



The Asia Foundation

2014 NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL EXAMINATION

A SNAP POLL IN CAMBODIA



OCTOBER 2014

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Background

Following the July 2013 election where the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) gained a surprisingly narrow victory over the opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), the newly formed government led by the ruling CPP promised a raft of new reforms. In one such reform effort, the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport (MoEYS) increased the monitoring of the annual national high school examination, which took place on August 4-5, 2014. About 90,000 high school students nationwide sat for the exam. With the increased monitoring, the passing rate fell to 25.7 percent from last year's 86 percent. The low passing rate prompted MoEYS to announce a second exam scheduled for October 13-14. The introduction of MoEYS' reform effort drew media debate over whether or not the increased monitoring was positive for both the government and for the improvement of education in Cambodia overall. In order to gauge public opinion, The Asia Foundation conducted a snap poll, which took place between September 13 and 19, 2014.

Methodology

Questionnaire

In-depth interviews: In order to devise the questionnaire preliminary face-to-face interviews were conducted from August 25-29 2014. The interview results were then used to populate the survey questionnaire with common statements of opinion related to MoEYS' reform measure.

Pre-testing: The questionnaire was tested during trainings conducted for enumerators prior to the data collection period.

Likert scale: The questionnaire used a scale from "totally agree" to "totally disagree" with "agree" and "disagree" in the middle. A "don't know/no response" was also provided as an option.

Sampling:

The survey consisted of a total of 500 respondents from different provinces, in which 400 respondents were from the general population age 15-65 and 100 respondents were high school students, grades 10th, 11th, and 12th including students who took the 2014 national high school examination.

Survey locations:

The survey was conducted in five of the 25 provinces stratified by urban and rural areas. The five provinces include Phnom Penh, Kampong Cham, Kratie, Koh Kong, and Siem Reap representing the urban, flatland, plateau, coastline, and Beong Tonle Sap areas respectively (*see Map 1 below*). Villages were identified by random selection. Additionally, respondents in each village were further identified by a Kish grid method for households.

Key findings

Overall Response:

- The survey shows that respondents overwhelmingly support (96%) the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport's (MoEYS) decision to increase the monitoring of the national exam. Fifty-seven percent of respondents said they agreed with the decision, while 39 percent said they totally agreed.
- In general, 46 percent and 50 percent of the respondents said they agreed and totally agreed with the statement, "It is time to start reforming education."
- When broken down by students and the general population, students were more likely than the general population to say they agreed rather than totally agreed with the reform to monitor the national exam.

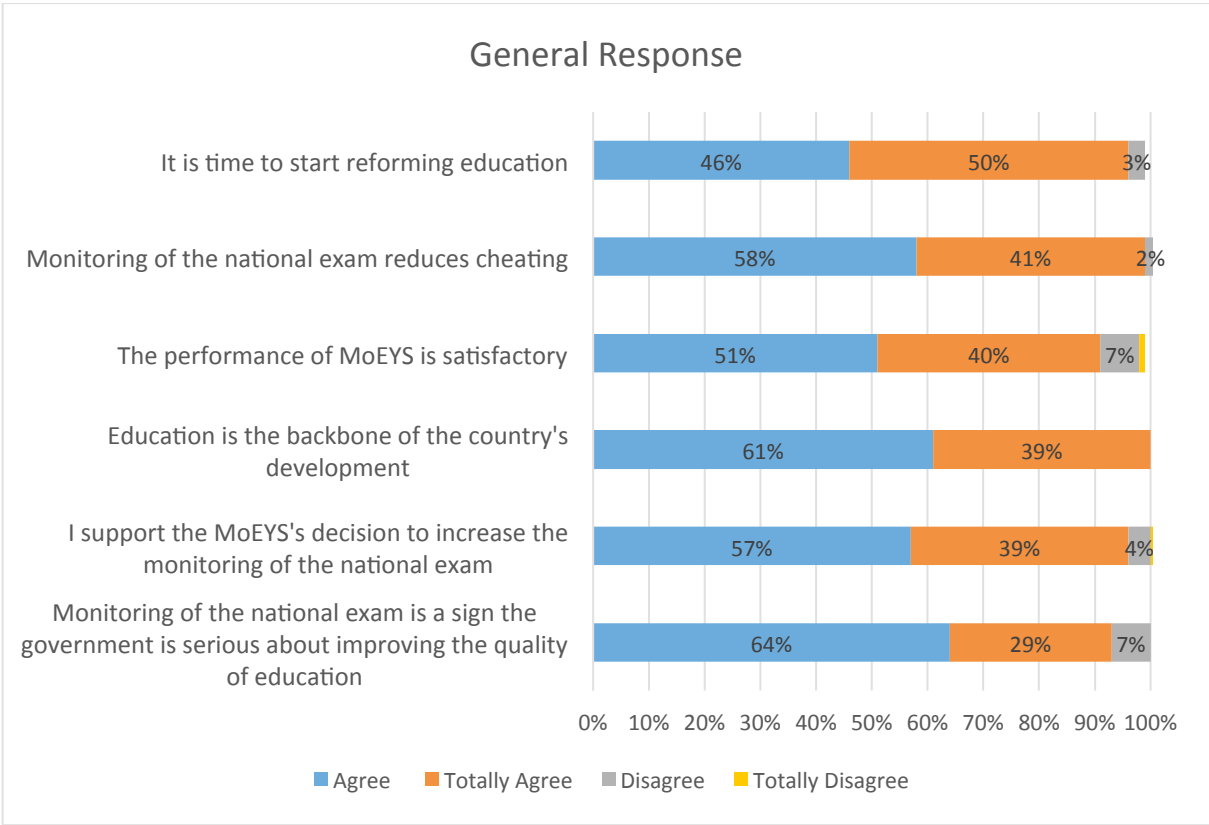
Reasons:

