



Agents of Change

Nurturing Learners into Active Citizens

Stories of the 2023 Princess Maha Chakri Awardees

Udomluk Koolsriroj

Wandee Kasemsukpipat

Onpawee Koonpornpen

Pongprapan Pongsophon

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Editor: Udomluk Koolsriroj

Layout: Chatree Faikhamta

Wandee Kasemsukpipat

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Santipong Changpuak

Sunchai Nongtrud

Princess Maha Chakri Award

The Princess Maha Chakri Award was established in 2015 in honor of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's 60th Birthday Anniversary to recognize her dedication as a teacher and her lifelong contribution to education both nationally and internationally.

The Princess Maha Chakri Award is a prestigious international award given to outstanding teachers from 11 countries in Southeast Asia: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Timor-Leste, and Thailand. These teachers have devoted themselves to helping students succeed in their lives. The Award aims to promote excellent teaching practices and inspire educators across Southeast Asia and beyond. Starting in 2025, the Award will also include Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Mongolia.

Teachers who receive the award are nominated by their respective Ministries of Education, based on the main criterion that they are educators who have changed students' lives and whose work has significantly contributed to education in their country. The more specific selection criteria are determined by each Ministry of Education, reflecting their desire to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of their outstanding teachers. Final approval of the award recipients is made by the Princess Maha Chakri Award Committee, chaired by HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn.

Acknowledgements and Expression of Thanks

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Through their writing, they have beautifully captured the stories of the 2023 PMCA awardees, whose contributions to education have inspired countless teachers across ASEAN and Timor-Leste. This book not only highlights the achievements of the 2023 PMCA recipients but also serves as a testament to the power of teachers who have changed the lives of students in ASEAN and Timor-Leste and nurtured them for brighter futures.

Thank you for the hard work, collaboration, and passion in bringing the remarkable stories of the 2023 PMCA awardees to light.

FOREWORD

This book highlights the extraordinary achievements of the 2023 Princess Maha Chakri Award (PMCA) recipients. The Princess Maha Chakri Award, established to recognize exceptional teachers across ASEAN and Timor-Leste, honors those who have made significant contributions to their students, schools, and communities. The Princess Maha Chakri Award celebrates the dedication, passion, and innovation that define these teachers and their tireless efforts to shape the future of their students.

Their stories presented here offer a glimpse into the lives of teachers who go beyond the traditional classroom to inspire change, create opportunities, and uplift the communities they serve. These teachers, each representing the best of their respective countries, have made an indelible impact on countless students' lives, transforming them, and nurturing them for brighter futures.

May this book serve as a source of inspiration and a reminder of the invaluable role that teachers play in shaping the minds and hearts of future generations.

Princess Maha Chakri Award Foundation

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BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

MOHAMAD AMIR IRWAN BIN HAJI MOKSIN

PMCA 2023

Story written by Onpawee Koonpornpen

From Classroom to Community: Shaping Bruneian Futures

“I’m not afraid of trying new things and I’m not afraid of failing.”



Irwan has been a teacher at Pengiran Kesuma Negara Bukit Beruang Primary School (SR PKN Bukit Beruang) from 2009 to the present. The school is in the public housing community, including about 2,000 units. It is one of two model-inclusive schools in Tutong District that offer learning opportunities to students with special needs such as autism, difficulties with speech, and cognitive delay. The students are diverse in terms of economic and social status - while some students hail from families with educational advantages, others are from low socioeconomic environments.

For Irwan's educational background, he earned a diploma in Primary Education from Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD). After a period of teaching, Irwan felt the need to further his education in the field. In 2016, he earned a Bachelor of Arts with first class-honours which is a joint degree from UBD and Michigan State University (USA). He primarily focuses on areas that are relevant to speech rehabilitation, that were not available in UBD, including neurolinguistics, cognitive and speech, laboratory phonetics, and oral development. At this school, he is responsible for enhancing the literacy skills of the students, particularly at the upper elementary level.



Every child matters

“An opportunity for education should be accessible to all children, particularly notably those from low-income families and those who underperform academically. To better one's life, I think education is essential,” Irwan claimed.

Among his six siblings, Irwan is the middle son. He comes from a family of police officers; his mom was a housewife. Irwan suffered from a learning difficulty throughout his school years. Both speaking and reading were challenges for him because he struggled with pronouncing words. It was not until fifth grade that he finally acquired reading. His life changed when he crossed paths with Ms. Sarina, a teacher who showed great concern and dedication and gave him the confidence he needed to read and communicate. Thereafter, he and his family relocated to a different place. Ms. Lim, a Chinese teacher, was his mathematics teacher at his new school and helped him improve his numeracy. For the better, his life was transformed by these two teachers. Under his improved self-confidence, he began trying to become better at reading. His

life experiences have pushed him toward a career in education, where he hopes to assist children who are disadvantaged in acquiring literacy skills and expanding their opportunities for learning.

Equity in education is essential for any teacher who wants to help their students succeed. It means that, regardless of circumstances, every student will have equitable access to the support and tools required to complete their education. Irwan confidently said “I believe that two things in life are essential for one’s well-being: education and manners. As a teacher, I pledge to prepare my students, the future generation of Brunei Darussalam, with these two essentials.”

My school is my second home.

Irwan had always believed that a school should be more than just a place where students attended classes; it should be a nurturing environment where students felt safe, valued, and inspired. He noticed that many of his students faced various challenges at home—ranging from busy parents and economic hardships to social isolation. These issues often impacted their academic performance and overall happiness.

As a guidance counseling instructor, he conducted a project called “My School, My Second Home.” He and his colleagues worked tirelessly to transform the school’s environment from black and white to colorful. “I want to create conducive environment to improve teaching and learning,” Irwan said. The goal of this initiative was to enhance teaching and learning in a variety of ways, including increasing school attendance, making learning more student-centered, and recognizing students’ work and effort. Irwan added “we stayed back in the afternoon and came to school on Friday to paint the school, it was so much fun and satisfied with this outcome.”

Another initiative is “Eco Garden,” which was the first school in Brunei to turn the area around into something valuable. In addition to its educational role, the Eco Garden was designed to be a hub for extracurricular activities. Recognizing the importance of outdoor experiences in developing life skills and fostering self-reliance, the school decided to set up a camping facility within the Eco Garden. This facility was to be used primarily for scout activities, providing a safe and engaging environment for students to learn survival skills, teamwork, and leadership.

Also, teaching and learning sessions for the Eco-garden-subject Science took place here. To ensure the Eco Garden's success and biodiversity, the school reached out to the Forestry Department for help identifying plants in the Eco-garden. The collaboration extended to workshops and seminars for both students and teachers, enhancing their knowledge of forestry and environmental conservation. This partnership not only enriched the Eco Garden project but also strengthened the ties between the school and the wider community.

The reason behind the “My School, My Second Home” and “Eco Garden” project was to foster a deep sense of belonging among the students. Irwan understood that when students felt connected to their school, they were more likely to engage in their studies, participate in extracurricular activities, and develop positive relationships with their peers and teachers. The impact of these two projects was profound. Students began to show greater enthusiasm for school, improved academic performance, and developed stronger relationships with their peers and teachers. Parents reported feeling more connected to the school community, and local businesses and organizations took pride in supporting the initiative.

One size does not fit all.

“The school is a melting pot of students from diverse backgrounds, each bringing their own stories and experiences,” Irwan brought it up. Walking into Irwan's classroom was like stepping into a dynamic learning environment. Desks were arranged in various configurations to facilitate different types of interactions—group work, individual study, and one-on-one instruction. The walls were adorned with student projects, each one unique and reflective of the student who created it. Shelves overflowed with resources that catered to a wide range of learning styles and abilities, from tactile learning tools to advanced reading materials.

Each student must be studied at the appropriate level and in a way that is tailored to them. Students require various forms of stimulation, and they need to explore possibilities that attract them because no single thing will be the winning recipe for everyone. **“Differentiated learning”** is the key to effective teaching and evaluation.



Teaching in a way that accommodates to each student's different learning style and promotes more student autonomy is known as differentiated Instruction. In another way, students have the ability personalize their learning experiences through this teaching approach. Tomlinson (2017) stated that differentiation in the classroom may take place in at least four areas: content, process, products, and learning environment. These areas might be tailored to students' interests, levels of readiness, or learning profiles.

In Irwan's English class, students were divided into three groups based on their current level of proficiency: secure, developing, and emerging. Each group was given a unique set of activities. In addition, Irwan provided extra support for students who were having difficulty in their studies.

Irwan firmly believed in the concept of differentiated instruction, the idea that **"one size doesn't fit all."** To him, teaching was not about fitting students into a predesigned mold but about recognizing and nurturing their individual differences. His classroom was a testament to this philosophy, where diversity was not just acknowledged but celebrated.

An example of differentiated tasks of Irwan's class activities:

Students' activities		
Secure	Developing	Emerging
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 357 words reading passage & 4 HOT questions - KWL chart - Reading fingers - Vocabulary table - Mind-map 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 282 words reading passage & 2 HOT questions - KWL chart - Reading fingers - Pronouns table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 241 words reading passage & 1 HOT question - KWL chart - Reading fingers

By allowing students to take responsibility of their own learning, teacher must provide them with the tools and support they require to succeed. Irwan mentioned "in my classroom practices, students do 80% of talking and myself as a facilitator is 20%." It is essential for students to have many opportunities to practice speaking and listening in order to develop their critical thinking, learning, and communication skills, which are the foundation of any kind of learning experience. Therefore, Irwan promoted a dialogic teaching which consists of five principles (Alexander, 2008);

- Reciprocal – teachers and students listen to each other, share ideas, and consider alternative viewpoints.
- Cumulative – teachers and students build on their own and each other's ideas and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry.
- Collective – classroom activities are worked on together by both teacher and students.
- Purposeful – teachers have educational goals in mind.
- Supportive – students speak freely and without fear of being ridiculed for giving 'wrong' answers.

Additionally, Irwan has included other Blended Learning approaches in the classes, including Lab Rotation, Station Rotation, and the Flipped Classroom. Therefore, students constantly use various electronic devices such as desktop computers, laptops, mobile phones, and tablets to further their education. In addition, students learn how to use Padlet, Sway, Microsoft Office, and Mentimeter. It helps to enhance students' engagement, autonomy, and proficiency in communication, collaboration, analysis, and information and communication technology (ICT).

Sharing best practice

“One of the best practices that I led in the school was English PSR Narrative Writing that I shared to other fellow teachers recently,” Irwan proudly said.

The objective of this strategy is to improve students’ writing strategy on six pictures composition which is one of the core questions in the Primary School Examination (PSR) which is administered annually by the Ministry of Education to students in public and private schools. English subject is one of the five mandatory subjects in the written examination; it is using paper-pencil exams. All exam takers get the same cognitive booklets or tests that are connected with the national curriculum.

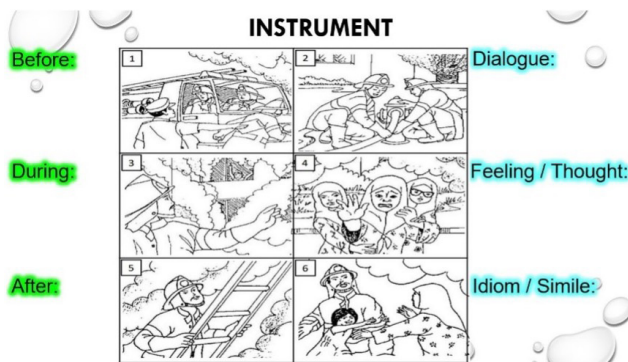
Before providing them literacy intervention, students’ writings were very much lacking in the story orientation, complication, sequence of events, and resolutions.

Irwan started to explain the strategy willingly “I handed out three instruments. The first is a story setting template, followed by six story-content elements, and finally a pre-writing template.”

Instrument 1 (Story-setting): The template gives a guideline for each phrase by using WH-How questions.

Sentence	Wh-How	Phrase
Sentence 1	Who?	
Sentence 2	When?,Who (subject pronoun)?, What?, Where?	
Sentence 3	Why?	
Sentence 4	How?	

Instrument 2 (6 features of story-content): The template provides instructions for producing sentences based on the story’s sequence: before, during, and after. This template also focuses on developing story content based on dialogue, feelings/ thoughts, and idioms/similes.



Instrument 3 (Pre-writing): This template combines Instrument 1 and Instrument 2. The whole set is quite beneficial in encouraging students to produce and arrange appropriately, as well as develop the whole draft into a cohesive narrative piece.

Sentence	Wh-How	Phrase
Sentence 1	Who?	
Sentence 2	When?, Who (subject pronoun)?, What?, Where?	
Sentence 3	Why?	
Sentence 4	How?	
1. _____		2. _____
Before: Dialogue:		Before: Dialogue:
During: Feeling/Thought:		During: Feeling/Thought:
After: Idiom/Simile:		After: Idiom/Simile:
3. _____		4. _____
Before: Dialogue:		Before: Dialogue:
During: Feeling/Thought:		During: Feeling/Thought:
After: Idiom/Simile:		After: Idiom/Simile:
5. _____		6. _____
Before: Dialogue:		Before: Dialogue:
During: Feeling/Thought:		During: Feeling/Thought:
After: Idiom/Simile:		After: Idiom/Simile:

As a consequence of utilizing this strategy, he was able to obtain 100% pass rates for his students in PSR at Sekolah Rendah Panchong School for three consecutive years.

Irwan serves as a literacy coach in addition to his teaching duties. “My colleagues at school believe in my ability to lead and coach them. We can work as a team. They constantly turn to me for pedagogies,” Irwan said. He works closely with the Ministry. He often takes on the role of focal coach for other schools, as well as presenting his best practices and leading seminars. Being up-to-date is part of Irwan’s job description as a literacy coach, so he also conducts research on contemporary pedagogies, makes improvements, and applies them to his students.

“I try to be positive in many ways. I see impossible as possible. I see failures as parts of learning journey but not something to hinder my progress,” Irwan said with pride.

To become well-educated Bruneians

Brunei Darussalam has consistently supported human capacity development. This is done to strengthen people’s capacity and develop high-quality human resources, as envisioned by the country’s vision, **Wawasan Brunei 2035**.

With the launch of Wawasan Brunei 2035, Irwan found himself at the forefront of an educational revolution. The government had introduced a series of initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality of teaching and learning across the country. These included professional development programs for teachers, the integration of technology into classrooms and a curriculum that emphasized critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

As a literacy coach and English teacher, Irwan embraced these changes with enthusiasm, his work is strongly related to the Teaching for Mastery Framework (TfM): English Literacy.

Tfm is a guideline by Ministry of Education of Brunei Darussalam used to improve the quality of English literacy and mathematics education. It is a practical handbook intended for use within the Bruneian education system. There are four pedagogical themes;

- **Structuring and organizing lessons:** plan lessons as part of coherent learning; plan individual lessons thoroughly; and plan structured lessons.

- **Teaching content dialogically:** use high proportion of whole class interactive teaching; target questions to students effectively; acknowledge and incorporate students' answers and ideas; use questions and statement to challenge students; use a range of types of questions; and allow students to discuss their ideas in pairs or small groups.

- **Designing effective learning tasks:** design collaborative tasks that require students to explore, discuss, and explain ideas; use textbooks and other resources thoughtfully; provide tasks to develop students' speaking and listening skills; ensure that tasks are appropriately challenging and do not oversimplify the skills; give systematic attention to word and sentence level aspects of reading and writing; and balance modelling and demonstrating "how to."

- **Assessing learning continuously:** share learning objectives; assess students through effective questioning, listening, and observing; provide oral and written feedback; identify quickly if a student fails to master and intervene early; expose, discuss and address common mistakes and misconceptions; adapt tasks to match the different needs; provide targeted support to students who are struggling; support students' self and peer review; use the final plenary to revisit learning objectives and assess the progress; and assess students' written work or understanding.

Reference: Teaching for English Literacy mastery framework (Tfm)

WAWASAN BRUNEI 2035

In 2008, His Majesty, Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Paduka Seri Baginda Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien, Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam has consented to the establishment of a vision for the country called Wawasan Brunei 2035.

By the year 2035, Brunei Darussalam wants to be recognized around the world for the achievements of its people who are educated and highly skilled in accordance with the highest international standards; the high quality of life among the top 10 countries in the world; and an economy that is both dynamic and sustainable with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that is among the top 10 countries in the world.

Educated, highly skilled and accomplished people

Goal 1 for Wawasan Brunei 2035 focuses on ensuring that the people of Brunei Darussalam are educated, highly skilled and accomplished. Fulfilling the nation's aspiration to be a developed country relies on its most valuable asset which is its people. The nation's workforce should be able to match the needs of the country whilst upholding the values of Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB). Towards achieving this, we aspire to have a first class education system that is holistic, with focus on ensuring students at all levels will be well-equipped with knowledge and 21st Century Skills. This includes primary, secondary, technical and vocational, as well as higher education. High quality education and life-long learning can ensure all individuals are given the opportunity in developing their potential to be part of a workforce that is productive and fulfill the nation's manpower needs. Based on the Wawasan Brunei 2035 Framework, Goal 1 has three (3) National Outcomes, six (6) Key Areas and eight (8) National Key Performance Indicators.

High quality of life

This Goal focuses on ensuring the highest quality of life in according to what is needed by a develop country. To achieve this aspiration, the main focus needs to be on key developing facilities and infrastructure, national security, environmental conservation and providing social safeguards and support needed by the community. High quality of life includes self-development, healthy lifestyle and access to facilities that enables us to achieve social wellbeing aligned to the national development objectives. Quality of life includes other aspects of development such as Healthcare, social, cultural and environmental. Looking back at the Wawasan Brunei 2035 Framework, Goal 2 has five (5) National Outcomes. Eleven (11) Key Areas and fourteen (14) National Key Performance Indicators (KPI).

A dynamic and sustainable economy

Currently, Brunei Darussalam's economy is dependent on the oil and gas sector as both its main export and income. In ensuring the economy is sustainable for our future generations, Goal 3 under Wawasan Brunei 2035 aims to transform the country to become a developed nation with a high income, utilizing knowledge and technology as the basis of development and boosting private sector involvement while strengthening the public sector's role in realizing the country's economic potential. Therefore, diversifying our economy is among the main agenda in the nation's economic development. In the Wawasan Brunei 2035 Framework, Goal 3 has four (4) National Outcomes, eleven (11) Key Areas which are being monitored through fifteen (15) National Key Performance Indicators.

Reference: <https://www.wawasanbrunei.gov.bn/en/SitePages/home.aspx>

CAMBODIA

HAY CHAKRIYA

PMCA 2023

Story written by Chatree Faikhamta

The Catalyst for Change: STEM Empowerment in Rural Communities

“Seeing my students succeed in their studies fuels my passion to help all students reach their full potential.”



Hay Chakriya, a mathematics teacher at Sok An Samrong High School in Takeo, is committed to educating and empowering students from the Cambodian community in the rural area where the school is located. In the pursuit of her passion for mathematics, she acquired both a bachelor's and a master's degree from Angkor Khemara University in Cambodia. With over two decades of experience in the teaching profession, she has been motivated to share her knowledge and inspire others through engaging discussions and encouragement. Chakriya is a dedicated teacher who imparts knowledge and

educates her students with enthusiasm and without prejudice. The most significant aspect of her teaching is that she does not discriminate against her students. Her father, who acted as a role model and guide for her, played a significant role in shaping her career as a teacher. He possessed an in-depth understanding of teaching, loved and nurtured children without bias, and was an exemplary figure for everyone in the community. Furthermore, she received the prestigious “2022 Samdach Techo Hun Sen Award,” recognizing her as the best teacher in Cambodia. She was also the author of numerous articles focused on mathematical subjects.

Quality of student learning

According to Chakriya, the act of learning involves acquiring new information with the intention of fostering positive transformations in students’ lives and enabling them to pursue further education. Chakriya believes that it is essential to instill in her students a lifelong passion for learning by emphasizing the vast scope of global knowledge, which no individual can possibly comprehend completely. As a result, it is crucial for students to continue their education and engage in lifelong learning. The acquisition of knowledge is highly advantageous for both personal growth and development.

She places a significant emphasis on the emotions and decisions made by her students when teaching.



“To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching for my students, I regularly gather information about their foundational knowledge, interests, and requirements. For example, if students do not achieve satisfactory outcomes, I provide them with straightforward tasks and consistently encourage them. I enable students to tackle exercises independently, assign relevant topics for exploration, and then request that they summarize their findings. This approach motivates students to take charge of their education.”

She had a sizable number of students who resided in rural areas. Their ages ranged from 12 to 19 years old. These dwellings were constructed using materials like wood, bricks, and zinc. Most of their parents were farmers, and during the rainy season, they only worked on a rice field once a year instead of every other year. Additionally, some families engaged in the racing of pigs, poultry, ducks, and calves as a sport. Another point to consider was that the majority of people living in the area were involved in the garment business. Due to their parents’ employment at the plant, a few students were expected to prepare their own lunches and rice after class. Unfortunately, some students felt a lack of parental warmth. Furthermore, the majority of people in the area were in debt to their banks, which is why their children did not have sufficient funds for their education and were forced to drop out of school to earn money for debt settlement. Despite this, female students showed greater learning capacity than their male counterparts of the same age. Her students faced various challenges, such as a lack of mobility and insufficient financial means to support their educational pursuits.

