



# SEA-PLM 2019 National Snapshot Report

## Grade 5 Students' Learning in Cambodia



unicef   
for every child



Southeast Asian  
Ministers of Education  
Organization



This report was prepared by the Assessment Technical Team of Education Quality Assurance Department, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Cambodia, with technical support from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), with great support from UNICEF Cambodia and UNICEF EPRO. The report was reviewed by Dr. Andres Sandoval Hernandez for technical aspects and published under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport that does not necessarily represent the official views of ACER, SEAMEO or UNICEF.

**Please cite this publication as:**

MoEYS (2021). Education in Cambodia: Results from Participation in the SEA-PLM. Phnom Penh: Author.

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## Foreword

The education sector has come to a new stage of development, encompassing a broad and ambitious scope covering a wide range of equitable and inclusive education issues; lifelong learning and skills in order for children and young people to live harmoniously and successfully in the 21st century. Furthermore, education is being delivered in Cambodia in the context of rapid social and economic change, market demand and a competitive world of work.

The Ministry of Education Youth and Sport has designed and implemented many programs to support education priorities as outlined in the Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023. These efforts are also assisting in alignment with Cambodia's Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education 2030 Roadmap and are in line with Cambodia's vision to become an upper-middle income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050. Therefore, the optimal goal of the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport is to strengthen the education system for the country, ensuring the system delivers equitable and excellent outcomes for all children and young people. Teaching and learning at the grassroots level is the main focus to support and inform policy development and service provision.

To achieve and align this purpose, Ministry of Education Youth and Sport, as a member of the Southeast Asian Ministries of Education Organization (SEAMEO) participated in the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metric (SEA-PLM) program. This learning assessment initiative for the region aims at "providing the members of SEAMEO countries with an enhanced understanding of factors affecting learning achievement in primary education and to support them to take actions to ensure that all children achieve meaningful learning outcomes". The SEA-PLM is a curriculum-based assessment, measuring reading, writing and mathematics, as well as Global Citizenship (GC), which is one of the domains outlined in UNESCO's framework on transversal competencies, also known as 21st-century skills. Some sub-strand skills and concepts highlighted in the GC also aligned with those in the local life skills program introduced to primary and secondary education levels, which MoEYS adopted from the UNICEF MENA framework on life skills and citizenship education.

In this SEA-PLM national report, relevant information and Cambodian data of SEA-PLM 2019 was analyzed by a technical team of the Education Quality Assurance Department (EQAD), Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. The purpose of the national report is to identify what students can do based on knowledge and skills taught, as well as how well they can extrapolate from what they have acquired and apply it in different contextual settings. In addition, the information about students' capacities associated with these three domains is described in relevant questionnaire items related to students' background and global citizenship. This information helps us witness the relationship between student achievement and its contextual potential factors, such as students' and homes' characteristics, teachers' and classroom characteristics, schools and context characteristics.

The SEA-PLM 2019 is also looking at the outcomes related to the GC that mainly focuses on students' attitudes and behaviors. That is, it has enabled deeper exploration of students' equity in learning GC-related issues at schools (gender and socio-economic status).

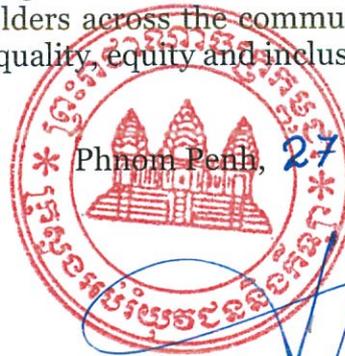
Moreover, this SEA-PLM national report can be used for the benefit of the education sector and the children within the education system. The report contributes sound data, information and analysis for work undertaken to support the potential strategies and programs in the future, especially the policies of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the Government of Cambodia as a whole.

This report provides Cambodia with a platform for sharing lesson learned and experience pertaining to students' achievement, benchmarking Cambodian grade 5 students' achievement against the next cycles, as well as offering an opportunity to compare this achievement with other countries in the region, which is a valuable aspect for refining education in Cambodia.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport intends to respond fully to the findings and messages contained in this report and to follow up the suggestions regarding effective interventions that are set out in the report. The effective interventions highlighted in this report include actions designed to:

- establish strong foundations for success and improving educational outcomes;
- improve the school environment;
- improve the quality of instruction;
- strengthen family and community support for education;
- optimize child-friendly policy and inspection system;
- improve school-based management (SBM);
- heighten application of concept-based approach and teaching methodology;
- strengthen the application of e-learning education

The results from SEA-PLM national findings will be disseminated widely to interested individuals, organizations and all stakeholders across the community since they play a very important role in contributing to the quality, equity and inclusiveness of education. ✓



Phnom Penh, 27

December 2021

**Dr. HANG CHUON NARON**

Minister

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport

### Summary of the key findings

- Among the three domains, Cambodian grade 5 students achieved the highest average score in reading (290) followed by mathematics (289) and then writing (285). Notably, about 76% and 64% of grade 5 students in Cambodia have met the minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematics, respectively by SDG 4.1.1 for *the end of lower primary*. Moreover, about 11% and 19% Grade 5 students have met minimum proficiency level in Reading and Mathematics, respectively for *the end of primary* as setting in the goal (minimum level of proficiency) of SDG 4.
- In terms of **equity**, grade 5 girl students outperformed grade 5 boy students in reading, writing and mathematics, and those students who come from more socioeconomically advantaged families outperformed their more disadvantaged peers.
- Students who have never repeated class, particularly in grade 1, outperformed those who have repeated a class [pls check this proposed change], and those who attended preschool for one year are more likely to perform better than those who did not attend preschool at all.
- Other findings are that grade 5 students who have positive attitudes towards school tend to perform better than those who have negative attitudes towards school in the three domains. Those who reported that their parents had engaged more with their school obtained, on average, higher scores than those who reported that their parents were less engaged with their school.
- When crossing-referencing information from SEA-PLM with data from the Child Friendly Schools (CFS) programme, results suggest that grade 5 students who are studying in advanced level CFS schools outperformed those who are studying in basic and medium level schools.
- In relation to Global Citizenship (GC), about 39% to 69% of Cambodia grade 5 students reported to have learned at least “some” GC at their schools. The majority of students also reported to be concerned with a variety of global issues, and students who performed better in reading, writing, and mathematics tend to have stronger concerns with those issues as well.
- SEA-PLM results also suggest that slightly more than 50% of grade 5 students do not have a strong Asian identity, whereas, about two thirds of them are more likely to be aware of the importance of learning about global citizenship-related topics. Consistently, a majority of grade 5 students have strong willingness to involve themselves in activities associated with civic behaviors both in school and in the wider community.
- Teachers surveyed in SEA-PLM agreed on the importance of students learning GC related topics. Cambodian teachers also recognize the importance of the skills, values, and characteristics related to GC that young people should possess and develop. Notably, in both cases, teachers seem to assert a higher value to those topics explicitly relevant to their country than to the topics globally relevant.
- Teachers also consider their pre-service teacher education programme prepared them well to teach contents related to GC; although the levels of agreement are lower when it comes to topics explicitly related to global issues. Last but not least, most teachers report to be highly confident in teaching subjects related to GC to their students. However, the proportion of teachers that feel confident to teach these topics is lower for contents related to global issues.

## Introduction

Cambodia got through a marathon journey and challenges to provide an education to its citizens, as experiencing a repeated social and political upheavals for over the past six decades. By the early 1970s, the country was ruined by a severe civil war, then fell into genocide regime, Khmer Rouge. The education system was completely destroyed, as Khmer Rouge attempted to obliterate all existing systems and transformed the country into Marxist agrarian society. After the collapse of the regime in 1979, the education system was re-installed and has been gradually developed. From 1979 to 1986, the system was applied ten-year basis for general education. In the primary level, students were required to spend four years before moving to secondary levels. Basically, at the earlier stage, the primary school was to serve each village in the community. Secondary school was divided into two levels. Students needed to complete the first level before taking the entrance examination for the second level. The academic years of the education system was modified. The purpose was to provide a quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning for all young children to cope up with their needs and social change and to align with regional and international education systems. Therefore, from 1996 up to now, the Cambodian education system has been applying 12 years in general education with 6 years in primary level, 3 years in lower secondary school level and another 3 years in upper secondary school level. Unfortunately, up to the early of 2000s, the quality of education in Cambodia seems not to be able to report properly due to there was an absence of clear reflection processes in the education system.

Historically, there was no evidence to state the presence of large-scale assessment in the education system in Cambodia until the early of 2000s. Instead, classroom-based assessments, such as monthly and semesterly examinations, had dominated nationwide. In 2005, MoEYS initiated the implementation of a large-scale assessment, so-called National Student Learning Assessment (NSLA) for grade 3, grade 6, grade 8, and grade 11. With the notable improvement of technical capacity and getting strong support from MoEYS's leaders, Cambodia has recently moved to participate in two International Large-Scale Assessments, the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) in 2014, and the Program for International Student Assessment for Development (PISA-D) in 2016. Additionally, in 2018, MoEYS released a K-12 student learning assessment framework of Cambodia to use nationwide. The framework discloses a holistic view of all sorts of assessments which embed different purposes: to provide the evidence-based learning, to inform policies and actions, and to improve teaching and learning in the classroom. Since that time, the quality of education has been recorded and the various evidences found during the assessment processes have been used to improve the quality of human resource in Cambodia.

As stated above, Cambodia is now in the period of implementing the SEA-PLM and it is time to release the results. These results are very significant for policy reflection and improvement as well as for the improvement of teaching and learning at the classroom level.

The Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) is a sample-based assessment, specifically developed for countries in Southeast Asia. It is a new regional program initiated by Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) and the UNICEF East Asia Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO). SEA-PLM was designed to assess learning outcomes of grade 5 students associated with four domain areas of reading, writing, mathematics and global citizenship to inform policy-making and ensure all children to achieve meaningful learning.

## *Education in Cambodia: Results from Participation in the SEA-PLM*

Especially, SEA-PLM was designed based on the curricula of the participating countries. Currently, there are six participation countries joining in the program.

SEA-PLM has been engaged with many elite partners. For instance, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) supported SEA-PLM in designing, implementation and capacity development of the program. ACER also played an important role to ensure an international standard of the SEA-PLM procedure through the development of the SEA-PLM assessment framework, tests and questionnaires, sampling, survey and data procedures and protocols. Other key partners also engaged in the SEA-PLM processes including ASEAN Secretariat, Centre for Universal Education (CUE) at Brookings Institute, Korean Education Development Institute (KEDI), Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE), Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific (NEQMAP), and UNESCO Bangkok.

Cambodia has been involved in the establishment of SEA-PLM program since 2012 and officially signed up to conduct a field trial in 2014 at the 36th SEAMEO High Official Meeting. In the country, SEA-PLM was implemented by the Education Quality Assurance Department (EQAD) of MoEYS. EQAD is a responsible institution, conducting all sample-based learning assessments in Cambodia. The EQAD's primary task is to measure the progression and development of education sectors and to monitor student learning achievement.

The main survey of SEA-PLM 2019 was rolled out at the end of the 2018–2019 school year in the six participating countries from the region, including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines and Viet Nam. In total, the main survey covered 1,093 primary schools, in 1,094 classes with 31,187 students among the participating countries using 18 test booklets and 4 questionnaires (student questionnaire, parental questionnaire, teacher questionnaire, and school questionnaire) in nine different languages as data collection instruments.

In particular, in Cambodia, the main survey was successfully implemented in July 2019, in 177 schools across the 25 provinces. There is a note that, participants from two provinces were excluded due to their small number of schools. Also, these two schools were not part of the targeted samples of schools selected by ACER. However, MoEYS invited one school from each of these provinces to administer the SEA-PLM instruments in order for them to gain the knowledge and experience of a regional assessment standard practice for the benefits of the next round survey and in-country assessments. As a result, 177 schools with the total of 5,396 grade 5 students (51.3% of girls), 380 teachers (48.7% of females), and 5,374 parents participated in the study.

## Objectives of the SEA-PLM

The main objectives of the SEA-PLM are as follows:

1. Enhance capacity to generate and analysis assessment data at regional, national and sub-national levels;
2. Enhance capacity to utilize assessment data for education improvement and more equitable learning outcome at regional, national and sub-national levels;
3. Enhance ASEAN integration in terms of approaches to assessment, with an initial focus on primary Grade 5 in the learning areas of numeracy (mathematics), literacy (reading and writing), and global citizenship (SEAMEO & UNICEF, 2017).

## Objectives of the National Report of SEA-PLM of Cambodia

The National Report of SEP-PLM will help Cambodia and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport to reveal as the following objectives:

1. To assess student's competence in reading, writing and mathematics
2. To examine students' attitude and behavior towards national and regional contexts;
3. To collect information related to background and characteristics of students, families, teachers, schools, parents and communities to reflect on the country's education system
4. To share lessons learned and recommendations to improve the quality of education.

## Assessment Methodology

Similar to other large-scale assessments, like PISA, SEA-PLM has employed replicate weights as a mean to reduce the bias caused for the nested structure of the data (i.e. students nested in schools and schools nested in countries) and to estimate the standard errors. Particularly, a replication method known as 'Jackknife 2' (JK2) was applied in SEA-PLM data analysis. Because of the rotated assessment design used in SEA-PLM, Plausible Values (PVs) were developed to obtain consistent estimates of population characteristics (i.e. achievement scores).

