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System Support for Early Grade Teacher Mentors in Cambodia

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SYSTEM SUPPORT FOR EARLY GRADE TEACHER MENTORS IN CAMBODIA

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACR	All Children Reading
ACL	All Children Learning
DOE	District Office of Education
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
IPEA	Inclusive Primary Education Activity
KRKC	*Komar Rien Komar Cheh*
MM	Master Mentor
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
PED	Primary Education Department
POE	Provincial Office of Education
RFM	Rapid Feedback Monitoring
SBEG	School-Based Early Grade Mentor
TLM	Teaching and Learning Material
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

ABSTRACT

The early primary education system in Cambodia is working to expand its teacher mentoring network. This quantitative and qualitative study examines the motivational factors of school-based early grade literacy mentors and master mentors who have played these roles in a pilot program implemented by a United States Agency for International Development-funded project during the 2021-2022 academic year in Cambodia. The study finds that mentors are motivated to perform the mentoring roles for intrinsic reasons such as improving student education and peer learning. It also finds that there are areas of improvement for mentor selection, workload assignment, financial remuneration, and recognition for the mentor network to successfully scale-up to the entire nation.

Key words: Cambodia, early primary education, literacy, teacher mentoring, motivation

Introduction and Statement of Research Question

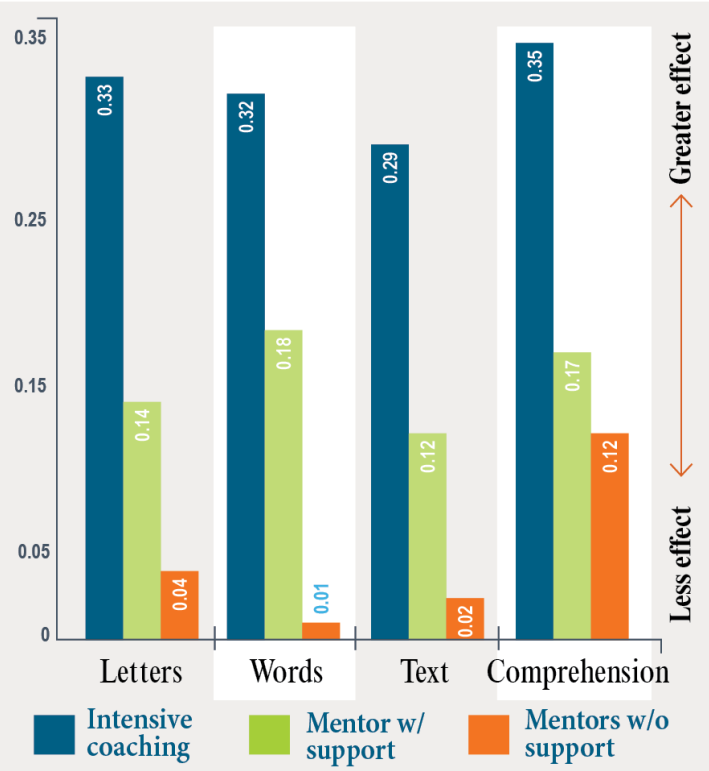
Over the years, increased access to education has led to monumental growth in the number of children attending school globally. However, the world faces a global crisis in education, with a pre-pandemic context of less than six of every ten children being proficient in reading and math in low-income countries (United Nations, 2022). The effect of school closures and other disruptions caused by COVID-19 have only worsened this grave problem. Seventy percent of children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a simple passage by the age of 10 (World Bank, 2022). Improving the quality of teaching is a key pathway to improving student performance, but there is much work to be done to determine how best to accomplish this, especially in low-income contexts where resources are limited: competing priorities, political agendas, and poorly coordinated international donor contributions complicate government spending.

In response to this growing global need, international donors such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) continue to implement strategies to work towards improving education. One program in USAID's strategy to improve basic education is a five-year, $25 million Inclusive Primary Education Activity (IPEA) in Cambodia. This program, which I support as Deputy Director, exemplifies one of the first of what I believe will continue to be USAID's priority for programming in the coming decade: to expand its investment in revised curricula/teaching and learning materials, teacher training and support methodologies, and other support to education system actors to adopt new practices at national levels while reducing donor financial support. IPEA's primary objective is to expand the reading package created with the Ministry and other non-governmental organizations, including my employer RTI International (a large implementer of USAID-funded international development programs), under the All Children Reading (ACR) project, *Komar Rien Komar Cheh* (*KRKC*).

From 2018 to 2021, RTI implemented the preceding USAID-funded ACR program, and demonstrated through a randomized control trial that there are significant improved outcomes when teachers are supported by coaches or mentors after they receive training. The intensive support and approaches provided by literacy coaches directly employed by ACR is now being applied to the national mentor network. This new approach is modeled by IPEA and explained in more detail below.

