supervision	MoEYS (2017)
Teacher professional standards	2016–2021	Professional knowledge, practice, development, and ethics	Provides a framework for teacher quality; guides school leaders in supervision and evaluation	MoEYS (2016)
School director standards	2016–2020	Leadership capacity, curriculum management, innovation, and community engagement	Defines competencies for school leaders to act as instructional leaders	MoEYS (2016)
SBM/decentralization	2019–Present	Autonomy in school management, budgeting, and teaching	Empowers principals to lead instruction and make school-level decisions	MoEYS (2019)
Teacher policy action plan (TPAP)	2024–2030	Transformative leadership, mentoring, and career pathways	Strengthens leadership skills and instructional guidance of school directors	MoEYS (2024a)
Strategic plan for teacher education reform (STEPCam)	2024–2030	Teacher preparation, CPD, ICT integration	Builds leadership capacity for school directors and teacher educators	MoEYS (2024b)

Instructional leadership

According to Hallinger (2011), the term instructional leadership (IL) describes the behaviors and responsibilities of school directors that are aimed at enhancing the quality of teaching and learning by cultivating a culture that values excellence and the efficacy of teachers. According to Hallinger and Truong (2014), it places an emphasis on directing and supporting instructors in order to successfully align instructional approaches with institutional objectives. This is accomplished through the utilization of fundamental competencies such as motivation, communication, and confidence. As a result of increasing responsibilities and academic expectations, IL has emerged as a central topic of discussion in the field of school reform and leadership studies (Hallinger, 2005). The students in schools need to be prepared for the global, technological, and cultural challenges of the 21st century. According to Hoy and Hoy (2013), in order for students to be successful in a worldwide environment, they need to possess superior information, technical, and creative abilities. Instructional leaders are responsible for evaluating teachers, having civil talks with them, and advocating for improved teaching methods in order to satisfy the requirements of the students. According to Pan et al. (2015),

they help schools achieve success by establishing high standards, establishing goals, and encouraging stakeholder engagement.

The findings of several studies (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Neumerski, 2013; Rigby, 2014; Stronge et al., 2008) indicate that instructional leadership is associated with an improvement in both student success and instruction. Instructional leaders are responsible for assisting teachers, providing them with feedback, and providing them with the authority to adapt to schooling in the 21st century.

2.2 Defining the school mission

According to the findings of Hallinger and Murphy (1985), one of the most important aspects of being an effective instructional leader is the establishment of a distinct school goal. According to Leithwood et al. (2004) and Robinson et al. (2008), this suggests that the director is responsible for shaping the character of the school and creating a feeling of shared purpose at the institution, which in turn influences decisions, policies, and practices. When the aim of the school is made apparent, there is a greater likelihood that all parties involved, including teachers, students, staff, and parents, will support the school's academic goals and fundamental principles (Fullan, 2001; Marzano et al., 2005). According to Spillane et al. (2004), it instructs both teachers and students on what they should be doing, and it implies that everyone is accountable for their actions. Through the use of logic, educators are able to design classes that are in line with the objectives of the school (Day et al., 2016). With the help of this approach, students will be motivated to strive toward achieving significant educational goals. Workers are able to collaborate with one another to achieve common objectives, as well as discuss the most effective methods for performing their tasks and finding solutions to issues that arise in the classroom (Bryk et al., 2010). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) state that the accomplishment of this purpose offers us a way of evaluating programs, determining how to make use of resources, fostering professional growth, and increasing the quality of educational outcomes and outcomes in general. It is necessary for parents and the community to be informed of what is taking place at the school (Coleman, 1988; Epstein, 2011).

This is especially important to foster trust, involvement, and a pleasant culture at the institution. The school can enjoy continuous academic development and advancement if it has a well-defined aim (Robinson, 2011; Sergiovanni, 2005). This is because having a well-defined objective brings the entire school community together.