- Reasons as to why people supported the MoEYS' decision to increase the monitoring of the national exam fell into several categories, such as improvements in the quality of education, fighting corruption, and creating a merit-based system of examination.
- The survey showed that 99 percent of the respondents said they agreed or totally agreed with the statement, "Improving the quality of education is a priority for Cambodia."
- When asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement "Monitoring of the national exam will improve the quality of graduates," 53 percent of the respondents said they agreed with the statement while 46 percent said they totally agreed.
- When it comes to merit, 35 percent of the respondents said they agreed that "monitoring of the national exam ensures poor and rich students have equal opportunity" and 64 percent said they strongly agreed.
- Forty-five percent of the respondents said they agreed that this year's exam set a good model for students in the future, while 54 percent said they totally agreed.

Priorities:

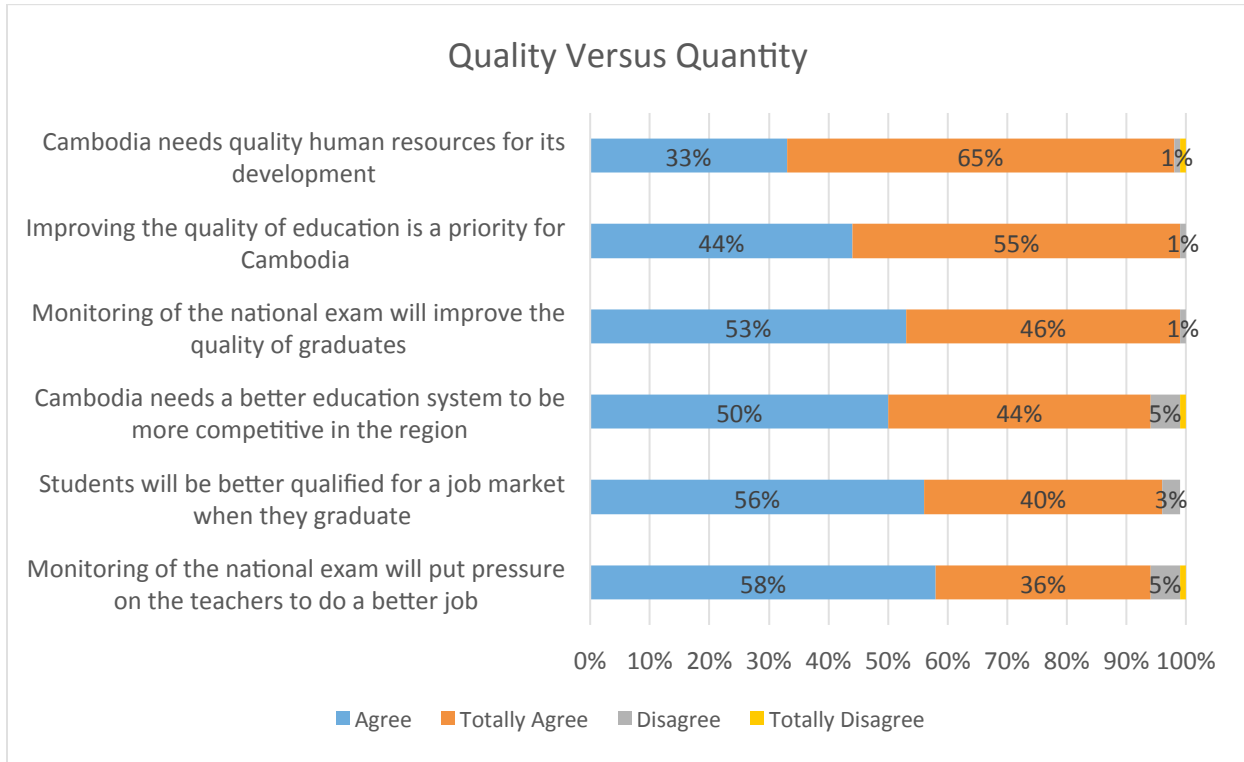
- The survey results suggest that people think that increasing the monitoring of the national exam is insufficient and deeper reform is needed to improve the quality of education in Cambodia.
- Increasing teachers' salaries and starting reform from primary school were the most strongly supported priorities voiced by respondents.