For cognitive skill data, SEA-PLM data specialists decided to transform these scores onto an achievement scale with mean 300 and standard deviation 50, which was more suited to reporting regional results. For scales constructed with data from the background questionnaires, the data specialists decided to transform the scores onto a scale with mean 50 mean and standard deviation of 10.

The cognitive results of SEA-PLM are presented in two main forms: as average student achievement and as the proportion of students in different proficiency levels or bands. SEA-PLM data specialists created 5 bands for Reading, 8 bands for Writing and 8 bands for Mathematics. The description of what students know and can do when they perform within each of the bands can be consulted in the National Report (MoEYS, *forthcoming*).

## Key Findings

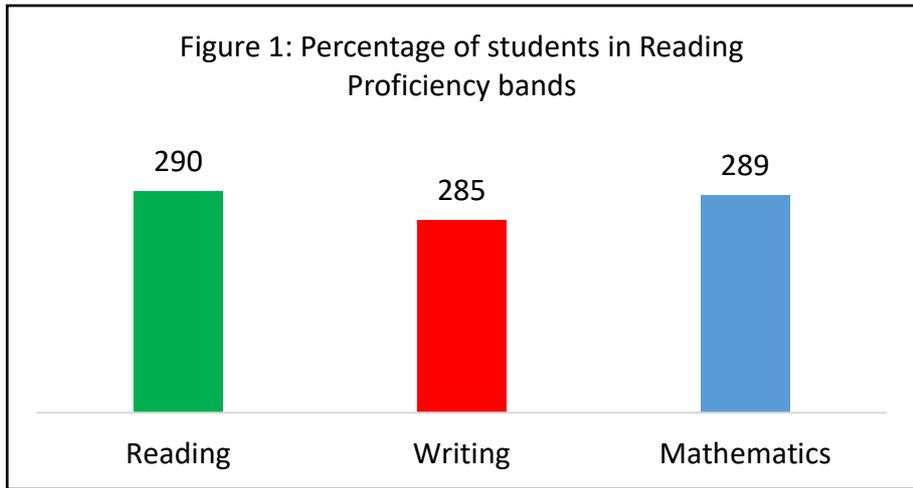
The results from SEA-PLM are significant indicators for the education system in Cambodia, specifically at primary education level. This addresses the suggestion from the international assessment, PISA-D, that Cambodia needs to focus on lower education level, particularly in primary level, in order to prepare the students to perform better in secondary school level. The key findings from the SEA-PLM results of grade 5 students in Cambodia are presented in this *Snapshot*.

## Student Performance in Reading, Writing and Mathematics

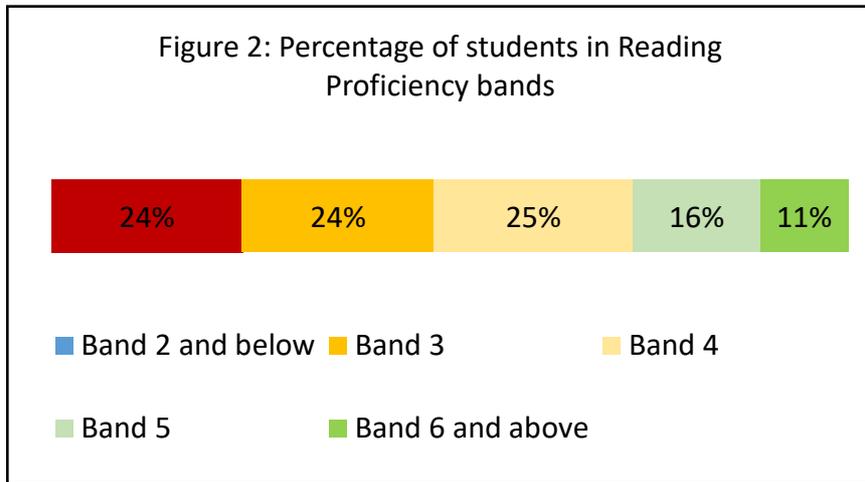
Many studies, like PISA-D, National Assessments of Cambodia and so on, have revealed so many factors influenced the student's performance. In this part, only some of them are presented below.

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On average, grade 5 students in Cambodia scored 290 in Reading, 285 in Writing and 289 in Mathematics. This result places the average performance of Cambodian grade 5 students in Band 4 of Reading, in Band 1 and below of Writing and in Band 4 of Mathematics.



Figures 2, 3 and 4 look closer at these results by showing the percentage of students in each band of the three domains. For Reading, the results showed that nearly half of the Cambodian grade 5 students are in band 3 and band 2 and below, while the other half were in upper bands. Specifically, there is a sizeable proportion of students (11%) in the highest band (band 6 and above).



The development of the SEA-PLM proficiency bands makes possible the alignment of Cambodian grade 5 student proficiencies against global indicators as defined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for reading and mathematics at the end of primary school (there is no reference for writing literacy). According to the description of SEA-PLM bands, students in band 3 and above appear to have a proficiency in reading that meets or exceeds that described by the end of lower Primary SDG 4.1.1a indicator. That is, 76% of the Cambodian grade 5 students. It was also agreed that those students in band 6 and above in Reading can be considered as reaching the minimum proficiency of SDG 4.1.1b at the end of Primary education. That is, about 11% of the grade 5 Cambodian students.

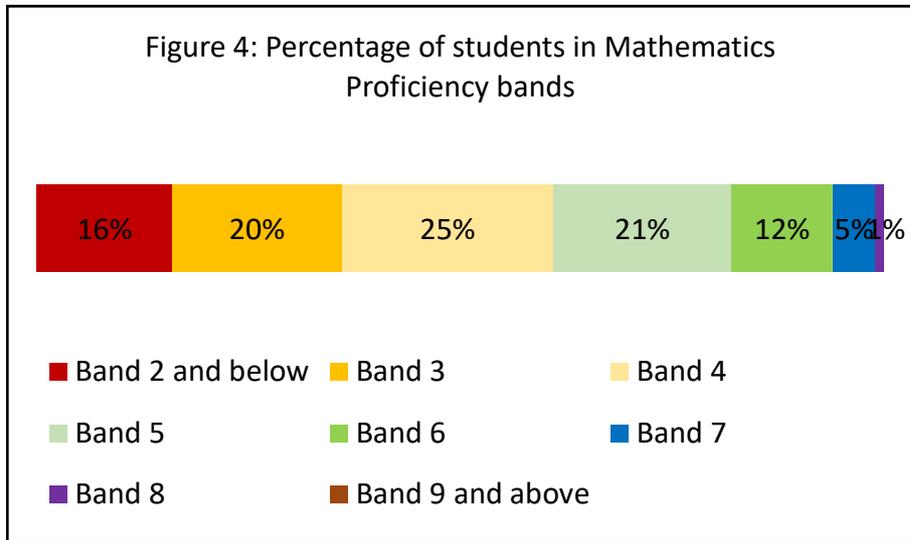
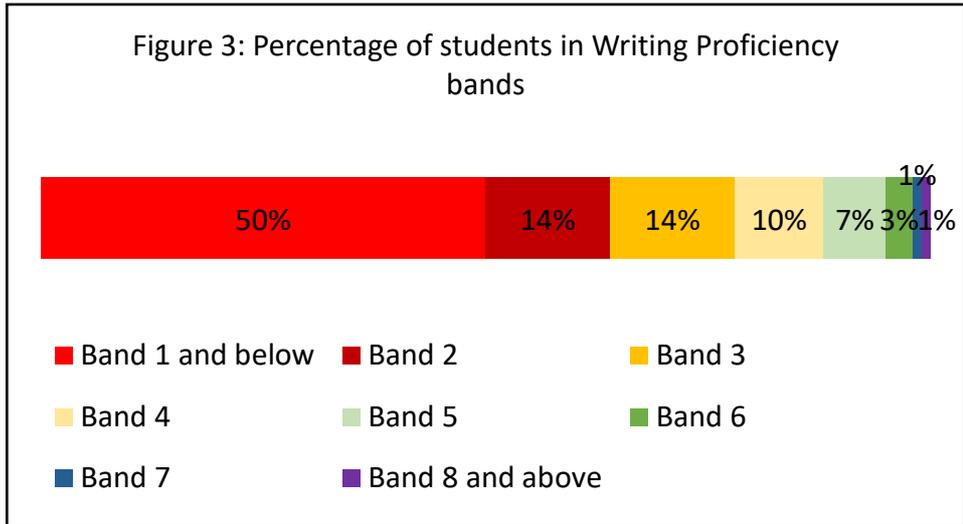
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For Reading, about **76%** of grade 5 students in Cambodia have met the minimum proficiency level suggested by SDG 4.1.1a for *the end of lower primary* and only about **11%** of them have met minimum proficiency level for *the end of primary* as setting in the goal (minimum level of proficiency) of SDG 4(SDG 4.1.1b).

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Regarding writing ability, about half of grade 5 students in Cambodia were placed in band 1 and below (see Figure 3). Only about 2% of them were in the highest bands, bands 7 and band 8 and above.



In the case of Mathematics, as shown in Figure 4, about 36% of students were in band 3 and band 2 and below. Most students were placed in bands 4 and 5, whereas only about 1% were in band 8. And no Cambodian students perform within the highest band (band 9 and

above). This reflects the diversity in the students' ability in Mathematics. Similar to reading, based on the SDG 4.1.1 indicator, it could be said that those students who are in the Band 4 and above can be considered as meeting the minimum level of proficiency of Mathematics for the end of lower Primary (64% of grade 5 Cambodian students), and those who are in band 6 and above can be considered as reaching the minimum proficiency of SDG 4.1.1b in Mathematics at the end of Primary education (18%).

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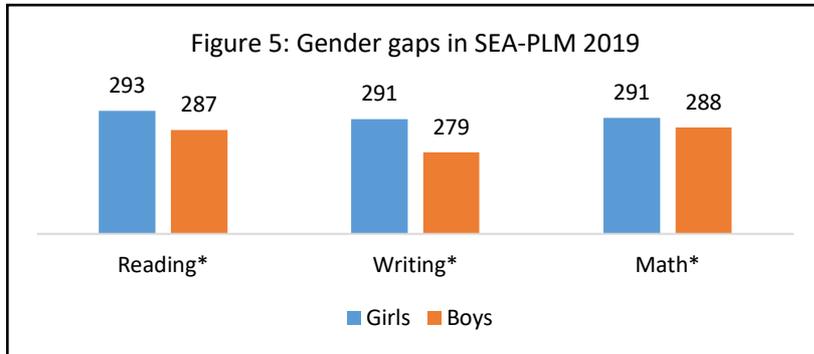
For Mathematics, about **64%** of grade 5 students in Cambodia have met the minimum proficiency level for *the end of lower primary* and only about **19%** of them have met the minimum proficiency level for *the end of primary* as setting in the goal (minimum level of proficiency) of SDG 4.

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## Student Performance by different characteristics

It is important to acknowledge that student performance in SEA-PLM is inevitably influenced by the context in which teaching and learning take place. For this reason, the results of Cambodian students are also reported in relation to a number of background characteristics.

Gender is one of the factors observed in the study. Many studies, especially PISA-D and

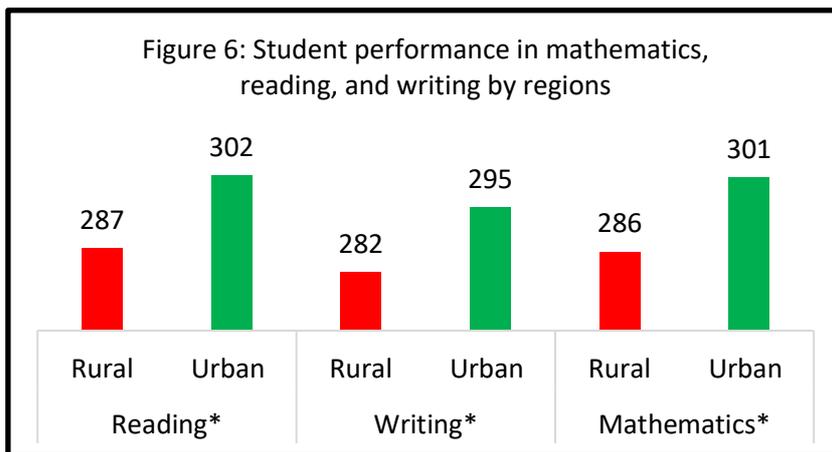


**Note:** \* Indicates a statistically significant difference  
**Source:** Authors' own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

national assessments have shown that female students tend to outperform male students in most subjects, especially in Reading competency. SEA-PLM results confirm this pattern. Cambodian girls outperformed boys in all subjects. As shown in Figure 5, girl students in grade 5 scored about 7 points higher than boy students in

Reading. Similarly, on average, girls got about 12 and 3 score points more than their peers in Writing and Mathematics, respectively.