2.3 Framing clear school goals

Besides goal-setting, school directors function as data analysts and facilitators. Research demonstrates that school leaders who utilize data-driven decision-making can enhance instructional practices and student outcomes (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). School directors develop a goal statement and guide the school community in its pursuit. This method assesses the school's strengths and areas for enhancement through the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, such as test scores, attendance records, disciplinary incidents, and stakeholder feedback. This evidence-based method guarantees that objectives target the most critical problems (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). This statistical method ensures that the established objectives prioritize the most significant issues. The plan highlights the necessity of enhancing the number of individuals reading at an advanced level, calling on educators, business owners, and community stakeholders to recognize this goal. The objectives of the school should require collaboration among all relevant stakeholders. This method promotes collaboration among all stakeholders to improve the results (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). This concept facilitates the

adjustment of our objectives as we gain knowledge and improve our understanding. Data must be utilized to evaluate and modify the school's objectives to foster ongoing development and alignment with its mission (Schildkamp, 2019). This guarantees comprehension and motivation among all individuals to achieve the objective.

2.4 Communicating clear school goals

School directors set goals, analyze statistics, and facilitate. Research shows that data-driven school directors improve teaching and student performance. The school directors help the community create a goal statement by analyzing quantitative and qualitative data like test scores, attendance, disciplinary records, and stakeholder feedback to determine what the school does well and what it could improve. This evidence-based approach ensures goals address the most pressing issues (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). With this statistical strategy, goals always matter most. The strategy requires teachers, workers, and community members to set goals like increasing reading levels. Set school goals with all concerned parties. This aids teamwork to improve it. Our goals might change as we learn and improve with this idea. Data should be used to review and adjust goals to keep the school improving and staying loyal to its mission. People are motivated to work toward the objective when they know it (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

2.5 Managing the instructional programs

The management of the instructional program (MIP) is a component of instructional leadership, as stated by Hallinger and Murphy (1985). Through the supervision of classroom instruction, the execution of the curriculum, and the accomplishments of students, the school director ensures that teaching and learning are carried out in an efficient manner (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Murphy, 2015). In this role, school directors are responsible for ensuring that the quality of instruction is maintained and for integrating school practices with educational objectives. According to Ruebling et al. (2004), effective administration of instructional programs not only improves support for teachers but also increases the likelihood that students will have consistent, coherent learning experiences.

2.6 Supervising and evaluating instruction

Monitoring and reviewing education are important, but supporting educators' professional development is crucial. Smart school directors provide teachers with comments after witnessing their work to help them think critically and improve (Marzano, 2003; Supovitz & Klein, 2003). They bridge the gap between instructional monitoring and teacher development by helping instructors identify their strengths and weaknesses and ensure that their teaching strategies match what students need to learn. The formative evaluation and supportive tracking conducted by school directors enhance teachers' self-confidence, motivation, and classroom performance (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

2.7 Coordinating the curriculum

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) suggest that school directors are crucial to meeting the school's goals and ensuring program logic (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). They facilitate collaborative projects that improve students' education and help teachers agree on learning goals (Fullan, 2001). The director also reviews teaching materials, provides resources, and employs pacing principles or scope-and-sequence models to ensure course consistency and no gaps (Marzano et al., 2005). Good curriculum design helps teachers align class plans with school goals and

supports research-based teaching approaches (Hattie, 2009). Promote teacher collaboration to boost student achievement in all disciplines and teaching quality (Robinson et al., 2008).

2.8 Monitoring student progress

To ensure that children are able to acquire knowledge in an efficient manner, it is the responsibility of school directors to keep track of the developmental progress of their pupils. Data analysis is performed with the purpose of identifying areas of learning that require intervention, as well as patterns and gaps in learning. According to Mandinach and Gummer (2016), progress monitoring systems offer teachers a useful tool that can be utilized in the process of modifying the curriculum, delivering targeted interventions, and tailoring instruction to conform to the needs of a varied student body.

2.9 Fostering a positive learning climate

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) emphasized that good educational leadership entails managing the administration and creating a positive learning environment (FPLC). The major purpose of this method is to help students grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally by giving them a secure, polite, and inspirational place to learn. When school leaders create an atmosphere of trust and collaboration, teachers, staff, and students are more involved, respectful, and devoted to learning. They also constructively deal with behavioral issues, create a space that is both enjoyable and productive, and acknowledge and celebrate successes. School administrators should make a healthy educational atmosphere a top priority. This will make the school a better place for teaching and learning, which will boost teacher morale and student performance (Day et al., 2016; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Robinson et al., 2008).