Figure 1

Comparison of Improved Outcomes in Three Treatment Groups of All Children Reading Project, (RTI, 2021)



These promising results were the impetus for the Ministry to adopt the ACR materials (*KRKC)* as the national early grade reading package and to endorse mentoring. In a public announcement, the Minister instructed all non-governmental organizations working in early grade reading in Cambodia to adopt *KRKC* and implement the curriculum in all public schools in which they operate. To date, approximately 6,500 public school teachers (of

approximately 20,000 grade 1 and grade 2 teachers nationally) have been trained on the complete set of these reading materials for grades 1 and 2, along with upper preschool, as part of the partnership among the Ministry, USAID, and the Global Partnership for Education. The trained teachers have implemented the Khmer literacy program and new teaching methods with support from professional mentors in eight of the 26 provinces in the country (RTI International, 2022).

In the last year other donors and implementing partners have come together behind this nationally adopted package to implement one harmonized approach to reading instruction in the early grades. The Ministry's adoption of *KRKC* has driven the entire education sector to harmonize their contributions around one approach. Since IPEA officially launched in October 2021, the team has already seen the education sector come together to map donor support to early grade learning through materials provision, teacher training, and teacher mentoring province-by- province across most of Cambodia.

As defined earlier, the ingredients to success in improving early grade reading confirmed through the research conducted under ACR are 1) the provision of teacher and student materials that are pedagogically structured and well-paced for optimal learning, 2) in-service teacher training, and 3) mentoring support to follow-up on skills taught during teacher training (RTI International, 2022). Under the ACR project, RTI hired independent consultants (called literacy coaches, as referenced in Figure 1, above) to support teachers after training because historically, the human resource for such intensive support has not existed within the government of Cambodia's education system. IPEA's challenge over the next five years will be to support the Ministry's request to model the scale-up of all three inputs of *KRKC* (teaching and learning materials provision, teacher training, and continuous mentor support which is designed to more closely model literacy coaching provided under

ACR). This study will focus on the third aspect of the *KRKC* package: systemic support and adoption of mentoring support for teachers. It seeks to answer the following research questions:

1) What are the motivating factors for mentors (both school-based early grade mentors (SBEGs) and master mentors (MMs)), who serve at the most decentralized level of the education system, to serve in the teacher mentoring system under the new national reading program?
    a. To what degree do compensation, recognition, professional development, and status motivate individuals to become mentors?
    b. Do mentors feel that they have sufficient time in their workday to complete the additional responsibilities associated with fulfilling a mentor role?
2) How do mentors feel about the selection process?
    a. How did the selection process affect individuals' desire to become mentors?
    b. What are some potential areas of improvement for mentor selection in future academic years?

This capstone focuses on the motivational factors of mentors working within the education system to implement the *KRKC* package in five districts in Kampong Chhnang Province. Through mentor surveys and focus group discussions, this capstone will contribute to the formative evaluation for IPEA. The timing of this research is also an important factor to consider. IPEA implemented activities in five districts in Kampong Chhnang province in its first year of implementation (October 2021 – September 2022). In its second year, (October 2022 – September 2023) IPEA has begun expanding *KRKC* in two new provinces and in its third year, will expand in two additional provinces in its third year (October 2023 – September 2024), for a total of five provinces. Thus, the literature review and the findings of

this capstone research, conducted in the spring of 2023, have the potential to provide critical formative lessons for the further expansion of *KRKC* in IPEA's third year of implementation (October 2023 – September 2024) (RTI International, April 2022) and for the Ministry and other donors as they support the scale-up of the national mentor network.

Additional Program Context

As additional background that impacts the research design of this capstone, the IPEA project conducts what has been termed Rapid Feedback Monitoring (RFM) on a quarterly basis. The objective of this formative assessment is to provide information about the motivational factors influencing government early grade teacher mentors who have been trained by IPEA so that the program can adapt its training methodologies and implementation practices on a regular and recurring basis. The quarterly RFM conducted by IPEA's monitoring and evaluation team includes student reading assessments, teacher interviews and observations, and mentor interviews and observations. More specific to mentors, these interviews obtain feedback that identify the current situation and support, services, and challenges that teachers and mentors are facing and need to improve. The data from the Monitoring also identifies what additional technical support may be needed. Data collected via the Monitoring does not, however, address some aspects of the education system's adoption of mentoring that may need to be improved for longer term sustainability of the national mentoring program. The findings from this capstone research will provide data that can be triangulated with findings from the program's regular monitoring to refine the mentoring component of the *KRKC* implementation, at a critical time when other donors and implementing partners begin to expand the mentor network throughout the 26 provinces of Cambodia.

Literature Review

The literature review below provides background information about the importance of mentoring to support teachers and improve the quality of instruction in low-income contexts. It also provides information related to the aspects of successful mentoring programs and motivational factors for individuals to take on a mentoring role in different sectors that may be applicable to the education sector. It also highlights that there is very little research available about the motivational factors of teacher mentors working at scale in low-income contexts.

The Importance of Mentoring

In Cambodia, the ACR project design was based upon the documented need in the field of international education for teachers to have three ingredients that lead to improved student learning outcomes: sufficient teaching and learning materials, in-service training, and teacher follow-up support following training. There is a growing body of research that demonstrates these are the priority ingredients to improving teaching practices in low-income contexts. Professional development is most effective when focused on one subject at a time and when supported by the necessary teaching and learning materials for both students and teachers. The third component of successful teacher professional development is follow-up and support following training in their own workplace – the classroom. As Piper and Spratt state, "converging evidence strongly points to the importance of combining in-service training courses with related pedagogical follow-up guidance and support to teachers in their classrooms" (2017).