STEM education as her teaching expertise

As an educator, Chakriya found that certain teaching approaches or strategies were crucial to her success. Throughout the teaching and learning process, she took into account the needs and interests of her students. She is particularly passionate about inspiring young minds to develop a love for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Chakriya enjoys the challenge of imparting her passion for these subjects onto others. She believes that STEM subjects are not just a collection of tedious facts and equations, but rather, they encompass the essential elements that make up the universe.

“I find that traditional memory done by rote is not sufficient beyond the confines of textbooks. In my opinion, the success of STEM education is directly correlated with the amount of hands-on experience students experience. Students get their hands dirty by doing experiments, building robots that solve problems that are encountered in the real world, and developing their own interactive games in the classroom that I design.”

The 5Es inquiry paradigm is integrated into the STEM activities that she conducts. Furthermore, she has transformed the classroom into a vibrant and engaging epicenter for learning. It is a priceless experience to observe their joy as they collaborate, tackle challenges, and ultimately achieve their objectives. She motivates students to collaborate in groups to conduct research and create mathematical books that contain a summary, exercises, and solutions. She accomplishes this by providing them with the necessary inspiration. Participation in these activities can aid students in acquiring information and communication technology (ICT) skills, subject matter expertise, and a sense of community. Additionally, she encourages students to teach mathematics to junior high school students and share the exceptional experiences and knowledge they have gained.



- Communication
- Collaboration
- Creativity

Chakriya's enthusiasm for STEM education is not limited to her professional work. She takes great joy in witnessing a student's excitement when their robot comes to life and experiences the "aha!" moment that occurs when something previously incomprehensible becomes clear. Her commitment to instructing courses within the STEM framework entails her constant participation in the interplay of inquiry, creativity, and problem-solving. According to Chakriya, her personal teaching techniques involve utilizing various forms of technology like art and video games to train students in leadership skills. She also incorporates STEM education and maintains a positive relationship with the parents of her students. Additionally, she decorates her classroom to create a conducive learning environment that attracts more students. Chakriya prides herself on being an ethical role model for her students, both in her profession and studies, and actively engages in research to improve her expertise. She also produces extra mathematical papers for her students and serves as a positive influence on them.

Working with students' parents and the community

Chakriya made significant contributions to the community by teaching children about STEM and fulfilling various roles in the school and nearby villages. She is developing a box of information that will allow both children and teachers to share their opinions anonymously, whether positive or negative. Additionally, Chakriya initiated a project to encourage students to develop a love for reading books, which includes the construction of new reading shelters on top of the existing library system. Chakriya is also concerned about the welfare of her students and encourages them to try eating healthier foods such as Khmer rice cake, boiled corn, and boiled yam. She also led a campaign to raise awareness about the harmful effects of consuming energy drinks and chemical foods. Furthermore, Chakriya encourages students and their guardians to love and protect the environment, take responsibility for their trash, and understand the dangers of burning plastic garbage. Chakriya also started a charitable movement to help low-income students who cannot afford to continue their education at a university. Other educators have also shown their support for these ideas, and the school has helped to promote them and provide the necessary tools. Chakriya stated,



“I am fortunate to have the opportunity to share my experiences with other educators in the province of Takeo, thanks to the Department of Education.”

The most unforgettable victory in her professional career occurred when she attained the highest score during my internship as a teacher trainee. Her colleagues acknowledged her for surpassing their own teaching skills and predicted that she would become an exceptional educator. As she embarked on her teaching path, she employed her expertise, determination, and compassion to instruct and educate her students, earning their love and admiration in return.

Additionally, she kept an open line of communication with the parents of her students and frequently shared their children’s academic progress with them. After a considerable period had elapsed, the Ministry of Education recognized her efforts by presenting her with a prestigious award as the country’s leading educator. She expressed her gratitude by saying:

“Now, as a result of becoming a member of the PMCA, I possess an even higher level of honor and a new experience. My approach to addressing challenges and setbacks in my role as a teacher involves conducting studies on the psychological state of my pupils while they are adolescents, and seeking assistance from the principal and senior instructors. I have acquired the skills necessary to manage children from the beginning of the school year onward in order to ensure that they are able to learn and attend school on a consistent basis.”

One of her strengths was her ability to effectively communicate teaching and learning to parents, ensuring they understood their role in nurturing their children's academic growth. By providing warmth and setting a good example, parents could assist in their children's education by encouraging them to study diligently, checking their academic progress, and attending events where they could observe their children learning. In short, parental engagement is a crucial factor in students' academic achievement. Furthermore, the school received financial contributions from both the community and the parents to purchase supplies and utilize construction materials. Without the support of the community, the school would not have been able to thrive and develop.

EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

Programme, 2019–2023 (excerpts)

UNICEF Country

Situation

Cambodia is known internationally as a success story in educational reconstruction and transformation, following the Khmer Rouge regime of the 1970s when much of the country's education system was destroyed. Significant progress has been made since then, with remarkable expansion in children's access to education. Today, more Cambodian children are entering school than ever before. The number of children enrolled in primary education increased from 82 percent in 1997 to over 97.8 per cent in school year 2017/18, while enrolment in early childhood education (ECE) has more than doubled since 2007.

...

There are lingering challenges in Cambodia in relation to education quality and school attendance. Many girls and boys are not reaching age-appropriate learning standards: at the primary level, nearly 25 percent of children in Grade 3 cannot write a single word in a dictation test. A child who started Grade 1 in school year 2016/17 has a 51 percent chance of reaching Grade 9, which is the end of lower secondary school.

Key factors behind these challenges include: children being unprepared for school, lacking motivation to stay in school, violence against children in schools—with teachers being common perpetrators— financial constraints within households, and the poor quality of teaching and learning. This is compounded by high pupil-teacher ratios.

There are growing disparities between the education attainment of girls and boys, with far fewer boys completing primary and secondary school than girls. At the primary level, 82.6 percent of girls complete school, compared to only 75.6 percent of boys. These numbers decline even further at lower secondary level, with 49 percent of girls completing, compared with only 40 percent of boys.

While progress is being made in improving education opportunities for children, in Cambodia too many children are struggling to learn and realize their potential, particularly children from poor, rural families, indigenous, ethnic minorities and those with disabilities. Additional efforts are required to ensure that girls and boys have access to inclusive, equitable, relevant and quality early childhood and basic education that promotes life-long learning in safe, protective environments. This includes during emergency situations.

Improving the quality of teaching and learning

Offering high quality education is critical to attracting and keeping children in school. Together with the government and other partners, UNICEF works to improve the quality of education so that Cambodian children can embark on a life-long learning journey.

UNICEF advocates for financial investment in teacher training, from early childhood to secondary education, and assists Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) in its efforts to revise the national curriculum (including the syllabus, learning standards, teacher training and textbooks), so that 21st century skills are integrated into the Cambodian education system. A priority is to include health, nutrition and life skills in the curriculum, so that adolescents can learn how to become healthy, capable and responsible adults.

Alongside strengthening the capacity of government officials to deliver education results for children, UNICEF also works with its partners to help build effective leadership and management of school leaders and teachers. This is done through the Capacity Development Partnership Fund Phase III, which includes MoEYS, the EU, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Global Partnership for Education (GPE), USAID and UNICEF in partnership with non-governmental organizations. This fund helps school leaders and teachers plan and allocate their resources more effectively and equitably.

Importantly, UNICEF supports the government to provide qualified multilingual teachers for ethnic minority children, particularly in the north-eastern provinces, and skilled teachers to teach children with disabilities. This is to ensure that schools are places where children's talents are nurtured and all children can learn. Through mobilization campaigns and training, UNICEF promotes positive discipline in the classroom without using corporal punishment, and encourages school leaders and teachers to replace violence with positive reinforcement which protects children and helps them learn. To complement this, UNICEF advocates for positive parenting practices within communities.

Reference

https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/media/2386/file/CountryProgramme_Education.pdf%20.pdf

INDONESIA
HARISDAYANI
PMCA 2023

Written by Onpawee Koonpornpen

Technology in the Context of Differentiation

“Differentiated instruction with technology helps students develop real-world skills for life and work.”



Looking back on the old days, Harisdayani said, “after graduating from college, my very first intention was to work in a bank rather than become a teacher; However, my parents influenced the change of my decision.”

Based on her parents' ideals, teaching is a noble profession. She added "my parents believed that I could assist children in accomplishing their life goals through education as a teacher." Consequently, she made the decision to pursue a career in education as a teacher.

Harisdayani graduated from the English Education department at the State University of Medan (Unimed) in 2010. With a background in education, she saws an opportunity to apply for a civil service position as a teacher. After going through the national exam process in November 2010, she successfully passed and began her career as an English teacher. Now, Harisdayani has been teaching for 13 years. Initially, she had taught at SD Negeri 026147, Binjai Timur, after that; she moved to another school to teach in junior high school level. From August 2016 until now, she has been actively working as an English teacher at SMP Negeri 2 Binjai.

"This journey reflects my commitment to the field of education, where I continuously strive to make a positive contribution in shaping the younger generation through English language learning at this school," Harisdayani proudly said.



A school overview and challenges

SMP Negeri 2 Binjai is a public school located in the city center and surrounded by public facilities such as a police station, hospital, and other schools. The school has a dual-shift learning structure, with one shift in the morning (07:30 a.m. - 12:40 p.m.) and another in the afternoon (01:00 p.m. - 18:00 p.m.). There are 50 teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Binjai, and the school serves over a thousand students per year.

Harisdayani defined “my students come from Binjai city and their houses are 75% near the school. Also, my class is very diverse in terms of students’ backgrounds, especially when looking at family socio-economics, environment, and family relationships.”

Generally speaking, the majority of students come from middle-class or lower-class families. Because of the tight economy, most of their parents work as pedicab drivers, public transit drivers, or domestic helpers. Also, it is worth mentioning that most of her students come from broken homes, which can affect their drive to learn and appreciate the value of education.

Moreover, a lack of parental care and attention is one of her students’ struggles. This is because working parents often put their children’s educational requirements on the back burner because of their hectic schedules. Furthermore, some of the students need to help their parents’ selling food or drinks until midnight.

Differentiated instruction: Why and how?

Harisdayani always searching for ways to make her classroom more inclusive and effective. She believed every student, regardless of their background or abilities, deserved an opportunity to excel. This belief drove her to explore different teaching methods that could reach each of her students in a meaningful way.

“One strategy that helped me become a successful teacher is what I call “Differentiated Instruction (DI).” Having a personalized road map for each student based on their learning style is like having a treasure map,” Harisdayani proudly said. Because of this, it is making sense to refer to her as an “educational designer.”

By doing so, she may tailor her lessons to the specific requirements of her students in order to enhance their learning experience and maximize their potential. This is crucial because it ensures that all students have a chance to succeed. Harisdayani always put her students' needs first and get to know them on a personal level by discovering if they learn best by reading, listening, doing, or seeing things. As a teacher, Harisdayani may be shaking things up in the classroom; providing options for different levels of challenges, such as easier and more difficult tasks; switching up the groups often so that students can collaborate with classmates from all throughout the class; and utilizing a variety of teaching methods, such as the use of visuals, interactive exercises, group work, and technology.

When it came to proving their knowledge, students were given a variety of options. While some students may do better with exams, others may do better with group work, presentations, or conversations. "Though important, my concept for evaluation grading is not a top concern. Every student has a unique place in their educational journey. As a result, I look at their growth rather than only their final grade. Because of that, I am certain that the evaluation is both valid and useful," Harisdayani stated.



Moreover, Project-based learning (PBL), which involved students working on real-world projects, seemed like the perfect fit. It allowed students to engage in hands-on activities, fostering collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. As the weeks went by, Harisdayani saw a transformation in her classroom. Students who had previously struggled began to thrive, finding confidence in their ability to contribute

to group projects. Those who excelled were challenged in new ways, pushing the boundaries of their creativity and critical thinking. The blend of differentiated instruction and PBL didn't just make learning more engaging—it prepared her students for the challenges of the modern world. They learned to adapt, think critically, and work together, skills that would serve them well beyond the classroom.

Additionally, she discovered that the results are even more impressive when she integrates technology. With the use of technology, students are able to work together on real-world projects in a classroom setting, complete with individualized tools, improve their ability to collaborate, analyze critically, and adjust to new situations. She knew she had found a winning strategy. It wasn't just about making learning fun; it was about equipping her students with the tools they needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world. And for her, there was no greater reward than seeing her students thrive.

Innovations and initiatives in education

Harisdayani has implemented innovations and initiatives in education that involve the use of technology, including board games and internet games, reflective diaries, as well as involvement in a home visit program supporting counseling teachers. These innovations not only focus on the improvement of creative methods of instruction but also emphasize their advantages for fellow teachers.

- **Board game and Online game**

The development of board game and online game as curriculum-integrated media for instruction allow teachers an opportunity to improve the appeal of education by delivering content in a fun and engaging form. Meanwhile, by integrating technology into the activities, teachers can sharpen their teaching skills and more effectively employ modern tools to enhance the efficacy of their lessons.

- **Reflective diary**

“Students are able to provide narratives of their learning experiences through the use of reflective diaries. The careful review of this reflection data provides valuable insights for fellow teachers, regarding student comprehension and the quality of learning,” Harisdayani explained. By employing student diaries as an evaluation tool, teachers can

improve the quality of instruction by refining their methods of teaching according to direct feedback from students.

- **Home visit program**

Through home visits, counseling teachers can gain insight into their students' social context and personal lives. Building relationships with students' families not only builds confidence, but it also creates a strong network of support for academic efforts in the community. Also, let the parents know what is going on, talk to them about what their child does well and what they might need more help with, show them things they can use at home and give them tips. These can make a big difference in the social and emotional parts of the students' learning process.

- **Educational journal**

For the purpose of documenting her successful experiences with learning innovation, Harisdayani intends to start an educational journal. She also plans to use webinars and seminars to connect with teachers at her school and across the ASEAN area in an effort to raise the bar for classroom instruction.

Applying Education Technology (EdTech) can be a big help by utilizing applications or web-based tools that adapt to the individual requirements of each student. Harisdayani says "I frequently utilize social media platforms and educational technology in my classroom, including YouTube videos, TikTok, and Edu Game accessed through mobile phones, Facebook, and WhatsApp. These technologies serve to improve my teaching methods and foster an enjoyable learning experience for my students."



Educational technology examples

- Google Docs, Google Slides, Jamboard and google classroom used for collaborative writing, presentations, and communication among students and teachers.
- Video conferencing platforms like Zoom and Google Meet are widely used for blended learning English and help the students learn from home.
- Wordwall is one of gamification platform that help teaching English.
- Quizizz can be employed to create interactive quizzes and assessments to reinforce English language concepts.

With all of that, students can see clearly where they begin their journey of learning and where they want to end it. As they continue to learn, they expand their perspectives, develop their abilities, and get a deeper understanding of the world around them. The goal is not rote memorization but rather critical thinking, problem-solving, and lifelong learning. As a result, a teacher's role should include those of an observer, listener, and facilitator.

The core of these innovations is the collaboration and exchange of ideas among teachers. Inspiring teachers to work together can lead to more creative lesson plans and more interesting classroom resources. Because of this, working conditions amongst teachers are more positive and encouraging. Not only does this innovation embrace a more holistic approach to learning, but it also integrates technology into the classroom which gives teachers a chance to create more meaningful and comprehensive learning experiences for their students by combining technology, self-reflection, parental involvement, and collaboration.

Embracing a growth mindset

As a teacher, it is essential to recognize that failure is an inevitable part of progress and growth. Embracing a growth mindset allows you to view setbacks as opportunities to learn and improve, rather than as roadblocks. If you encounter challenges, do not hesitate to reach out for support—whether it's by talking to fellow teachers, finding a mentor, or engaging in a professional development program. These resources can offer valuable guidance, fresh perspectives, and the encouragement needed to continue growing in your teaching practice.

“Teachers frequently face challenges, but it is acceptable since such problems contribute to my learning process. I try to take account of what went wrong, what went right, and how things could have been handled better if things do not turn out the way I expected,” says Harisdayani.

A growth mindset is something that Harisdayani values and she is aware of how to develop one. The following are some practices that she finds useful:

- Make friends with students - a happy class helps learning.
- Keep things tidy - use time well and know what is important.
- Be ready to change plans - not everything goes as expected, and that is fine.
- Learn from experienced teachers - they can share smart tips.
- Ask for help - everyone starts as a beginner in teaching.
- Teach with happiness and being patient for everything happen in the class or school environment that not suitable for the principles.

Moreover, she consistently uses motivational phrases with her students in the classroom to inspire and encourage them. By incorporating positive affirmations such as “you are handsome and good-hearted,” “you can do it,” “let’s try slowly,” and “no one is foolish.” She creates a supportive learning environment. These phrases not only boost students’ confidence but also reinforce the idea that effort and perseverance are key to success, helping them to adopt a growth mindset in their own learning journeys.

Furthermore, in today’s rapidly changing world, it is essential for teachers to adopt a growth mindset in order to stay current and effective in their profession. As new technologies, teaching methods, and educational theories emerge, teachers must continuously seek to expand their knowledge and skills. This means embracing lifelong learning, being open to new ideas, and actively pursuing professional development opportunities. By doing so, teachers can not only enhance their own expertise but also better support their students in navigating the evolving educational landscape. A growth mindset empowers teachers to view these changes as opportunities for growth, ensuring they remain adaptable and innovative in their teaching practice.

Harisdayani mentioned “I often attend seminars, conferences, and webinars to explore new teaching methods and technologies. Plus, there is reading educational blogs, journals, and social media to stay up-to-date on what is new, thinking about pursuing additional degrees or certifications to learn even more, as well as sharing and discussing best practices in teaching and learning with teachers in professional learning communities.”

Out of her comfort zone, Harisdayani bravely entered a competition for the development of IT-based learning media. After coming out on top in the competition, she was appointed to represent technology-based learning at the provincial level. She has grown in self-confidence as a teacher since then. By providing her students with engaging material and effective teaching approaches, she has not only even changed her mindset but also students’ mindset on learning.

In conclusion, by prioritizing essential tasks, fostering collaboration, and focusing on quality over quantity, Harisdayani manage to balance the demands of teaching with personal well-being. Through strategic use of technology, regular physical activity, open communication, and mindful self-evaluation, she maintains a healthy work-life balance. These practices not only enhance her effectiveness as a teacher but also contribute to a more fulfilling and sustainable teaching career.



With more than 52 million students, three million teachers, and 400 thousand schools, Indonesia has one of the largest education systems globally. Along with steadily increasing budget for education over the years, the Indonesian government aims to develop a world-class education system with a focus on using the latest technologies. Today, the main challenge for the Indonesian education system is no longer solely about improving its access, but also enhancing its quality.

The education system in Indonesia

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has primary responsibility for managing all levels of the education system. Indonesians are required to complete twelve years of compulsory education, including six years of elementary education and three years each of lower-secondary and upper-secondary education. Students who complete lower secondary education can enroll in either senior high school or vocational schools.

While most Indonesian primary schools are public, more than half of the high schools and 96 percent of the universities are private. Public schools in Indonesia are normally free of charge. When compared to international schools, Indonesian private schools can be more affordable, with school fees starting at around 15 million Indonesian rupiah per year. In comparison, fees for a mid-range international school usually start at 50 million Indonesian rupiah. In recent years, the market for international education qualifications has been growing in the nation, and Indonesia is among the countries with the highest numbers of English-language international schools in the ASEAN region.

Challenges in Indonesia's education system

Although the leading universities in Indonesia are dominated by state universities, for many Indonesians, the tuition fees are still relatively high. Since 2012, the government has started a scholarship program called LPDP to support Indonesian students who are accepted into either the leading national universities or the world's best-ranked universities. This initiative was taken to give Indonesians a chance to have a better quality of education, hence improving the quality of the country's human resources. The number of Indonesians studying abroad has increased since then.

On the other side, ensuring equal access to education remains one of the main challenges in Indonesia's educational landscape. Disparities are still found between urban and rural areas in terms of students' access to the internet, and higher dropout rates are also found in Indonesian rural areas. Furthermore, there are significant imbalances in pupil-to-teacher ratios among different provinces across the archipelago. Coupled with persisting concerns regarding teacher welfare, these challenges impact the overall quality of education in the country. Given Indonesia's young population and the country's golden vision to become a top-five economy by 2045, addressing these issues becomes crucial, as education stands as a foundation to accelerate national development.

Reference: Education in Indonesia - statistics & facts

<https://www.statista.com/topics/9229/education-in-indonesia/#topicOverview>

LAO PDR

KIMFEUANG HEUANGMANY

PMCA 2023

Story written by Chawapan Pettkrai and Wandee Kasemsukpipat

Brave-Hearted Teacher: Innovating and Overcoming Challenges

“One possible solution is to raise funds to develop this school, ensuring it continues to provide educational opportunities for all children in the area.”



She is a petite lady with a sweet smile, sharp eyes, and a deep soft voice, who is gentle and attentive to those around her. Every gesture reveals a sincere person who always sees the positive side of life—a charm that becomes apparent when conversing with this lady. She is the fifth representative of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic to receive the Princess Maha Chakri Award in 2023. Her name is “Kimfeuung Heuangmany,”

the Director of Prathom Somboon Ban Pia Mai School in Lamam City, Sekong Province. A resolute female leader with a strong heart, she has led her students and fellow teachers to overcome various resource limitations.