2.10 Creating a positive school climate

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) suggested that school directors go beyond managing staff. Instructors and students necessitate an appropriate learning environment. Given the importance of academic and social development, schools prioritize creating a safe, welcoming, and enjoyable environment for students. They enforce laws, promote ethics, cooperation, and accountability. Effective communication, recognition, and the constructive management of classroom behavior and challenges maintain student engagement and confidence. When supported, praised, and provided with professional development, teachers feel capable. This boosts performance and training. These methods help school directors grow students and teachers. Cambodia's limited resources and diverse culture require schools to prioritize health. Team members are inspired to innovate, overcome challenges, and improve.

2.11 Protecting instructional time

An effective instructional leader knows how to protect teaching time. School directors need to do more than just keep to a schedule. They also need to make sure that teaching and learning hours aren't disrupted in ways that make kids less motivated and instructors less productive. This involves not making unnecessary comments, having management meetings outside of school hours, and making sure there are clear procedures for how to handle visits from students or parents. School directors show that they care about teaching and respect teachers' and students' time by making sure that instructors and students have uninterrupted time in the classroom. When instructional time is always preserved, it also helps teachers do a better job, makes classes more focused, and increases overall student performance. Moreover, it enhances teachers' confidence in their capabilities and job performance by providing them with a

structured environment conducive to effective teaching and fostering encouragement in their responsibilities (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Robinson et al., 2008).

2.12 Promoting professional development

School directors need to actively encourage their teachers to take part in professional development so that they can maintain teaching at a high level and encourage an attitude of constantly becoming better. When money is invested in teachers' professional advancement, it makes human capital better. This helps the school run better as a whole. As part of this, instructors should be permitted to go to classes, seminars, conferences, and training. Teachers should also learn together through peer observations, team planning, and mentorship initiatives. School directors aim for frequent professional improvement to show that they care about their workforce. This makes instructors feel better about what they can do and makes them want to think about their job and continually want to do better. Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Leithwood and Jantzi (2005), Robinson et al. (2008), and Day et al. (2016) underscore the essential function of instructional leaders in facilitating continuous teacher professional development.