Chart 1: General Response



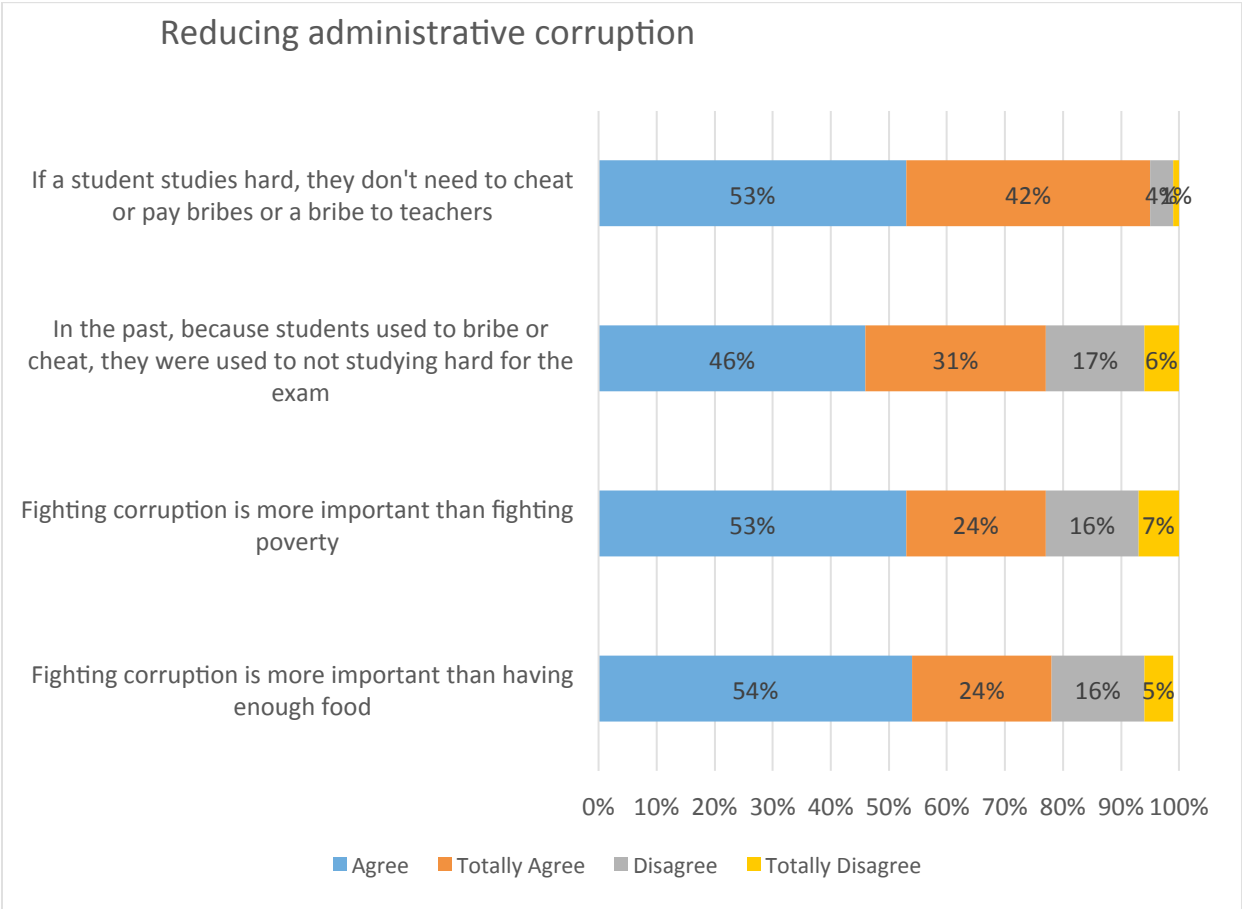
The survey reveals that respondents overwhelmingly supported (96%) the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport’s (MoEYS) decision to increase the monitoring of the national exam. Fifty-seven percent said they agreed with the decision, while 39 percent said they totally agreed. Students as compared to the general population, were more likely to say they agree (students = 59.4%, general population = 55.8%) rather than totally agree (students = 28.3%, general population = 41.8%) with the reform to monitor the national exam.