### In Cambodia, grade 5 girl students outperformed grade 5 boy students in Reading, Writing and Mathematics.



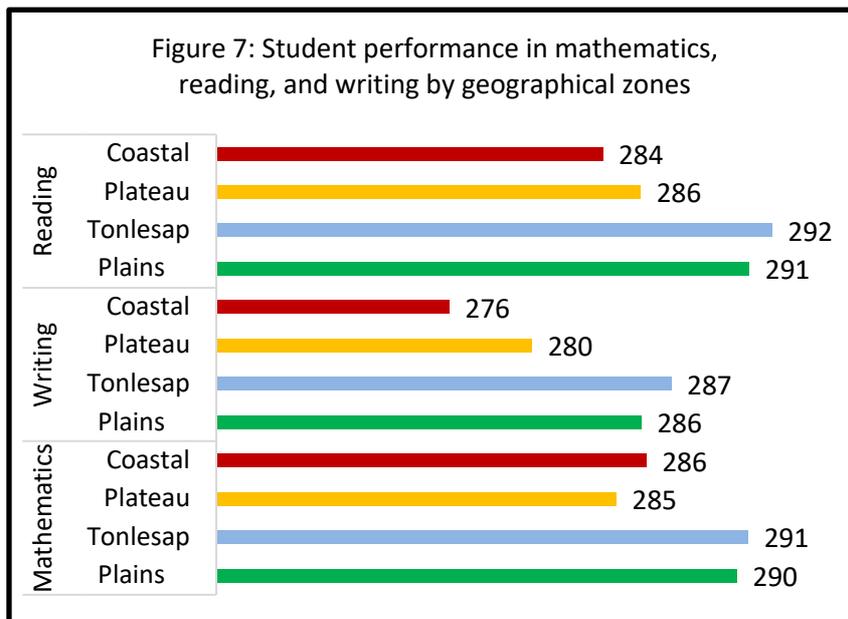
**Note:** \* Indicates a statistically significant difference  
**Source:** Authors' own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

In the case of regions, students in urban schools outperformed those in rural schools in all three domains. The performance difference is 15 score points in Reading, 13 score points in Writing and 15 score points in Mathematics. This reflects persistent inequality in learning between the two regions

### In Cambodia, grade 5 urban students outperformed grade 5 rural students in Reading, Writing and Mathematics.

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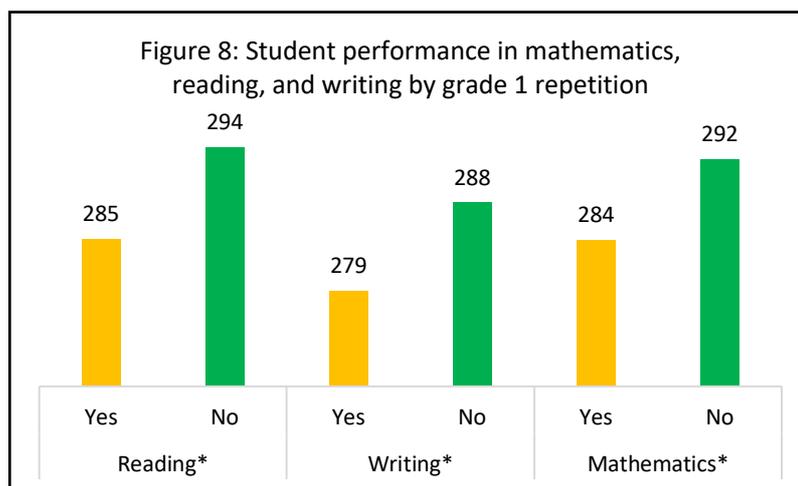
In Cambodia, Geographic zone was divided into four, those are Plains, Tonle Sap, Plateau and Coastal. Figure 7 indicates the results of grade 5 students among the four zones. Overall, students from Plains and Tonle Sap perform better than students from Plateau and Coastal in all subjects. This reflects inequality in learning between Plains and Tonle, and Plateau and Coastal.



**Note:** \* Indicates a statistically significant difference  
**Source:** Authors' own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

**In Cambodia, students from Plains and Tonle Sap perform better than students from Plateau and Coastal in all subjects.**

Repetition is also an important factor to be observed. Similar to gender, previous studies, especially PISA-D and national assessments, revealed that students who repeat class tend to have lower performance than those who have never repeated class. Repeating a school year has also been shown to cause students to drop out and to increase the national educational expenditure (MoEYS, 2018). Consistent



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**Source:** Authors' own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

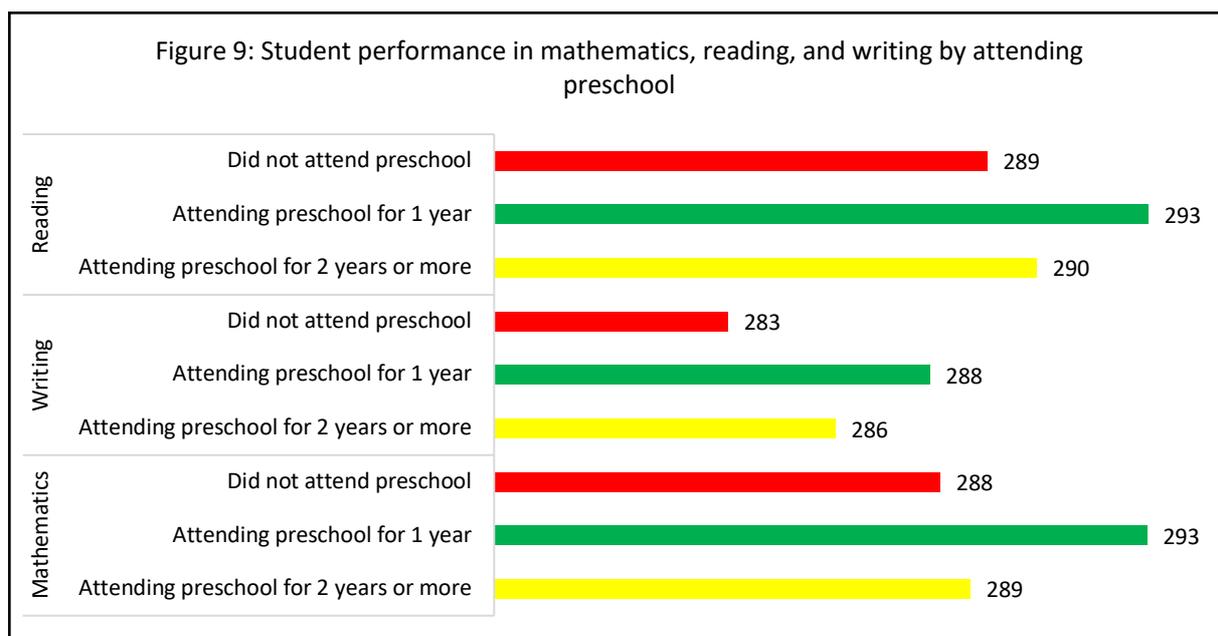
with previous findings, SEA-PLM results also indicated a statistically significant difference between the two groups. As shown in Figure 8, students who have never repeated class, particularly in grade 1, outperformed those who have repeated class. Non-repeating students

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scored about 9 points higher in Reading than those who reported having repeated a class. In Mathematics this difference was of about 8 score points on average.

**In Cambodia, grade 5 students who have never repeated class, particularly in grade 1, outperformed those who have ever repeated class.**

Figure 9 illustrates the difference in student performance depending on preschool attendance. Similar to previous findings, especially results of grade 3 and grade 6 national assessment (2019 and 2016, respectively), the analysis of SEA-PLM data indicates that students who attended preschool for one year performed better than those who did not attend preschool at all. However, a somehow surprising finding is that students who spent 2 or more years in pre-school scored lower than those who attended preschool for only one year.



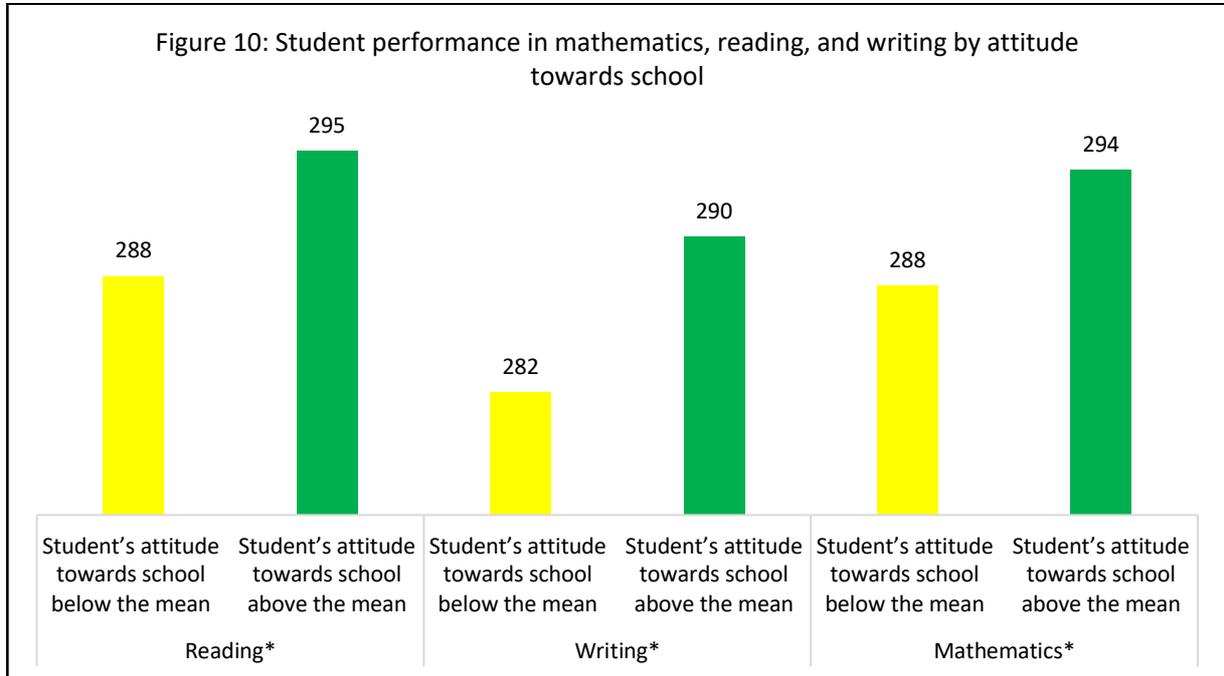
**Note:** \* Indicates a statistically significant difference  
**Source:** Authors' own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

**In Cambodia, grade 5 students who attended preschool for one year are more likely to perform better than those who did not attend preschool at all.**

SEA-PLM also explored the performance of students based on their attitude towards school. Data analysts divided students into two groups. One group with those students who reported to have attitudes towards school below the national mean (i.e. negative attitudes) and

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another group with those who reported attitudes towards school above the mean (i.e. positive attitudes). Figure 10 illustrates the results of this analysis. It could be seen that students who have a positive attitude towards school performed better than those who have a negative attitude in the three domains. The difference is, on average, about 7 score points for Reading, 8 score points for Writing, and about 6 score points for Mathematics.

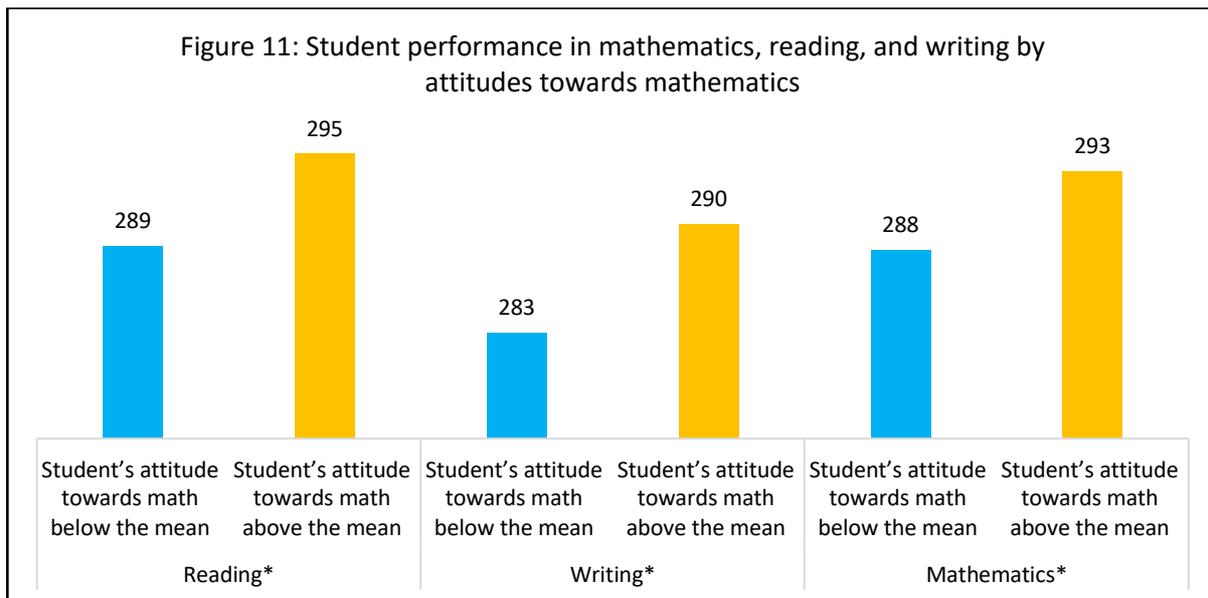


**Note:** \* Indicates a statistically significant difference  
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**In Cambodia, grade 5 students who have positive attitude towards school are more likely to perform better than those who have negative attitude towards school in the three domains.**