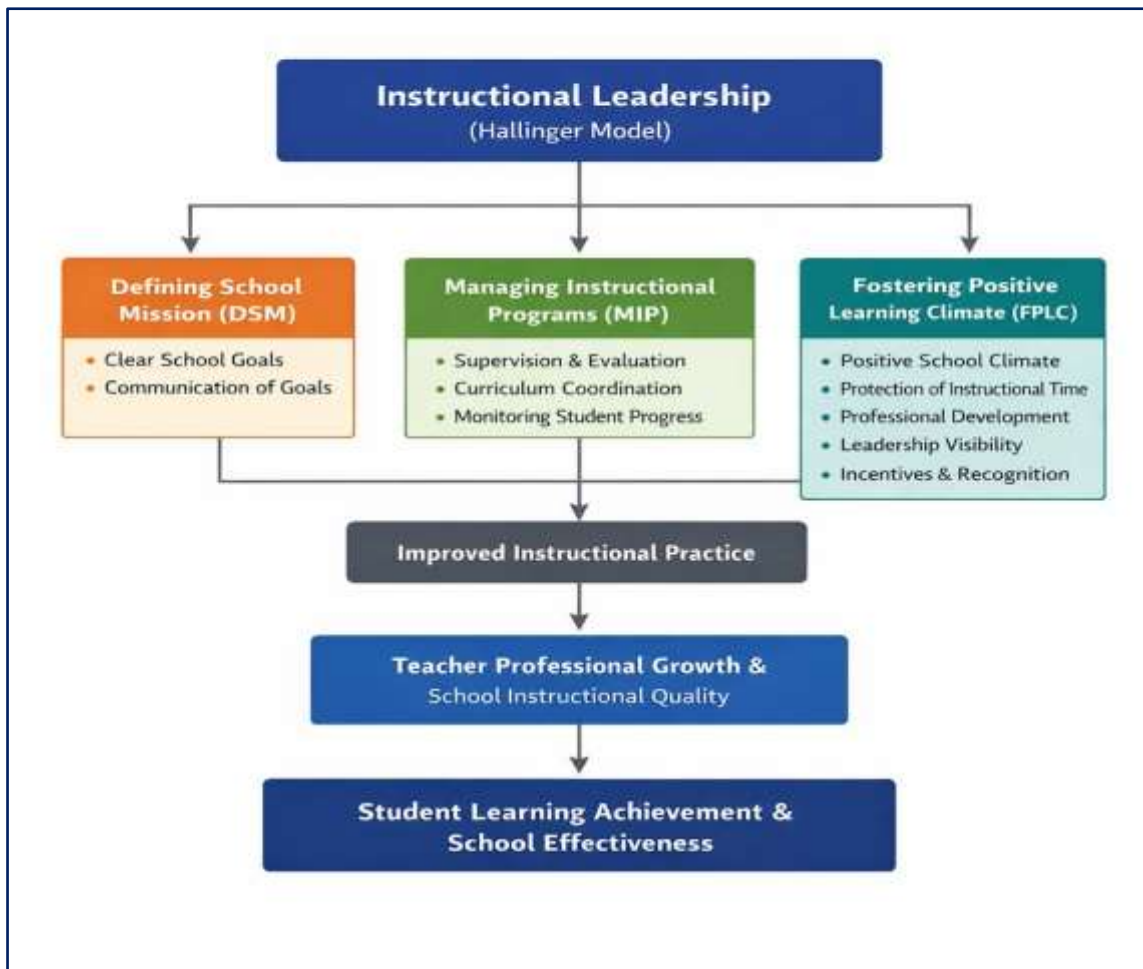
2.13 Maintaining high visibility

A competent instructional leader must be visible in school! School directors shouldn't constantly be in the office. Instead, they should greet students and parents, watch lessons and help out, and attend after-school programs. The director's presence demonstrates they care about school operations and learning. School directors enhance communication, foster open dialogue, and highlight their role as instructional leaders rather than just managers. Prominent leaders are readily accessible. The school directors can improve teachers' performance, confidence, and overall school success through consistent presence and active participation. Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Leithwood and Jantzi (2005), and Robinson et al. advocate for the enhancement of trust and relationships. Visible leaders enhance approachability, promote open dialogue, and emphasize instructional leadership rather than administrative tasks. Increased visibility simplifies leader communication. School directors can boost teacher confidence, performance, and school effectiveness by visiting regularly (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Effective instructional leadership requires school directors' visibility.

2.14 Providing incentives and recognition

Reward and recognition programs for educators and students foster a positive, efficient, and motivating educational atmosphere. Incentives enhance performance and promote school pride, belonging, and motivation. Studies indicate that verbal praise, public recognition, and personal notes of appreciation exert a more enduring influence than material rewards (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Robinson et al., 2008). Recognizing teachers through meetings, newsletters, or professional development enhances enthusiasm, innovation, and professional standards, which in turn positively influences student learning (Robinson et al., 2008). The acknowledgment of improvements and achievements fosters students' self-regulation, collaboration, and discipline, subsequently encouraging a growth mindset and increased engagement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Structured appreciation fosters a goal-oriented, supportive educational environment, enhancing collaboration and accountability. The strategic implementation of rewards and incentives leads to improved school success through increasing the confidence, motivation, and self-worth of both teachers and students (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Robinson et al., 2008).

Figure 1. Framework of instructional leadership



Source: Hallinger and Murphy (1985)

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The historical development of instructional leadership in Cambodia is examined in this paper using a qualitative systematic literature review methodology across four key historical periods: pre-1975, the Khmer Rouge era (1975–1979), post-conflict reconstruction (1979–1999), and the current reform period (2000–present). This method was chosen as it allows for an in-depth analysis of leadership trends, changes in educational policy, and governance structures during significant socio-political shifts. This also aids in identifying shortcomings within institutions, frameworks, and leadership patterns that have negatively impacted education in Cambodia throughout the years (Ayres, 2000; Chandler, 2008; Clayton, 1998).

3.2 Samples and sampling techniques

This literature analysis analyzed a selection of academic and policy materials regarding instructional leadership, educational reform, and school governance in Cambodia (Ayres, 2000; Hallinger & Truong, 2014; MoEYS, 2013; UNESCO, 2015). A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select the sources deemed most relevant and reliable (Duggan, 2003; Dy, 2004). The materials comprised peer-reviewed research articles, strategic plans from the

MoEYS, frameworks endorsed by UNESCO, as well as national policy standards and leadership guidelines (MoEYS, 2005; World Bank, 2018). Four criteria were established for selection: the work needed to be published in 1990, it had to have a direct connection to Cambodia and instructional leadership, it had to be accessible in English or Khmer, and it had to align with the primary historical periods addressed in the study (Ayres, 2000; Hallinger & Truong, 2014).