Chart 2: Quality Versus Quantity



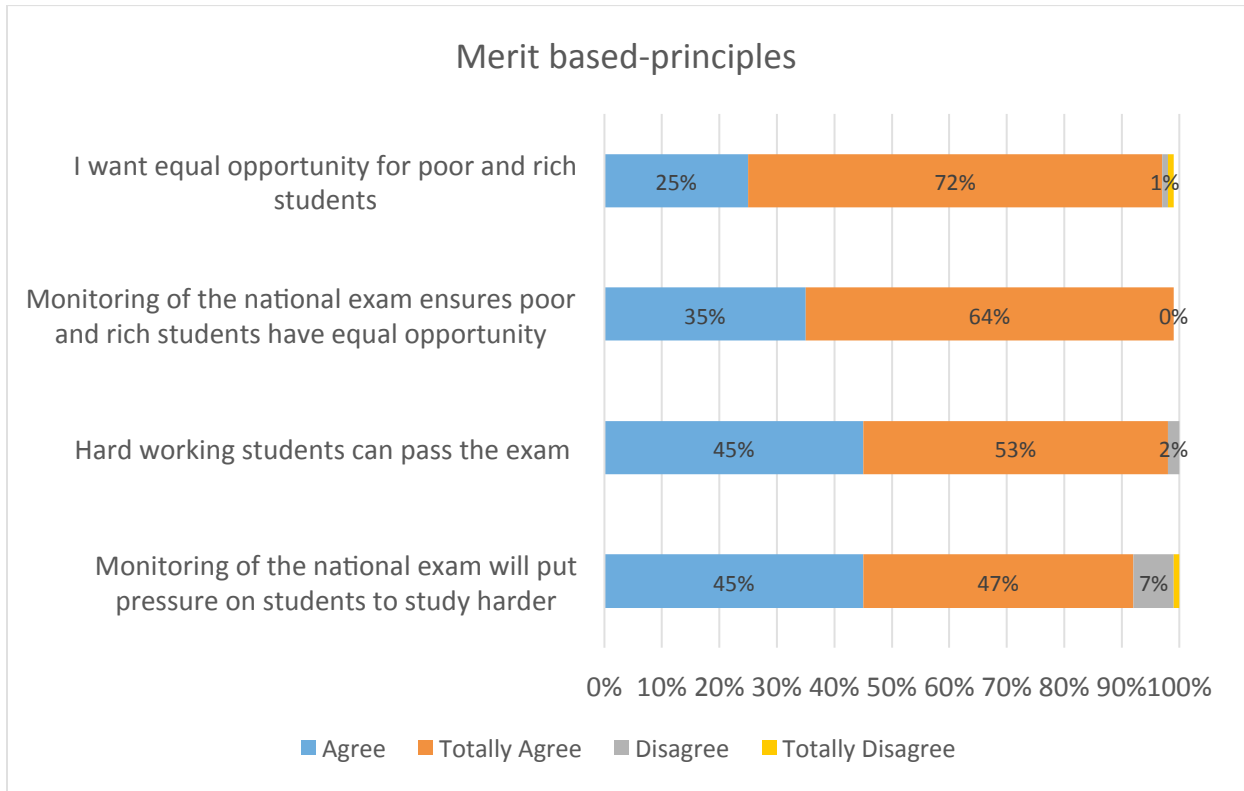
The survey probed for drivers of support for MoEYS' decision to increase the monitoring of the national exam. The survey showed that 99 percent of the respondents agreed or totally agreed with the statement "Improving the quality of education is a priority for Cambodia." When asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement "monitoring of the national exam will improve the quality of graduates," 53 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement while 46 percent totally agreed.