Kimfeuang was born on August 8th, 1973, in Sekong Province. She was born into a farming family that was not wealthy. Kimfeuang is the eldest of eight siblings. She had to help her mother take care of her younger siblings while her parents went out to work in the fields and took on labor jobs in various places. For over seven years, her father worked as a laborer in Vietnam, leaving Kimfeuang and her siblings at home with their mother. As a child, Kimfeuang would help her mother harvest vegetables and fruits to sell at the market, earning money for school allowance. Despite the family's financial difficulties, her mother never let her stop studying. She was determined to save money to send her children to the highest level of education they could achieve. Kimfeuang, the eldest sister, tried to finish her studies quickly and started working to ease the burden on her mother as soon as possible, so she could provide opportunities for education to her younger siblings.

Beginning the journey in education

Kimfeuang had dreamed of becoming a teacher since she was in primary school at a tribal school in Sekong Province, where students lived and boarded together. She loved children and learning and enjoyed role-playing as a teacher with her friends. During her school years, she noticed a major issue in her community: a shortage of teachers. As a result, she was determined to return to her hometown to teach local children, ensuring they had enough knowledge to survive themselves. She diligently pursued her education, completing her vocational school and primary teacher training at the teacher training college in Sekong Province in 1990.



Even after becoming a full-fledged teacher, Kimfeuang continued to develop her professional skills to fully impart knowledge to her students. Initially holding only a teaching qualification, she pursued further education, completing non-formal education and middle technical school in 2012.

Kimfeuang's role model

Kimfeuang mentions the role models who inspired and shaped her teaching spirit. She drew inspiration from several individuals, including Si Feuang (currently teaching in Salavan Province), Say Kham, and Kaew, who were her primary school teachers. These teachers made learning enjoyable and had excellent teaching techniques. Although modern technological media were not as prevalent at that time as they are today, they paid close attention to her learning. They guided her hand in writing Lao script and helped her become proficient in reading. These memories became the foundation of her determination to become a teacher and provide educational opportunities to her students, just as she had received from her own teachers.

First steps in teaching: Not an easy path

After graduating with a teaching qualification in 1990, Kimfeuang began her teaching career as a first-year elementary teacher at Nonmechai primary school. She then moved on to Tha Luang School and finally to Prathom Somboon Ban Pia Mai School. She recounted that “my first year as a teacher was very challenging. I had to walk to school, waking up early and allowing about an hour for the journey.” As a new teacher, she had to experiment with different teaching methods, learning through trial and error until she found what worked. She needed to work with the community to help the school develop in its early stages. Teachers took an active role in solving problems like the shortage of student desks and learning materials, which were insufficient to meet the needs of students from different villages and ethnic groups. Navigating these challenges required significant patience and determination.

She recalls, “When I first started as a teacher, I had to use my own salary to cover the costs of teaching materials and supplies. Moreover, the infrequent salary payments every three months posed a significant challenge. I had to save and plan my finances carefully. My first month’s salary was about 17,000 kip (0.77 US dollar).” If it were someone else, they might have sought higher-paying jobs. However, her commitment and passion for teaching drove her to continue in her role, despite her family’s wishes for her to pursue a career with a higher income.

The Ministry of Education appointed Kimfeuang as an ‘Experienced Teacher’ in 2013, a prestigious status for teachers in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic. Since then, she has also held an administrative position as a school principal, a role she continues to serve to this day.”

School environment

Sekong is a city rich in natural resources, surrounded by hills. Traveling to Kimfeuang’s school is not particularly difficult. Forests and farmland line the route, with some rough gravel roads gradually transforming into concrete paths that lead into the city. Kimfeuang describes her school’s conditions as follows: Prathom Somboon Ban Pia Mai School is located in Lamam, Sekong Province. It offers education from early

childhood through Grade 5 and has about 205 students and 13 teachers. Most of the students are from the TaLieng ethnic group, one of Laos' many ethnicities, and live in the surrounding community. The students commute daily, and their parents work in various occupations, such as government officials, merchants, laborers, and farmers.



Cultural groups in Southern Laos

In the southern region of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, there are thirteen distinct ethnic groups organized around four major towns:

1. Muang Dakcheung (atop the hills). It comprises the Yeh, Talieng, and ethnic groups.
2. Muang Kalem. It is composed of the Nge, Katou, and Krieng ethnic groups.
3. Muang Lamam encompasses the ethnic groups of Harak and Lave.
4. Muang Thateng is made up of two ethnic groups: Suay and Laven.

Reference: Suwanna Krangkraiphet, 2544. *13 tribes in southern Laos lifestyle and culture*

Although Daido Life Insurance Company from Japan donated two classroom buildings to the school in September 2004 to commemorate the company's 100th anniversary, and the private sector in Laos provided assistance, some limitations still exist. For example, while funds were available for building construction, there was no budget for electrical installations. As a result, students have to study in classrooms using natural light and without fans. The lack of a water supply means the school has to solve the problem by having students fetch water from sources for use while at school. Additionally, despite receiving support for computer equipment in the library, there is no internet access.

Kimfeuang says that there have been frequent discussions about consolidating her school with others that have more resources and capabilities to develop students. However, Kimfeuang has consistently expressed her concerns about this policy, fearing that students from Prathom Somboon Ban Pia Mai School may have to travel long distances to attend school, potentially leading them to drop out of the education system to pursue employment. One thing she can do is raise funds from all sectors to develop the school, ensuring it remains a school that provides educational opportunities for children in the area.

Educational management in Sekong Province

Sekong Province is one of the four southern provinces of Laos, characterized by a fragile economic base. It covers a predominantly mountainous area, accounting for up to 65% of its total land area of 7,750 square kilometers. The region primarily focuses on agricultural production, with a low population density. Administratively, it comprises 4 districts, 10 ethnic groups, 199 villages, and a total population of 132,044 people, with 90% residing in rural areas.

The province faces both opportunities and challenges, particularly in the fields of education and sports. Throughout Sekong, there are a total of 301 schools, including 34 kindergartens (4 private), 219 primary schools (3 private), 32 lower secondary schools, and 16 upper secondary schools.

The educational workforce consists of a total of 1,869 teachers, comprising 1,020 women, serving both public and private schools.

Reference: <https://www.matichonweekly.com/column/article>

Kimfeuang has a policy to develop the classrooms into a learning resource. She wishes that every corner of the room could facilitate student learning. Furthermore, she emphasizes the importance of using handmade teaching materials to add vibrancy to the classroom as much as possible. She establishes a ‘reading room’ or a small library to provide students with the opportunity to read books donated by education enthusiasts, and she also constructs a ‘central room’ to serve as a venue for teacher meetings at the school.

Teaching in the classroom and administration: Tasks to be done together

Believing that education plays an important role in everyone’s life, Kimfeuang deeply loves being a teacher. She is enthusiastic and treats her students as if they were her own children. Therefore, Kimfeuang consistently prepares special lessons for her students according to the ‘Five Principles’ and the national curriculum for Human Resources Development by the Ministry of Education of Laos. She does this to help her students overcome their academic weaknesses and to develop the next generation of Laos into well-rounded individuals who can significantly contribute to the country’s development. Simultaneously, in her role as the school principal, Kimfeuang prioritizes the needs of the students and teachers by spearheading the development of teaching materials and overseeing the school garden. She also teaches three main subjects: mathematics, science and environment, as well as Lao language. Moreover, Kimfeuang actively participates in various workshops to continuously improve her teaching skills.



The five principles of education of the Ministry of Education of Laos

The education system in Laos is divided into four levels:

1. Kindergarten: divided into Kindergarten 1-3
2. Primary Education (Grades 1-5)
3. Secondary Education: Divided into Lower Secondary (4 years) and Upper Secondary (3 years)
4. Higher Education (university level)

In 2011, Laos implemented an education system aligned with the Five Principles, which include:

1. Moral Development: Focuses on knowledge, virtues, ethics, morality, and attitudes, such as expressing patriotism, love for one's homeland, and respect for others.
2. Intellectual Development: Emphasizes skills in calculation, literacy, enhancing, thinking skills, theories, and cognitive skills.
3. Vocational Development: Aims to cultivate diligence and readiness for employment.
4. Physical Development: Promotes good health and sports.
5. Artistic Development: Focuses on preserving culture, traditions, and positive beliefs while allowing for their adaptation, development, and improvement.

Reference: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKl8xPW9m1E&t=352s>

When asked which of the three main subjects she is responsible for teaching she enjoys teaching the most, Kimfeuang responded that she enjoys teaching Lao Language the most. This is because she wants to address the problem faced by many students who cannot read or write in Lao. Kimfeuang is particularly concerned about children whose literacy skills are below their age level, as this can limit their future educational and career opportunities. For instance, a Grade 5 student who is at the highest level in the school still struggles to read his name, place names, or simple words. This leads to further problems in other subjects, such as being unable to read math problems,

which prevents them from solving them correctly. To tackle this, Kimfeuang starts by teaching vowels first, followed by consonants, and then combining them into words and sentences. Some students need handholding in writing and detailed explanations from the very start, as incorrect learning can result in reversed or misshaped letters and vowels. Therefore, she writes Lao consonants and vowels carefully on the blackboard and has students pronounce each one clearly. Additionally, Kimfeuang enjoys creating vocabulary flashcards to use as teaching aids in the classroom.

Currently, Kimfeuang and other Lao language teachers at the school must prioritize caring for students with special needs and disabilities, including hearing, vision, physical, and cognitive impairments. These children learn more slowly than their peers in an inclusive classroom setting. Therefore, Kimfeuang must carefully observe and quickly identify these students to address their issues promptly. She then arranges for these students to attend remedial classes and complete additional exercises during lunchtime or after school.

Kimfeuang primarily utilizes readily accessible teaching materials for her lessons, making sure they align with the subject matter. For example, when teaching mathematics, specifically counting numbers, she uses bottle caps, plastic lids, and seashells as teaching aids. First-grade students start learning addition and subtraction after counting numbers, and from second grade onwards, they begin memorizing multiplication tables. Kimfeuang places great emphasis on writing problem statements and examples on the board. For teaching science and environmental studies, Kimfeuang starts with the topic of the human body and then teaches about plant components. She takes students outside to experience real local plants.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the learning process at Prathom Somboon Ban Pia Mai School was interrupted due to the government's strict social distancing measures. Kimfeuang described that during this crisis, the school had to hold urgent teacher meetings to comply with the Sekong Provincial Department of Education's policies. At that time, the school implemented an on-hand learning approach, where students came to the school to pick up their homework, and teachers followed up by visiting each student's home to address learning issues. Once the situation improved, the school allowed students to return, with parents picking up younger children before the usual dismissal time.

Kimfeuang shared that she and the other teachers at the school received support from the Laos Ministry of Education, including provision of textbooks. Additionally, there were programs for teachers to visit other schools for study tours and training workshops to improve their teaching techniques and professional development.

The school and community are committed to developing students together.

As the principal of Prathom Somboun Ban Pia Mai School and another branch school, Kimfeuang has a key strategy to involve local wisdom and community guardians in educational management. She plans to develop this into a local curriculum in the future. Kimfeuang has a policy to develop a local wisdom center, which serves as a learning resource about the cultural identity of the community. This includes displaying local musical instruments, dance performances, traditional crafts, and demonstrations of making ‘Khan Makk Beng or Bai Sri’ for use for rituals in various important ceremonies. Additionally, Kimfeuang designs activities that develop students’ experiences and life skills, such as growing vegetables behind the school buildings and making biofermented fertilizer. This allows students to learn through practical implementation and use the product for lunch or sell it in the community.



Additionally, Kimfeuang has built strong relationships with the community and collaborated on educational management. For example, they worked together on a plan to install electricity to ensure each classroom has sufficient lighting for studying. However, due to budget constraints, this plan had to be temporarily postponed. Kimfeuang, with a hopeful expression, mentioned that “the funds I received from the Princess Maha Chakri Award will allow the school’s electrical installation plan to be reconsidered.”

Teacher Kimfeuang and her matter of pride

Throughout her three decades of dedicated teaching, Kimfeuang has made a remarkable impact, earning widespread recognition for her efforts. She has received 29 letters of appreciation from local and central government agencies. Kimfeuang always says she wants to be a teacher who loves teaching, loves her students, and has faith in the government’s administrative methods. Her guiding principle in teaching is “Develop students to the best of their abilities, for the children of today are the adults of tomorrow.”

Kimfeuang proudly stated that her greatest pride is helping students become “literate” and capable of performing basic calculations. These fundamental skills enable students to build upon modern knowledge in various fields. Every time she sees her former students in various professions, whether as senior government officials, businesspeople, farmers, or merchants, she always remembers them as children. This makes her proud that they can be self-reliant and contribute to society. This is the most significant reward for a teacher, reflecting that she has transformed her students’ lives for the better.

Students and teachers at Prathom Somboon Ban Pia Mai School often describe Kimfeuang as being “strict.” However, in the local context, “strict” signifies “dedicated” and “diligent” in her work. Her strictness reflects her strong work ethic, decisive nature, and relentless efforts to foster collaboration and sustain the school’s mission. This is to ensure the school’s survival and its mission to provide a bright future for Lao youth. The life of Kimfeuang Heuangmany serves as an example of a “dedicated teacher and an administrator who manages scarcity and uses available resources efficiently.”

MALAYSIA

SAIFULNIZAN CHE ISMAIL

PMCA 2023

Story written by Wandee Kasemsukpipat

Coding the Future: A Journey of Innovation in Mathematics Education

“Let’s code for our future.”



Saifulnizan Che Ismail’s motto resonated with the promise of transformation and progress. With this guiding principle, he embarked on a remarkable journey, shaping minds and shaping the future through the power of education and innovation.

Growing up in Malaysia, Saifulnizan faced numerous challenges. “I am the child of a chef and have three siblings,” he recalls. “I was born during a difficult family situation.” Despite these hardships, his determination to improve his family’s situation drove him to excel academically. After graduating with a bachelor’s degree in Science (Computer) from the University Technology Malaysia in 2005, he pursued a master’s in

Mathematics Education at the same university in 2007. His path was not straightforward—he worked as a book seller and a laborer in a factory before finally stepping into the classroom as a teacher. “The hardships of working as a book seller and factory worker drove me to continue studying for a Diploma in Education in 2008 at the Institut Penguruan Teknik, Cheras, Kuala Lumpur,” he explains.

Saiful’s motivation to become a teacher stemmed from a desire to make a difference in the lives of others. “I am very grateful to have become a teacher and determined to elevate the teaching profession in the eyes of society,” he affirmed. He was grateful for the opportunity to improve the teaching profession; he became an expert in mathematics and received recognition as the best and outstanding graduate during his teacher training. Each milestone in his teaching career reinforced his commitment to the profession. Adding to his words, he reflected, “I have been serving as a teacher for 14 years,” he said with a smile. “I’m really proud of my job.”

Reflecting on his journey, Saiful acknowledged the profound influence of his role models and students. “For me, all teachers serve as role models,” he shared. Every teacher he encountered shaped his approach to education, but it was the students who truly inspired him. Watching their progress and development ignited his passion for teaching, motivating him to meet their needs and aspirations. “The students constantly make me ponder how to fulfill their needs and desires while learning in the classroom,” he explained.

Collaboration among teachers and parental engagement were crucial to Saiful’s approach. He initiated projects that actively involved parents, such as a community garden, where families came together to plant herbs around the school grounds and fundraising campaigns using used cooking oil. “Parents’ support brings great success for their children and the school,” he believed, emphasizing the importance of a strong home-school partnership.

In addition to fostering collaboration, Saifulnizan remained aware of the challenges in keeping pace with rapid technological advancements. He stressed the importance of continuous learning for teachers, urging them to embrace lifelong learning as a means of staying relevant in an ever-evolving landscape. “Learning should be a lifelong pursuit,” he asserted, highlighting the necessity for educators to adapt to changing times and remain prepared for future developments. Balancing his professional

and personal life, he ensured that he brought energy, health, and enthusiasm into the classroom every day. “When I’m at school with the students, I always ensure that I am energetic, healthy, and enthusiastic before entering the classroom,” he shared.

Shaping future minds

Saiful’s journey in education transcends the typical role of a teacher; he is a creative visionary who views education as a pathway to a brighter future. His philosophy in teaching and learning is deeply rooted in the belief that education should be meaningful, engaging, and accessible to all. “Learning can be defined as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, behaviors, or attitudes through study, experience, or teaching,” he explained, his words ringing with passion and belief. “It involves the process of gaining new insights, understanding, or abilities that can be applied and adapted to various contexts.”

In his classroom, Saiful integrates meaningful learning and educational entertainment, aiming to dismiss the misconception that mathematics is a difficult subject. His classroom is a dynamic arena where experiential learning and project-based activities thrive, providing students with direct experiences and deeper understanding. “I always incorporate elements when teaching mathematics,” he shared. “It aims to change their perception of the subject.”

Technology and coding are at the core of Saiful’s vision for the future. “Let’s code for our future,” he declares, highlighting the importance of equipping students with the necessary tools to thrive in a technology-driven world. His proactive approach to learning underscores the significance of coding in shaping a prosperous future.

But Saiful’s story is not just about teaching mathematics; it’s about inspiring a new generation to view learning as a lifelong journey with endless opportunities for growth and development. His philosophy reflects his unwavering dedication to empowering students to reach their fullest potential and shape a brighter tomorrow. “In my classroom, I am not just a teacher; I am a conductor of knowledge,” Saiful shared, his eyes twinkling with excitement. “I believe that by diversifying teaching and learning methods, we can awaken the curiosity and enthusiasm of our students.”



Saiful's journey in innovative teaching began in 2017 when he embarked on a mission to transform mathematics education. "I'm constantly on the lookout for new ways to make mathematical concepts come alive for my students," he said. One of his most inventive creations is the "REWARD BOX" system. "Imagine a treasure chest filled not with gold coins, but with knowledge and excitement," he described. "Every month, I fill the box with intriguing items that students can earn by mastering mathematical exercises. It's a fun way to keep them engaged and motivated."

He believes in nurturing a lifelong love of learning among his students, extending far beyond the school walls. "Learning shouldn't be limited to textbooks and classrooms," he asserted. "It should be an exciting journey that connects us to the world around us." To achieve this, Saiful brings real-life applications into the classroom, showing students how mathematical concepts relate to their everyday lives. "Whether it's calculating the trajectory of a basketball or analyzing the patterns in music, I want my students to see the beauty and relevance of mathematics," he explains.

Technology is another keystone of Saiful's approach. "We live in a digital age, and it's essential for our students to be fluent in technology," he stated. With this in mind, he has transformed his classroom into a digital oasis, equipped with technology that enhances the learning experience. "From interactive simulations to online quizzes, technology opens up a world of possibilities for learning," he motivates.

Saiful's teaching methodology is remarkable for its emphasis on student voice and choice. "Every student is unique, with their own strengths, interests, and learning styles," he said. "By empowering students to take ownership of their learning journey, we give them the freedom to explore, experiment, and grow." In his classroom, students are encouraged to express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions freely, shaping the

direction of their learning. “I want my students to be active participants in their education, not passive recipients,” he declared. His classroom is more than just a place of learning; it’s a haven of creativity, curiosity, and possibility.

Reflecting on his career, Saiful recalled some of the most memorable moments and successes that had shaped his journey. Among them, the year 2019 stood out vividly. “The most beautiful memories and achievements that are hard for me to forget are when I was selected for the McDonald’s Inspirational Teacher Award in 2019,” Saiful reminisces with gratitude. “One of my students nominated me for this award by submitting an essay to the organizers. I was deeply moved when I read the essay written by my student.”

That same year, he won the Mathematics Teaching & Learning Model competition in Southeast Asia and had the opportunity to conduct teaching and learning sessions with students at SD Budi Mulia 2, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Another highlight of 2019 was taking five of his students to participate in the international children’s conference during the I Can Children’s Global Summit in Rome, Italy. These students presented their project called “Save the Earth,” supporting sustainable development Goals 13. “The year 2019 was the most meaningful year for me as a teacher,” he reflected.

These achievements were not just milestones; they were evidence of Saiful’s unwavering dedication and commitment to his students’ success. Each recognition served as fuel for his passion, pushing him forward on his journey of shaping young minds and making a positive impact in education. “I always employ edutainment methods to spark interest in learning,” Saiful explained. “I utilize a variety of strategies and approaches to ensure that the learning atmosphere in the classroom remains fresh and lively.” His dedication to continuous improvement is evident in how he deals with challenges and failures along the way. “It cannot be denied that sometimes I feel pressured when what we do is belittled by others,” Saiful admitted. “But I have learned that failures are not the endpoints, but they are steppingstones towards improvement.”



Pioneering digital learning and inclusive education

Saiful's commitment to digital learning extends beyond his classroom to the wider school community at SK Raja Bahar, a school located on the outskirts of the city. This school, with its 54 teachers and 557 students aged 6 to 12 years, serves a diverse demographic, primarily consisting of students from modest family backgrounds. Many parents work as laborers and farmers, highlighting the socioeconomic challenges they face. Saiful recognized the gap in access to technology among his students and the impact it has on their learning experiences. "Not all students at SK Raja Bahar have the means to own devices such as laptops and computers at their homes," he acknowledged.

In response to this challenge, Saiful took proactive steps by establishing a digital classroom within the school premises. This initiative aimed to provide students with equitable learning opportunities using computer technology, regardless of their socioeconomic background. Through his leadership and dedication, Saiful not only transformed teaching methods but also strived to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students at SK Raja Bahar.