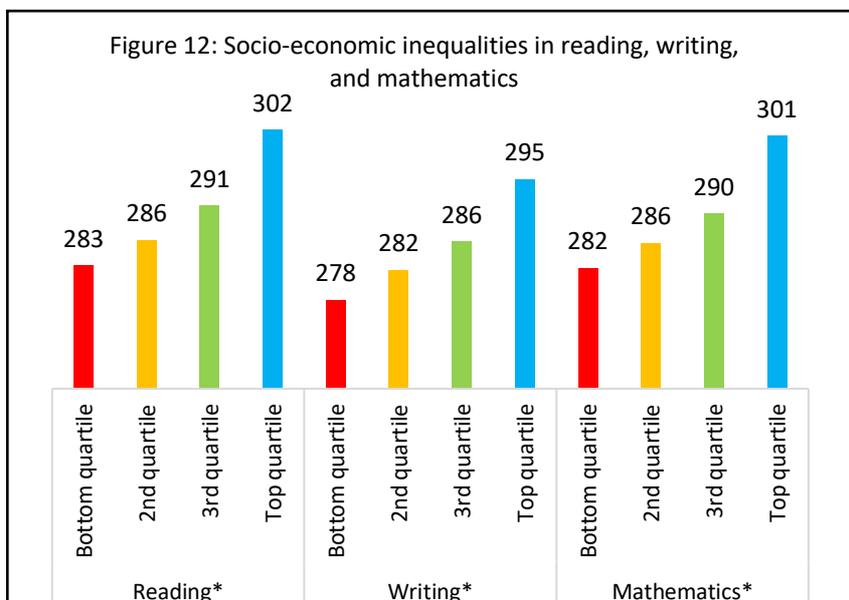
Because attitudes towards learning Mathematics has been found to influence students' performance not only in Mathematics but in other subjects too, SEA-PLM examined the performance of students in Reading Writing and Mathematics in relation with their attitudes towards Mathematics. Similar to the case of attitude towards school, data analysts have divided students into two groups. One group with those students who reported attitudes towards Mathematics below the national mean (i.e. negative attitudes) and another group with those students who reported attitudes towards Mathematics above the mean (i.e. positive attitudes). Figure 11 illustrates the results of this analysis. It could be seen that students who have positive attitudes towards Mathematics tend to perform better than those who have negative attitudes in all domains. The difference is, on average, about 6 score points for Reading, 7 score points for Writing, and about 5 score points for Mathematics.

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**Note:** \* Indicates a statistically significant difference  
**Source:** Authors' own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

In Cambodia, grade 5 students who have a positive attitude towards Mathematics tend to perform better than those who have a negative attitude towards Mathematics in the three domains.



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**Source:** Authors' own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

Once again, similar to previous assessments, SEA-PLM looked at the relationship between the student performance in reading, writing and mathematics and family socio-economic status (SES). In this case, students were divided according to their SES score in quartiles, so the students with the lowest 25% SES score in the country are in the bottom quartile and the students with the highest 25% SES score are in the top quartile. As shown in

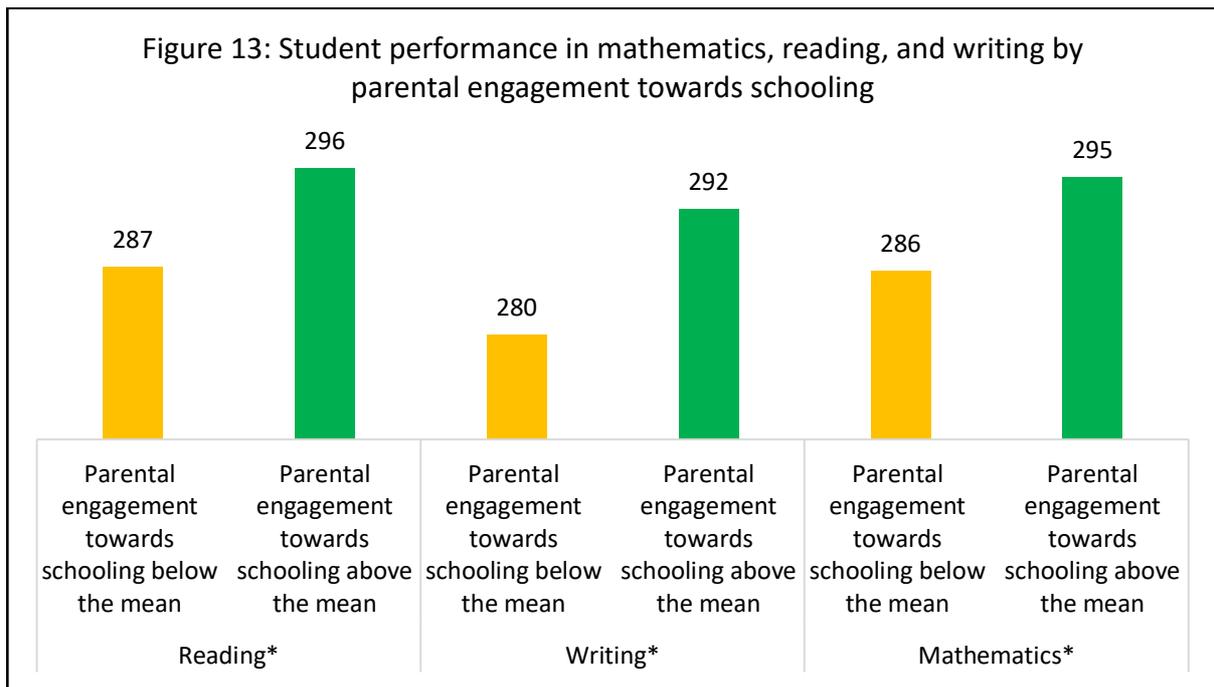
Figure 12, students at the top quartile (i.e. socioeconomically advantaged students) outperformed students at the bottom quartile (i.e. socioeconomically disadvantaged students). The difference is, on average, about 19 points in Reading, 17 points in Writing and

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19 score points in Mathematics. This finding is consistent with previous studies, such as PISA-D and national assessments. So, it can be concluded that students with a more socioeconomically advantaged background perform better than more disadvantaged students. It is important to mention that such socioeconomic gaps in educational achievement are well-known in sociology of education and are reported to a major or lesser extent in all countries around the world.

**In Cambodia, grade 5 students with more advantaged outperformed disadvantaged students.**

SEA-PLM also revealed that parental involvement in children’s education has a strong association with their educational achievement. Figure 13 indicates that students who reported that their parent had engaged more with their schools tend to perform better than those who reported that their parents had engaged less with their schools. The difference is, on average, about 9 score points in Reading, 12 score points in Writing and 9 score points in Mathematics. This finding suggests that this aspect of the educational reform in Cambodia is having the expected results. As this reform explicitly encourages parents to collaborate with teachers and schools with the aim of reinforcing the quality of childrens education.

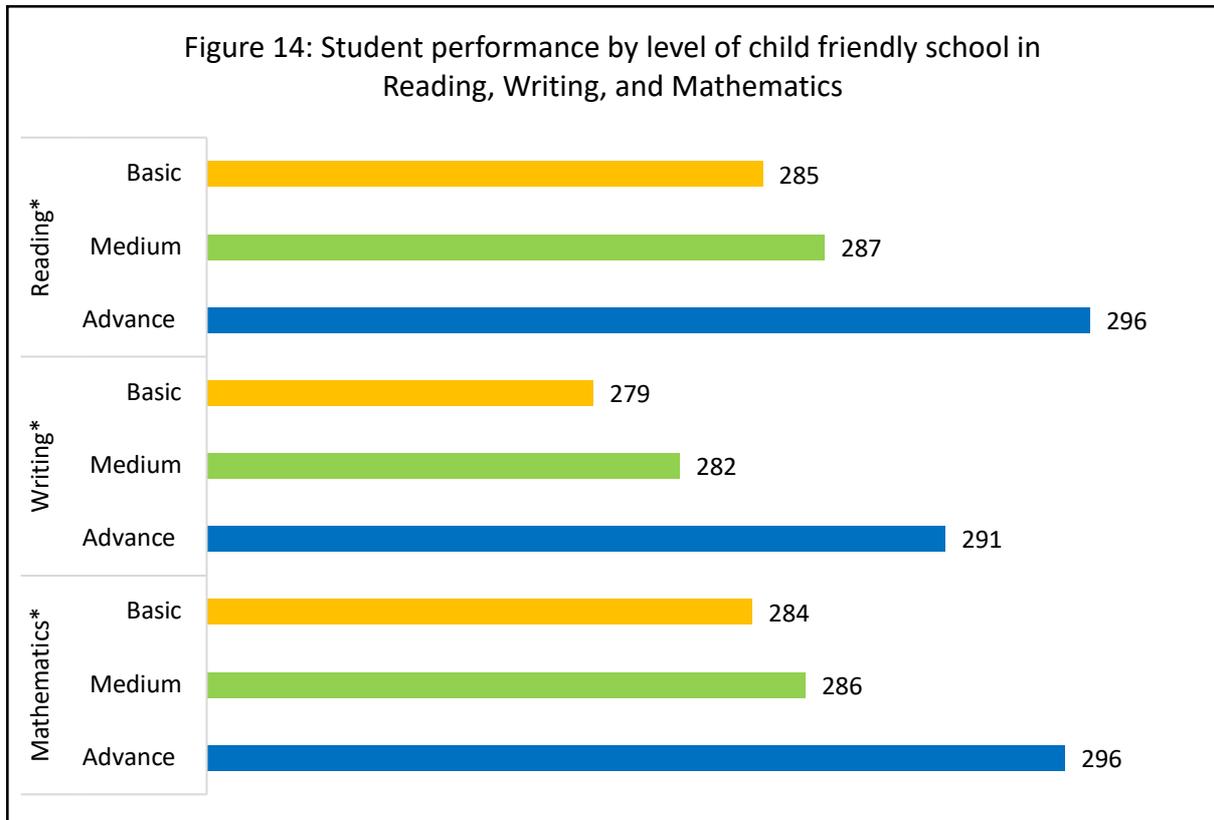


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**In Cambodia, grade 5 that students who reported that their parents had engaged more with their schools then to perform better in all domains than those who reported that their parents had engaged less with their schools**

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SEA-PLM also allowed contrasting the performance of grade 5 students according to the Cambodia’s Child Friendly School Policy (CFS). There are six components required for a school to be certified as a child-friendly school. However, according to the CFS Framework, the main condition is that a school should be inclusive and ensure that all children have access to schooling, particularly the most vulnerable such as orphans, ethnic minorities and those with physical disabilities. Following this, schools can be classified in Basic, Medium or Advanced levels of child-friendliness. The result of this analysis indicates that students who are studying in advanced level schools of CFS outperformed students who are studying in basic and medium level school. The difference between students in schools categorized as basic level and those in schools categorized as advanced level is, on average, about 11 score points in Reading, 12 score points in Writing, and 12 score points in Mathematics. While the difference in performance between students in basic level schools and medium level schools tends to be rather small and not statistically significant.



**Note:** \* Indicates a statistically significant difference  
**Source:** Authors’ own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

In Cambodia, grade 5 students who are studying in advanced level schools of CFS outperformed students who are studying in basic and medium level school. However, the difference in performance of students in basic level schools and medium level schools tends to be rather small.

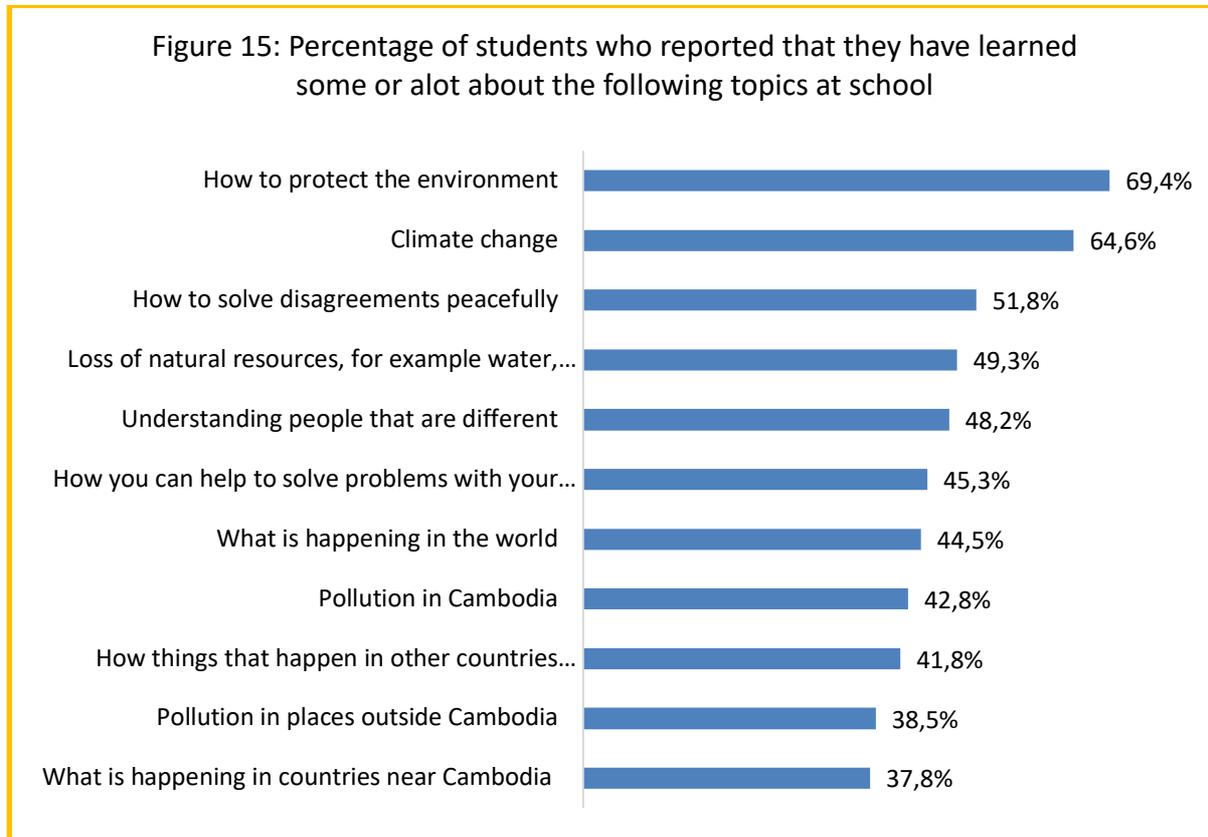
## Global Citizenship

Since the goal of SDG 4 is to promote sustainable development, sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equity, peace and non-violence, and appreciation of cultural diversity, Global Citizenship (GC) is included as part of the targets of SDG 4. The term “global citizens” refers to those who appreciate and understand the interconnectedness of all life on the planet. They act and relate to others with this understanding to make the world a more peaceful, just, safe and sustainable place.