Chart 3: Reducing Administrative Corruption



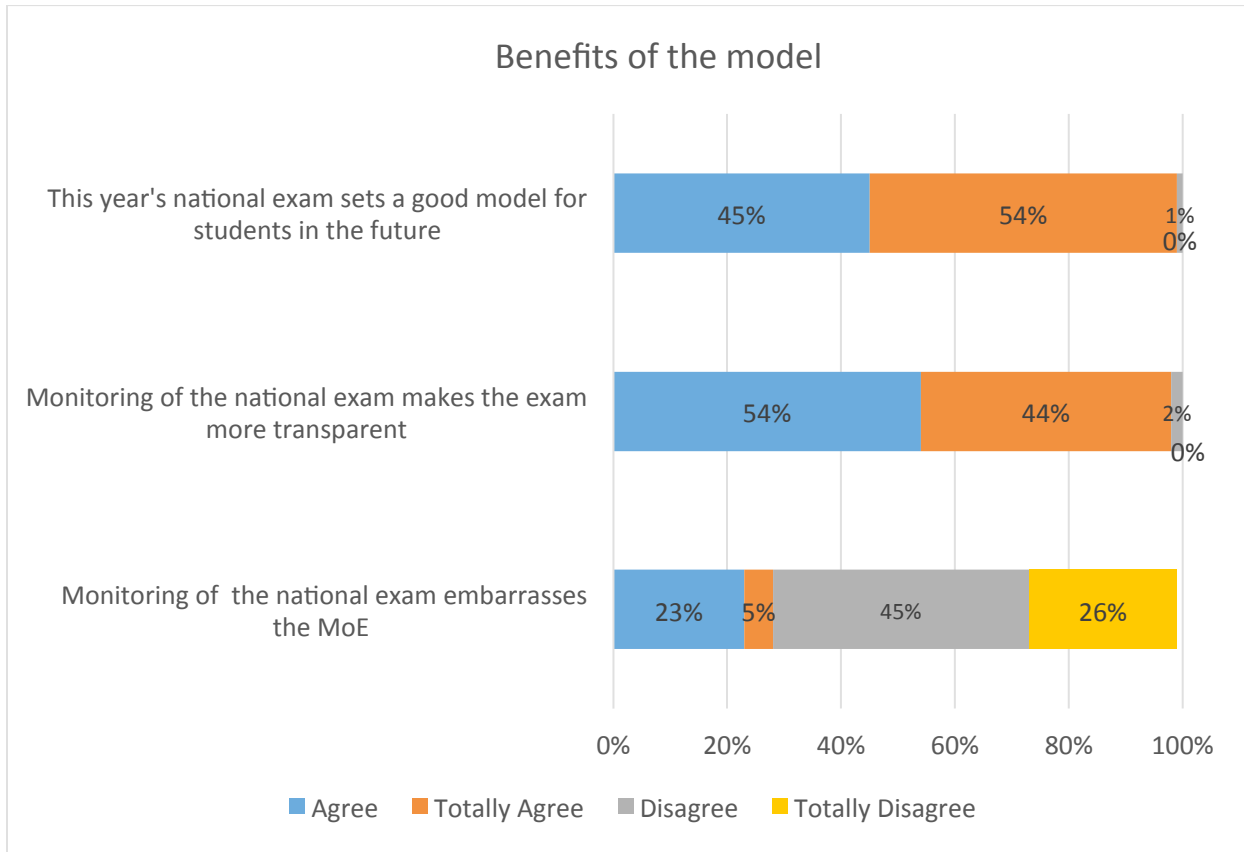
Respondents’ views highlighted the relative importance of reducing corruption in education over other tradeoffs. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents believed that if a student studies hard, they do not need to cheat or pay bribes to teachers. Forty-six percent said they agreed and 31 percent said they totally agreed with the statement “In the past, because students used to bribe or cheat, they were used to not studying hard for the exam.” Seventy-seven percent of respondents (53% agreed and 24% totally agreed) supported the statement “Fighting corruption is more important than fighting poverty.” Similarly, 78 percent of the respondents said they agreed (54% agreed and 24% totally agreed) with the statement “fighting corruption is more important than having enough food.”