Saiful's innovative spirit has transformed teaching methods and reshaped the learning landscape at his school. He firmly believes in the power of diversity in teaching methods and strategies to enrich students' understanding. "I always seek information through the internet to improve pedagogy, especially in mathematics learning,"

he explained. His commitment extends beyond the classroom, emphasizing the importance of experiential learning and its application in real-life scenarios. Saiful's project-based learning (PBL) approach, guided by the FIDS approach (Feel, Imagine, Do & Share), empowers students to unleash their creativity and drive positive change. "The FIDS approach is easily understood by the students," he noted. "This 'I Can' spirit empowers children, giving them the opportunity to express their own ideas for a better world and put them into action," he affirmed.

FIDS approach

The FIDS approach, also known as Feel, Imagine, Do, and Share, is a design thinking methodology specifically designed for young learners. Developed by Design for Change (DfC), a global movement fostering the "I CAN" mindset in every child, FIDS empowers students to become active participants in their learning and address realworld challenges in their communities. Research suggests that the FIDS approach offers a multitude of benefits for young learners, fostering not only academic achievement but also social-emotional development and essential life skills.

The four key steps in the FIDS approach, along with research that highlights its effectiveness:

- **Feel (Empathy):** Students cultivate empathy by identifying problems or areas for improvement in their environment. They consider the perspectives of others and develop a sense of compassion for those affected by the issue.
- **Imagine (Ethics):** This stage encourages students to brainstorm creative solutions to the identified problem. They explore different possibilities and ethical considerations, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- **Do (Excellence):** The "Do" stage involves taking action. Students develop a plan to implement their chosen solution, putting their ideas into practice and gaining valuable hands-on experience.
- **Share (Elevation):** Finally, students share their project outcomes with their classmates, teachers, or even the wider community. This fosters communication skills and allows them to inspire others to take action.

Reference: <https://dfcworld.org/>

Saiful's innovative use of technology extends beyond the classroom. "I have developed several Android applications as learning support materials, particularly in Mathematics," he shared. These apps, available for free download on the Play Store, aim to enhance students' learning experiences. Recognizing the effectiveness of technology in facilitating quick learning, Saiful emphasizes its role in modern education. "I believe that students nowadays will learn quickly when using technology," he asserted. Augmented Reality (AR) further enhances mathematical understanding by providing interactive learning experiences. Saiful's commitment to leveraging technology for education is evident in his conduct of video conference lessons with teachers and students from other schools. "Despite being at a distance, learning can still take place with the presence of current technology," he noted. These online collaborative sessions foster collaboration among students, promoting effective communication skills. Additionally, Saiful has created his own mathematics learning website, www.gcsaifulnizan.com, with the aim of sharing knowledge and learning materials with teachers and students worldwide, regardless of their location.

Saiful's dedication to digital learning led him to pioneer the establishment of a fully equipped digital classroom within the school. "Recognizing the significance of digital learning for our students prompted me to take the initiative," he explained. In 2016, he actively sought donations, securing 40 chairs, 20 tables, and 2 air conditioners from the YTL Foundation for the Digital Classroom. Additionally, Saiful personally contributed by providing and purchasing ICT equipment, including 15 netbooks for student use during learning sessions. His vision for the digital classroom garnered recognition, with the school's initiative receiving an award for the best use of virtual learning environment (VLE) at the state level in 2015.

Saiful's leadership and commitment to 21st-century education were further acknowledged when he was named the most inspirational teacher for the 1Bestarinet Teacher Award in 2018. Saiful believes that providing modern facilities and equipment in the digital classroom is crucial for students to thrive in today's technology-driven world. "I feel that establishing this digital classroom can help our students learn using technology, similar to students in urban schools," he asserted. The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) and the State Education Department, recognized his school as one of the 24 champion schools nationwide for digital innovation and robotics. SK Raja Bahar became the first primary school in Kelantan to have a Digital Maker Hub, providing students with

opportunities to explore digital innovation, robotics, and programming. Saiful's personal investment in enhancing infrastructure, including mosaic flooring, airtight windows, lighting, fans, tables, and chairs, underscores his commitment to creating a conducive learning environment. His persistent effort in realizing the Digital Maker Hub aims to empower students to cultivate interests, enhance talents, and explore potential in digital innovation, robotics, and programming.

The supportive environment at SK Raja Bahar fuels Saiful's passion for innovation. "The school administration and teachers are highly supportive of what I have accomplished," he acknowledged. Their recognition has not only elevated the school's reputation but also attracted visits and benchmarking tours from schools worldwide. Saiful's contributions have been recognized by the Malaysian Ministry of Education, earning him honors such as the Icon of Information and Communication Technology Teachers, Digital Champion Teacher, and Edufluencer. Through his unwavering dedication, Saiful continues to inspire a generation of learners and shape the future of education. Moreover, he has strong connections with his fellow teachers, both within his school and beyond. These relationships extend to social media, where he engages with teacher friends who find inspiration in his work. Saiful values these connections deeply, seeing them as sources of mutual support and shared learning. Reflecting on this, he shares, "My teacher friends inspire me to keep pushing forward, no matter the challenges."



Saifulnizan Che Ismail's journey embodies the transformative potential of education when fueled by passion, innovation, and a dedicated commitment to excellence. Through his pioneering efforts to integrate coding into mathematics and harness technology to enrich learning experiences, Saiful has not only acquired recognition but also inspired a generation of teachers and learners. His initiatives, from establishing digital classrooms to developing educational apps, serve as examples of progress in an ever-evolving educational landscape. Beyond personal awards, Saiful's

ethos of collaboration and sharing underscores his belief in the collective power of education to uplift communities and shape futures. As he continues to advocate innovative pedagogy and technological advancement, Saiful leaves an indelible mark on the field of education, inviting others to join him in the journey of empowering minds and unlocking potentials. In his unwavering dedication and visionary leadership, Saiful exemplifies not just a teacher, but a catalyst for change in the field of teaching and learning mathematics.

Why technology in education must be on our terms

The relationship between technology and education has been a topic of interest for decades. While technology presents remarkable opportunities, it's essential to approach its integration thoughtfully and responsibly. The 2023 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report offers valuable insights into how technology has transformed education, its benefits, limitations, and the challenges associated with its implementation.

The flagship UNESCO report highlights the lack of appropriate governance and regulation, especially amidst rapidly emerging generative artificial intelligence tools. It urges countries to urgently set their own terms for the way technology is designed and used in learning so that it never replaces in-person, teacher-led instruction, and supports quality education for all. Here are some insights from the report.

What has been the evolution of technology in education?

While the use of technology in education dates back to the emergence of radio in the 1920s, it's the digital technology of the last 40 years that holds the greatest potential for educational transformation. This period has witnessed a revolution in content distribution, technology, even raising questions about the role of human interaction in education.

Learning management systems, testing methods, and language instruction. From augmented reality to personalized tutoring, technology has reshaped our learning experiences. Recent advancements in artificial intelligence have amplified the capabilities of educational

What is the impact of technology on learning?

Technology undeniably enhances learning in specific contexts. However, it is crucial to recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach does not apply. Digital technology's primary contributions to learning lie in its ability to personalize instruction and extend available learning time. Additionally, it fosters engagement by encouraging interaction and collaboration among learners. Notably, the report highlights that technology need not be cutting-edge to be effective. For instance, in China, providing high-quality lesson recordings to rural students resulted in a 32% improvement in outcomes and a 38% reduction in urban-rural learning gaps.

How do we evaluate technology's effectiveness in education?

The report emphasizes that evaluating technology's impact must focus on learning outcomes rather than the mere implementation of digital tools. Cases such as Peru, where laptops were distributed without integrating them into pedagogy, demonstrate that technology alone doesn't guarantee improved learning. Similarly, exclusive reliance on remote instruction in the United States widened learning gaps. The report further warns against inappropriate or excessive technology use, citing instances of negative links between excessive ICT use and student performance.

How reliable is the evidence?

The rapid evolution of technology often outpaces its evaluation. Evidence primarily comes from affluent countries, raising concerns about generalizability. The report reveals that a mere 7% of education technology companies in the United Kingdom conducted randomized controlled trials, reflecting a lack of rigorous evaluation. The challenge of isolating technology's impact from other factors complicates precise assessment. Additionally, the influence of technology companies on evidence generation poses credibility challenges.

What are the recommendations for effective integration of technology in education?

As artificial intelligence gains prominence, the report emphasizes that not all technological change equates to progress. The adoption of technology must be guided by a learner-centric, rights-based framework, ensuring appropriateness, equity, evidence-based decisions, and sustainability. The report presents a four-point compass for policy-makers:

- Look down: Evaluate the context and learning objectives to ensure technology choices strengthen education systems.
- Look back: Prioritize marginalized groups to ensure that technology benefits all learners and narrows educational disparities.
- Look up: Ensure evidence-based decision-making and consider hidden longterm costs before scaling up technology initiatives.
- Look forward: Align technology integration with sustainable development goals, considering financial implications, children's well-being, and environmental impact.

Reference: <https://dfcworld.org/>

MYANMAR

DAW AYE SU WIN

PMCA 2023

Story written by Watsatree Diteeyont

Love, Passion, and Purpose

*“Love your profession
and try your best to evolve students’ life.”*



Starting point

The story unfolds at No. 2 Basic Education High School Hlaingthaya, situated in the bustling township of Hlaingthaya, within the Yangon Region of Myanmar. Hlaingthaya stands as one of the most populous townships, housing 15% of Yangon’s urban population. No. 2 Basic Education High School holds significance as an educational

institution, offering classes from kindergarten to tenth grade. The school contains 1,042 students who are primarily from middle-class families, with many parents employed in factories, as street vendors, or as shop owners.

Daw Aye Su Win was born in the Irrawaddy Delta region in 1985. She earned her bachelor's degree in English from Patheingyi University before assuming the role of upper-secondary teacher at No. 2 Basic Education High School Hlaingtharya. Su Win, an English educator at the institution for 15 years, strives to enhance students' lives and learning experiences. Reflecting on her journey, she shares, “my primary objectives have been to elevate my students' academic performance, ensuring a promising future for them. I aspire to impart substantial knowledge and foster qualities that mold them into responsible citizens.”

The journey of Su Win was not easy. As a young girl, she dreamed of a medical career, but life had another plan, and it led her into the teaching profession. Despite facing numerous challenges, Su Win never gave up on her education. One of the most significant barriers she overcame was mastering the English language. She said, “I used to dream to be a medical doctor, but it did not come true. As a teacher, I have also encountered many difficulties. However, whenever I experience problems and failures in my teaching career, I write them down on the notebook, read them again and again, and I seek out the best method to deal with them.”

Su Win's mission was to be a leader and role model for students. She stated, “I have learned invaluable life lessons. I had a difficult path to be a senior teacher, but I never gave up learning English to uplift my life, and I wish I could be a good leader who can evolve students' life as I did.”



Love and learning

“The love of my students really inspires me to do anything that I can to promote love in learning among them.” Su Win said. Love, when combined with her passion for the English language, inspires Su Win to believe that English is the competency that will open up further opportunities for her students. Therefore, during the past few years, she started working hard to support English proficiency in her students.

She believed that different learning styles and a student-centered approach were the keys. Thus, instead of dry lectures, Su Win transformed text into interactive activities to spark motivation, foster lifelong learning, and enhance English proficiency among students. She encouraged students to elicit brainstorming ideas and create their sentences for the English writing lesson. She also fostered the development of reading habits by encouraging students to engage in extensive reading sessions with their favorite books from the library.

Su Win encouraged students to share their thoughts on her teaching methods, and she welcomed questions that encouraged student learning exploration. She consistently permitted mistakes in her classes, allowing students to share and engage in discussions with her. She explained that “I support students to participate in activities. I prioritize fairness and effectiveness in my evaluations, aiming to recognize students who consistently demonstrate high achievement.”

Learning styles

Learning styles refer to the different ways individuals prefer to absorb, process, and retain information. Understanding and identifying learners' learning styles will encourage teachers to design effective instructions that provide valuable learning experiences. However, the majority of individuals possess a variety of learning styles, which are subject to change over time. There are five common learning styles, as follows:

1. **Visual Learners.** Visual learners prefer to learn by looking and observing. Therefore, images, diagrams, charts, and videos, including mind maps, infographics, and presentations, become the important tools for delivering content and supporting their learning.

2. **Auditory Learners.** Auditory learners prefer to learn by listening and hearing. Therefore, activities such as lectures, discussions, and audio recordings are the best ways for supporting their learning. Suitable learning tools for these learners include podcasts, music, and audiobooks.

3. **Kinesthetic Learners.** These learners prefer to learn through hands-on experiences and movement. Physical activities such as experiments, role-playing, or building models are appropriate for supporting learning among kinesthetic learners.

4. **Reading/Writing Learners.** These learners usually prefer reading and writing and thrive with traditional textbooks, handouts, and written assignments. Reading and writing learners are similar to visual learners because they like to see the information on a page. Thus, ebooks, blogs, essays, or articles are efficient tools for these learners.

Love also inspires Su Win to cultivate a school environment that is safe and inspirational, where students feel comfortable, secure, and motivated to learn. Her classroom became a haven, a place where laughter and learning intertwined, as she saw her students as steppingstones to understanding, aware of their often fraught home lives. She expressed, “I aspire to transform the school into a place that encourages students to explore opportunities and pursue their passions in life.”

Many of her students hail from Hlaingthaya, a tranquil and quiet area. Several of them encountered family issues stemming from broken homes. Su Win extended an open ear, expressing, “I am willing to listen and provide support for students facing learning difficulties.” Furthermore, she emphasizes, “I am committed to meeting with students and their parents to foster a collaborative environment that ensures the best outcomes for our students.” Through active engagement with parents and guardians, Su Win had forged strong home-school partnerships that were significantly contributing to students’ success.

In addition to her regular teaching duties, Su Win spearheaded various school projects focusing on student health and agriculture. Her motivation stemmed from a desire to promote student well-being and enhance their quality of life. Moreover, she volunteered to teach free English lessons after school and on weekends. Additionally, she allocated her earnings from online teaching platforms to procure learning materials for underprivileged students, including new books for the school library. She firmly believed that the library serves as an inspiring hub for all her students, nurturing their academic growth for a brighter future.”



Student-centered approach

A student-centered approach shifts the focus from the teachers to the students. Instead of the teacher being the primary source of information, students become active participants in their own learning journey. It empowers students to take ownership of their education, fostering a love of learning and developing the skills needed to succeed in life. Key characteristics of a student-centered approach are the following:

- **Active Learning:** A student-centered approach encourages students to be actively engaged in the learning process through activities such as discussions, projects, problem-solving, and hands-on experiences. Students have to explore, investigate, and discover knowledge by themselves.
- **Self-Directed Learning:** A student-centered approach allows students to control and manage their learning. Therefore, they need to be responsible for their own learning. For example, they must set goals, make decisions about what and how they learn, and reflect on their learning progress. According to its goal, the approach will support students' ability to think critically, ask questions, and analyze information. This helps them develop a deeper understanding of concepts and encourages curiosity and intellectual engagement.
- **Personalization:** The student-centered approach emphasizes each student's learner needs, interests, and abilities. Therefore, the design of learning activities, including learning materials, takes into account the student's preferences, interests, and skills. In addition, teachers become facilitators who provide support, resources, and guidance, as well as adapt teaching strategies based on students' needs and progress.
- **Assessment for Learning:** A student-centered approach focuses on understanding students' progress and learning outcomes rather than just grades. It often includes formative assessments (e.g., feedback, self-assessment) that help students improve their understanding and skills over time.

Advantages of a student-centered approach include increased motivation and engagement. It fosters student retention of knowledge, develops lifelong learning skills, and increases adaptability to diverse learning environments. A student-centered approach does not only prepare students with knowledge or important skills, but it also enhances students with valuable learning experiences that are linked to real-life situations and problems.

Technology integration

In addition to teaching English, Su Win also served as a computer teacher at this institution. She implemented technology to support student learning. The impressive project was that she used a website named ‘www.EnglishClass101.com’, providing students with weaker writing skills the opportunity to enhance their abilities at any time. She utilized digital games and electronic ebooks as her learning materials, which significantly improved the learning performance of her students. In addition, she increased listening and speaking skills through the use of resources such as YouTube and Podcast.

Passion for teaching and hard work brought her success. In 2017, Su Win successfully trained her students to receive the third prize in the ASEAN Cyberkids Camp in the Philippines. Her students competed by developing a project using the Scratch programming language. She was a tutor who not only helped students learn and use the Scratch programming language, but she also taught them English to communicate with people from different countries.

Su Win used technology to keep her up-to-date on teaching and knowledge. “When I am curious about dramatic developments in education, I will surf various websites, explore new teaching learning strategies, and innovative teaching styles and techniques, and then apply them with my students,” she said.

Technology integration framework

TPACK is the most common framework for technology integration, helping teachers and educators plan to use technology in lessons appropriately. It is called Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK), which is an intersection of three areas.

Area 1: Technological Knowledge (TK). It focuses on knowledge of how to use technology or tools.

Area 2: Pedagogical Knowledge (PK). It refers to knowledge of teaching techniques that teachers need to know how to teach effectively.

Area 3 Content Knowledge (CK). It refers to the knowledge or lessons that are taught, which teachers must understand and recognize in the class.

The results of those knowledge intersections will be recognized as Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK), where teachers understand how to use specific technologies to enhance the way they teach a particular subject, as well as how to use technology to address learning objectives and student needs within that subject.

Reference: Mishra, P., & Koehler, M. J. (2006). Technological pedagogical content knowledge: A framework for integrating technology in teachers' knowledge. *Teachers College Record*, 108 (6), 1017–1054.



Challenges

Su Win believed that the most pressing challenges in teaching focus on weak parent-teacher collaboration and a lack of teachers' proficiency in their respective subjects. She believed teachers should serve as role models by encouraging them to participate in effective and efficient training programs, as well as promoting more collaboration between parents and teachers.

Su Win hoped that her journey and endeavors would serve as inspiration to fellow educators. She suggested, “love your profession and try your best to evolve students' lives.” “I am always passionate about my work, and I try my best to support my students in every possible way to ensure a brighter future for them.”

SAMR model

The SAMR model represents four levels of technology transformation that enhance a learning task. The model helps educators think critically about how they use technology that truly transforms learning. Those four levels are the following:

Level 1: Substitution. The fundamental stage of technology integration involves the direct replacement of a non-tech tool with minimal functional alterations. The principle of the task remains the same, but the tools change. For example, teachers use a projector instead of a whiteboard or blackboard.

Level 2: Augmentation. At this level, technology enhances a task by adding new functionality, but it does not fundamentally change the learning results. It means that technology isn't just replacing traditional tools; it adds a layer of improvement to the learning experience. For example, teachers use presentation software with animations to explain a concept to students.

Level 3: Modification. It represents the level of technology usage that enables significant changes to a task. In this level, technology will restructure the educational experience, paving the way for innovative approaches. For example, students create a multimedia presentation instead of a written report.

Level 4: Redefinition: This is the highest level of technology transformation, where technology enables the creation of entirely new tasks and learning experiences for learners that would not be possible without its use. For example, students collaborate on a virtual reality project.

Reference: <https://educationaltechnology.net/samr-model-substitution-augmentationmodification-and-redefinition/>



An overview of Myanmar's education system

Education in Myanmar is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education is responsible for Myanmar's education. The structure divides the system into four main levels.

1. Primary Education. This is the compulsory stage, which focuses on supporting foundational literacy, numeracy, and basic subjects like social studies and science for students. Curriculum contains basic subjects including Myanmar language, English, mathematics, science, social studies, and physical education.

2. Middle Education. The program aims to deepen students' understanding of basic concepts and prepare them for higher secondary education with a wider range of subjects such as advanced mathematics, biology, physics, chemistry, history, geography, and arts.

3. Secondary Education. The program offers a more specialized curriculum that focuses on preparing students for university entrance exams. Students need to choose between Arts, Science, or Economics streams. Science students focus on subjects like physics, chemistry, and biology, while arts students focus on subjects like history, geography, and economics.

4. Tertiary Education. The level includes universities, degree colleges, and institutes offering specific programs in diverse fields of study, including arts, sciences, engineering, medicine, law, and the humanities. The length of study varies depending on the program.

Reference: <http://www.myanmars.net/bluepages/ministries.htm>

PHILIPPINES

JERWIN O. VALENCIA

PMCA 2023

Story written by Wandee Kasemsukpipat

Planting the Seeds of Change

“School isn’t just about math. It’s about helping them build a better future for themselves and their loved ones.”



The sunshine glowed over Dingras, a busy town in the Philippines. Inside a regular classroom, Mr. Jerwin O. Valencia, a mathematics teacher, had a big idea. He did not just care about numbers; he wanted his students and their families to have a good life, where they could take care of themselves.

The reality of his school

Dingras National High School is located in the Ilocos Norte region. It stands as a symbol of hope and learning for many students. Most of these students come from the Poblacion area of the Town. Some students journey from neighboring Barangays, their path often requiring them to cross rivers. The rest are from nearby towns like Solsona, Sarrat, and Marcos. The students at this school come from various family backgrounds, each with their own challenges and stories. “Our student body is like a colorful mosaic,” Jerwin shared. “They come from various family backgrounds, many come from modest homes, with some experiencing broken families and financial struggles, which can make acquiring basic school supplies a real challenge.”

The school itself has its own set of problems. With more students enrolling each year, some students do not have permanent classrooms, leading to temporary learning spaces. Despite these physical challenges, the spirit of learning remains strong. “Education should be the great equalizer,” Jerwin often said. “No matter where our students come from, we strive to give them the tools and opportunities to succeed.”