Many elements or statements were included in the questionnaires in order to explore the student’s awareness, attitude, value, and behavior toward GC (UNICEF & SEAMEO, 2017). However, in this snapshot, only some of them are presented and divided in GC of students and GC of teachers.

### Student’s Perception of GC:

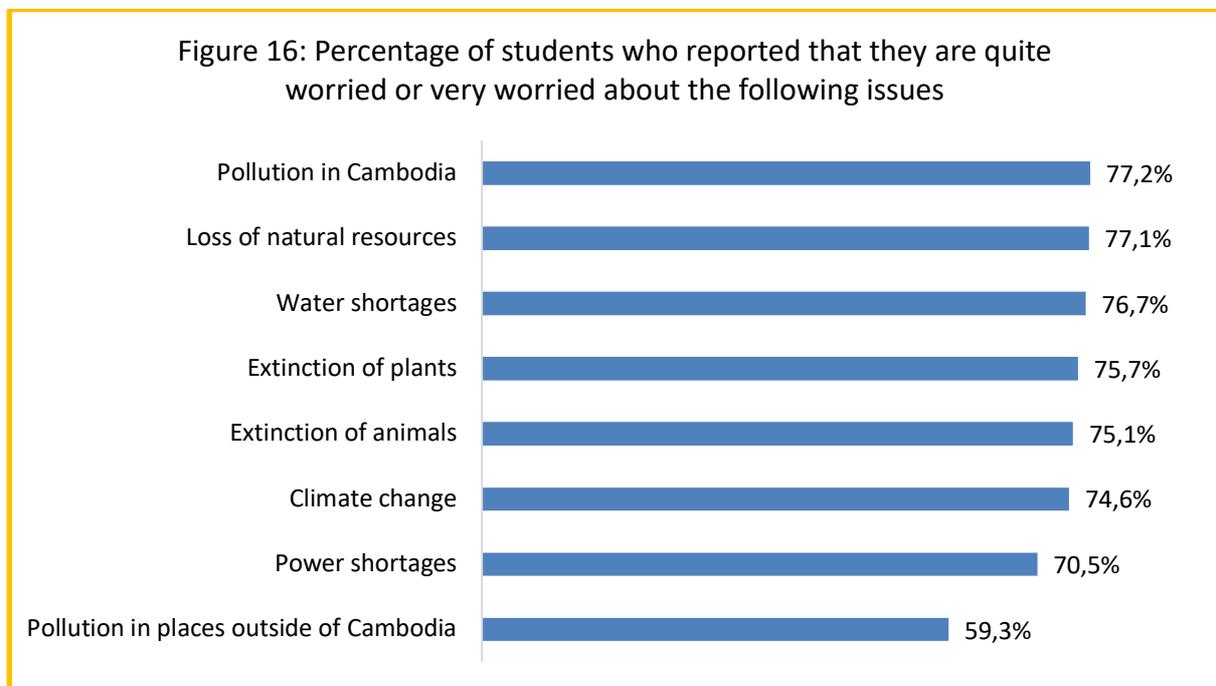
The exposure to GC issues at school is one among the elements used to look at the GC of Cambodian children. A set of statements and its results are presented the Figure 15. The figure shows the percentage of students who reported that they have learned “*some or a lot*” of global citizenship in school. Among the GC indicators, about two-thirds of students reported that (Figure 15) they have learned “How to protect the environment” and “Climate change” in school, whereas about half of them reported that they have learned “How to solve disagreement peacefully”. On the other hand, less than half of the students reported that they have learned other indicators at school. This reflects that about one to two thirds of Cambodia grade 5 students have learned at least “some” GC at their schools, whereas the rest of student might have not obtained any knowledge about GC from their schools.



Source: Authors’ own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

About 39% to 69% of Cambodia grade 5 students have learned at least “some” GC at their schools, where the rest of students might have not learned GC from their schools.

The concern with global issues is another element used to reflect the GC of Cambodian children. A set of statements and its results are presented in Figure 16 below. The results indicate that more than two thirds of students reported that they are “quite worried or very worried” about issues happening in Cambodia, whereas only 59% of students are concerned about the pollution in place outside of Cambodia. When taken together to construct a scale of ‘concern for global issues’, the students’ attitudes show a significant correlation with student performance in mathematics (0.32), reading (0.35) and writing (0.26)”. It can be seen that a majority of students are concerned with global issues and that students who performed better in reading, writing, and mathematics tend to have stronger concerns with those issues as well.



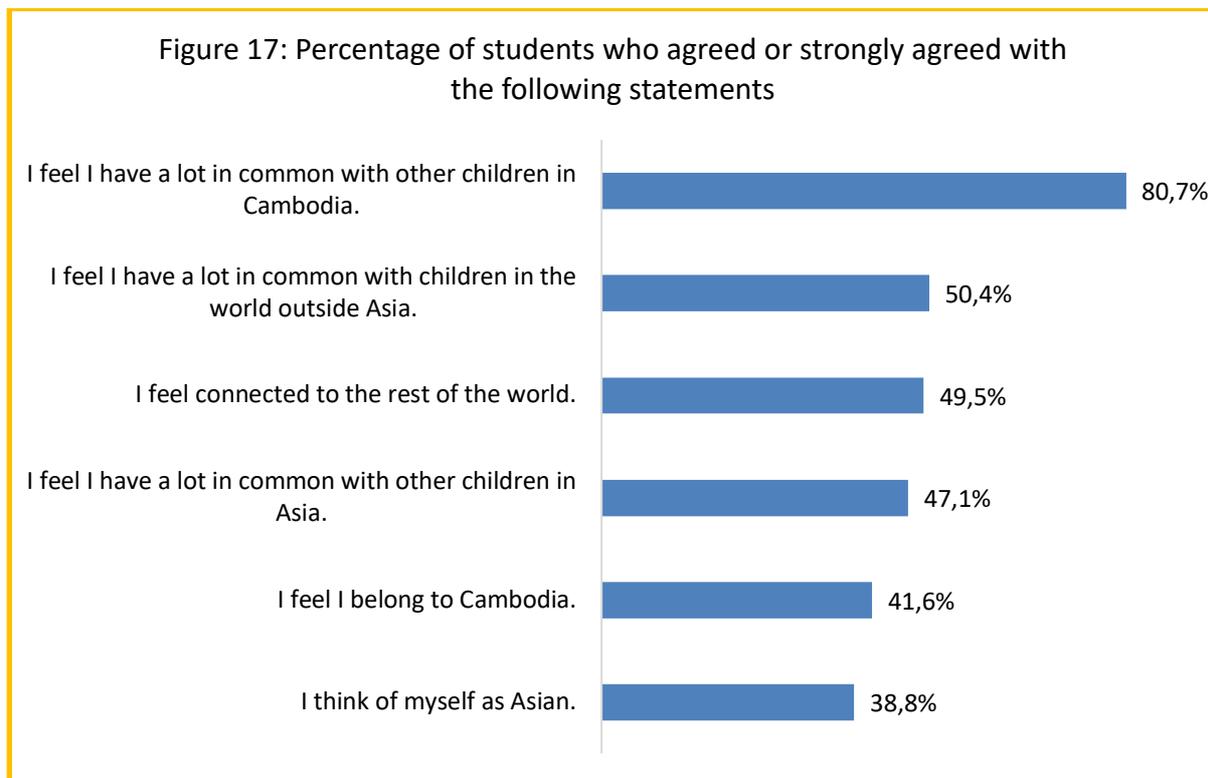
Source: Authors’ own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

A majority of students are concerned with global issues and students who performed better in reading, writing, and mathematics tend to have stronger concerns with those issues as well.

SEA-PLM identifies the Asian identity of students with some statements illustrated in Figure 17. The figure indicates that about half or less of students reported that they “agree or strongly agree” to the statements related to Asian Identity. The exception is the statement “I feel I have a lot in common with other children in Asia”, where about 80% chose “agree or

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strongly agree”. It can be seen that, according to most of these statements, slightly more than 50% of grade 5 students in Cambodia reported not feel themselves as part of Asia.



Source: Authors' own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

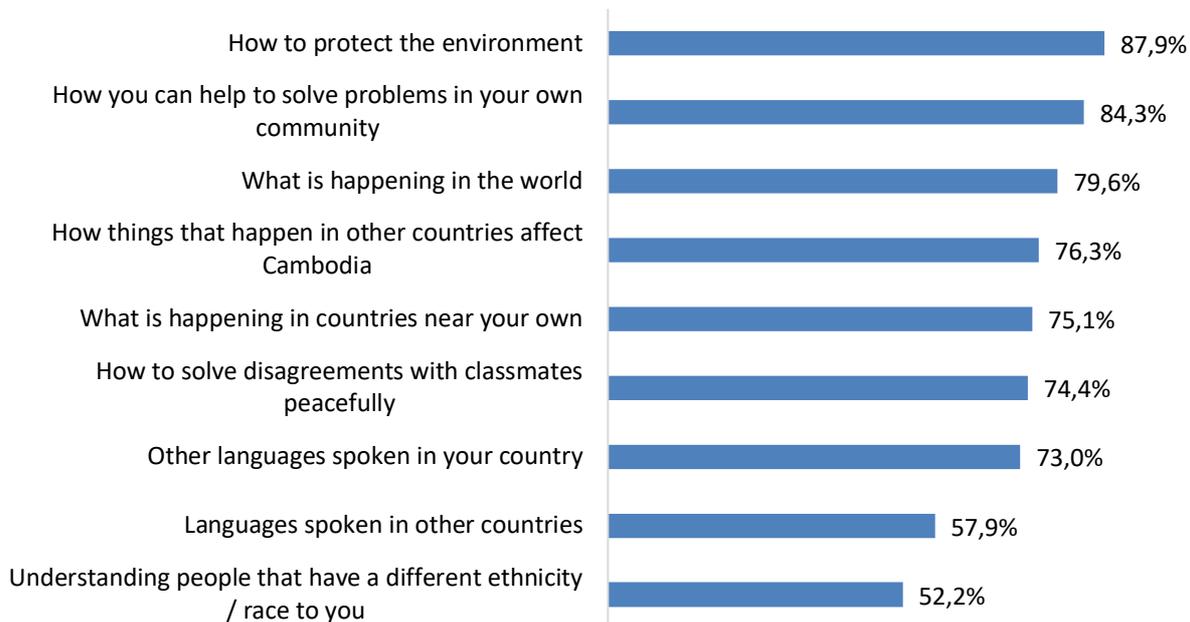
#### Slightly more than 50% of grade 5 students in Cambodia do not have a strong Asian identity.

Figure 18 illustrates that when asked about how important is to learn about GC topics, more than two thirds of students selected the options “quite important or very important” from the statements provided. The two statements with that students considered as less important to learn about were “Languages spoken in other countries” and “Understanding people that have different ethnicity/race”, for which about 58% and 52% of students chose “quite important or very important”, respectively. Overall, it can be seen that the majority (about two thirds) of grade 5 students in Cambodia are more likely to be aware of the importance of learning about global citizenship-related topics.

#### A majority (about two third) of grade 5 students in Cambodia are more likely to be aware of the importance of learning about global citizenship-related topics.