This only recently supported evidence is critical for the international development community and practitioners who design early grade literacy and numeracy programs. Given that follow-up with teachers is so important to the successful sustainability and scalability of early grade literacy instruction, what are the best practices for providing teacher support and mentoring at scale?

Aspects of Successful Mentoring Programs

A meta-analysis of 60 programs conducted (mostly pre- or early primary literacy programs) by Kraft, Blazar, and Hogan showed that while teacher coaching shows promise as being a positive factor in teacher professional development, the effectiveness of coaching decreases dramatically when implemented at scale (2018). There has been little research published on taking in-service teacher professional development to scale, and more importantly, taking these actions to be government-system led. RTI International and the Center for Global Development conducted a Learning at Scale study, whose goal is to "respond to two clear needs in the sector: a better understanding of the driving forces behind successful, large-scale numeracy programs, and insight into the factors that enable government-run programs to succeed at scale" (Stern et al., 2021). The third objective of the study focused on the system support to deliver training and support to teachers. Early findings shared in the interim report suggest that education officers at subnational levels are very capable of supporting teachers provided they have the tools and knowledge to do so. There is also a growing body of research that supports why teachers are motivated to work with a mentor: it can improve their professional skills, job satisfaction, morale, while reducing stress and preventing burnout. However, a key question remains. Why are the teachers or education officers working as mentors in decentralized systems motivated to support their teacher peers or subordinates? The success of the mentoring component of *KRKC* will depend on many factors, the motivations of individuals who serve in the role of mentors being one of particular significance for system sustainability.

Motivational Factors of Mentoring

Zachary (2000) acknowledges that motivation drives participation in a mentoring role and that motivating factors have impact on the quality of the interaction between mentors and their mentees. Taking time to consider the factors of motivation of selected mentors in the

early primary mentor network in Cambodia should improve the likelihood of its sustainability as a national education system change.

Garza, Ramirez, and Oavando (2009) identified four main themes of teacher motivation to become a mentor: “a. to express an altruistic value, b. to provide active support, c. to grow professionally through self-actualization, and d. to enhance a colleague's growth and development” (p. 5). In their study, teacher mentors felt a moral obligation to help their less-experienced colleagues, remembering what it was like being a new teacher themselves. They also felt a moral obligation to build capacity of other teachers when teacher shortages existed, to help meet the educational needs of the students in their schools. Extrinsic rewards that have been tried in the past have generally not produced the expected or preferred results. Research and experience show that teachers are most likely to value intrinsic rewards such as self-respect, responsibility, and a sense of accomplishment. Scheetz, Waters, Smeaton, and Lare (2005) interviewed teachers to identify reasons for wanting to become mentors. A major response was “to give back” followed by comments such as “flex time, being released from some professional development activities, state-mandated professional development credits, thank-you notes, gifts, and celebratory social events” (p. 35).

A study comparing mentoring in high-income countries with those in and low and middle-income countries highlights the differences in the factors of success that contribute to mentoring programs in these contexts (Lescano et al, 2009). In addition to altruism, factors contributing to the success of mentoring programs in low and middle-income countries include the existence of a policy framework, formal recognition, career growth, financial compensation, rewards for high performance, and investment in mentor training opportunities (Lescano et al, 2019).

Finally, a factor linked to motivation and a mentor’s success in the role is tied to the way in which the individual becomes a mentor. The selection process often influences how

that person will work with a mentee (Trubowitz, 2004, p. 59). Thus, it is critical to investigate not only motivational factors of choosing to become a mentor remain in the role, but also the selection process by which these individuals became mentors in the first place.

All the findings shared above come from the experiences of mentors working in high income countries. There is little evidence, especially within the field of in-service education, of the motivational factors of becoming a mentor in low-income settings, partly because teacher mentoring systems often do not exist in these settings. While limited in sample size and generalizability, this capstone study can contribute to the improvement of IPEA's expanding program implementation and will contribute to Cambodia's adaptation of the national early grade teacher mentoring system going forward. It is important that the factors of motivation for early grade teacher mentors in Cambodia be identified and explored further.

Research Design

Methodology

The study employed phenomenology, which addresses the way individuals analyze the meaning of lived experience, "how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 17).

This study employed qualitative and quantitative research methodology. An initial electronic survey was administered to all individuals serving as school-based early grade reading mentors and master mentors in the in-service teacher professional development in the five districts where IPEA has implemented the mentoring program in the province of Kampong Chhnang, one of Cambodia's 25 provinces. The survey, (See Appendix A), focused on mentors' motivations for being a mentor and their experience with the selection process.

Subsequent focus group discussions, (See Appendix B) delved deeper into questions posed in the survey. The qualitative aspects of the study allowed flexibility such that lived experiences of participants were explored, as well as the context and meaning of those experiences. Those who participated in more in-depth focus group discussions provided more detailed and descriptive information about the same topics covered in the survey.