Jerwin sees these challenges as opportunities to connect with his students and find new ways to support them. He believes that helping these students means focusing not just on their studies, but also on their overall well-being. His approach is about understanding the needs of the community and using local resources to create lasting solutions. “The key is to look beyond the classroom,” Jerwin explained. “We need to understand the world our students live in and find ways to make education relevant and supportive of their lives.”

Roots of inspiration

Jerwin’s commitment to education is profoundly rooted in Dingras, where he was raised within a family devoted to teaching. With one brother and three sisters who all certified educators, education was not merely a career but a cherished family tradition. Jerwin began his teaching career almost a decade ago, starting with two years in a private school before transitioning to the public secondary school system.

His journey into teaching was influenced significantly by his early involvement in the scouting movement. “As a young scout, I learned about service and leadership,” Jerwin fondly recalled. “Those experiences shaped my desire to make a positive impact on young lives.” Inspired by his older siblings who dedicated themselves to teaching, Jerwin saw education not just as a job but as a calling—a chance to shape young minds and instill values that extend far beyond the classroom. “It has always been my greatest aspiration to help my students realize their full potential, to serve their communities, and, above all, to strengthen their faith,” Jerwin reflected. His dedication to education goes beyond academic; it includes nurturing character, resilience, and empathy in his students.

Throughout his career, Jerwin’s proudest moments as an educator have been marked not only by academic achievements but by the personal growth and maturity of his students. “Seeing my students overcome obstacles and mature into responsible individuals is the most rewarding part of my job,” Jerwin shared. “It’s about empowering them to believe in themselves and their abilities.” Jerwin credited his family, especially his parents and siblings, as his role models who shaped his values and work ethic. “They taught me the importance of perseverance, compassion, and continuous learning,” Jerwin acknowledges. Their unwavering support and guidance have been instrumental in his journey as a teacher, inspiring him to strive for excellence and to make a meaningful difference in his students’ lives.

When asked about his teaching philosophy and style, Jerwin reflected on his definition of learning: “Learning for me is the acquisition of knowledge and information with the integration of different learning areas, including real-world application.” He emphasizes the importance of practical application in understanding concepts and their relevance beyond the classroom. Regarding assessment and grading, Jerwin believes in a holistic approach: “The best way to measure learning is through applying concepts in real-world settings and assessing their comprehension through various means, including oral recitation and practical tasks.” He ensures fairness and effectiveness by seeking feedback from students and analyzing their performance consistently.



Jerwin fosters a lifelong love of learning by making mathematics relevant to daily life: “I integrate mathematics into their everyday activities, such as household chores to show them its practicality and relevance.” He also conducts engaging activities that spark students’ interests, showing that mathematics can be enjoyable and accessible. Dingras National High School Mathematics Departments’ “Project Wag MATHakot” (Don’t Be Afraid of Math) transform classroom into an engaging space where games and technology made learning mathematics exciting. “I wanted my students to see mathematics as more than just numbers,” Jerwin explained. “It became about discovery and problem-solving, using tools they find fun and engaging.”

In empowering students to take ownership of their learning, Jerwin values student voice and choice: “I encourage my students to explore new ideas and expand their thinking through diverse learning styles.” By fostering a supportive environment where students can express themselves and engage actively in their education, Jerwin nurtures a sense of responsibility and enthusiasm for learning. His “Project MATH” (Make A Tremendous Help) exemplifies his philosophy, showing students the practical applications of mathematics in real life. From constructing plant boxes using recycled materials to understanding environmental sustainability, this project not only enhanced their math skills but also instilled a sense of responsibility towards their community and environment. “I believe in teaching math that is meaningful and relevant,” Jerwin reflected. “It’s about empowering students to see how they can make a positive impact in their surroundings. “These innovative projects embody Jerwin’s teaching philosophy, which integrates academic rigor with practical application and community engagement. By creating learning experiences that resonate beyond the classroom, Jerwin equips his students with the needed skills and mindset to thrive in a dynamic world.

Jerwin cherishes the moments when his students start their day with a heartfelt prayer, expressing gratitude for his dedication. “Their words inspire me to teach with renewed vigor,” Jerwin reflected. He finds particular motivation in the simplest prayers where students thank him for his strength and patience. Additionally, Jerwin finds joy in fostering unity and smiles through fun-filled activities, which strengthen the bonds among learners. “Moments during these activities are the times I will always cherish because I see the smiles on their faces and the spirit of unity amongst the learners,” he shared. To engage students effectively, Jerwin employs diverse strategies like game-based learning, outdoor activities, and a thoughtful reward system, ensuring every student feels valued and motivated in the classroom.

Pioneering education for community transformation

Jerwin’s commitment to education goes beyond the conventional classroom. It embodies a visionary approach that aims to transform both the academic landscape and the broader community. His innovative projects exemplify a profound belief in education as a catalyst for positive change and sustainable community development.

One of his most heartwarming initiatives is the Sagut-Ayat Para Iti Arapaap (A Gift of Love for a Dream) Project. Picture a bustling day in Brgy Sulquiano, filled with laughter and excitement. Children eagerly gather, not just for school supplies and snacks, but for the joy and hope that come with regular games and gift-giving activities, especially during the festive season. This project is more than just a distribution of items; it is about inspiring over 150 children annually, nurturing their dreams, and creating a supportive environment where they feel valued and motivated.

His innovative spirit shines brightly through his teaching methods as well. He has transformed how students perceive and engage with mathematics. Through Project M.A.T.H (Make A Tremendous Help), he has turned mathematics into a living subject. Imagine students eagerly participating in math activities that are woven into their daily lives, making learning both practical and enjoyable. For the past four years, over a thousand of students have benefited from this approach, gaining not just mathematical skills but also a sense of responsibility and practical knowledge that extends beyond the classroom.



In the halls of Dingras NHS, Mathematics Department’s Wag Mathakot Project stands as an example of hope for grade 7 learners struggling with numeracy. Through personalized tutorial sessions and remedial activities, Jerwin and his fellow teachers provide the support these students need to grasp and master basic mathematical operations. “Together with my fellow teachers, we served as a bridge to connect the heart of the learners to the good Samaritans for the materials, snacks, and other operational expenses,” Jerwin reflected.

His dedication goes beyond educational initiatives; he also focuses on community infrastructure and resilience. The “AGBALAYGI” PROJECT is a testament to this commitment. Imagine the joy and relief of families as they move into one of the 34 concrete homes that Jerwin helped facilitate. These homes provide stability and security, allowing hundreds of individuals to lay a solid foundation for a better future.

Another inspiring project is the Backyard to Kitchen Project, spearheaded by the International Professionals Association of Dingras Inc. which was implemented by Mr. Jerwin Valencia. Visualize families in Dingras transforming their backyards into thriving gardens. By distributing vegetable seeds, it promotes sustainable living and food security. The initiative, known locally as “BIN-I,” empowers families to save seeds for future crops, fostering long-term self-sufficiency and resilience.

As the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management and scouting coordinator, he spearheads Project Iligtas (Save), which focuses on waste management, disaster preparedness, and community building activities. Imagine a community coming together, learning to manage waste effectively, preparing for disasters, and building a resilient, environmentally conscious society.

Through these pioneering projects, Jerwin exemplifies leadership and dedication in transforming lives and building a brighter future for his students and the community. His innovative spirit and commitment to community transformation serve as an example of inspiration, illustrating the profound impact teachers can have beyond the classroom walls.

Handling challenges and learning from failures

“In teaching, every challenge is an opportunity for growth,” Jerwin asserted. He tackles setbacks with resilience and sincerity, using each experience to refine his teaching approach and better support his students’ diverse needs. By focusing on continuous improvement and learning from mistakes, Jerwin exemplifies his dedication to student success and personal development as an educator.

To new teachers, Jerwin offers sage advice: “Embrace your journey with passion and perseverance. Seek support from peers and community members; together, we can make a meaningful impact.” He stays current in education trends through professional development activities, advocating for lifelong learning and skill expansion. Outside of teaching, Jerwin finds balance in charitable activities, cycling, and environmental advocacy, emphasizing the importance of nurturing personal interests for overall well-being.

Navigating challenges and inspiring growth

Jerwin’s journey as an educator is a testament to resilience and continuous improvement. Guided by the belief that “practice makes perfect,” he embraces challenges as opportunities to learn and grow. “My lapses serve as my springboard for me to do my best in catering to the needs of my students,” Jerwin reflects. He approaches problems with commitment and sincerity, resolving each issue thoroughly to prevent further mistakes.

Jerwin’s dedication extends beyond his own development; he is passionate about mentoring new teachers. He encourages them to strive for excellence and seek support from those around them. “There are so many good Samaritans who are willing to support us in our endeavors. They are only waiting for us to touch their lives to ignite

it more for the Glory of God,” he advised. Jerwin emphasizes the importance of pushing oneself to the limits, confident that every initiative will yield positive outcomes.

Jerwin embraced lifelong learning, actively participating in professional activities to stay informed about current trends in education. He firmly held that “learning was a continuous process, available anytime, anywhere, and from anyone.” By exploring new experiences, exchanging ideas with peers, and continually improving his skills, Jerwin attempted to enhance the effectiveness and innovation of his teaching.

Balancing teaching responsibilities with personal well-being is a strength of Jerwin’s. He values maintaining a healthy work-life balance and encourages colleagues to explore activities outside of teaching, such as charity work, leadership training, and humanitarian endeavors. Personally, Jerwin finds serenity in pursuits like motorcycle riding and gardening. “Participate in activities that bring you peace. Teaching alone shouldn’t exhaust our strength,” he advised. This holistic approach helps him stay energized and inspired, both within and beyond the classroom.

Jerwin’s journey as an educator embodies dedication, innovation, and a profound commitment to both his students and community. Through initiatives projects, Jerwin has not only enriched educational experiences but also fostered sustainable community development. His approach, grounded in empathy and practicality, underscores the transformative power of education beyond the confines of the classroom. Jerwin’s story serves as an inspiring example for teachers, illustrating how passion, creativity, and community engagement can create lasting change and empower future generations. As we reflect on his achievements, let us carry forward Jerwin’s ethos of service and leadership, striving to make a meaningful impact in the lives of our students and communities alike.



Why is it important to make connections with the real world when teaching math concepts?

Making real-world connections when teaching math is critical for helping students understand the relevance and practical applications of mathematical concepts. When math is taught in isolation without context, it can seem abstract, boring, and purposeless to students. However, relating math topics to real-world examples helps get students engaged and invested in developing stronger math skills. Here are some key reasons why connecting math concepts to the real world matters:

- **Increases Student Engagement:** Using real-world math examples gets students interested and enthusiastic to learn. Discussing practical applications makes the learning process more fun and interactive.
- **Enhances Understanding:** Providing context through real-world connections facilitates deeper and more meaningful learning. Students grasp abstract concepts better when they can relate it to tangible situations.
- **Develops Problem-Solving Skills:** Exposing students to real-world math problems enhances their critical thinking abilities to creatively apply mathematical knowledge. This builds confidence in using math to solve daily challenges.
- **Shows Relevance of Math:** Highlighting real-world uses demolishes the notion that math is irrelevant. Students realize that strong math skills are imperative for managing practical tasks and real-life goals. This intrinsic motivation propels learning.
- **Prepares Students for Life:** Equipping students to use math in real-world contexts prepares them for professional and personal situations where math literacy is essential. This builds life-long skills.

In summary, utilizing a real-world connected math curriculum fosters deeper understanding and engagement among students while also developing crucial mathematical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Connecting abstract concepts to practical real-world applications is thus pivotal for meaningful and enduring math learning.

How do you make real world connections in math?

Making real-world connections in math lessons helps students see how math applies in everyday life. Here are some tips:

Use real-world examples and case studies

- When teaching concepts like percentages, use examples like sales prices and tips at restaurants. Ask students to calculate discounts on items they might buy.
- Incorporate real news stories and data into statistics lessons. Have students analyze and interpret graphs.
- For geometry, provide diagrams of everyday objects like houses, sports fields, or roads. Ask questions about area, perimeter, volume, etc.

Encourage mathematical thinking in daily life

- Have students measure ingredients when cooking and calculate ratios.
 - Prompt them to figure out distances to places they go using maps.
 - Suggest they keep track of sports statistics or savings account interest.
- Making these connections helps math feel relevant. Students then better retain concepts for using math skills in real world situations.

Real-World Math curriculum: Bridging classroom and life

Integrating real-life applications into math lessons provides meaningful contexts for students to develop critical thinking skills. When math concepts are taught in isolation, students struggle to comprehend their relevance outside the classroom. A real-world math curriculum bridges this gap by linking lessons to tangible scenarios students regularly encounter.

Rather than relying solely on textbook word problems, teachers can rewrite questions using more relatable situations from students' day-to-day experiences. For example, an algebra lesson on solving systems of equations could feature a baking scenario where students calculate ingredient amounts and costs to stay within a budget. Local sports examples featuring player or team stats also motivate students to engage with challenging concepts like analytic geometry and probability.

Real world Math examples: Enhancing lesson plans

Creating authentic real-world connections requires reworking lesson and assignment prompts to resonate more concretely for students. Here are tips for enhancing existing lesson plans:

- Replace generic names and locations in word problems with local references students recognize. This immediacy promotes buy-in.
 - Feature topics aligned to students' personal interests and future aspirations to highlight math relevance in those areas. Tap into pop culture trends and current events that fascinate learners.
 - Develop a question bank of real-world scenarios tailored to your community such as:
 - o Calculating costs and concrete needs for community garden projects
 - o Analyzing nutrition data and planning balanced menus reflecting students' food preferences
 - o Interpreting transit maps and schedules to evaluate commute times and carbon footprints across different transportation modes
- Grounding math concepts in tangible contexts enables deeper exploration of how mathematical reasoning applies in everyday situations.

Real world Math problems: Crafting new assessments

In addition to modifying existing curriculum materials, teachers can design custom assignments addressing real community needs. Math tasks rooted in projects with personal relevance enhance motivation and comprehension. Consider these starting points:

Personal finance

- Creating monthly budgets factoring in expenses like cell phone plans, streaming subscriptions, eating out costs and balancing against real income data
- Researching price trends to predict future college tuition based on current rates
- Comparing total lifetime earnings across different careers spanning retirement age timelines

Sports analytics

- Crunching game stats to develop fantasy league draft strategies
- Analyzing shot percentages and scoring averages to predict match outcomes
- Designing floor plans and seating configurations for new local stadiums and arenas

Baking conversions

- Adjusting cookie recipes to yield desired serving sizes
- Calculating ingredient substitutions to accommodate food allergies
- Scaling cake pans and baking times for layered tortes

Anchoring assignments in practical real-world applications gives students opportunities to interpret and evaluate mathematical concepts in personally relevant contexts, driving deeper engagement.

Reference: <https://lessonbud.com/blog/teaching-real-world-applications-of-math-concepts/>

SINGAPORE PENNY CHONG PMCA 2023

Story written by Udomluk Koolsriroj

Seeing Beyond Sight

*“Whenever I see my visually impaired students achieve their goals,
I am incredibly proud.”*



After spending their early years at a special school, the majority of visually impaired (VI) students face a dramatic transition when they enroll in Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary School (AISS). In the beginning, they have to find their way around much larger facilities while studying side by side with sighted students, many of whom are making new friendships with disabled people. However, after a year or two, the disparities between them become less noticeable when those same students are able to attend camps, perform in public, and serve the community together.

Ms. Penny Chong, a school alumna, is the driving force behind these integration initiatives. The first time I met her, she was a cute, petite, slender woman in a gorgeous skirt and high heels strolling swiftly around Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary School. She looked really pleasant. It's difficult to believe she's visually impaired herself.

Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary School in Singapore offers a mainstream education program for visually impaired students. Penny is in charge of a program for students with special needs at AISS. This program is for VI students in mainstream schools. AISS first implemented this program in 1967 and currently supports five VI students who require additional assistance.



The program aims to integrate VI students into a mainstream school environment, offering them the opportunity to study and work alongside their sighted peers. By doing so, it prepares them for the challenges they will encounter in tertiary education and future employment. The program not only fosters socialization and mental openness with sighted classmates but also promotes self-reliance and resourcefulness in problem-solving. To ensure a comprehensive education, it includes specially designed enrichment programs that enhance the overall learning experience for VI students.

Penny's VI students come mainly from Lighthouse School, a special primary school for VI children.

A journey towards becoming a teacher

When Penny was just nine years old, a medical condition damaged her optic nerves, taking away her sight and altering the course of her young life. Faced with this profound challenge, she joined a special school tailored to support students with visual impairments, where she began to navigate her new world. Despite the obstacles, her resilience shone through as she moved on to Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary School and later achieved her dream of enrolling at the National University of Singapore.

After graduating with honors in history from the prestigious National University of Singapore, Penny set her sights on a teaching career. However, there weren't any open teaching positions at the time. So, she turned her talents to work in the Braille Production Unit at Lighthouse School. For three years, Penny honed her craft as a brailist, meticulously transcribing text into Braille, a tactile writing system that allows blind and visually impaired people to read and write.

The chance to fulfill her dream of teaching finally arrived when Penny received a life-changing call from a former teacher at her alma mater, Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary School. Her old teacher contacted her to see if she was interested in becoming a resource teacher for VI students. Penny eagerly expressed her interest, thrilled at the prospect, and the process began. To prepare for this new chapter, she embarked on a rigorous one-year teacher training program at the prominent National Institute of Education (NIE). After successfully completing the program in 2008, Penny returned to AISS, but this time as a dedicated teacher rather than a student.

Penny has been a teacher for fifteen years. She is the only one in her family who chose teaching as a career.

Role models as a good teacher

At nine years old, a sudden twist of fate took Penny's sight, but through the darkness, a guiding light emerged: her father. With unwavering determination, he left the Navy and became her steadfast rock. Refusing to let her disability define her, he filled her life with a spirit of boundless positivity and fierce resolve.

Her father became her teacher, cheerleader, and compass. Whenever Penny faced difficulties, she knew she could rely on him for unwavering support. He encouraged her to cast aside self-pity and confront every challenge with determination, always aiming for her personal best. His creative approach transformed geography lessons, once dependent on sight. Boxes became mountains, erasers became islands, and rulers became rivers, creating a tactile world that enhanced her understanding and nurtured her growth.

His influence extended far beyond academics. He imparted to her the deep value of giving back and paying kindness forward, embedding these principles as core values that would guide her throughout her life. With her father's unwavering support, Penny navigated the world not by sight but with a heart full of determination and a spirit brimming with gratitude.

When she transitioned to AISS in the 1990s, she moved from a small class of three to a bustling class of forty. This shift brought new challenges, as learning materials were not specifically designed for VI students, requiring her to adapt and overcome additional obstacles.

Penny recalls that she and her classmates required a literature guide that was not accessible in Braille. Her teacher, Ms. Deborah Ng, who was also visually impaired, took on the task of creating the Braille translation. Ms. Deborah ensured that her students had the necessary learning materials in Braille. "What impressed me the most was that she was completely blind and couldn't read print books," said Penny. "She had to braille a literature guide manually, word by word, page by page, as technology was not so advanced at that time."

Ms. Deborah's dedication left a profound mark on Penny. "Her commitment truly inspired me," Penny recalls. "Despite her own challenges, she showed me how to overcome obstacles and push boundaries in a sighted world." This inspiration ignited Penny's passion to support young people like herself, and for the past 15 years, she has devoted her career to being a resource teacher for VI students. Remarkably, Penny now works alongside her former mentor, Ms. Deborah, who continues to provide invaluable support as a colleague. "Whenever I feel overwhelmed, Miss Deborah is always there to lend a hand," Penny shared.

Throughout her student years, Penny received unwavering support from her family, friends, and teachers, which left a lasting impression on her. This support inspired her to give back and help others as she grew up. Penny took advantage of the opportunity to help students with special needs by becoming a teacher. Having navigated the education system as a VI student herself, she deeply understands the challenges VI students face. “I want to help them develop the skills they need to live independently and build their confidence,” she explained. “I also hope to instill greater empathy among sighted students and encourage them to learn how to support and care for their VI peers.”

Her belief: Visual impairment is not a hindrance but a challenge to dream of the impossible.

“I believe that learning extends beyond academic pursuits,” Penny said. It is equally important to equip our students with the necessary knowledge, life skills, and values, enabling them to become reflective, creative, and responsible individuals. They need to acquire skills to be ready to rise above the challenges and do well in the uncertain future.”

Penny’s main goal is to encourage VI students to push themselves and embark on activities they never thought were possible. This, in turn, will strengthen their resilience, confidence, and adaptation to the world around them. “Every student can learn. Every student is teachable. So long as the students have the right mindset, they will be able to achieve their potential,” she believes. Penny constantly challenges her visually impaired students to venture out of their comfort zone, seize opportunities, and give back to the community.

Here are some of her most memorable teaching moments and success stories with her VI students.

Toh Bo Sheng, an AISS 2021 graduate, made history by becoming the first visually impaired student at Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary School to take Chinese Language at the N-Level examinations. The challenge to study the subject was significant, as the Chinese language, unlike languages based on the English alphabet, does not naturally

translate into Braille, making it exponentially more difficult to learn. Typically, teachers exempt visually impaired students from subjects like Chinese and Tamil, offering them Malay in Braille instead if they have some basic knowledge of the language.