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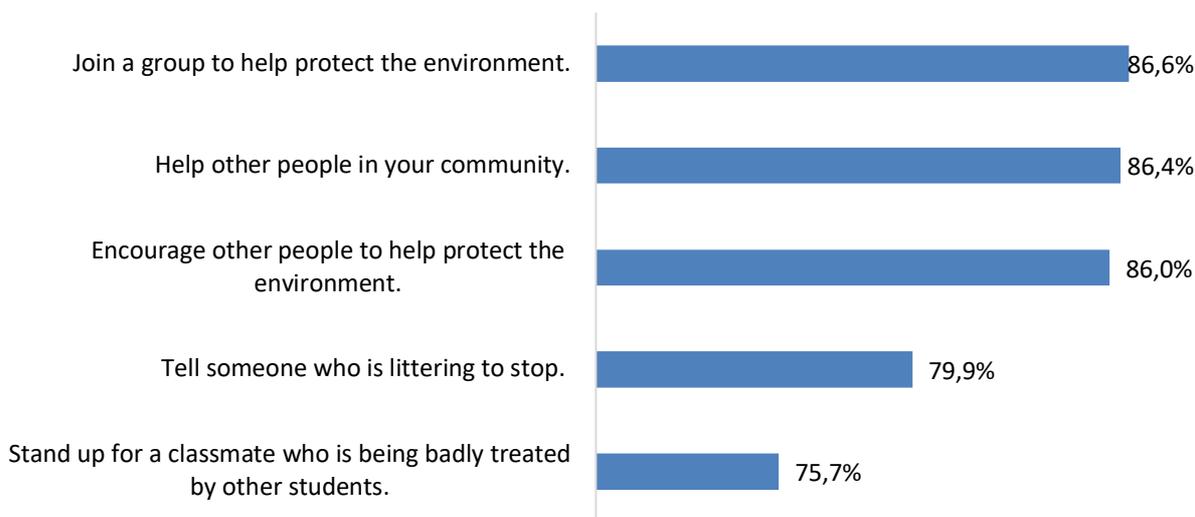
Figure 18: Percentage of students who reported about the following topics that they have learned is quite important or very important



Source: Authors' own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

SEA-PLM explored the willingness of students to participate in activities related to civic behavior. As shown in Figure 19, more than two thirds of grade 5 students in Cambodia reported that they “might do or will do” the activities they were asked about. It can be said that the majority of grade 5 students have strong willingness to involve themselves in activities associated with civic behaviours.

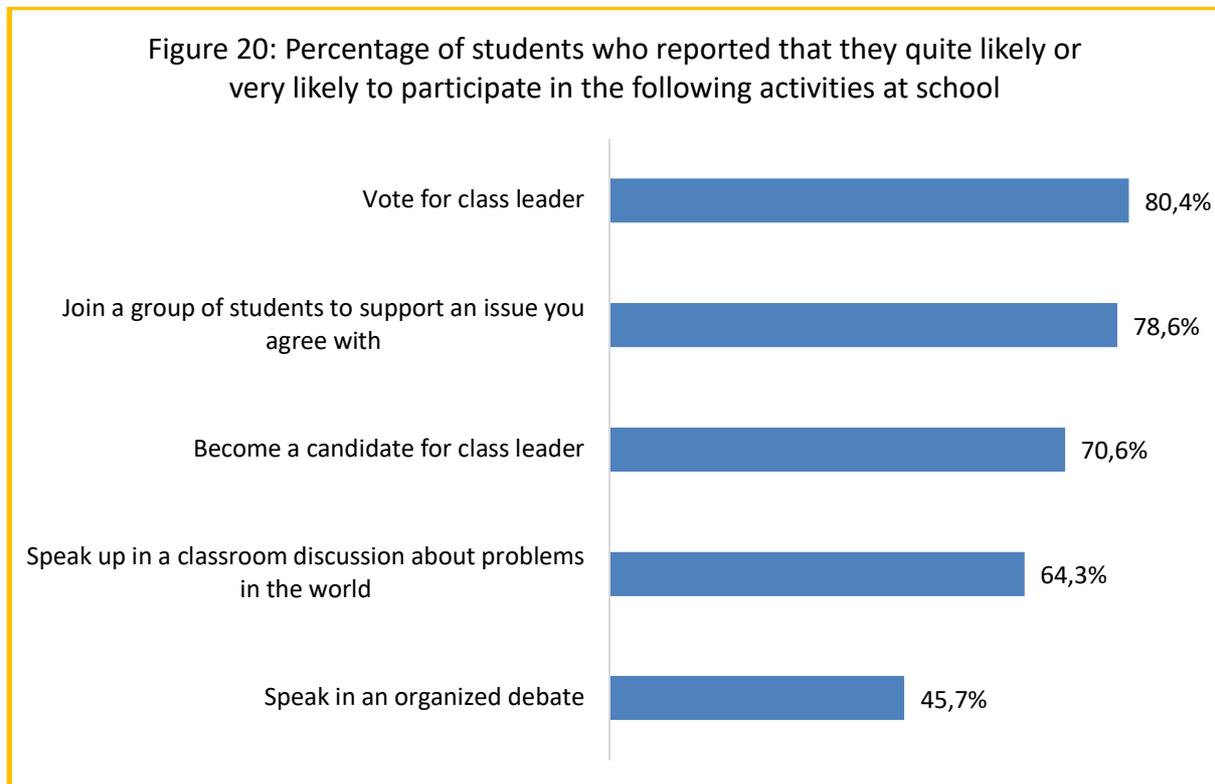
Figure 19: Percentage of students who reported that they might do or will do the following activities



Source: Authors' own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

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Another set of indicators to examine the intention of students in doing some activities related to civic behavior, particularly, in class and school are presented in Figure 20. The figure shows that an important proportion of grade 5 students (from 60% to 80%) are “likely or very likely” to participate in activities related to civic behavior offered in their schools. The activity that was rated as less likely to participate in by students was to “speak in an organized debate”, with about 46% of students reporting to have the intention to participate in it.



Source: Authors' own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

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**A majority of grade 5 students have strong willingness to involve themselves in activities associated with civic behaviors both in school and in the wider community.**

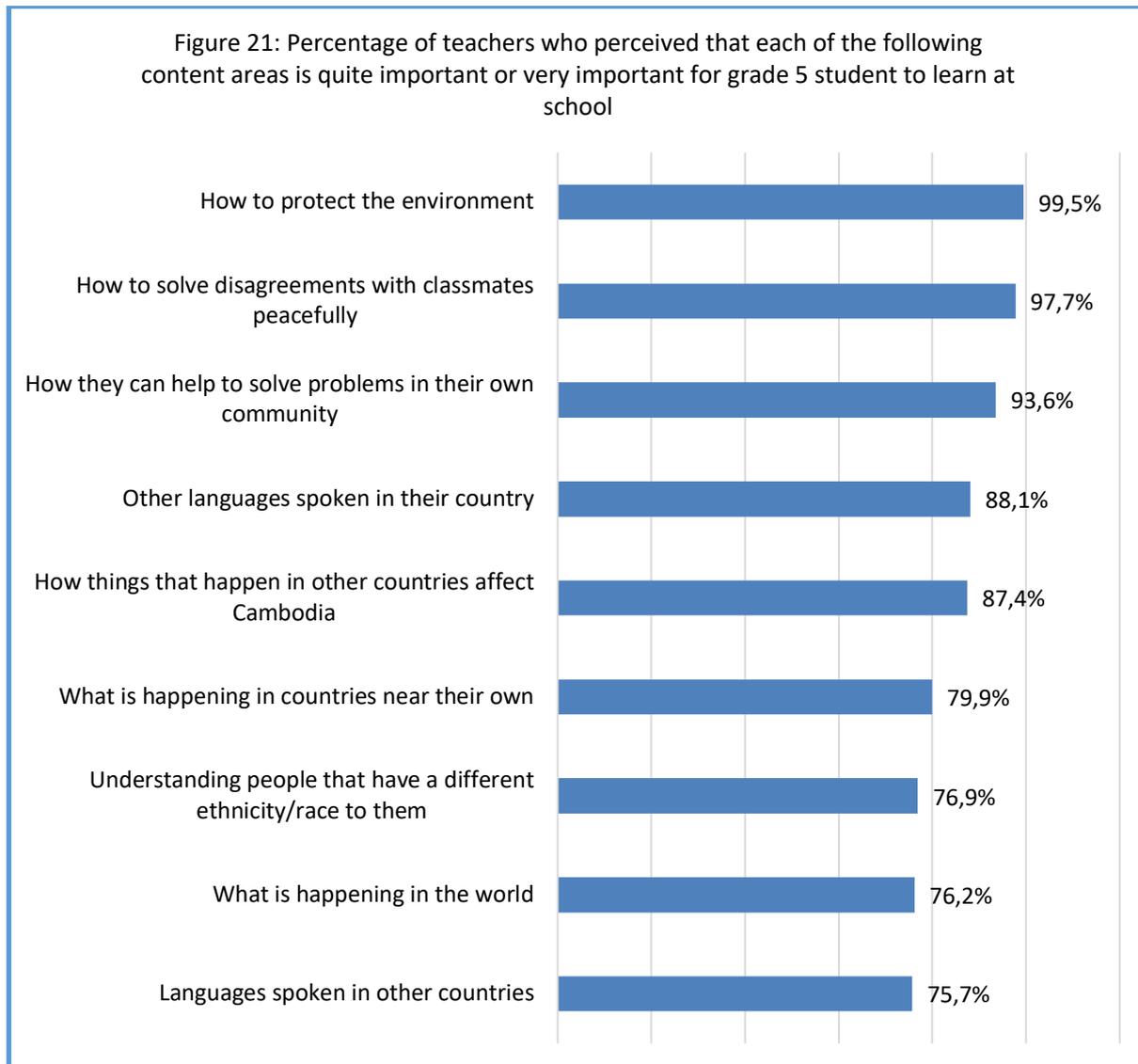
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### Teacher's Response on GC:

SEA-PLM also explored the perception of teachers on GC issues. Figure 21 shows the percentage of teachers who perceived that each of the following content areas is “quite important or very important” for grade 5 students to learn at school. The analysis indicates that most teachers (from 75% to almost 100%) admitted that the global citizenship-related topics presented in the Figure below are “quite or very important” for students to learn. A closer look at these results suggests that Cambodian teachers seem to put more value on the topics relevant to their own country, rather than those topics which are relevant to the

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regions or globally. So, it can be seen that Cambodian teachers agree on the importance of GC related topics to be taught to students, particularly those related to their country.



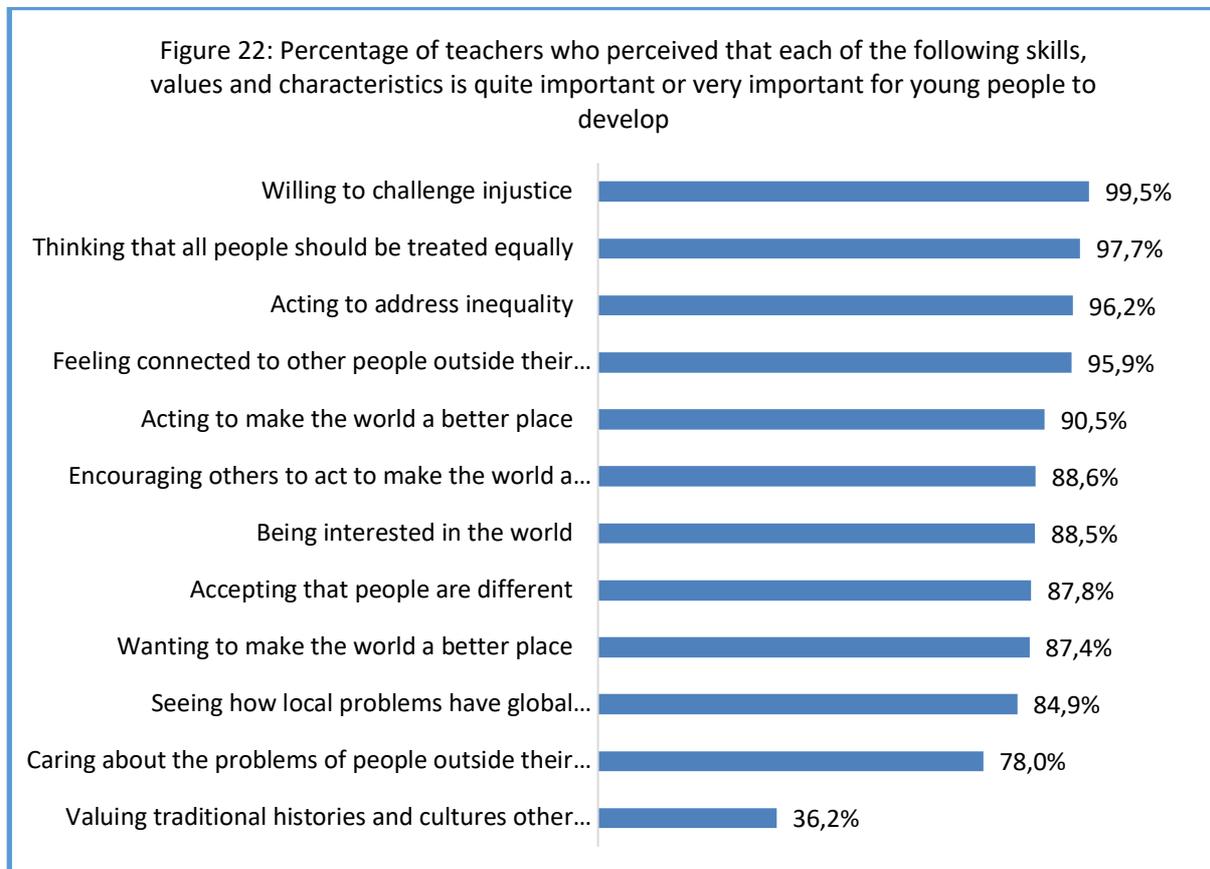
Source: Authors’ own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

**Cambodian teachers agree on the importance of students learning GC related topics. Notably, teachers seem to assert a high value to those topics relevant to their country.**

Figure 22 illustrates the percentage of teachers who perceived that each of the listed skills, values and characteristics are “quite important or very important” for young people to develop. Interestingly, around 80% to almost 100% of teachers rated the skills, values and characteristics presented in Figure 22 as “quite important or very important”. The only exception was “valuing the histories and cultures other than their own”, which only about 36% of the teachers considered quite or very important. It can be seen that Cambodian teachers recognize the importance of skills, values, and characteristics related to GC that

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young people should possess and develop. But, again, Cambodian teachers seem not to give much importance to those aspects that are only relevant outside their own country.