As this study gathered the feedback of individuals who have been a part of the government-run teacher mentor network for just over a year, the study gave participants an opportunity to reflect about their experience, their motivations for serving as mentors, and the operational aspects that affected their satisfaction (such as recruitment, payment processes, and time commitment). The combined quantitative and qualitative data provided valuable information about the viability and sustainability of this recent change in the education system.

Participants and Sampling

To receive an invitation to complete the electronic survey, participants must have served in the role of a master mentor or a school-based early grade reading mentor during the previous academic year in one of the five IPEA implementation districts of Kampong Chhnang. The electronic survey was sent via Telegram (a messaging application) based on the telephone numbers of mentors in IPEA's training database. All mentors (28 master mentors and 154 school-based early grade mentors) in IPEA's five districts of implementation in Kampong Chhnang were invited to complete the electronic survey using IPEA's project database of mentors in these districts.

Focus group participants (for one focus group of master mentors and three focus groups of school-based mentors) were sampled as follows. As master mentors are grouped together by district within a province in Cambodia, one group of master mentors was

randomly selected from the five IPEA implementation districts to select the master mentor focus group participants. To randomly select the district, the names of the five districts were printed on small pieces of paper, folded, and put in basket. An IPEA colleague drew a slip of paper out of a basket and Barbour district was selected for the master mentor focus group discussion.

Within the district level, school-based mentors are grouped in clusters. Three groups of school-based early grade mentors (who work in the same school cluster) were selected by randomly sampling three clusters from the 48 total clusters in these five IPEA implementation districts in Kampong Chhnang. Like the master mentor sampling, the names of all 48 clusters in the five districts were printed on pieces of paper, folded, and placed in a basket. Three colleagues in the IPEA office drew one slip of paper out of the basket, selecting Phsar, Thonal Toteung, and Ksam Measchanleab clusters as the locations of the school-based mentor focus group discussions.

Methods of Data Collection

Using the IPEA database of master mentors and school-based early grade mentors, all individuals fulfilling these roles (28 master mentors and 154 school-based mentors) in the selected districts of Kampong Chhnang were sent an electronic survey using Kobo Toolbox®. Kobo Toolbox® is a free data management, collection, and analysis platform created for use by researchers and practitioners working globally for social impact. The electronic survey began with consent. The survey was left open for one week and 42 individuals responded: 31 school-based mentors and 11 master mentors.

Four focus group discussions, one composed of five master mentors and three composed of five to nine school-based mentors, for a total of 27 individuals, were conducted to further elaborate on findings from the electronic survey. Master mentors gather at the district level for training.

There are 48 clusters in the five implementation districts of IPEA in Kampong Chhnang province. One focus group discussion was held at each of the three sampled cluster-level schools. Table 1 summarizes all study instruments utilized, participant sample sizes, and the locations of data collection.

Table 1

Summary of study instruments, sample size, and location of data collection.

Instrument	Number of Participants	Location of data collection
Electronic Survey	11 master mentors 31 school-based mentors	N/A (electronic survey sent to smart phones)
Focus Group Discussion 1	5 master mentors working in Baribour, a randomly selected district.	District-level mentor training venue
Focus Group Discussion 2	9 school-based mentors working in Phsar, a randomly sampled cluster.	Cluster-school
Focus Group Discussion 3	8 school-based mentors working in Thnal Toteung, a randomly sampled cluster.	Cluster-school
Focus Group Discussion 4	5 school-based mentors working in Ksam Measchanleab, a randomly sampled cluster.	Cluster-school

All study instruments (the electronic survey and focus group discussion prompts) were translated from English to Khmer. To obtain the initial feedback from a larger group of mentors, the survey was sent to all eligible mentors as described above.

Obtaining more detailed feedback from study participants using focus group discussions required more finesse. Given I am a white foreigner in a leadership position of an international donor-funded project, discussions with my colleagues confirmed that it was highly unlikely that participants in focus group discussions would feel comfortable answering questions posed by me. To obtain honest feedback from participants, two Cambodian data collectors were hired to conduct the focus group discussions. These data collectors were

identified as strong assessors among those individuals who have previously collected data for IPEA and have experience conducting qualitative data collection. I paid the two data collectors for their time including orientation, preparation, travel, and focus group discussion facilitation, based on their established daily consulting rate. The assessors (hired as independent contractors) were oriented on the purpose of the study, study procedures, and ethics of data collection, including obtaining informed consent from focus group participants.

The semi-structured focus group discussions are based on the following rationales. First, I am interested in the impact of mentoring support on individual participants. Focus group discussions would provide insights into the "individual lived experiences" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 102) while also maximizing time. They also "allow a systematic and iterative gathering of data where questions are arranged in a protocol that evokes rich data but is also focused for efficient data analysis" (Galetta, 2013, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 149). Strengths of using focus group discussions for this study include this methodology's usefulness for uncovering participants' perspectives and experiences, the opportunity to follow up immediately for clarification, the usefulness of describing complex situations, and the ability to gather large amounts of data quickly (Marshall &Rossman, 2016). It was also beneficial to use focus group discussions with these participants in a high-context culture like Cambodia, where individuals place value group interaction. The study aimed to capture participants' true motivations for and experiences being mentors without any supervisor present during the discussion.