Chart 4: Merit-based Principles



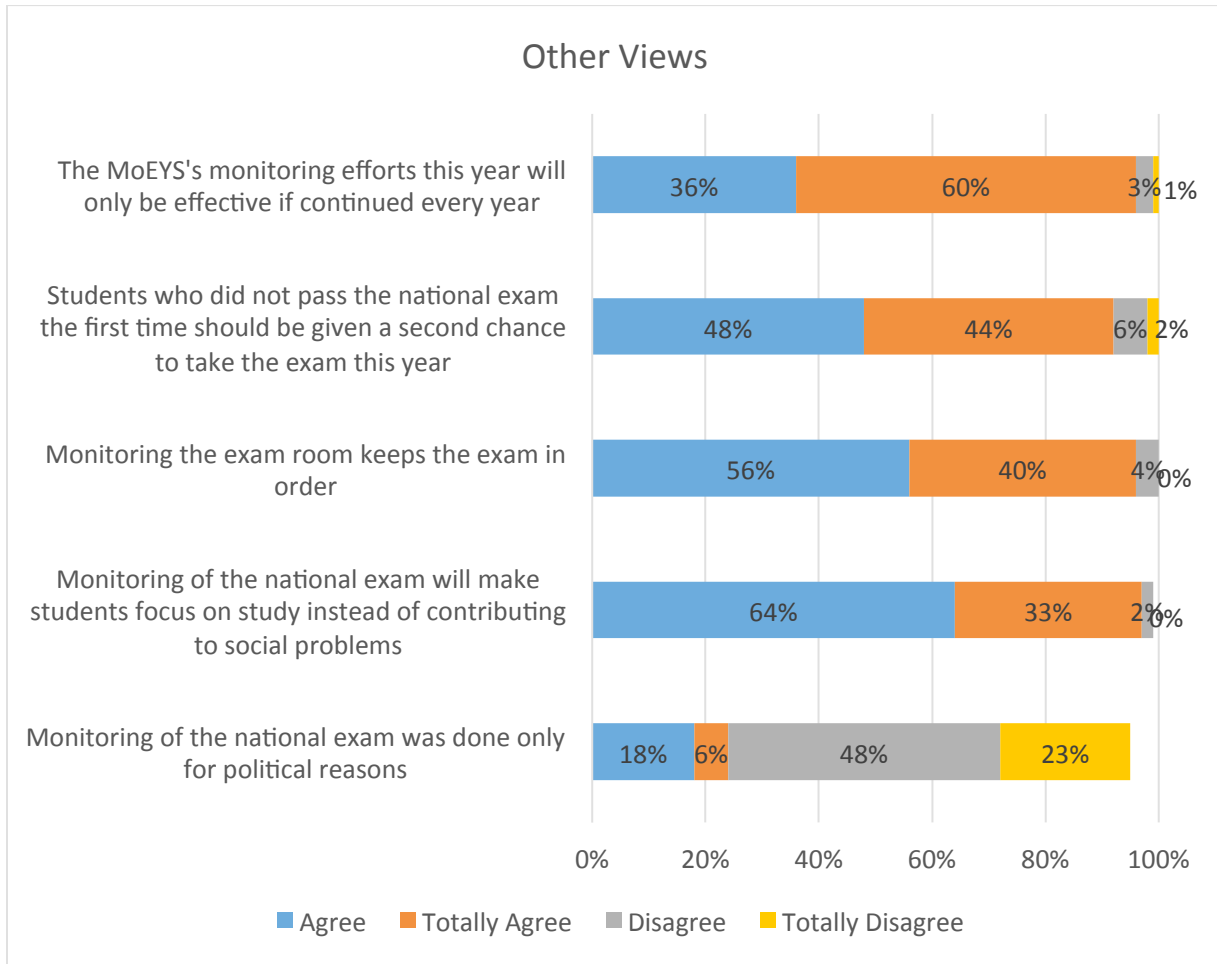
When it comes to merit, 64 percent of respondents said they totally agreed that monitoring of the national exam ensures poor and rich students have equal opportunity and 35 percent said they agreed. Similarly, 97 percent of the respondents said they agreed with the statement “I want equal opportunity for poor and rich students,” with 72 percent saying they totally agreed. Ninety-two percent of the respondents said they agreed or totally agreed with the statement “Monitoring of the national exam will put pressure on students to study harder.”