Bo Sheng had never learned Chinese in school. In Secondary 1, he took Malay Language, but his grades were weak. However, when Penny, a dedicated teacher, realized that Bo Sheng spoke Mandarin fluently because of his love for Mandarin documentaries, she recommended he switch to Chinese in Secondary 2. Penny recognized Bo Sheng's enthusiasm for learning Chinese and explored various technologies to provide him with access to Chinese learning materials. Her efforts paid off, and Bo Sheng excelled in his national exams. "He enjoyed his studies at AISS, and I am proud to have journeyed with him as the first VI student to take Chinese at AISS. This also opens up more options for future VI students," Penny said with a smile.

Bo Sheng and his visually impaired friend were able to join their classmates in the mainstream Outdoor Learning Experience (OLE). Participating in physical activities together with their sighted peers allowed both groups of students to build rapport through play. The visually impaired students learned to trust their classmates, while the sighted students learned to look after their visually impaired friends. "I am so glad to be able to work with the Physical Education department to allow Bo Sheng and another visually impaired student to take part in the mainstream outdoor learning experience with their classmates," Penny said.

Dickson Tan, one of her first batch of students, is currently a software engineer at GovTech. He has a passion for information and communication technology (ICT). "I was very moved when I received a recording from his mother during an award ceremony where he thanked the teacher who taught him computer skills," Penny recalled with a sense of pride. "I taught him computer skills when he was in primary school and at AISS. I was delighted that he developed a passion for technology and used IT to pursue his learning." Dickson works with his team to develop digital platforms for the Singapore government.

In 2016, John Danesh created a play based on crime while participating in Unseen Constellations, a project where Penny's visually impaired students worked with their sighted mentors to produce skits and other exhibits for the public based on their career aspirations. Penny collaborated with artist Alecia Neo on this initiative. At the time, John was not accustomed to moving around independently, and the experience

pushed him to pursue his interests and venture beyond his comfort zone.

John's interest in criminal psychology led him to meet two mentors: a blind counselor who works in the prison and a police officer. Today, he is studying a subject he enjoys at a university in Tasmania, Australia, with the goal of becoming a lawyer someday.

Penny explained, "When my students express interest in areas that visually impaired students in our school have never pursued, I work with the relevant departments to create opportunities for them to try." She believes in providing learning opportunities based on her students' choices and interests. Such success stories open up more possibilities for future students and inspire them to pursue their passions.

"Similarly, we provided support to a few visually impaired students who were interested in taking music as a subject, and one of them did very well. He is now pursuing a diploma in music in his tertiary education," she added.

Penny's dedication has enabled visually impaired students to not only participate in mainstream education but also excel in subjects they are passionate about. "Whenever I see my visually impaired students achieve their goals, I am incredibly proud," she shared.

Innovating for inclusion

Penny is a huge fan of technology. "Technology is very important," she reiterated. "If a visually impaired person does not have it, it's very difficult to survive in society today." Penny has truly embraced the philosophy of sustainable and innovative education practices. She led an initiative using ICT (Information and Communication Technology) to empower visually impaired students.

To foster a lifelong love of learning, Penny encourages her students to experiment with new methods of learning, such as adopting technology to access resources. Laptops with screen readers have provided visually impaired students with access to a vast amount of digital material and the ability to receive

immediate feedback from their teachers. As a result, they have gained more independence in their learning journey.

“My students are capable of conducting their own research. This undoubtedly boosts their self-esteem, ultimately increasing their desire to learn independently,” Penny explained.

Penny trains her students to listen to and type in Chinese using a computer with a screen reader and other assistive devices like a Braille note-taker. This device functions similarly to an electronic Braille book, allowing students to upload digital books and read through rows of pins that move up and down to reflect the words on the screen.

After teaching her students computer skills in English class, they now use their laptops to access and complete assignments. They can use their devices in class, allowing teachers to guide them and provide feedback almost instantly. This integration enables visually impaired students to work alongside their sighted peers.

However, like any endeavor, this initiative had its challenges. One major hurdle was converting graphical materials into accessible formats. “For a visually impaired person to actually access the material, it should usually be more text-based. Provide some description if there are graphics. This is a challenge we face because the screen reader is not able to describe pictures,” Penny explained.

To overcome this challenge, Penny adopted innovative solutions, including manual description of images and basic OCR (Optical Character Recognition) technology. Subject teachers played a vital role in providing accurate descriptions to ensure students had the right information.

Given the limitations of technology, Penny uses tactile methods for teaching math to help her visually impaired students grasp complex concepts. She uses tangible shapes such as pyramids and cubes, allowing students to physically feel and visualize mathematical structures. For graphing, she introduces strawboards, where students place Braille graph paper and use pins to plot points. This approach transforms abstract data into a tactile learning experience. These innovative techniques empower her students to fully understand and engage with the subject matter.



Penny maintains a positive outlook to navigate the inevitable challenges of the classroom. She believes focusing on her best effort and letting go of what's outside her control is key. Her guidance for new teachers echoes this sentiment, urging them to be open-minded, seek help from colleagues, and prioritize self-care, acknowledging the emotional demands of the profession.

She works with teachers from different departments to ensure that her students are able to participate in all school activities. Without the support of her colleagues and school leaders, none of her programs would be possible. For instance, she collaborates with the PE department to integrate the VI students into the overall learning environment. She also works closely with subject teachers to ensure that her students have the necessary learning materials.

Accommodation but not exemption

She believes that everyone, regardless of ability or disability, should have an equal opportunity to learn. Her role is to equip her students with the necessary skills to learn alongside their mainstream peers. To support VI students, we should modify tasks and assessments to ensure they can complete their work effectively. For example, providing a text description of a visual source enables VI students to respond to questions just like their peers. Their disability should not lead to a simplification of tasks and assessments.

When we asked Penny about strategies she has used in the classroom, she replied that her VI students also find it challenging to follow and learn in class. “I usually teach my students individually. This allows me to customize my lessons according to each student’s needs. This is especially true for subjects like math and science, which require students to understand concepts. They needed more time to feel and interpret tactile diagrams, as I needed to guide them in interpreting diagrams.” This is exactly differentiated instruction, which involves teaching in a way that meets the different needs and interests of students using varied course content, activities, and assessments (Stanford University, 2023). “When I conduct IT lessons, I need to instruct, model, and demonstrate the use of a screen reader individually to each student,” she continued telling us.

“We need to have an open mind when teaching students with special needs. The mode or method of acquiring knowledge differs between teaching VI students and sighted students. We need to adapt our teaching methods to cater to the needs of these students.”

Rising above in darkness

Coming from a special school, many of her VI students needed time to adjust to their new surroundings. Classes range in size from 3-5 students to as many as 40, and the school area varies from small to large. The students had to learn to buy their own food at recess rather than having it cooked and placed on their designated tables. “My students have difficulties socializing with their sighted friends in Secondary 1,” she said. Both visually impaired and sighted students required time to develop interpersonal and understanding skills.

Penny contributed significantly to VI students’ overall development by adopting a variety of initiatives. For example, since 2018, she has initiated a collaboration between the school and the National University of Singapore’s College of Alice and Peter Tan to reinforce the school’s 2-level approach to the VI program, in which VI students learn daily living skills to gain greater independence while the sighted students learn to help and care for them. Building on this collaboration, Penny helped her VI students develop their character and confidence through service-learning experiences with the elderly at St. Luke’s Care Center and teaching Braille to younger

children at Tasek Jurong, a non-profit organization that runs community-supporting programs.

While working on her students' academic progress, Penny is also committed to promoting inclusion both inside and outside of school. She creates opportunities for VI students to interact with sighted students and involves them in activities outside of the classroom, such as working with mentors to pursue their interests or showcase their talents.

“Fortunately, with the support of my school leaders and other colleagues, my team and I introduced a core program for the entire Secondary 1 cohort to go on a learning journey to Dialogue in the Dark Singapore (DiD) every year since 2014,” Penny explained. At DiD, students participate in a 45-minute walk in total darkness. They must learn to touch and listen to their surroundings, just like their VI peers. This experience raises awareness of visual impairment among sighted students and helps them understand the challenges faced by their VI peers, fostering appreciation for their adaptability and resilience through experiential learning.

Embarking on a journey of understanding, we aim to ignite a deeper empathy within our sighted students for their VI classmates. Reports from a previous visit to Dialogue in the Dark Singapore reveal a truly transformative experience for all involved. Teachers and students alike emerged with a newfound appreciation for the challenges and triumphs of navigating a world without sight. Even parents expressed their heartfelt gratitude to the school for providing their children with such a unique and impactful opportunity.

Because of her extensive expertise and depth of work, Penny is considered an educational expert for VI students. As a result, Penny frequently shares her VI-related information with staff at MOE headquarters, other educational institutions, and the Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board. Beyond Singapore, Penny received a Vietnamese delegate from the Nguyen Ding Chiu School for the Blind in Ho Chi Minh City, with whom she shared and exchanged pedagogy and practices. This exchange also widened her perspective on VI education, which helps her work with her VI students. These professional discussions have helped the fraternity expand its expertise in instructing VI students. Furthermore, her work at AISS has significantly influenced the school's approach to managing and working with SEN kids, as well as providing access arrangements for students with various impairments for learning and exams.

Kindness knows no boundaries: VI people pay it forward

Penny weaves a rich tapestry of education, fostering strong partnerships between home, school, and the wider community. An open line of communication flows freely between her and the parents of her VI students. “Parents feel comfortable texting me with any concerns they have,” Penny explains, emphasizing the importance of building rapport. “Trust blossoms from a strong relationship,” she believes.

This collaboration extends beyond the classroom walls. Penny actively seeks partnerships with external organizations to create meaningful experiences for her VI students. “I work with a group of university undergraduates,” she says, “to design activities that build self-confidence and open doors to community engagement for my students.” For instance, they might visit a local senior center, allowing the students to see how they can contribute to society despite their visual limitations. These partnerships offer a two-way street of learning. University students gain valuable skills in caring for VI individuals while simultaneously developing empathy and a deeper understanding of their needs.

Penny has been encouraging her students to do their part for the community, which aligns with her firm belief that individuals from the VI community are also generous.



A bridge to success

“Inclusivity is a big word; there is a long road ahead,” Penny wisely observes. Her life’s work demonstrates her commitment to breaking down barriers and ensuring that every student, regardless of ability, has access to a high-quality education and a chance to succeed. Penny sees herself as a bridge, linking students to academic success, character development, and communication with both schools and families.

Penny acknowledges that while awareness about the visually impaired has improved, understanding about their capabilities is still lacking. She works to bridge this gap by sharing information on teaching tools and advocating for VI students. Overcoming challenges is a core part of her work, and she credits her own supportive family for helping her succeed as a student. “My family is really supportive. I consider myself very blessed.”

As a visually impaired educator, Penny brings a unique perspective. She believes that her sight impairment does not distinguish her from others. “Very normal” is how she describes herself. She simply cannot see. Her determination, resilience, and steadfast commitment to her students show that abilities extend far beyond physical limitations.

Special education schools in Singapore

- For children with moderate-to-severe special education needs
- Schools are government-funded and have customised facilities, curriculum and pedagogy, and support from allied professionals to cater to the children’s specific needs

Special Education refers to the customisation of curriculum provided for in specialised settings. In the context of Singapore, these settings are our government-funded Special Education (SPED) schools, which support 1.5% of the schooling population with support needs that cannot be met in mainstream schools.

Students in SPED schools require more intensive and specialised assistance. These schools are run by social service agencies and are fully funded by the government and community.

Most SPED schools offer a customised curriculum, with a few of the schools offering the national curriculum. SPED schools are guided by the Ministry of Education's SPED Curriculum.

Framework and aspire for students to be active in the community and valued in society; achieving outcomes in the key areas of living, learning and working.

Schools develop quality teaching and learning curriculum materials in alignment with the MOE SPED Teaching and Learning

Syllabuses for seven Learning Domains:

- Communication and Language
- Numeracy
- Daily Living Skills
- Social-Emotional Learning
- Physical Education
- Arts
- Vocational Education

SPED schools are also supported with customised facilities, specially trained teachers and allied professionals (e.g. therapists, psychologists and social workers) to provide strengthened support for students.

Individual education and transition planning

In SPED schools, teaching and learning is also guided through each student's Individual Education Plan in the primary and lower secondary years, and an Individual Transition Plan in the upper secondary years. These plans contain each student's personalised goals to facilitate their access to the curriculum and success in the home and community.

SPED schools also implement a process of Transition Planning for all their students, to support them and their families in their transition to post-school living, learning and working. Each student's Individual Transition Plan takes into consideration their interests, preferences, strengths and aspirations

Purposeful and meaningful interactions

Students in the SPED schools continue to have opportunities for regular and meaningful interactions with peers in mainstream schools.

Our mainstream and SPED schools have established partnerships: teachers in SPED schools work closely with teachers in mainstream schools to plan and implement purposeful and sustained interactions between students across the schools. These include joint extra-curricular or co-curricular activities, recess, workshops and camps.

Over the years, the Ministry has worked with the SPED schools to uplift the quality, accessibility, and affordability of SPED, and has also put in place more pathways for students in SPED schools. We believe that every SPED graduate can contribute, and their schooling years prepare them to lead an independent life to the best of their ability

Reference: Ministry of Education Singapore. 2023. Pathways and Possibilities: Singapore's Education Journey



THAILAND

NIWAT NGERNGAMMESUK

PMCA 2023

Story written by Chawapan Pettkrai and Wandee Kasemsukpipat

Mud, Mountains, Faith, and the Exceptional Teacher in the Mountain Forests

*“I believe it’s all about the will.
If my heart wants to do something, my leg can’t stop me.”*



Amidst the towering mountains forming a natural border between Thailand and Myanmar, the path is covered with dense forests. The route was rough with laterite with sharp turns and steep slopes, making it impossible for regular vehicles to access. Specially during the rainy season, the transportation routes to ‘Moko Kee’ are almost completely cut off from the outside world, as they face flash floods and landslides. These are the initial challenges faced by anyone trying to reach this area, often leading them to give up, ultimately defeated by the relentless toughness of the path, as previously mentioned. However, it is remarkable that there is a teacher who has dedicated his life

and soul to the continuous development of this area for over two decades. His efforts, especially in developing fundamental skills and knowledge for people of all ages in the community, are aimed at enhancing their quality of life. The person we are talking about is Mr. Niwat Ngerngammesuk, the head teacher of the “Mae Fah Luang” Hill Area Community Learning Center (HACLC), Ban Moko Kee, Tha Song Yang District, Tak Province, under the Department of Learning Encouragement. He was selected as Thailand’s representative to receive the Princess Maha Chakri Award in 2023.

Young Niwat

The image of young Niwat: He was an enthusiastic and cheerful child who always loved learning. He grew up in Mae Usu, a small subdistrict in Tha Song Yang District, Tak Province. His daily routine involved helping his father take care of cattle and buffaloes, which his father bought from Myanmar. When asked about his family’s past, he did not hesitate to say, “In the past, our family lived quite a difficult life. Whenever we heard the sound of gunfire, we had to run and escape from bullets coming from across the neighboring country’s border to a shelter. Childhood was therefore suspended on a thread between life and death, and there was not much safety in life. Not only that, but traveling from our home on the mountains to the city was quite challenging. When family members fell ill, it would take days to travel to see a doctor.” At that time, Niwat’s favorite hobby was waiting to watch outdoor movies, because his idol was ‘Sorapong Chatree.’ He especially enjoyed movies where this actor played the role of a community development worker or a hero fighting against villains.

Student life, transitional years, and inspiration

Although life was not as rosy as in the movie starring Sorapong Chatree, fate was not too harsh on him, as he continued to receive educational opportunities. Niwat’s formal education journey began at Mae Usu School when he was 7 years old. Later, his father sent him to study at a school in Tak Province, entrusting his care to an official from the Hill Tribe Welfare Office in Tak Province. He then attended the Tak Welfare School (now known as Rajaprajanugroh 55 School) in 1984. After completing his junior high school education (Grade 9), he pursued Vocational Certificate and High Vocational Certificate at

Tak College of Agriculture. Subsequently, he was granted a quota to pursue a bachelor's degree in Plant Science at Rajamangala University of Technology, Nan Campus, driven by his dreams of becoming an agricultural extension officer and community developer at the Royal Project Foundation.



His journey on the path to teaching

After graduation, Niwat began his first job at Bhumibol Dam Water Supply Augmentation Project. He was entrusted by senior officials with responsibilities in public relations. His main duties involved surveying problems faced by those affected by the construction of the Bhumibol Dam and assessing remedies for villages that would divert water to help the Bhumibol Dam in the areas of Mae Sot District, Mae Ramat District, Tha Song Yang District, Sob Moei District, and Mae La Noi District in the year 1999. After that, the Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education (ONIE) in Tak Province opened applications for teachers in hill tribe areas. Since there were several learning centers in Tha Song Yang, he decided to apply. He began working as a volunteer teacher at “Mae Fah Luang” Hill Area Community Learning Center. This learning center helped Niwat discover an inspiration he had never experienced before—the spirit of teaching. He spent time learning how to work from experienced teachers at the center, inquiring about roles and responsibilities from the head teacher, who also acted as a ‘supervising teacher’ which gave Niwat the opportunity to plan, think, and implement his ideas himself.

In 2001, he began working at Ban Huay Phra Chao, Moo 2, Mae Tun Sub-district, Mae Ramad District, Tak Province. When Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn proposed the establishment of a learning center in the remote areas of Tha Song Yang District, which included 34 villages, the Tak Province sought to appoint a head teacher who would also serve as a supervising teacher. Niwat was selected due to his outstanding performance and his experience conducting various training programs for villagers, such as campaigns against drug abuse, promoting democracy in the community, malaria education, health promotion, and more.

One of his notable achievements was coordinating with Member of the House of Representative to inaugurate a Youth Development Sports Grounds, which became a model for other areas. These visible accomplishments led Niwat being chosen to become the head teacher to pioneer and develop the “Mae Fah Luang” Hill Area Community Learning Center at Ban Moko Kee in 2002 and has been performing this duty ever since.

He proudly shares that “I grew to like and love the teaching profession even more through solving problems faced by students and villagers.” He constantly thought that being a teacher was not just about addressing issues happen in the classroom, but also about looking back at the students’ homes and communities as the root causes of problems might originate from there. His original dream of becoming a community developer could be realized through teaching and providing knowledge to villagers on various topics. His aspiration to be an agricultural extension worker could also be achieved by reaching out to villagers in their fields. Thus, the teaching profession, in his view, is broader than merely instructing students; it is a role defined by providing support and helping to elevate the thoughts and spirits of every community member to develop according to their potential.

The Moko Kee learning center: Opening a new world for the hill tribe community

Previously, Ban Moko Kee did not have a school, so the children would roam around, foraging in the forest, hunting birds, and fishing, without attending school. If they were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to attend school in the city, they would often skip classes due to their unfamiliarity with the urban environment. When

the “Mae Fah Luang” Hill Tribe Community Learning Center at the Moko Kee Village was established in 2002, Niwat, as the head teacher, pioneered the founding of the center by coordinating with the villagers to foster understanding and collaborate on managing education. During the initial construction phase of the learning center, the process was very challenging. Access was only possible by walking through steep mountains, as the road did not reach the area, making transportation difficult and living conditions poor. It took a day and a half to travel from the city, with an overnight stay along the way. Upon arrival, there were only villages and no schools. The first problem encountered was that community members were illegally growing opium to buy rice. There were also issues with the villagers’ sanitation. Niwat told himself, “These problems can be solved through education.”

In the early stages of pioneering, Niwat had to immerse himself in the community to build good relationships and earn the trust of the villagers. His good fortune was that the villagers were very cooperative in managing the education process. Most of the villagers wanted a school to be established in their village because they wanted their children to have the same educational opportunities as those in the city. The villagers then helped transport construction materials that were granted by royal donation, such as corrugated iron, wood, cement, solar panels, etc., to help building the school. Not only was Niwat responsible for the learning center he managed, but he also had to travel to supervise five nearby sub-learning centers. The most convenient mode of transportation was walking, which took about 2-3 hours per school.



Niwat described the atmosphere of the school: The “Mae Fah Luang” Hill Tribe Community Learning Center at Moko Kee Villages is located in a highland area. The majority of the population are Karen (Thai Pga K’Nyau) people. There are two permanent teachers (including Niwat) and 35 students, with classes ranging from kindergarten to high school. There are 14 kindergarten students, 21 primary school students, 2 lower secondary school students, and 1 upper secondary school student. Most of the students attending the “Mae Fah Luang” Hill Tribe Community Learning Center at Moko Kee Village are from the Pga K’Nyau tribe, S’gaw or White Karen. They attend school during the day and return home in the evening. The children spend their days at school from morning until dusk, engaging in sports, agriculture, animal husbandry, etc. Due to the low teacher-to-student ratio, one strategy implemented is the “buddy system,” where older primary school students help take care of and mentor younger primary school students, rotating from generation to generation.

Later, Niwat noticed that many children in Moko Mai Village lacked educational opportunities. When organizing sports events, Children’s Day activities, or off-road group activities, the children there would look on with hopeful eyes, wishing for a school and the chance to study like those in Moko Kee. Driven by his ideals, Niwat collaborated with the villagers to establish a branch classroom, the ‘Moko Mai’ Hill Tribe Community Learning Center, in 2019. Currently, there are 30 students, supported by funding for hiring local teachers from the Equitable Education Fund and the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) Alumni Group. Niwat explained, “Every time we build a branch school, besides planning the budget, the transportation of materials is also very challenging. We have to take a detour through Mae Sariang District, Omkoi District, and then into Mae Tuen District before circling back to Moko Kee, covering a distance of about 400 kilometers.”