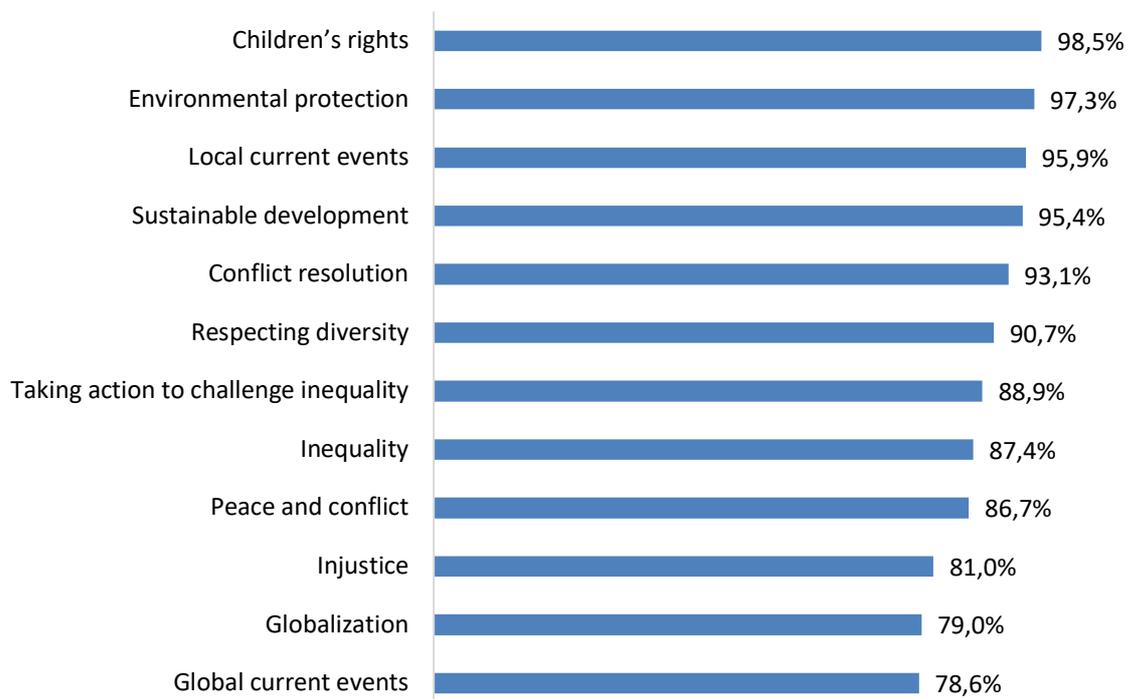
Source: Authors’ own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

**Cambodian teachers recognize the importance of the skills, values, and characteristics related to GC that young people should possess and develop. But, again, Cambodian teachers seem not to give much importance to those aspects that are only relevant outside their own country.**

SEA-PLM also looked at the quality of the pre-service teacher education program of Cambodia in relation to how well it prepared them to teach GC content. Figure 23 demonstrates the percentage of teachers who reported that the pre-service teacher education program prepared them “quite well or very well” to teach GC topics. As shown in the figure below, nearly 80% to almost 100% of teachers considered that the pre-service teacher education program had prepared them quite well or very well to teach GC issues. These percentages are particularly high when related to Children’s rights and Environmental protection; whereas the lowest percentages of agreement are linked to Globalization and Global current events.

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Figure 23: Percentage of teachers who reported that pre-service teacher education programme prepare them quite well or very well to teach about following contents



Source: Authors' own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

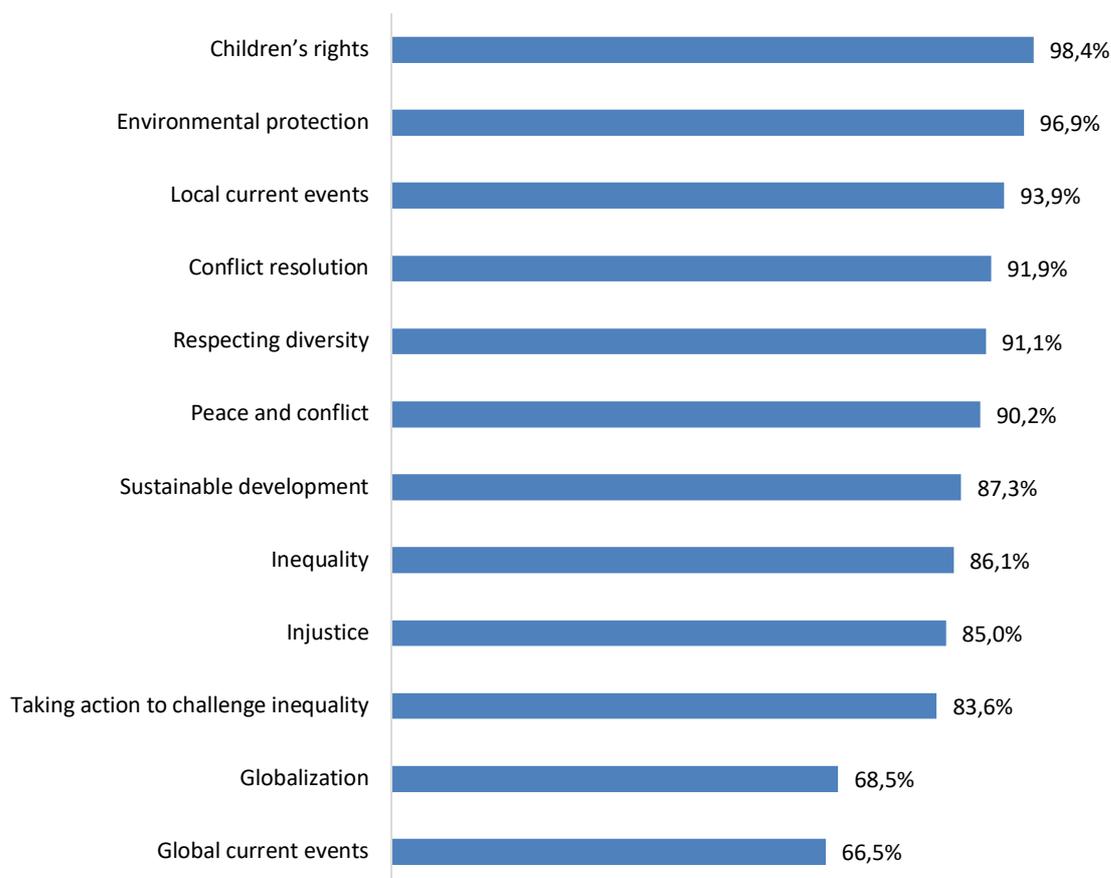
**Cambodian teachers consider that their pre-service teacher education program prepared them well to teach contents related to GC, although the levels of agreement are lower when it comes to topics explicitly related to global issues.**

Figure 24 illustrates the percentage of teachers who feel “quite confident or very confident” to teach the listed contents to grade 5 students. The percentages of teachers who feel quite confident or very confident to teach these topics range from 80% to almost 100%. The exception again are the contents of the Globalization and Global current events. This result is consistent with the findings described above.

In general, while the great majority of teachers agree on the importance of students learning and developing attitudes and values related to GC, the level of agreement tend to decrease when it comes to global issues (see Figures 19 and 20). The fact that it is precisely global topics the ones that teachers feel less prepared and less confident (see Figures 21 and 22) to teach seems to contribute, at least in part, to the explanation of this pattern.

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Figure 24: Percentage of teachers who are quite confident or very confident to teach grade 5 students at their school about following contents



Source: Authors' own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

Most Cambodian teachers report to be highly confident in teaching subjects related to GC to their students. However, the proportion of teachers that feel confident to teach these topics is lower for contents related to global issues.

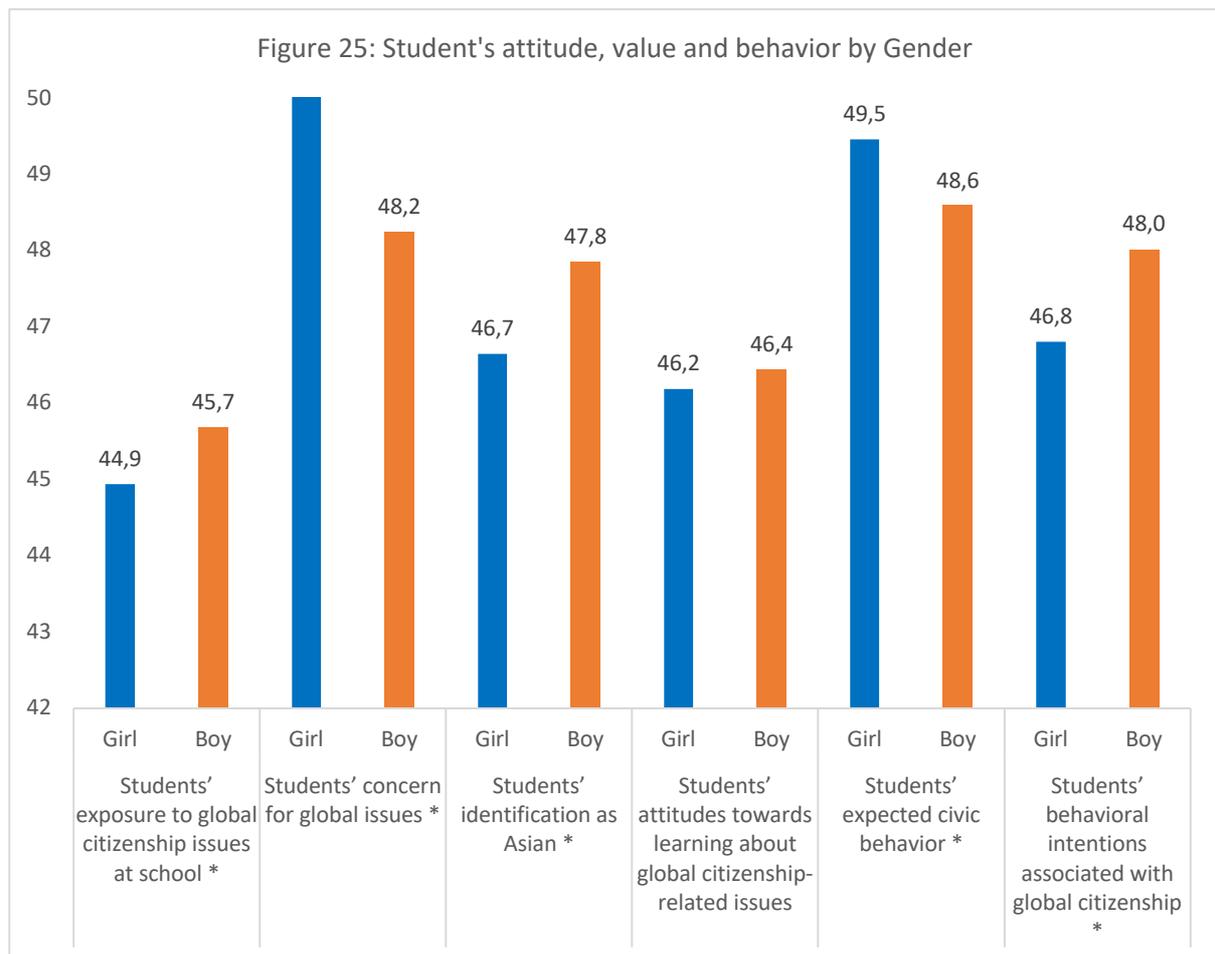
### Global Citizenships by Gender and SES

In order to promote a deeper reflection of these results, SEA-PLM data analysts explored the students' attitudes, values and behaviors towards GC-related issues by gender and socio-economic status of students. To do this, the individual items explored above were summarized in a set of indices or scales, namely behavioural intentions associated with GC, Attitudes towards learning about GC-related issues, Asian identity, Concern for global issues, Exposure to GC issues at school, and Expected civic behaviour. Each index or scale was scaled to have a mean of 50 score points and standard deviation of 10. Detailed information on the

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construction of these scales or indices can be found in the forthcoming National Report of SEA-PLM.