Chart 5: Benefits of the Model



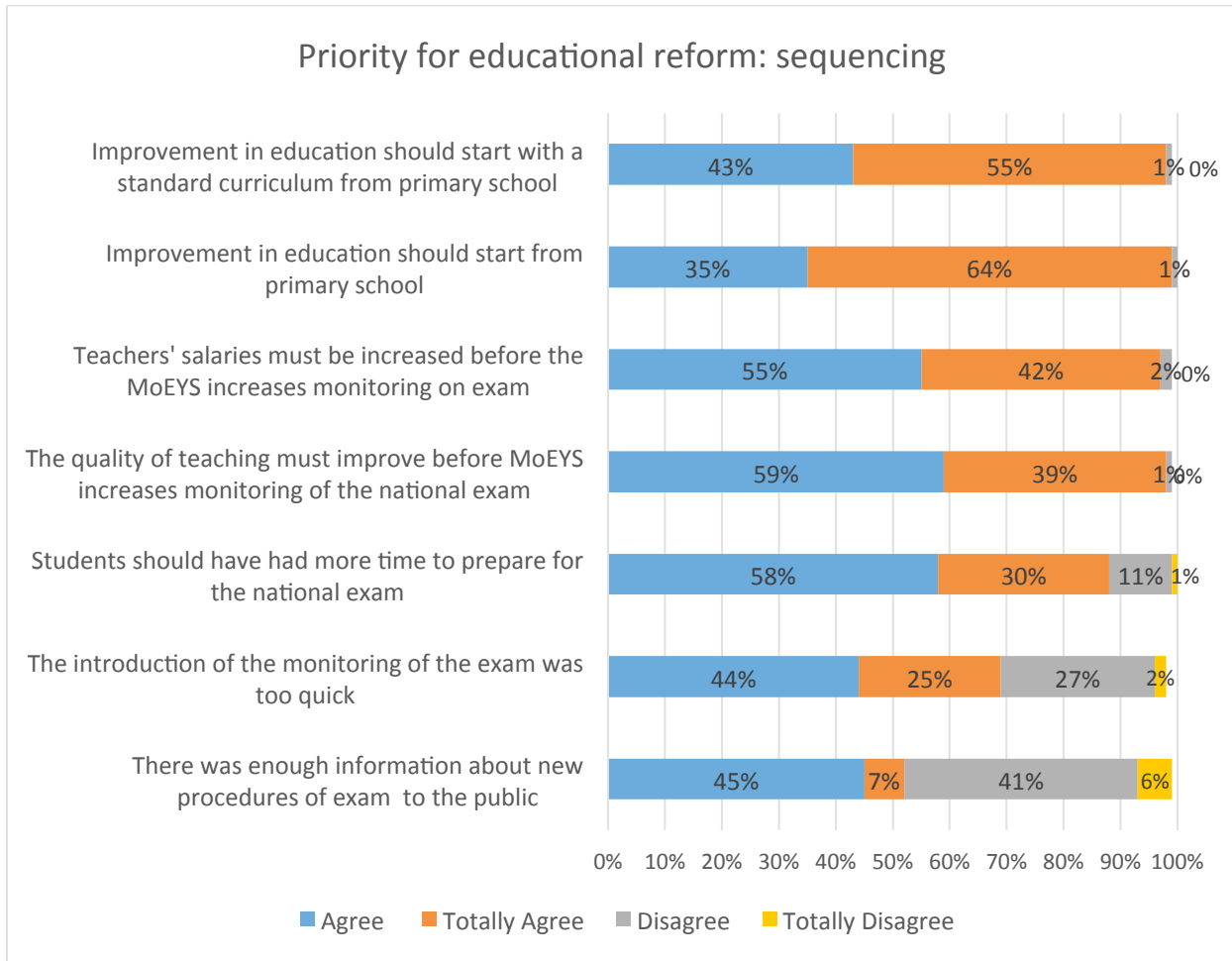
The survey results also demonstrated that respondents supported the MoEYS' decision to increase the monitoring of the national exam because they agreed that it set a good model for future examinations. Forty-five percent of the respondents said they agreed while 54 percent said they totally agreed that this year's exam set a good model for students in the future. Likewise, 98 percent of the respondents said they agreed or totally agreed with the statement "Monitoring of the national exam makes the exam more transparent."