“Another world on the high mountains”

The Pga K’Nyau or S’gaw Karen, also known as White Karen, people. They belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family and are the largest hill tribe group in terms of population. The Karen people migrated from southern China to reside along the Thai-Myanmar border, with some scattered across the highlands in Shan State. The Karen who migrated to Thailand belong to subgroups like S’gaw Karen, Pwo Karen, Thong So Karen, and Kayah Karen, totaling over several hundred thousand people. They are spread across 15 provinces, with the largest populations in Chiang Mai, followed by Mae Hong Son and Tak provinces. Currently, there’s a trend of increasing Karen migration to Thailand due to conflicts between Myanmar and the Karen state, along with other ethnic minority groups, which puts pressure on the Karens to migrate in and out of the Thai border region.

Most Karen villages are located on mountainsides in the northern region. Each village, regardless of size, has a community leader. Generally, Karen people tend to stay settled, not frequently migrating or relocating. This is evident in their permanent housing structures. Karen society is agricultural, producing for subsistence. They grow rice for household consumption, owning their own rice fields. Most cultivate non-glutinous rice using terraced paddy fields and practice rotational farming with irrigation from streams. The Karen are the only hill tribe that doesn’t engage in deforestation for shifting cultivation like other groups. They are also the only hill tribe practicing soil and water conservation. Therefore, the mountains where Karen people reside are often fertile and covered in dense forests.

Apart from their nature-loving disposition, the Karen are also peace-loving and dislike conflict, leading to a simple and content life. They have a monogamous family system, with women holding authority in the household. Additionally, they hold animistic beliefs.

Reference: <https://www.finearts.go.th/chiangmailibrary/view/7241>

The community development teacher: Building people with ideals

In his role as a non-formal education teacher, Niwat's responsibilities extend beyond teaching students to include educating adults in the community as well. He coordinates community meetings and organizes the construction of sports fields, and building Takraw courts. This initiative led to increased youth participation in sports within the community. He has also worked with community members to raise awareness about the dangers of drug abuse, particularly opium, which was a significant problem among the villagers. Without education or awareness of the dangers of drugs, youth might fall into the trap of becoming part of criminal gangs. Additionally, Niwat provides knowledge on environmental conservation, cancer prevention, agricultural chemicals, waste management, and vocational development to help community members increase their income, reduce expenses, and become self-reliant. These activities are part of proactive non-formal education efforts aimed at helping villagers improve themselves.



He organizes film screenings to promote Thai language listening and speaking skills. Despite not being very skilled in technology, he continuously improves himself by learning to present through PowerPoint, researching information on the internet, and editing videos to provide essential daily knowledge to villagers. Niwat's dedication to education for everyone in Moko Kee demonstrates that he has undoubtedly become a “teacher of the community.”

Managing adult learning: A challenging task

Niwat explains the mission of organizing learning for adults: “Managing learning for adults involves three main activities. First, it involves providing basic education with a focus on non-formal primary education. The aim is to teach Thai literacy so that adults can communicate with the outside world. This curriculum is designed for adults who cannot read, write, or communicate. Primary school students in grades 4 to 6 assist as teacher aides for this group.

Second, it includes continuing education to develop vocational skills, quality of life, and society, community and environmental awareness, as well as essential life skills. This type of education addresses the needs of ethnic groups in highland areas, providing practical experience through hands-on activities. Finally, it involves informal education, allowing community members to learn based on their interests without a fixed curriculum or set learning times. This includes opportunities to learn through discussions, radio broadcasts, or educational videos.”

Niwat’s learning activities follow the non-formal education curriculum. He feels that teaching adults is often faster compared to teaching children, but he faces significant challenges, particularly with balancing learning time and work time. He adjusts the schedule according to the community’s constraints to avoid overburdening them, such as scheduling classes on days when the villagers are not working, like on religious holidays. The content of the lessons is practical and applicable to daily life, covering topics such as plant propagation, agricultural chemicals, cancer, and malaria—diseases that have caused many deaths. Another major obstacle is that students and villagers often use their local dialects for communication. Although they practice Thai at the learning center, they use their dialects at home, limiting their exposure to Thai. Even when they use Thai, their pronunciation is often unclear, especially with ending consonant.

The activity that interests adults in the community the most is community development. After participating in these activities, they have benefited from what they have done. For example, activities like forest conservation, constructing water retention dams to restore and protect the ecosystem, and repairing roads to ensure convenient transportation, especially for emergencies like transporting the injured to hospitals, have been highly valued. Niwat observes that “effective learning occurs when villagers

engage in hands-on activities, investigate causes, analyze problems thoroughly, and try to solve them repeatedly. Designing learning processes for adults should involve exploring community issues, holding community forums, and extracting lessons based on the villagers' needs, rather than designing the process solely from the teacher's perspective."

A day in the life of a principal: What do they do?

A principal in a typical school might have a luxurious air-conditioned office with all the amenities, but this is not the case for Niwat. For him, his office is the classroom and the community. Niwat describes his routine, "my daily routine starts at 5:00 AM. I have to prepare firewood for the villagers to cook. I oversee the food preparation. By 7:00 AM, students start arriving at school. I ensure they water the vegetable plots, clean the school buildings, feed the pigs, fish, and chickens, and tend to the mushrooms. I also ensure that students line up to salute the flag at the flagpole. At 8:00 AM., after the flag ceremony I conduct lessons according to the non-formal education curriculum of 2008 (B.E. 2551). At noon, we break for lunch, then continue with the afternoon lessons according to the schedule. After school, I supervise the students in cleaning the school. In the evening, I hold meetings with teachers and villagers to communicate policies from the district office, ensuring that the community is aware and can implement them. Additionally, I coordinate the educational television services for the community."

Not only that, Niwat also serves as a supervisor. He monitors issues related to students dropping out of the education system, surveys the lack of equipment and learning materials to request support from various agencies. He handles paperwork, schedules classes, and repairs buildings (some schools only have female teachers). He coordinates various community activities, such as Forest Creation and Income Generation project, National Children's Day events, sports events, Thai literacy promotion activities, student development activities, and vocational skills and life skills training. He also addresses conflicts between school teachers and the community, coordinates with external networks, and provides morale and encouragement to both teachers and students.



He believes that “a principal must be someone who is ‘visionary’ and ‘provides opportunities.’ They need to manage the school to move forward despite any limitations. It is essential to relieve other workloads in the school so that teachers can spend the maximum amount of time with the students in the classroom, allowing for a full learning process.”

Enhancing vocational skills with coffee to generate income

Originally, in 2002 when Niwat began pioneering the Moko Kee Learning Center, coffee cultivation was not present in the area, which was still forested area. However, in 2007, the locals started planting coffee brought from the Omkoi district, using a method known as “coffee in the husk,” which sold for 100-120 baht per kilogram, making the villagers happy. Niwat saw the potential for coffee to become a community product but recognized the lack of knowledge about roasting coffee, which could increase its value from 120 baht to 600 baht per kilogram. Therefore, he organized training on coffee processing in collaboration with the Mae Usu Subdistrict Administrative Organization. After several years of trial and error, with repeated training sessions led by experts from Chiang Mai University, they succeeded in producing high-quality coffee with desirable flavors, particularly its strength and aroma. This led them to register as a community enterprise with the District Agricultural Office. His initiative to promote comprehensive coffee cultivation and product development within the community resulted in Moko Kee Coffee winning a bronze medal at the national level in the Arabica coffee category,

in the semi-dry processing method, at the Thailand Coffee Championship organized by the Department of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, in 2021. This achievement has increased the coffee's popularity among natural coffee enthusiasts.

When life takes a turn, but the fighter has not reached the end.

If Niwat's life were a play, this would be the scene where the hero faces unexpected danger. In late December 2019, he had a motorcycle accident because he forgot to retract the kickstand. When the bike reached a curve, the kickstand scraped against the asphalt, causing the bike to lose balance and collide with a car coming from the opposite direction. This accident resulted in fractures in his leg and pelvis, making it difficult for him to move as freely as before. Niwat reflects on the incident: "Even though this nightmare happened, life must go on. I have never given up trying to drive a four-wheel drive up to Moko Kee, slowly climbing up getting better at it. Many people asked if I could still drive with my leg in such a condition. I believe it's all about the will. If my heart wants to do something, my leg can't stop me."

COVID-19 situation at Moko Kee

During 2020-2021, Niwat had to strictly follow the public health policies of the province. Online learning was not possible because there was no internet signal on the mountain, and the parents did not have the necessary communication devices for online learning. Initially, the children had to learn through an "on-hand" format, with teachers delivering worksheets and following up with every household where students resided. He found that this approach was not very effective because parents had to go out to work and had no time to help their children practice reading and writing. As measures began to ease, Niwat wanted students to return to the learning center to continue developing their skills. He believed that students should not miss out on education for too long, as it would impact their learning opportunities. Despite the small number of students, social distancing still had to be maintained. Niwat and the community members had to work together to monitor and prevent strangers from entering the community. It was a time when the community had to adapt significantly.

Philosophy of life of teacher Niwat

Niwat shared, “providing knowledge to people is the most important thing because development starts with education. Without knowledge, progress is slow. I want to give people knowledge so they can use it to solve their own problems. If you give someone a thousand baht or a hundred thousand baht, it might be spent quickly, but knowledge stays on the mind and heart and remains with them throughout their life. If one day they find themselves in a difficult situation, feeling hopeless and discouraged, they can use that knowledge as guidance to solve various problems in life, such as issues with drugs, malaria, forest fires, or monoculture farming.”

For over 23 years, Niwat has diligently developed the community learning center at Ban Moko Kee with perseverance, sacrifice, and dedication, tirelessly working every single day. Covering a distance of 70 kilometers from the city and situated more than 1,000 meters above sea level, he has worked to build and coordinate over 10 schools with the mission of providing educational opportunities for children and enabling them to communicate with the outside world. Every memory of his past work makes him proud of “applying a golden leaf at the back of a Buddha image¹” to repay his homeland. He feels grateful to Thailand for providing him with food, warmth, safety, and peace. Niwat said, “I am delighted that my life has served Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn and I am always grateful for her royal grace.”

Despite having numerous honorary awards that attest to his unwavering dedication to teaching and commitment to the community, such as the 2007 award from the Princess Mother’s Medical Volunteer Foundation for his selfless service to patients, and the 2013 and 2017 awards from the Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education for his continuous and diligent work in non-formal and informal education, as well as the 2022 Prince Narathiwat Rajanagarindra Teacher Award from the Compassion of Princess Mother’s project—his true honor lies in the opportunities he has created for hundreds of children to receive an education. He takes pride in having nurtured students who have grown up to become farmers, teachers, and local government officials, returning to help develop their community and pass on the “opportunity” they once received to others.

¹ The Thai proverb means doing good deeds or making contributions without seeking recognition or reward, often behind the scenes.

If the muddy paths represent the geographical limitations that make traveling to Moko Kee difficult during the rainy season, and if the winding, perilous mountains symbolize the life-threatening obstacles we face, then Niwat embodies the ordinary person who, with just one mind and two hands, overcomes these challenges through the strong heart of a teacher. He is a living testament to unwavering commitment and the ideal of creating change. Niwat stands as a model of a teacher who transcends the limits of his work, elevating the lives of the mountain children by providing them with truly “inclusive” and “equitable” educational opportunities.



TIMOR-LESTE

GONCALVES FILOMENA DA COSTA

PMCA 2023

Story written by Pongprapan Pongsophon

Filomena's Journey: Touching Lives and Shaping Futures

“I found myself contracted to teach, eventually becoming a permanent part of the educational landscape in my community.”



In the lush green valleys of Letefoho, Same Subdistrict, in the heart of Timor Leste, a beacon of hope and inspiration shines in the form of a teacher, Ms. Filomena da Costa, known affectionately as Mimi. The story of her journey, filled with both challenges and victories, reflects the resilience and commitment characteristic of a true educator.

Mimi's journey began in the humblest of circumstances, born into an underprivileged family, the eldest of five siblings. Her life took an unexpected turn when her father left, burdening her courageous mother with the sole responsibility of raising their children. Despite these hardships, Mimi's mother stood as a pillar of strength and love, teaching her children the values of hard work, faith, and education.

Her journey was not just a tale of teaching; it was a saga of unwavering determination, a beacon of hope in a world often clouded with challenges.

Mimi's story began with a deferred dream. After high school, her path to further education was obstructed, leaving her to grapple with the harsh realities of life. But she was not one to succumb to despair. Her resilience shone brightly, as she found her calling in the noble profession of teaching. This decision was not just a career choice; it was a stepping stone to fulfilling her own educational aspirations.

"In 2008, I made a life-changing decision – to become a teacher. It was not a lifelong dream, but rather a practical choice to support my family and those less fortunate around me. My first steps were tentative, volunteering at an elementary school while continuing my Portuguese studies. But with each lesson I taught, my passion for teaching grew, and soon I found myself contracted to teach, eventually becoming a permanent part of the educational landscape in my community."

Mimi's empathetic and innovative approach to education

Mimi's teaching philosophy is a blend of empathy, inclusivity, and a deep understanding of her students' diverse backgrounds. She sees learning as a journey, not just within the confines of a classroom but as a lifelong pursuit that extends beyond its walls. Her teaching style is innovative

"I often take my students outside to learn from nature, use music and games to enhance their learning, and encourage them to participate in various activities."

She believes in assessing students from multiple angles, understanding that each child is unique and deserves an individual approach. Her classroom was a vibrant tapestry of innovation and compassion. Filomena believed in simple yet effective

teaching methods – question-and-answer, discussion-based, and demonstration methods. But her innovation was not confined to the four walls of the classroom. With limited resources, she embraced technology, using smartphones and computers to bring a world of knowledge to her students, despite the hurdles of slow internet connections.



Her role in the lives of her students is not just that of a teacher but also a mentor and friend. She empowers them to take ownership of their learning, to be curious, and to be active participants in their education. This approach has not only impacted her students in the classroom but has also led to the establishment of a Home Care for underprivileged children, further extending her influence and care to those in dire need.

Mimi's achievements and the impact she has had on her community are a testament to her strength, dedication, and love for teaching. Her story is not just about overcoming adversity; it is about transforming it into an opportunity to make a difference. Her journey from a young girl in Letefoho, Same City to an award-winning teacher is a source of inspiration, showing that with determination, compassion, and a willingness to help others, anyone can create a meaningful and lasting impact in the world.

Sowing seeds of community and character

Her impact extended beyond the school. She founded 'Home Care', a sanctuary not just for children but for everyone in need, financed through her own salary and a bank loan. This place was a testament to her belief in community, inclusivity, and unconditional support. Here, she taught children of various ages, fostering a spirit of volunteerism, leadership, and sensitivity in them.



Mimi's approach to teaching was holistic. She was a gardener of young minds, nurturing them with academic rigor, extracurricular excellence, and spiritual growth.

“My students learn not just from textbooks, but from life itself, engaging in activities like journalism, leadership training, public speaking, sports, and even gardening.”

Each activity was a thread in the fabric of their character development.

Recognition, resilience, and balance

Her peers, the school, and even the Ministry of Education recognized her efforts. They welcomed her innovations and supported her endeavors, acknowledging the transformation she was bringing about in the educational landscape.

Despite her numerous achievements, including owning a home, helping her siblings with their education, and receiving the prestigious PMCA Outstanding Teacher Award, Filomena remained humble. She viewed every failure as a stepping stone to success, an opportunity to learn and grow. Her advice to new teachers echoed her life's philosophy – to never give up, to be open to learning, and to embrace the challenges of the 21st century.

Balancing her demanding career with personal life was a tightrope walk, but she managed it with the grace of a seasoned acrobat. She knew the importance of dividing time wisely and making the most of school holidays for self-care and rejuvenation.

Mimi's relationship with her fellow teachers was built on mutual respect and collaboration. She believed in the power of community and involved parents and guardians in their children's education, creating a strong network of support and guidance.

Ms. Filomena da Costa was more than just a teacher. She was a visionary, a warrior in the realm of education, fighting not with weapons but with wisdom, love, and an unwavering spirit. Her story was not just about teaching methodologies or educational strategies; it was about the heart and soul she poured into every aspect of her life, touching and transforming lives, one student, one community member at a time.

In a world often overshadowed by material pursuits, Filomena da Costa stood as a luminous example of what it truly means to be a teacher – not just a profession, but a calling that transcends boundaries, touches hearts, and shapes futures.



Education in Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste, a Southeast Asian nation, has a young and evolving education system that has been significantly shaped by its recent history of conflict and its journey to independence in 2002. Since gaining independence, the country has concentrated its efforts on rebuilding and enhancing its education sector. The education system in Timor-Leste is structured into three main levels: primary education, which spans six years; pre-secondary education, which lasts three years; and secondary education, also three years, followed by opportunities for tertiary education.

However, the education system faces several key challenges. Many schools, especially in rural areas, struggle with inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching materials, and a shortage of trained teachers. Language barriers also pose a significant issue, as Tetum and Portuguese are the official languages of instruction, but many students speak local languages at home, leading to difficulties in comprehension and learning. Additionally, the quality of education is an ongoing concern, with teacher training and curriculum development requiring continuous improvement, often supported by international aid and local initiatives.

Access to education has seen improvements, with higher enrollment rates, but dropout rates remain a challenge, particularly at the secondary level. Economic hardships and the need for children to contribute to their family's income often compel them to leave school early. In response to these challenges, the government of Timor-Leste, along with NGOs and international organizations, is actively working to improve teacher training, develop better curricula, and increase access to education, with a particular focus on girls and marginalized communities. Recognizing the pivotal role of education in national development, the Timorese government continues to invest in reforms aimed at creating a more inclusive and effective education system.

Reference:

The 3rd Princess Maha Chakri Award Forum, 2020

UNICEF, 2018. Education through teacher peer learning in Timor-Leste | UNICEF Timor-Leste

Strengthening Communities for a stronger school system UNICEF (excerpts)

Education is a constitutional right in Timor-Leste. But in a country still rebuilding its education system, getting children into classrooms is only half the story. Now, see how the Ministry of Education with UNICEF's support is strengthening teachers and leaders and communities for a stronger school system for all.

Designed to build on the strong legislative and policy steps taken in recent years by the Ministry of Education, this teacher peer learning session is one small part of a comprehensive programme of school capacity development designed with reference to the principles of Eskola Foun—the child friendly school approach that improved access to and quality of primary and pre-secondary education across Timor-Leste.

This teacher peer exchange recognises that while significant progress has been made with the development of strong national education policies in Timor-Leste, it is at the local level where changes to education is truly realised. By building the capacity of schoolteachers and leaders – principals and their deputies - and encouraging greater participation from communities, this programme of school development builds on the child-centred Eskola Foun approach to promote safe, healthy, and inclusive school environments in which students can reach their full potential.

The exchange also facilitates public-private schools cross learning, something that is not yet established in the country. In 2018, the Ministry of Education and UNICEF published the “Documentation of Good Practices and Lessons Learned in Church-run, Private and Public Schools” report to provide more insights into Timor-Leste schooling system. The exchange visits among schools held in October allowed for teachers and school leaders to see for themselves these good practices.

Teachers learning to improve their own classrooms

Teachers from Caitehu Filial School, Casait Basic Education Central School, and Matata Filial School spent the morning asking questions of teachers, students, and school leaders of EPS Cannossa – learning new ideas and approaches for classroom and school management and sharing experiences of their own.

School exchange visits like the visit to EPS Cannossa are part of a holistic programme designed to strengthen core aspects of a child’s learning environment—improving school governance and management, encouraging deeper community and parent participation, building teachers’ and school leaders’ skills, and ensuring the school environment is safe, healthy, protective, and inclusive for all learners.

Model schools for the future

Between June and December 2018 teacher training and governance training will be conducted in five basic schools in Ainara and Ermera municipalities, with the aim of reaching teachers and school leaders in 17 basic education schools in four of Timor-Leste’s 13 municipalities.

To complement the peer exchange, teachers from 35 basic education schools in Ermera, Ainara and Liquica Municipalities were trained between June to December 2018 on school management, improving teaching-learning in line with the curriculum, including creating a nurturing learning environment, and engagement of parents and families. The 182 teachers who received the training will serve as peer mentors for other public schools in their municipalities.

It is hoped that in the near future, these 35 schools will become models for other schools offering a crucial opportunity for Timor-Leste's schools to work together, learn from one another, and have a significant, positive impact on students' lives.

One teacher noted that private schools have a large number of students compared to the Basic Education Filial Schools, but they somehow manage the school well and know each child and even their parents. This is an important realization for the teachers and school principals from the public schools to make the extra effort to engage parents by regularly communicating to them about their children's progress and inviting them to school activities.

Reference: UNICEF, 2018

Education through teacher peer learning in Timor-Leste | UNICEF Timor-Leste

VIETNAM NGUYỄN MẠNH HÙNG PMCA 2023

Story written by Pongprapan Pongsophon

A Beacon of Hope in Vietnam's Educational Landscape

“The “30 Golden Minutes” model have garnered national recognition and have been instrumental in shaping the lives of students across Vietnam.”



In the heart of Hòa Bình Province, Vietnam, amidst the lush landscapes and rich cultural tapestry, there stands a beacon of educational excellence and inspiration: Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng, a visionary teacher and Vice Principal of Hoàng Văn Thụ Specialized High School. His journey, spanning over two and a half decades, encapsulates a tale of dedication, innovation, and profound impact on the lives of countless students and the community at large.