Ethics of Research

A critical question to consider was how to protect participants' identities, while still obtaining relevant information for the study. The electronic Kobo Toolbox survey was sent potential survey respondents and their responses were recorded in Kobo with random identifiers.

To protect the identification of focus group participants, pseudonyms were used during the discussions. The two Cambodian data collectors, who conducted the focus group discussions, explained to all participants the procedures put in place to maintain confidentiality of the research data and informed participants not to repeat what was said in the focus group to others and that they could refuse to participate and drop out at any time.

To omit further identifying information this paper does not include any identifying information below the cluster level in which mentors work. Neither participants' names nor the name of the school where they work are identified in this paper.

Researcher Positionality

My positionality as a researcher is shaped by my knowledge of the IPEA project and my experience working with international development programs with teacher mentoring components. My professional experience and the literature review support the idea that mentoring is a key component to the success of behavior change for teachers after receiving teacher training. However, prior to this study, I had yet to learn if those playing the new roles of master mentor and school-based mentors in Cambodia had sufficient incentives to continue fulfilling the role.

It is important to note again that as a foreigner in a leadership position, participants' responses may have been biased given I could have been viewed by some participants as hierarchically superior. As advised by colleagues and local experts, by engaging Cambodian data collectors, participants felt more at ease and willing to share their true feelings about their experiences working as mentors.

Data Management and Analysis

The electronic survey results received were uploaded to Google Drive and analysis of the electronic survey results was conducted using Excel and Kobo Toolbox.

The focus group discussion notes and recordings were uploaded to Google Drive and the data management and analysis software, Dedoose. After translation was completed, I coded the discussions using induction, "discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data" (Patton, 2002, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 222). Following the completion of coding of all transcripts, I reviewed the data again in Dedoose to identify themes of the findings. These findings were compared with results from the electronic survey to identify consistencies and inconsistencies between the electronic survey and the focus group discussions.

Credibility of Findings

Although as a novel researcher I have not developed a professional reputation in academia through publication and thus credibility as a researcher, I designed this study to be credible, particularly along the lines of transferability and applicability. I utilized critical self-reflexivity to be aware of my potential areas of bias, how they might impact this work (Peshkin, 1988). The survey and focus group discussion questions were intentionally designed to allow for answers that reflect the participants' experiences, rather than my own assumptions. In addition, having a group of Khmer-speaking researchers perform the interviews helped to ensure that my foreign positionality did not influence the discussion. I also employed the concepts of triangulation and crystallization by working with multiple participants and types of data sources, while also reflecting on my own practice (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, and Cho and Trent, 2006, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Limitations of Methodology

A limitation of this study was my not being a Khmer speaker, and thus, that I was unable to conduct the focus group discussions myself. This means that transcripts and data were translated and there is a risk that some information was lost in translation or interpreted in a way that I might not have agreed with. Finally, there is a potential limitation in the

sample that, despite being advised otherwise, participation could be limited by participants' feeling as if their responses could be held against them or seen as a critique of their superiors, and this limited the transparency of responses.

Findings

The study found that mentors are motivated to perform their roles for intrinsic reasons such as improving student education, improving their peers' learning and for professional growth to gain additional knowledge and skills. It also found that there are areas of improvement for mentor selection, workload assignment, financial remuneration, and recognition for the mentor network to successfully scale-up to the entire nation and be sustainable. This section will explore the primary motivational factors of mentors, their greatest challenges, financial aspects of mentoring, and other areas of improvement for the mentor network.

Of 182 potential survey respondents, 23 percent (11 master mentors and 31 school-based mentors) responded to the electronic survey. Eighty-two percent of master mentor respondents are school directors and 18 percent work at the District Office of Education. School-based mentor respondents vary in composition between four school-based professions: early grade teachers (16 percent), upper grade teachers (19 percent percent), school directors (42 percent), and deputy school directors (23 percent). These primary job functions are important to consider when interpreting the data.

Motivational Factors

Survey results from the 42 school-based mentor and master mentor respondents showed that there are three main reasons these individuals are motivated to be mentors: 29 percent of respondents cited their desire to provide feedback and help teachers, 27 percent responded that their main motivation was to improve education of children, and 23 percent cited their own professional growth as their top motivating factor. Table 2 summarizes these primary motivational survey responses.

Table 2

Summary of survey respondents' primary motivation to become a mentor.

Response	Percentage of respondents
Providing feedback to teachers/peers	29%
Improving education for children	27%
Professional growth	23%

The focus group discussions validated the survey results. Sixteen of the 27 focus group participants (59 percent) said that they wanted to become mentors to have additional learning opportunities to deepen their knowledge and skills in using the *KRKC* reading package and teacher's guide. The same number of focus group participants (59 percent) said that supporting teachers in their use of *KRKC* brought them satisfaction in their mentoring role.