3.3 Instruments

The primary research instrument was a document analysis matrix employed to collect and classify information regarding instructional leadership from the chosen sources. The matrix has important columns including author(s) and year, historical period, leadership traits, leadership focus (administration, survival, reform, or instructional), obstacles that were found, and policy implications. Also, Tables 1 and 2 in the literature review part were analytical summaries that showed important historical trends and big government changes that had to do with leadership development in Cambodia.

3.4 Data collection procedures

The data collection process employed an accurate method comprising five distinct stages. Sources were identified through academic databases and publications from MoEYS. These publications include documents from 2005 to 2024. Materials were assessed for their applicability to instructional leadership in Cambodia. Third, selected documents underwent critical analysis, and essential points were recorded. Fourth, information about leadership was extracted and documented in the analysis matrix. Finally, the data were classified into historical and thematic categories.

All materials were organized into four main phases: pre-1975, 1975–1979, 1979–1999, and the post-2000 reform period. Only credible, peer-reviewed, or officially recognized documents were included to ensure the reliability of the findings (MoEYS, 2016, 2017).

3.5 Data analysis

Two primary methods of observation were utilized. Theme analysis was utilized to identify recurring patterns in school administration and leadership. Several key themes emerged, including centralized authority and hierarchy, leadership flaws, management's focus on survival, school-based leadership, institutional constraints, and opportunities for professional development among educators. Previous studies, particularly those by Ayres (2000), Clayton (1998), and Chandler (2008), have laid the groundwork for understanding these challenges. A chronological analysis was conducted to examine the progression of leadership styles throughout history. The findings demonstrate a steady shift from autocratic and ineffective systems to leadership models emphasizing reform and guidance, especially in the post-2000 period (Hallinger & Truong, 2014; MoEYS, 2019). This paper contextualizes current leadership challenges in Cambodia within a broad historical and political framework, employing a dual analytical approach.

3.6 Ethical consideration

This was a study based on documents; hence, there were no people involved. Ethical standards included fully citing all sources, without plagiarizing or changing data, using the APA 7th

reference system correctly, and respecting information from institutions and governments. These steps guaranteed that the study process was open, trustworthy, and honest.

4. Findings

4.1 Historical evolution of instructional leadership

Table 3. Four distinct leadership phases

Period	Key finding	Source
Pre-1975	Hierarchical and bureaucratic leadership focused on compliance.	Clayton (1998)
1975–1979	Destruction of the leadership system.	Chandler (2008)
1979–1999	Survival-based leadership with limited capacity.	Ayres (2000)
2000–Present	Shift to instructional and school-based leadership.	MoEYS (2013, 2024b)

This progression demonstrates Cambodia’s transition from institutional collapse to a reform-oriented leadership environment.

4.2 Modern challenges in leadership

Despite the fact that numerous advances are continuously being made, the leadership of schools in Cambodia continues to face a great deal of challenges that render it less effective (UNESCO, 2021). One of the most significant issues is that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training is only offered for a limited amount of time and is not always accessible (MoEYS, 2019). This makes it difficult for school leaders to develop instructional leadership abilities that are both long-lasting and profound. If they do not receive consistent, high-quality training, many principals and senior teachers struggle to develop the abilities necessary to assist students in learning and to teach effectively (Hallinger & Truong, 2014).

Not only that, but when school administrators have an excessive number of administrative responsibilities, it becomes difficult for them to concentrate on things like supervising instruction, mentoring teachers, and enhancing the curriculum (Hallinger & Truong, 2014). Because choices are typically made at a centralized level, this issue is made much more difficult to deal with because schools do not have a great deal of autonomy (MoEYS, 2019). As a result of this, school administrators are unable to readily establish new rules, reorganize existing resources, or implement strategies that are unique to their schools in order to fulfill their requirements.

This limitation is especially obvious in rural areas, where access to educational resources, professional networks, and leadership training is significantly more restricted than in urban areas (UNESCO, 2021). As a consequence of this, leadership strategies can be found in rural locations, although they are typically not as well-developed or consistent as those found in urban settings. Despite the fact that there have been policy actions with the intention of

improving school leadership systems, these findings provide credence to the opinion expressed by Hallinger and Truong (2014), which states that instructional leadership in Cambodia remains inconsistent and lacking.