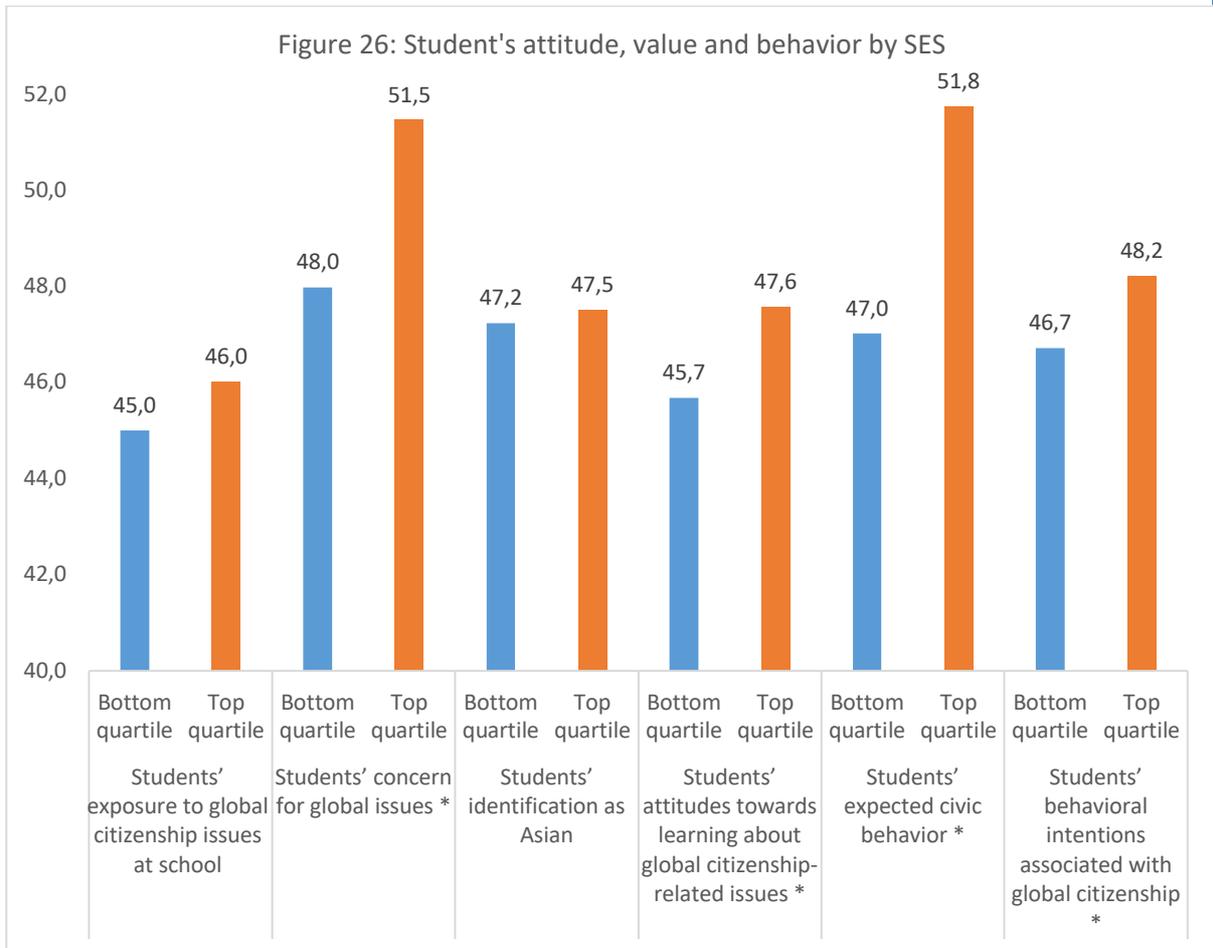
Figure 25 shows the students’ attitudes, values and behaviors towards GC by gender. The results indicate that the differences in score points between girl and boy students are generally small and not statistically significant in all cases. Furthermore, these differences are in some cases in favour of boys (i.e. students’ exposure to GC at school, identification as Asian, attitudes towards learning GC and behavioural intentions related to GC) and some others in favour of girls (i.e. students’ concern for global issues and expected civic behaviour). These results suggest that the education system of Cambodia is providing similar opportunities to learn GC to all students independently of their gender.



Source: Authors’ own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

Similarly, figure 26 illustrates students’ attitudes, values and behaviors towards GC by socio-economic status (SES). The results indicate that the differences in score points between students in the top quartile of the distribution of SES and those at the bottom quartile are not statistically significant in all cases and can also be considered small (i.e. it ranges between 1 and 5 score points). However, it is important to point out that, in all cases, the differences are in favour of the more socioeconomically advantaged students. Nevertheless, given the small size of the differences, it could be inferred that the education system of Cambodia is providing similar opportunities to learn GC to all students independently of their socio-economic status.

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Source: Authors' own calculations from SEA-PLM 2019 Database

**In relation to GC, the education system of Cambodia, somehow, provides opportunity to students to perceive knowledge similarly.**

## Policy Options

The findings from Cambodia's participation in SEA-PLM suggest both accomplishments and opportunities. While Cambodian grade 5 students obtained an average performance in mathematics, reading and writing below the regional mean, it is good news that most students met the minimum proficiency levels suggested by SDG 4.1.1a for the end of lower primary (76% in reading and 64% in mathematics) and a notable amount of grade 5 students have met the minimum proficiency levels suggested by SDG 4.1.1b for the end of primary (11% in reading and 19% in mathematics). Additionally, most Cambodian students report having opportunities to learn Global Citizenship topics at school, and most of them also report having positive attitudes towards these issues. Importantly, these opportunities, behaviours and attitudes are similar for all students regardless of their gender or socioeconomic status. Furthermore, most of their teachers recognize the importance of students learning about GC, consider to be well prepared and feel confident to teach these topics. These results, however, tend to be not so good when GC is explicitly related to issues not directly relevant for Cambodia.

In this document, we sought to identify those factors that are more consistently associated with the educational achievement of Cambodian students, and in what follows we present some policy options that can be derived from our findings.

**Option 1: Implement strategies to bridge the gender gap:** Results from SEA-PLM confirm the findings of previous studies: Cambodian Girls outperform boys in mathematics, reading and writing. The male disadvantage in education is a fairly recent, increasingly common and very complex phenomenon to understand. However, empirical evidence suggests that, on top of performing lower than girls, boys are also more likely to be bullied, repeat grade and to drop out of school altogether. So, it is important and urgent to identify the causes of this phenomenon to design and implement interventions that help to close this gap.

**Option 2: Improve the quality of instruction for the socially disadvantaged groups:** In coincidence with previous studies from both Cambodia and worldwide, SEA-PLM shows that students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds perform considerably lower than their more socioeconomically advantaged peers. This suggests that children from low socioeconomic background do not receive the same learning experiences in or out of school as do their counterparts coming from higher socioeconomic contexts. It is therefore important to make sure that all children receive the same opportunities to learn regardless of their socioeconomic background.

**Option 3: Reduce grade repetition:** The original idea of implementing repetition strategy in education system in Cambodia was to help improve the capacity of slow-learners before promoting them to the next grade. However, international assessments (e.g. PISA and PISA-D) have consistently evidenced that repetition can cause students to drop out and to increase the national educational expenditure. So, reducing grade repetition could help reduce the dropout rate as well as to decrease educational expenditure. However, it is important to note that promoting students to upper grades without having full basic knowledge and skills could cause learning issues in the upper grade as well. To solve this issue, schools [teachers and community] could compensatory actions, like providing additional courses or quality support to slow-learners before promoting them to the upper grade.

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- Option 4: Strengthen the quality of preschool:** Many studies, including PISA-D and national assessments (for grade 3, grade 6 and grade 8), SEA-PLM revealed a positive association between preschool attendance and academic performance of students. It is, however, important to point out that SEAP-PLM results also showed that students who attended preschool for more than one year performed lower than those who attended only for one year. This is a counterintuitive finding since there is no repetition policy applied in preschool. Actually, there are three levels of preschool in Cambodia. The lower level (for one three years old children), medium level (for 4 years old children) and advanced level (for 5 years old children). It would be logical to think that the more years a child learns in preschool, the higher the achievement he or she would have. However, the results indicate the opposite. This invites to have a closer look at the curriculum and pedagogic strategies being implemented at this level. So, Cambodian children can fully benefit from the investment that is currently being made in preschool and basic education.
- Option 5: Enhance the implementation of Child-Friendly School at school level:** Child-Friendly School (CFS) is a school improving policy being implemented in the education system since years ago. SEA-PLM revealed its positive impact on student performance. So, enhancing the CFS implementation at primary school level and potentially expanding it to secondary school level could help attract student to school (note that improving the attitudes toward school is another factor that was identified as having a positive association with student performance by SEA-PLM). However, some important considerations have to be made. Our analyses revealed a difference in performance between students in schools with basic and advanced CFS level, but no significant difference was found when compared with students in schools with medium CFS level. This finding suggests to look back at some points, such as CFS self-evaluation tools, the process of rating school (to be basic, medium, and advanced), incomplete implementation of CFS policies and so on.
- Option 6: Promote more Mathematics Education at primary level:** Mathematics is a fundamental knowledge and skill for life. This study revealed the impact of positive attitude towards Mathematics on the performance of students not only in mathematics but also in reading and writing. Therefore, promoting positive attitudes towards Mathematics seems to be a potential strategy to help improve the education quality of children in all areas.
- Option 7: Increase parental engagement/participation with their kid's education:** Parental engagement appeared to influence the children's learning outcomes assessed by SEA-PLM. So, it seems that implementing a comprehensive strategy for MoEYS, School principals, teachers, educators and all relevant stakeholders to encourage parents to engage with their children's education could help to improve their educational achievement. The involvement suggested here should not be limited to follow up on school homework or the push children to learn at home, but should also include discussions between parents, teachers and school principals to find solutions to increase the quality of the educational opportunities offered at home and school. From this point of view, parental engagement in children's education should be seen as a tool to guarantee and sustain the quality of education in school.
- Option 8: Promote Global Citizenship and Asianization, especially among teachers:** Promoting globalization and asianization would help to reach the idea of "we are same" as well as "education for all". This is especially important in a world that is

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more globalized than ever. Global Citizenship education nurtures personal respect and respect for others, wherever they live. It encourages individuals to think deeply and critically about what is equitable and just, and what will minimise harm to our planet.

### **Option 9: Strengthen teacher education program in Cambodia to respond to the globe:**

Teacher Education Program is still “the must” to tackle with for a long-time success. Conducting the right reform with the teacher education program, for example, changing teaching methods to 21st-century teaching methods, encouraging Cambodian young teachers to actually love their profession, updating and upgrading the content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge of next-generation teachers, as well as the old generation teachers, would help to equip the children with full basic universal skills.

#### Responses to the Policy Options

After the preliminary results of Cambodia based on the SEA-PLM 2019 were revealed, MoEYS called for Assessment Steering Committee Meeting, led by His Excellency Minister of MoEYS. The meeting discussed the key findings found, suggested policy options and solutions to solve the revealed issues, so-called responses. As a result, the meeting arose some responses for MoEYS to do in order to improve the quality of education in Cambodia. The responses are described as below.

1. Strengthen teacher training program by focusing on teaching methodology and packages of early grade reading and early grade mathematics. To build the reading foundation and contribute to the improvement, in term of reading and mathematics to respond to the findings in the assessment.
2. Promote quality of teachers and principal and introduce career pathways, and evaluation approaches to encourage good teachers and school principals. We know that the quality of education is the quality of teachers and the best principal is the backbone of education system
3. Increase a number of community preschools in order to increase access to pre-school and to promote comprehensive approach to transform to standard community preschools and state preschools, so that we can increase access to early childhood education as well as strengthen quality of teacher training program for community pre-school, and provide teaching support and materials to those pre-schools.
4. Strengthen quality of early childhood education to reduce repetition and drop-out rates in grade 1 as it is important for early childhood education, especially pre-school for strengthening reading in the primary education as mentioned in the findings of report. Therefore, it is important to provide comprehensive approach for the development of children, including focusing on providing meal at school and additional nutrition, to children living in vulnerable areas, as well as providing a hygiene and clean water at schools at rural areas.

5. Improve the quality of reading and reading comprehension, we must introduce dictation, writing of short essay, composition in curriculum at primary level. That is important to build the foundation for success of children in secondary education. Learning to write is also important as the children now use a lot of gadgets, like smart phone, they spend less time in writing.
6. Improve contents of textbook in order to introduce the concept-based curriculum. Especially, to address the global citizenship, we must improve the contents of the social science textbooks at the primary level. So that, textbook will respond to the strategic issues identified in the assessment.
7. Strengthen primary Child Friendly School which is the main concept at the primary level. If a school is at an advanced level of child friendly school, they perform better. Therefore, it is important to focus on all aspects of school management, especially to transform the schools into child friendly, so that to it creates a culture and climate inclusive of teaching and learning.
8. Strengthen school-based management (SBM) by focusing on leadership and management of school directors on teaching and learning, learning outcomes of children and parents' participation in school management. Especially, we must create school improvement plan and school management committee, in which we allow parents to participate, and to reduce the dropout rate of children and absenteeism of the children and teachers, and to promote the use of active learning methods as well as to ensure the teachers follow up children regularly, especially to check their homework.
9. Encourage parents, community and local authority to contribute to the school management, to provide support to the teachers, school principal, and be part of learning processes, as mentioned in the assessment.
10. Train professional librarian to respond to the standard library at school which contains books associated with the level of students' capacity, and integrate reading in library as part of teaching and learning in classroom.

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