When asked about professional development being a motivational factor of being a mentor, an overwhelming 95 percent of all survey respondents responded that they hoped to gain on-the-job experience that would make them stronger in their current profession. Similarly, when asked specifically about professional growth, 23 of the 27 focus group participants (85 percent) said that they wanted to gain skills gained from becoming a mentor, like giving feedback to peers.

Thirty-three percent of survey respondents cited formal credit from the Ministry (that would lead to certification on their resume, potentially aiding in eventual promotion within the public education system) as a motivational factor of becoming a mentor.

Twenty-seven percent of the master mentors surveyed also cited recognition within the community as a motivational factor, whereas only seven percent of school-based mentors cited this motivational factor. One school-based mentor recommended that "the Ministry should monitor the SBEG's work by field visit or interview him/her for his/her roles, reports,

and achievement that they supported in their school. Moreover, the Ministry could issue a letter of appreciation to SBEGs to encourage their work."

Challenges of Mentoring

Seventeen of the 22 school-based mentors (77 percent) who participated in focus group discussions highlighted felt that they had sufficient time to perform their mentoring responsibilities, and that they found it easy to create their plans to observe teachers. However, when prompted about the challenges of being a mentor, the highest response (33 percent) of respondents in the survey cited insufficient time in their workday. Thirty-three percent of focus group participants cited juggling their primary role and their mentoring role as a difficulty as well. These focus group participants elaborated that being able to schedule all their mentee observations was particularly challenging for school-based mentors whose primary occupation is teaching. One focus group participant elaborated that if the "Ministry decides to scale up the mentoring program nationwide, the important thing is to have the teacher who does not teach and can be the SBEG in order to do this job properly and effectively…. some [teachers] are not SBEGs because SBEGs are supposed to support about six teachers and need to teach their own class." Those school-based mentors whose primary jobs are that of a school director, deputy school director, or librarian have more flexibility in scheduling their visits to mentees. This mixed feedback from school-based mentors is an important factor when considering the sustainability of the system change.

Some master mentors also cited the issue of time management as a challenge. In their case, however, the challenge came from the time associated with traveling to visit mentees. Sixty-four percent of master mentors said the most frustrating thing about being a mentor was not having enough time to complete their mentoring responsibilities. Focus group discussions revealed that the contributing factors of variance in distances, general and seasonal road

conditions, and other travel logistics (such as river crossings) to reach their mentees were contributing factors to the time management issue for master mentors.

Finally, nearly 17 percent of the respondents cited insufficient training as the largest challenge of being a mentor. It is worth noting that this response could reflect a desire for increased per diem payments, since mentors are compensated for their travel and per diem while attending training events. This is often a topic of discussion among IPEA staff and a challenge for the program when Ministry staff request to hold workshops outside of their city of residence so that they are eligible for larger per diem payments.

Financial Considerations

Seventy-three percent of master mentors and 65 percent of school-based mentors responded that they do not feel that they are sufficiently paid for the role, suggesting that payment is still an important issue to explore. The focus group discussions with mentors indicated the same. Twenty-two of the 27 mentors (81 percent) who participated in focus group discussions did not find the payments for the mentoring role to be sufficient. The second most common response from mentors in the electronic survey on how to improve the mentoring process was related to increased allowances.

The focus group discussions also revealed that in some cases, mentors are using their own money to cover the costs of mentoring, including paying for photocopies, additional transport costs to submit reports up the chain in the mentoring system, and for cell data to upload digital reports into the mentoring system. One school-based mentor said, “For me, there is a problem for everyone as we used our own salary which is needed for various expenses to cover the work and sometimes it effects my mental health because I work very hard but haven't received the stipend on time. But if I was asked whether I want to continue this work or not, I do still want to work.” Another participant said, “My challenge is I have to use my own money and it is hard to request the money from my wife for this work.” Overall,

45 percent of the mentors who responded to the survey think that increased allowances would improve the mentoring system.

Twenty one percent of all mentor respondents cited late payments for work performed as their biggest frustration of being a mentor, and all 27 focus group participants said they were paid late for their mentoring visits.

Other Areas for Improvement

On a positive note, focus group participants felt that the mentoring program should be scaled nationally and that in provinces currently supported by IPEA, it should continue after the project ends. That said, if scaled nationally, an overwhelming 71 percent of mentors who participated in the electronic survey responded that the mentoring network could be improved with additional training for mentors. Focus group participants echoed this finding, with 21 of 27 mentors (78 percent) requested more training on the use of the *KRKC* package and of mentoring electronic reporting tools.

Forty percent of mentor respondents felt that there was not sufficient time to apply during the selection process, and nearly 30 percent felt the job responsibilities were unclear at the time of application. Similarly, over a quarter (26 percent) of the mentors felt that the overall application process was unclear.

Focus group participants said that resources such as printers or photocopiers to produce mentoring report templates, tablets, or smart phones for digital reporting (so that they don't have to use their personal phones), additional teaching and learning materials for the teachers that they coach, and better transportation would make their mentoring responsibilities easier to accomplish.