Born on June 17, 1975, in Hanoi, Hùng was the first in his family to embark on a path that would eventually lead him to become a venerated figure in Vietnamese education.

“My dream of teaching took root in childhood, driven by a deep-seated desire to share knowledge and inspire young minds.”

This passion led him to the gates of Thai Nguyen University of Education, where he laid the academic foundation for his future career. Upon graduating in 1997, Hùng’s journey took him to the Ethnic Boarding High School in Hoà Bình Province, marking the beginning of a transformative era in his life and the lives of those he would touch.

Hùng’s career is a tapestry woven with milestones that highlight his dedication to educational excellence and innovation. From winning an award in the National Teaching Skills Contest in 1997 to being recognized as a national exemplary teacher in 2022, and receiving the prestigious PMCA award in 2023, each accolade reflects his relentless pursuit of excellence. However, Hùng’s influence extends beyond these commendations; his innovative teaching methods, particularly the “30 Golden Minutes” model, have garnered national recognition and have been instrumental in shaping the lives of students across Vietnam.

At the heart of Hùng’s philosophy lies a profound understanding of the learning process as a dynamic journey of discovery, collaboration, and personal growth. He emphasizes the importance of creating an educational environment that fosters curiosity, encourages self-motivation, and prepares students to navigate the complexities of the modern world.

“My approach to teaching and learning is holistic, focusing not just on academic achievements but on developing life skills, moral values, and a deep respect for cultural diversity.”

Hoàng Văn Thụ Specialized High School, under Hùng’s leadership, epitomizes an educational sanctuary where students from diverse backgrounds come together to learn, dream, and aspire. The school’s rich history and commitment to nurturing talent have made it a cornerstone of education in Hòa Bình Province. Hùng’s vision extends beyond the classroom; he is deeply committed to integrating technology in education,

leveraging virtual reality, and mobile applications to enhance the learning experience and prepare students for a future driven by innovation.

The “30 Golden Minutes” model, a brainchild of Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng, is more than just an educational strategy; it’s a visionary approach designed to prepare students for the complexities of modern life. This model exemplifies Hùng’s deep understanding of the challenges that today’s youth face and his commitment to equipping them with the tools they need to navigate these challenges successfully. At its core, the model serves as a dynamic platform for engagement, learning, and community building, reflecting Hùng’s innovative spirit and dedication to his students’ holistic development.

GOLDEN 30 MINUTES



Engagement with critical issues

In an era where students are bombarded with information from myriad sources, discerning reliable from unreliable data has become increasingly challenging. The “30 Golden Minutes” offers a structured yet flexible framework within which students can engage with a wide array of critical issues. From social media’s impact on mental health

to the importance of environmental conservation, this model ensures that students are not only aware of the world around them but are also prepared to contribute thoughtfully to conversations on these topics. Through interactive sessions with guest speakers, including storytellers, experts, and even war veterans, students are exposed to diverse perspectives, enriching their understanding and empathy.

Development of life skills

Life skills are an essential component of the “30 Golden Minutes” model. Recognizing that academic success alone is insufficient for navigating life’s complexities, Hùng has meticulously designed these sessions to include practical lessons on social conduct, health awareness, and even financial literacy. This approach ensures that students are equipped with a robust set of skills, from critical thinking and problem-solving to emotional intelligence and resilience. By addressing the gap often found in traditional educational systems, Hùng’s model fosters a well-rounded development that is crucial for personal and professional success.

Fostering a sense of community and shared purpose

Perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of the “30 Golden Minutes” is its ability to cultivate a strong sense of community among students. By involving them in the organization and execution of these sessions, Hùng has empowered his students to take ownership of their learning experiences. This collective participation creates a shared purpose, uniting students from diverse backgrounds and fostering an environment of mutual respect, collaboration, and support. The model also facilitates the sharing of personal stories and challenges, encouraging empathy and understanding among students. This sense of belonging and community is invaluable in promoting social cohesion and a positive school culture.

Moreover, the scalability and adaptability of the “30 Golden Minutes” model signify its potential far beyond Hoàng Văn Thụ Specialized High School. Hùng’s initiative has already inspired other schools within and outside Hòa Bình Province to adopt similar models, demonstrating its effectiveness and the universal appeal of its core principles. The model’s success lies not just in its content but in its approach to education as a collaborative, engaging, and transformative process.

In essence, the “30 Golden Minutes” model stands as a profound testament to Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng’s innovative approach to education. It reflects a deep understanding of the multifaceted challenges facing today’s youth and a committed effort to prepare them for a future marked by uncertainty and opportunity. Through this initiative, Hùng has not only transformed the educational experience for his students but has also laid the groundwork for a more informed, skilled, and compassionate generation.

Hùng’s journey is not just a story of personal achievement but a reflection of his unwavering commitment to his students, colleagues, and community.



“My relationship with fellow educators is built on cooperation, respect, and a shared vision for a brighter future. Together, we work tirelessly to create an inclusive, dynamic, and supportive educational ecosystem. My engagement with parents and guardians further strengthens the bond between the school and the community, forming a collaborative framework for student success.”

As Hùng navigates the challenges and opportunities of education in the 21st century, his advice to aspiring teachers resonates with wisdom and clarity: love for the profession is paramount. It is this love that drives innovation, fosters resilience, and ignites a lifelong passion for learning and teaching. His journey underscores the transformative power of education and the role of teachers in shaping the future.

Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng's story is a beacon of inspiration, a reminder of the profound impact one individual can have on the lives of many. Through his dedication, creativity, and leadership, he has not only shaped the future of his students but has also left an indelible mark on the landscape of education in Vietnam.

The education system in Vietnam

The education system in Vietnam is structured into several levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Primary education is compulsory and lasts for five years. However, secondary education, which includes lower secondary and upper secondary levels, is not mandatory. The upper secondary level is known for its challenging curriculum and emphasis on examinations.

Over the past two decades, Vietnam has made significant strides in education, with increased enrollment rates across all levels, particularly in primary and lower secondary education. This progress is partly due to substantial government investment in educational infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development. Additionally, Vietnam has embraced technological advancements, integrating information technology into education management and teaching methods.

However, challenges remain, especially in ensuring equitable access to quality education. There are spatial and gender disparities, particularly in remote and rural areas where ethnic minorities and female students face more significant barriers. The focus on exams also continues to place pressure on students, although there are ongoing efforts to reform the assessment system to foster a more holistic approach to education.

Vietnam's education system is recognized as one of the more successful in the East Asia-Pacific region, with high literacy rates and strong performance in international assessments like the OECD PISA study

World Bank: Review of Science, Technology, and Innovation in Vietnam (excerpts)

Vietnam's achievements and new challenges

Vietnam's economic and social development has been impressive. High economic performance has translated into a rise in per-capita income and reduction of poverty. This has meant better lives for many.

Vietnam is approaching a crossroads, nevertheless. GDP growth has been slowing in a less buoyant international environment. Previous sources of growth are diminishing in power, raising the threat of a “middle-income trap”. Vietnam will have to rely more on productivity gains driven by innovation. This will require considerable improvements in domestic innovation capabilities.

Strengthen the human resource base for innovation

Human resources are the key to innovation. A nation's innovation capacity depends crucially on the quality of education and training for scientists, technologists, and a wide range of professionals and on the inclusiveness of the education system. Vietnam has made a substantial effort on education and skills. The results of the 2012 OECD PISA assessment of the performance of secondary students bode well.

However, there is still scope for increasing the quantity and improving the quality of human resources, particularly at the tertiary and secondary vocational levels. Funding of tertiary education has been insufficient to cope with the increase in technical and research students.

The skills supplied through formal education and training are often out of date or too theoretical and do not meet the demands of the labour market. In addition to financing constraints, the governance of higher education suffers from weaknesses in terms of information about skills needs and incentives for alignment.

The accumulation of innovation capabilities within businesses depends on the availability of specialised professionals. Broadening options for professional specialisation in upper secondary education and enhancing the standing of vocational training seem necessary.

It is also important to provide more opportunities for upgrading the skills of those already in the workforce and to improve the effectiveness of short-term training. An expansion of part-time tertiary education and other lifelong learning opportunities could help address gaps in “soft” skills.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) could be used to encourage businesses to take greater part in the national effort on human resource development. Firms, especially SOEs and MNEs, should be encouraged to increase their training investments, to fund demand-tailored aspects of formal education and to partake in decisions over curricula and programme design.

Skills constraints in the public sector are a major constraint to the effective delivery of public functions. Meeting the government’s ambitious targets to remove skills constraints in the public sector by 2020 should be a priority.

Reference: World Bank, 2019

<https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/EAP/Vietnam/Vietnam-STI-review-executive-summary.pdf>

Agents of Change: Nurturing Learners into Active Citizens

A discussion paper by Udomluk Koolsriroj and Chatree Faikhamta

In an era marked by rapid globalization and complex societal challenges, the role of education in fostering active citizenship has become increasingly crucial. Active citizens (Davies and Evans, 2002; Birdwell et al., 2013) are individuals who possess not only knowledge and skills but also a sense of responsibility and agency to contribute positively to their communities and the world. This chapter delves into the concept of active citizenship, exploring its theoretical underpinnings, pedagogical approaches, and real-world examples from the Princess Maha Chakri Award (PMCA) awardees.

Deeply rooted in democratic ideals, the concept of active citizenship emphasizes the importance of citizen participation in shaping the social, political, and economic landscape of their communities and nations. Active citizenship encompasses a range of attributes, as outlined by Davies and Evans (2002) and Rowland (2022), including:

- **Knowledge and Understanding:** Active citizens possess a deep understanding of their rights, responsibilities, and the workings of their societies.
- **Skills and Competencies:** They are equipped with critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration skills, enabling them to engage effectively in civic discourse and action.
- **Values and Attitudes:** Active citizens demonstrate a commitment to democratic values, social justice, and the common good. They are empathetic, respectful of diversity, and willing to take initiative to address societal challenges.
- **Action and Participation:** They actively participate in their communities, whether through volunteering, advocacy, or other forms of civic engagement.

Several theoretical frameworks inform the concept of active citizenship (Michalos, 2014; Wood et al., 2018), including:

- **Dewey's Experiential Learning:** The active citizenship approach resonates with John Dewey's emphasis on learning by doing and connecting education to real-life experiences. By engaging students in hands-on activities and projects that address real-world issues, educators can foster a sense of agency and responsibility, empowering learners to become active contributors to their communities.

- **Freire's Critical Pedagogy:** Paulo Freire's focus on empowering learners to critically analyze their social realities and take action to transform them aligns with the active citizen's role in challenging injustice and promoting social change. Through critical pedagogy, educators can encourage students to question prevailing norms, challenge oppressive structures, and actively participate in creating a more just and equitable society.

- **Global Citizenship Education:** This framework emphasizes the interconnectedness of global challenges and the need for individuals to develop a sense of global responsibility and solidarity. By exposing students to global perspectives and issues, educators can foster empathy, intercultural understanding, and a sense of shared responsibility for addressing global challenges such as climate change, poverty, and inequality.

Pedagogical approaches to fostering active citizenship

Cultivating active citizenship requires a shift from traditional teacher-centered pedagogies to student-centered approaches that empower learners to become active agents of their own learning and development. Some key pedagogical strategies include:

- **Project-Based Learning (PBL):** PBL engages students in real-world projects that address community needs, fostering problem-solving, collaboration, and a sense of agency. By working on projects that have a tangible impact on their communities, students develop a sense of ownership and responsibility, realizing that they can make a difference in the world around them (Birdwell et al. 2013).

- **Service-Learning:** This approach integrates community service with academic learning, providing students with opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills to address real-world issues. Service-learning not only enhances students' understanding of social issues but also fosters empathy, compassion, and a sense of civic responsibility (Birdwell et al. 2013).

- **Participatory Learning:** This approach encourages student participation in decision-making processes within the classroom and school, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility. By involving students in setting learning goals, designing assessments, and evaluating their own progress, educators can create a more democratic and empowering learning environment (Jarkiewicz, 2020).

- **Critical Literacy:** This approach empowers students to critically analyze media and other sources of information, enabling them to make informed decisions and challenge dominant narratives. By developing critical literacy skills, students become more discerning consumers of information, capable of questioning prevailing ideologies and advocating for social justice (Ashbridge et al., 2022).

- **Global Education:** This approach exposes students to global perspectives and issues, fostering empathy, intercultural understanding, and a sense of global responsibility. Students develop a broader worldview through global education, recognizing their interconnectedness with people and communities around the world, as well as their role in addressing global challenges (Monte and Reis, 2021).

Beyond the classroom: The PMCA teachers as agents of change

The PMCA-winning teachers, through their exemplary practices, transcend the traditional boundaries of the classroom and become true agents of change. Their stories are a testament to the profound impact that educators can have on their students and communities, inspiring them to embrace active citizenship and contribute to a brighter future.

- **Daw Aye Su Win (Myanmar):** The story of Daw Aye Su Win, who transformed her initial aspiration of becoming a doctor into a fulfilling journey as an English teacher, underscores the profound impact of dedication and perseverance. Her innovative teaching methods, student-centered approach, and integration of technology have not only enhanced her students' English proficiency but also empowered them to become lifelong learners and responsible citizens.

- Filomena da Costa (Timor Leste): Filomena’s establishment of the “Home Care” center for underprivileged children is a shining example of her unwavering dedication to social justice and community empowerment. By fostering volunteerism, leadership, and empathy among her students, she is cultivating a generation of active citizens who are passionate about making a difference in their communities.

- Harisdayani (Indonesia): Harisdayani’s innovative use of project-based learning (PBL) and technology integration empowers her students to develop real-world skills and address community needs. Her emphasis on student voice and choice fosters a sense of agency and responsibility, essential attributes of active citizens.

- Hay Chakriya (Cambodia): Chakriya’s active engagement of her students in community projects, such as teaching mathematics to younger students and participating in environmental conservation efforts, exemplifies the spirit of active citizenship. By providing opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to benefit their communities, she is nurturing a sense of social responsibility and civic engagement.

- Jerwin O. Valencia (Philippines): Jerwin’s dedication to his students extends beyond academics, fostering holistic growth through innovative projects that address community needs. By integrating real-world applications into his math lessons and spearheading initiatives like the “Sagut-Ayat Para Iti Arapaap” and “Project MATH,” he empowers students to become active contributors to their communities.

- Kimfeuang Heuangmany (Laos): Kimfeuang’s unwavering dedication to education, even in the face of limited resources and challenging circumstances, exemplifies the transformative power of a passionate teacher. Her innovative approach to teaching, coupled with her strong community engagement, has empowered countless students to overcome obstacles and achieve their full potential.

- Mohamad Amir Irwan Bin Haji Moxin (Brunei): Irwan’s “My School, My Second Home” and “Eco Garden” projects demonstrate his commitment to creating a nurturing and empowering school environment that fosters a sense of belonging and responsibility among his students. By actively involving them in transforming their school environment and promoting environmental awareness, he is nurturing active citizenship and stewardship.

- Niwat Ngerngammesuk (Thailand): Niwat’s dedication to educating the entire community on a wide range of topics, including drug abuse prevention, environmental conservation, and vocational development, showcases his commitment to empowering individuals and fostering active citizenship beyond the classroom.

- Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng (Vietnam): Hùng’s innovative “30 Golden Minutes” model provides a platform for students to engage with critical issues, develop life skills, and foster a sense of community and shared purpose. By empowering students to take ownership of their learning and contribute to their communities, he is nurturing active citizenship and social responsibility.

- Penny Chong (Singapore): Penny’s unwavering belief in the potential of every student, regardless of their visual impairment, has transformed the lives of countless young learners. By championing inclusive education and leveraging technology, she empowers her students to overcome challenges, embrace their unique abilities, and achieve academic and personal success.

- Saifulnizan Che Ismail (Malaysia): Saifulnizan’s integration of coding and technology into his teaching empowers his students and prepares them for the future. His emphasis on experiential learning and its application in real-life scenarios fosters a sense of agency and responsibility, crucial attributes of active citizens.

Conclusion: Inspiring a generation of change makers

The concept of active citizenship is not merely an abstract ideal but a tangible reality that can be nurtured through education. The stories of the PMCA-awardees serve as powerful reminders of the transformative potential of education in fostering active citizens who possess the necessary knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to positively contribute to their communities and the world. By embracing student-centered pedagogies, promoting community engagement, and leveraging technology, educators can empower learners to become active agents of change, shaping a brighter and more sustainable future for all.

The examples set by these exceptional teachers highlight the importance of going beyond traditional teaching methods and embracing innovative approaches that foster critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and a sense of social responsibility. By creating inclusive and empowering learning environments, educators can inspire students to become active participants in their communities, advocating for social justice, promoting environmental sustainability, and contributing to the betterment of society as a whole.

The journey towards active citizenship is a continuous one, requiring ongoing commitment and collaboration between educators, students, parents, and communities. By working together and drawing inspiration from the PMCA teachers, we can create a world where every individual is empowered to make a positive difference, shaping a future that is both prosperous and sustainable for generations to come. Their stories serve as a powerful reminder that education is not just about imparting knowledge but about igniting a passion for change and empowering individuals to become the architects of a better world.

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About the Authors

Chatree Faikhamta is an associate professor at the Faculty of Education, Kasetsart University, Thailand. He earned his Ph.D. from the same institution. He has taught a full range of undergraduate and graduate courses in science education, such as chemistry methods course, research design in science education, science teacher professional development, etc. His research areas focus on STEM education, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), and action research. He is involved in collaborative research in many countries, such as Canada, Japan, Korea, Spain, Taiwan, and the UK.

Chawapan Pettkrai is a lecturer in Thai language teaching at the Faculty of Education, Kasetsart University. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Department of Thai Literature at Kasetsart University and a Master's degree in Thai language from Chulalongkorn University. He had four years of experience teaching Thai subjects at the upper secondary level at the Kasetsart University Laboratory School Center for Educational Research and Development. Chawaphan is interested in oral literature and learning management that uses local culture as a foundation. He is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in folklore at Chulalongkorn University.

Onpawee Koonpornpen holds a lecturer position in Curriculum and Instruction at Kasetsart University's Faculty of Education. She teaches methods of teaching and curriculum development. Before that, she taught English for Aviation Business Management at Panyapiwat Institute of Management for 5 years. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in English from Mae Fah Luang University, a Master of Arts in Language and Communication at the National Institute of Development Administration, and a Doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Kasetsart University.

Pongprapan Pongsophon, an associate professor of Science Education at Kasetsart University, earned his Ph.D. from the same institution. Prior to his tenure in academia, he gained valuable experience teaching high school biology, with an emphasis on genetics, biodiversity, and evolution. As a visiting scholar at the University of Arkansas and University of Missouri, his broad research interests include educational psychology, science/math education, and advanced statistics. With a strong commitment to pedagogical innovation, he is particularly passionate about the integration of computing

into science education. He uses Python to retrieve, manipulate, and analyze biological data, thereby enhancing the intersection of computer science with biology. In his free time, he indulges in bird watching and hones his skills in Python programming, further blending his love for nature and technology.

Udomluk Koolsriroj is an assistant professor and currently serves as the dean of the Faculty of Education at Kasetsart University. Her academic expertise encompasses courses such as Diversity and Equity in Education, Leadership in Curriculum and Instruction, and Curriculum and Instruction Development. Prior to her tenure at Kasetsart University, Dr. Koolsriroj accumulated 13 years of experience teaching English at the University Laboratory School, Center for Educational Research and Development. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from Chulalongkorn University and both a Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics and a Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from Kasetsart University.

Wandee Kasemsukpipat has been a dedicated educator since 2003 and currently serves as an assistant professor and associate dean for international affairs at the Faculty of Education, Kasetsart University. She earned her Ph.D. in Mathematics Education from the University of Wyoming, USA. She has 20 years of experience teaching mathematics at both undergraduate and graduate levels, and she has also supervised pre-service and in-service teachers. Her research interests focus on teacher preparation and the knowledge necessary for effective mathematics teaching.

Watsatree Diteeyont is an assistant professor and assistant dean of digital technology of the Faculty of Education, Kasetsart University. Her areas of interest focus on online education, technology integration, mobile education, and Artificial Intelligence. She earned her Ph.D. in Educational Technology from the University of Northern Colorado, USA. She was awarded an Erasmus scholarship to be a visiting professor in Turkey, as well as national and international research funding in the Educational Technology field.

Cultivating active citizenship requires a shift from traditional teacher-centered pedagogies to student-centered approaches that empower learners to become active agents of their own learning and development.

The PMCA-winning teachers, through their exemplary practices, transcend the traditional boundaries of the classroom and become true agents of change. Their stories are a testament to the profound impact that educators can have on their students and communities, inspiring them to embrace active citizenship and contribute to a brighter future.

Mohamad Amir Irwan Bin Haji Moksini, *Brunei Darussalam*

Hay Chakriya, *Cambodia*

Harisdayani, *Indonesia*

Kimfeuang Heuangmany, *Lao PDR*

Saifulnizan Che Ismail, *Malaysia*

Daw Aye Su Win, *Myanmar*

Jerwin O. Valencia, *Philippines*

Penny Chong, *Singapore*

Niwat Ngerngammesuk, *Thailand*

Filomena da Costa, *Timor-Leste*

Nguyễn Mạnh Hùng, *Vietnam*

Princess Maha Chakri Award Foundation

Bangkok, Thailand

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