Chart 6: Other Views



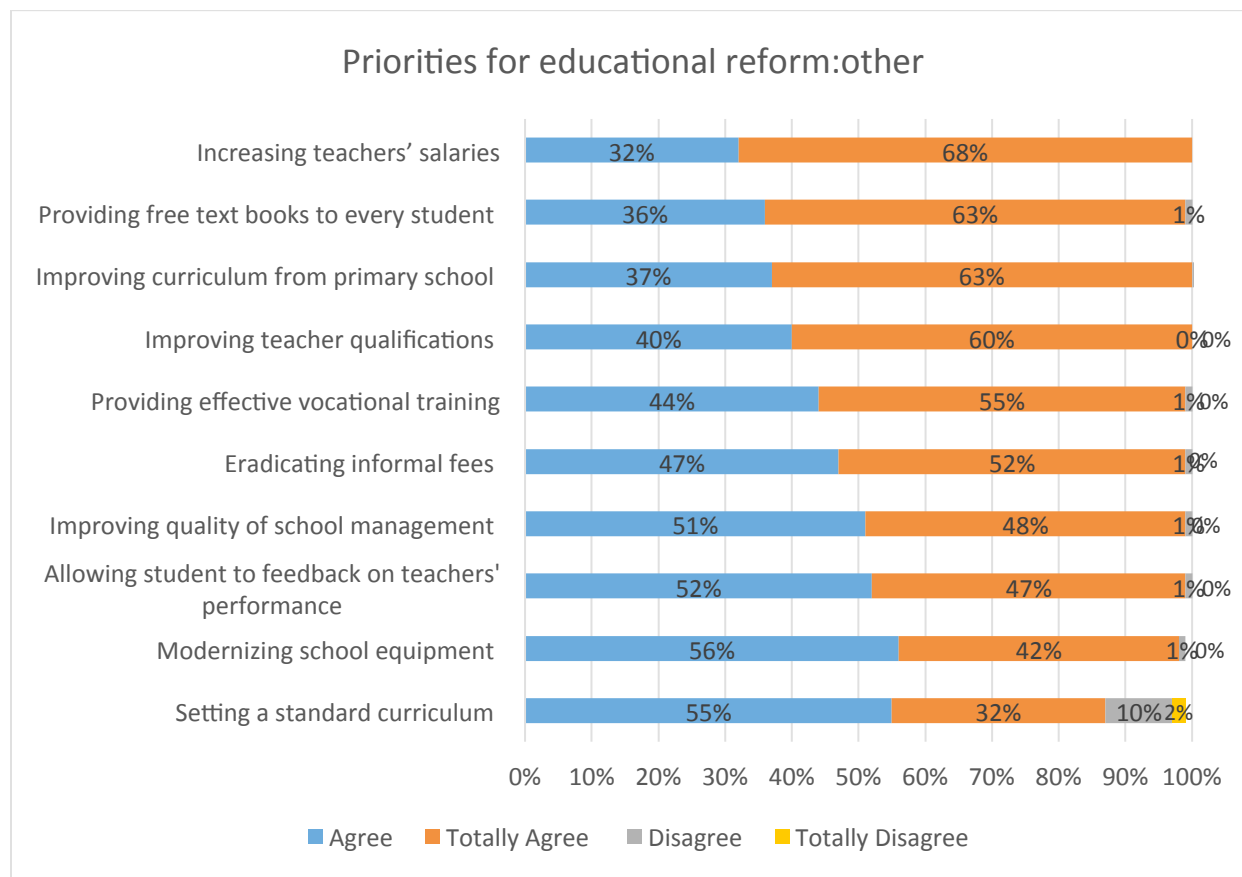
In terms of the implementation of the reform, 96 percent of the respondents (60% agreed and 36% totally agreed) thought that the MoEYS' monitoring efforts this year will only be effective if continued every year. Sixty-four percent of the respondents agreed while 33 percent totally agreed that monitoring of the national exam will make students focus on study instead of contributing to social problems. Only 6 percent of respondents said they totally agreed while 18 percent said they agreed that the monitoring of this year's national exam was done only for political reasons.

Chart 7. Priorities for Educational Reform: Sequencing



Respondents had a range of views on priorities for improving the quality of education, most significantly MoEYS’ reform to monitor the exam was viewed as important, but other reforms should take primacy in sequencing. For example, 64 percent of the respondents said they totally agreed while 35 percent said they agreed that improvement in education should start from primary school. Furthermore, 39 percent said they totally agreed while 59 percent said they agreed that the quality of teaching must improve before the MoEYS increases monitoring of the national exam. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents said they agreed or totally agreed that the introduction of monitoring the exam was too quick. In addition, 88 percent of the respondents, in which 58 percent said they agreed and 30 percent said they totally agreed, supported the statement “students should have had more time to prepare for the national exam.”

Chart 8: Priorities for Educational Reform: Other



In determining the relative importance of other priorities for educational reforms, responses were ranked according to the strength of the respondents' agreement with the statement. As such, increasing teachers' salaries ranked on the top of the list with 68 percent of respondents saying they totally agreed with the statement. Providing free text books to every student came next with 63 percent saying they totally agreed and 36 percent agreeing. Modernizing school equipment and setting a standard curriculum came last, but still achieved high degrees of support as a priority for improving education in Cambodia.

About The Asia Foundation

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Informed by six decades of experience and deep local expertise, our programs address critical issues affecting Asia in the 21st century—governance and law, economic development, women's empowerment, environment, and regional cooperation. In addition, our Books for Asia and professional exchanges are among the ways we encourage Asia's continued development as a peaceful, just, and thriving region of the world.

Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals. In 2013, we provided nearly \$114 million in direct program support and distributed textbooks and other educational materials valued at over \$10 million.

In Cambodia, with programs in women's empowerment, local governance, human rights and law, and urban governance, The Asia Foundation seeks to create opportunities and platforms for dialogue among leading actors in government, the private sector, and civil society to build broader support for reform in areas critical to the country's development.



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