Recommendations, Limitations, and Future Lines of Inquiry

Intrinsic factors such as helping their teacher peers, improving student learning, and growing professionally were reported as the most motivating factors of being a mentor. Both

school-based mentors and master mentors are excited to have opportunities to increase their professional knowledge of teaching literacy and coaching their peers. The fact that strengthening the quality of teaching through the mentor network will be led by mentors themselves who see the value of mentoring and its impact on student learning is extremely promising, however improvements can be made to support mentor motivation and satisfaction.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Increase methods of recognizing mentor contributions.

The Ministry has an opportunity to build on the intrinsic factors motivating individuals to be mentors. To further encourage the morale of mentors and take advantage of the momentum gained during this period of implementation of the revitalized mentor network system, the Ministry should consider additional low-cost ways in which to recognize mentors for their work, such as:

- At the school level, school directors could share information about school-based mentors with school management committees to formally recognize mentors with appreciation events or other activities within the community.
- District Education Offices could provide mentors with a certificate that they can display and add to their documentation of professional experience.
- The central Ministry could initiate recognition programs to be administered at cluster, district, province, and the national level for high-performing mentors to be acknowledged and celebrated for excellent performance.

Although mentors did not cite formal credit from the Ministry as their primary motivating factor of becoming a mentor, this may be a result of them not being familiar with such a process in the first place. Given that developing an accreditation program involves a lengthy and intensive process, other forms of community and professional recognition like those suggested above would be faster and more cost-effective to implement.

Recommendation 2: Monitor and reduce mentors' workload.

The Ministry should limit the number of mentees assigned to each mentor based on several factors. For school-based mentors, their primary occupation should be considered when assigning mentees to allow sufficient time for teacher visits, with teachers having fewer mentees than other positions that have greater control over scheduling.

The number of mentees assigned to master mentors should take into consideration the distances, road conditions and other conditions of travel to mentees so that they have sufficient time to visit their mentees. Senior Master Mentors (who were not a part of this study but who oversee the work of master mentors) could monitor the workload of master mentors, paying particular attention to the time required to travel to visit each school-based mentor at the school within the cluster. Among master mentor respondents in the survey, seventy-three percent reported that they oversee between seven and 16 school-based mentors. This variance in the number of school-based mentors they support, combined with the differences in distances they must travel to conduct mentoring visits, are compounding factors to their overstrained workload.

Recommendation 3*: *Continue mentor training and electronic reporting.

The Inclusive Primary Education Activity should continue to prioritize mentor training on the use of the electronic reporting system and to refine it and reporting requirements as the mentor network scale-up continues. Much work remains for the sector to adopt this reporting system and advocacy is needed to ensure its eventual use nation-wide. Participants' suggestions that more training on the use of the electronic reporting system is one potential solution for time management challenges.

The qualitative data from the focus group discussions that heavy reporting requirements contributed to the difficulty of time management for some mentors has already been considered by IPEA. At the time of data collection, most mentors were not yet using the electronic reporting tool created by the IPEA team for reporting on mentor visits and teacher observations. Once

mentors are fully trained on the electronic data collection system and they are comfortable using it, time spent reporting and bringing paper forms to central collections points will be reduced. It will also eliminate the time and costs associated with finding photocopiers and printers to print report templates.

Recommendation 4: Review mentor payment policies.

Over time, insufficient payments to cover the costs associated with mentoring (transport, photocopies, and airtime) combined with late payments for work performed, could lead to individuals not wanting to take on this additional role on top of their regular job, which would put the functionality of the mentor network at great risk.

Financial consideration should be made for the variance in distances that master mentors must travel to conduct their visits to ensure they are able to cover the costs of transport. Master mentors, who are required to travel to their mentees, are currently paid a fixed rate for all mentor visits. They could, for example, be compensated at a fixed rate for their visit plus reimbursement based on distance to their mentees' locations.

Financial reward for the mentoring role is a theme that recurred throughout the survey results and focus group discussions and deserves additional consideration and attention. The respondents' feedback on financial incentives indicates that while money is not a principal motivating factor for becoming a mentor, issues related to remuneration affect their morale and satisfaction with the role. Qualitative data from respondent state that they are willing to be mentors even though they are paying out of pocket for the associated expenses to perform the role.

Recommendation 5: Improve oversight of mentor selection.

The final recommendation of this study is for mentor applicants to be given sufficient time to apply for these roles and that the details about the mentor roles and responsibilities, workload, and financial remuneration be clearly communicated to potential applicants. While

the mentor roles are intended to be open for all interested and qualified individuals to apply, data suggest that nominations were given to individuals who were nominated by a school director or District Education Officer which is not how mentor selection should occur according to the Ministry's policy. Further investigation could be done to inquire if the mentor selection process is fair and open for all interested parties to apply, and the Ministry should put oversight processes in place during the recruitment process.

Limitations

One of the most significant limitations in this study was my inability to conduct focus group discussions myself. As such, I had to rely on hired consultants to conduct the interviews and there is a chance that they may not have pursued lines of questioning that I would have. In addition, I had to rely on them to record and summarize the transcripts of the discussions afterwards.