Table 4. Major challenges affecting the development and implementation of instructional leadership

No.	Key challenges	Description of the problem	Impact on instructional leadership	Source
1.	Short and irregular CPD training	Professional development programs for school leaders are limited in duration and lack consistency.	Weakens sustained leadership skill development and limits instructional improvement	Darling-Hammond et al. (2017)
2.	Excessive administrative responsibilities	School leaders spend most of their time on paperwork and management tasks	Reduces focus on classroom supervision, mentoring, and instructional support	Leithwood, Kenneth et al. (2004)
3.	Weak school-level autonomy	Decision-making remains centralized at higher levels	Limits leaders' ability to respond to school-specific needs and innovate	World Bank (2018)
4.	Limited leadership practice in rural areas	Rural schools have fewer training opportunities and professional networks	Creates unequal leadership development and inconsistent practices	UNESCO (2015)
5.	Inconsistent instructional leadership.	Leadership practices are uneven across regions and schools.	Slows overall progress in teaching quality and learning outcomes.	Hallinger and Truong (2014)

5. Discussion

This paper's findings correspond with existing literature on post-conflict and developing educational systems. The political instability and genocide in Cambodia significantly disrupted leadership development, leading to lasting damage to institutional memory and professional capacity, as noted by Ayres (2000) and Chandler (2008).

MoEYS has enacted changes through the CPD, SBM, ESP, and teacher performance appraisal process frameworks (MoEYS, 2005, 2013). However, effective instructional supervision is hindered by time constraints, administrative pressures, and inadequate decentralization (Hallinger & Truong, 2014). This paper provides a temporal synthesis that illustrates the direct impact of political history on the professional identity and roles of school leaders in Cambodia.

6. Conclusion and recommendation

This paper effectively accomplished its objectives by systematically documenting the historical context of instructional leadership in Cambodia and analyzing the key political and educational factors that have influenced its development over time. The analysis demonstrates the impact of wartime conditions, post-war reconstruction, and educational reform initiatives on the roles, duties, and practices of school administrators. This illustrates the importance of aligning national policy changes with modifications in school operations, teacher expectations, and

professional standards. The findings align with the research conducted by Clayton (1998), Chandler (2008), Ayres (2000), and MoEYS (MoEYS, 2013), which highlight the substantial impact of Cambodia's historical, political, and institutional contexts on the evolution of instructional leadership.

7. Limitations and future studies

This paper is primarily limited by its reliance on document-based sources, including policy papers, historical records, and published literature. No direct data were acquired through interviews, classroom observations, or field-based case studies. Thus, the findings reflect dominant perspectives rather than the genuine experiences of school administrators and educators. This limits the depth of understanding of the actual execution of instructional leadership in daily educational environments. The perspectives of school leaders in remote and isolated areas are inadequately represented due to a lack of research and documentation in these settings. This highlights a significant shortcoming identified in the literature: the lack of empirical and context-specific studies focused on rural Cambodian schools. The study did not include quantitative data to assess the influence of leadership on teacher efficacy and student outcomes, thereby limiting the capacity to draw statistical conclusions regarding leadership effectiveness.

To address these issues, future studies should include qualitative interviews with urban and rural school administrators, teachers, and educational authorities. This would help identify instructional leadership issues and successes. Leadership depends on teacher self-efficacy, performance, and passion. Researchers and politicians should study Cambodia and other ASEAN nations to understand their issues, leadership, and education. Interviews, surveys, observations, and document analysis will illuminate Cambodia's historical, political, and educational contexts for instructional leadership. These principles support evidence-based leadership development and fill research gaps.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to convey their profound appreciation to the reviewers and the editing team of CJESS for their evaluation and proofreading of the manuscript. This piece would not have emerged in academic circles without their assistance. Consequently, their contributions are seen as indispensable and beneficial to society at large, particularly within the academic community of research and publication.

Conflict of interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the study, authorship, and/or publication of this study.

Declaration of AI usage

The authors used Grammarly to polish the language in some parts of the article. However, they declared that the article's content is entirely theirs and not generated by any means.

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