Given that all study instruments and results had to be translated into Khmer, the time left for analysis was extremely short. The limited timing also meant that I had to deploy the survey while simultaneously preparing for the focus group discussions in Kampong Chhnang. This limited my ability to discuss the survey findings with my IPEA colleagues to then adapt the focus group questions to pursue lines of inquiry that might have better complimented findings of the survey.

A final limitation is that the sample size of the electronic survey respondents was not as ideal as it could have been. Of 182 potential survey respondents, 23 percent (11 master mentors and 31 school-based mentors) responded to the electronic survey. Similarly, given the time and costs associated with conducting focus group discussions in Kampong Chhnang, which required overnight travel for both me and the data collectors, I was only able to conduct four focus group discussions. Their responses to the questions are not representative

of the entire group of individuals who have worked as mentors in Kampong Chhnang during the last academic year.

Further Lines of Inquiry

Further research should include a system-wide analysis of the number of mentees that each mentor supports and the distances that each master mentor must travel to visit his or her mentees. The actual costs of performing mentoring responsibilities, including the detailed range of transport costs, photocopies, and cellular data, should be further investigated. It would also be worthwhile for the Ministry and IPEA to review selection processes in more detail to better understand why some mentors were nominated rather than selected after application.

Conclusion

Based on this small study, there is promising feedback regarding the core motivations of mentors who have participated in IPEA's pilot program in Kampong Chhnang. The findings from this capstone will be shared with the Inclusive Primary Education Activity team and the Ministry so that recommendations can be further explored and considered. Many mentors who participated in this study report that they support the national expansion of the Ministry's enhanced mentor network. Teachers are the backbone of any education system and hold the keys to improving learning outcomes of children in the early grades. It is my hope that the findings of this capstone will be used to build upon the existing momentum to improve the experience of mentors, thereby improving the quality of literacy instruction for thousands of children in Cambodia.

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Appendix A: Electronic Survey Instrument

Introduction and Consent

#	Question	Response
1	What is your main job? **[Select only one]**	Deputy School Director School Director Early Grades Teacher (G1-G3) Upper grades Teacher (G4-G6) Librarian/Administrator Early Grades Teacher technical lead Other – open entry for participants to write a response
2	What type of mentor are you?	Master mentor School-based early grade mentor
2	How would you describe your main motivation to be a mentor? **[Mark all that apply]**	Financial reasons Providing feedback to teacher/make teachers feel supported/peer support Improving education for children Status Recognition within the community Professional growth Other____open entry for participants to write a response
3	Do you have enough time to do the work that is asked of you as a mentor?	Never Not always Sometimes Most of the time Always
4	What kind of professional growth do you anticipate experiencing as a result of being a mentor?	Accreditation from the Ministry Experience that will make me a better teacher Promotion Other_____ open entry for participants to write a response
5	What gives you the most satisfaction in being a mentor? **[Choose only one]**	Supporting other teachers Training received Financial support received Helping children by helping their teachers Status Recognition within the community Professional growth Other_____ open entry for participants to write a response
6	What is the most frustrating thing about being a mentor? **[Choose only one]**	Not enough training Not enough time Not enough payment Late payments for work done No recognition No formal professional growth Other_____ open entry for participants to write a response

#	Question	Response
7	How many teachers are you responsible for supporting as a mentor?	____Teachers
9	Do you feel that you are paid sufficiently for the work that is asked of you as a mentor?	Yes No
10	Were you paid timely for the work you completed as a mentor last academic year?	Yes No N/A
11	How do you think the mentoring process could be improved? **[Mark all that apply]**	Increased frequency of visits/meetings Additional training for SBEG Mentors Increased allowances (e.g. transport, etc.) Increased support from program staff Reduced workload (number of teachers; other responsibilities) Other_____ open entry for participants to write a response
20	How do you think the mentoring selection process could be improved? **[Mark all that apply] Do Not read response options]**	Application process was unclear Not enough time to apply Job responsibilities unclear at time of application Allowances/payment terms were not clear Selection process was not transparent Other_____ open entry for participants to write a response
21	Is there anything else that you would like to share?	Open comment box for participants to write a response

Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Instrument

Introduction and Consent

1. How many teachers/SBEG Mentors do you support?

   1.1 Do you feel this is too few, too many, or the right number of teachers/SBEG mentors to support? Why?

2. Why did you choose to apply to become a mentor?

3. What kind of professional growth have you experienced, or do you anticipate experiencing as result of being a mentor, if any?

4. What gives you the most satisfaction about being a mentor?

5. What is the most difficult thing about being a mentor?

6. What worked well for you during the mentor selection process? Is there anything about that process that should be improved?

7. Do you feel that you get enough financial support for your role as a mentor?

   7.1 If not, what would be appropriate for the role that you play?

8. Have you been paid on time for your time working as a mentor?

   8.1 If not, did this pose a problem for you?

9. What kind of support and resources do you need do perform your role as a mentor? Who provides those supports?

10. What do you think is most critical for the Ministry to implement this mentoring program nationally?

11. What are some challenges you face in providing mentoring? How were/can these be addressed?

12. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your work as a mentor?