



Challenges and Strategies in English Preparatory Program (EPP) Language Planning: An EPP Director's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the challenges experienced by an EPP director and the strategies that she applied in language planning during the EPP director's first year of appointment in an international higher education institution in The Kingdom of Cambodia. In this qualitative research, case study was employed. Data were gathered via semi-structured interview conducted using Google Meet. The findings reveal that the EPP director encountered the three C's of language planning challenges; namely, 1) cultural conflicts, 2) classroom challenges, 3) and coordination concerns. Amidst the challenges experienced by the EPP director during her first year of appointment, she utilized the following strategies known as the three C's of language strategies: 1) curriculum customization, 2) classroom engagement, and 3) communication. Despite ongoing challenges, the director's strategic adjustments have driven program growth such as the improvement of learning materials, student engagement, and decision-making procedures by meeting evolving student needs through curriculum customization, engagement enhancement, and collaboration. The program's flexibility and stakeholder focus have built resilience, enabling it to thrive despite limitations.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

3c's;
Cambodia;
Case Study;
Language Education;
Language Program

How to Cite in APA Style:

Ferrera, R., Macaraeg, J., Gutierrez, J., & Paulino, F. (2025). Challenges and Strategies in English Preparatory Program (EPP) Language Planning: An EPP Director's Perspective. *IJLHE: International Journal of Language, Humanities, and Education*, 8(2), 375–396.

<https://doi.org/10.52217/ijlhe.v8i2.1786>

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INTRODUCTION

Language planning involves devising strategies to meet the language needs of individuals for education, politics, and employment. This encompasses both sociolinguistic planning, which addresses language use and status within communities,

and language acquisition planning, which focuses on developing effective language education programs (Velázquez & García-Ponce, 2018; Wetshokodi & Çavusoglu, 2022; Yudina et al., 2020).

Since World War II, language education has been a top policy concern in Asia, largely because language planning is vital in this region of exceptional linguistic diversity, home to around 2,500 of the world's 6,700 languages just in East and Southeast Asia (Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017). This focus on language education is further amplified by the widespread use of English as a global language. Asia plays a major role in the global English language scene for two clear reasons. First, there are more non-native English speakers in Asia than native speakers (Orosoo & Jamiyansuren, 2021). Second, the total number of English speakers in Asia, including those learning it, is greater than the worldwide population of native English speakers (Cheng, 2012). This linguistic diversity, coupled with the region's diverse religious beliefs, cultural systems, and socioeconomic conditions, creates unique challenges that can be addressed through critical discourse (Valdez, 2020). Asia's diverse and complex linguistic makeup makes it a fascinating area for exploring how critical pedagogy is used in various educational settings such as Cambodia which is a nation experiencing a dynamic English language landscape (Ngel, 2022). Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat (2017) mentioned that language planning is a major focus in Southeast Asia. A key initiative in English language planning in Southeast Asia specifically Cambodia is the establishment and management of English preparatory programs.

Cambodia's shifting linguistic landscape has prompted numerous universities to establish English Preparatory Programs aimed at bolstering students' English skills. English Preparatory Program (EPP), also called English Preparatory School, offers an intensive, university-level English courses that prepare students for academic success in English-speaking universities (Erdoğan & Mede, 2021; Geçkinli, 2024). This program bridges the gap between high school and university by providing students with the English skills they need for their chosen majors, international study, and general communication (Şaban & Atay, 2023). While EPP students are high school graduates, they are not yet fully enrolled university students. They must successfully complete at least one academic year of preparatory English training before they can begin their degree programs (Barzani et al., 2021; Kemaloglu-Er, 2023). University preparatory programs typically emphasize the four core language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—often with grammar as a supplementary component. Proficiency is commonly measured using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Duruk, 2021; Paker & Balci, 2020).

In Cambodia, concerns are rising about the quality of education offered by the many new higher education institutions. Despite being an Expanding Circle country where English is a foreign language, English is becoming increasingly vital, now serving as the first foreign language in schools, replacing French. Unlike the 1990s when few were proficient, English is now used much more frequently within Cambodia (Hashim

et al., 2014). However, despite this increased focus, Cambodia's English proficiency remains critically low, ranking 111st globally out of 116 countries and 23rd among 23 Asian nations (EF Education First, 2024). This situation highlights the pressing need for improvements in English language education within the country which lies in the hands of an English language administrator or an EPP director.

English language instruction was not formally integrated into Cambodia's education system until 1989, and even then, resources were severely limited, with shortages of curricula, textbooks, and qualified teachers. While both English and French have been official foreign languages in Cambodian schools since the early 1990s, English has become the more popular choice among students (Mao, 2015).

Following the 1993 general election, Cambodia has experienced a surge in English language learning, driven by its increasing importance in areas like business and education. Universities have responded by incorporating English courses into their curricula. Despite this growing emphasis on English, the development of effective language programs remains a complex and challenging undertaking (Moody, 2024; Sothan, 2015).

Hence, studying the challenges and strategies of the EPP director can enhance English preparatory programs by identifying areas for improvement and highlighting best practices. It provides insights for informed decision-making by stakeholders and supports long-term program development.

Moreover, this also addresses concerns in language policy implementation. Examining the director's strategies provides insights into aligning language policies with classroom practices, ensuring consistency in teaching, language use, and assessment, and overcoming discrepancies between policy intentions and real-world application.

Furthermore, this study aims to explore the challenges experienced by an EPP director and the strategies that the EPP director employed in language planning during the EPP director's first year of appointment. Specifically, these research questions were answered:

1. What challenges were experienced by the EPP director?
2. What strategies or approaches were employed by the EPP director to address those challenges?

In truth, there have been studies conducted on language planning in various English Preparatory Programs. For example, Uysal (2019) investigated the challenges and proposed solutions related to the English language preparatory curriculum at Eskişehir Osmangazi University's School of Foreign Languages, as perceived by English language teaching (ELT) instructors. The study categorized the identified problems into four main themes: objectives, teaching materials, assessment and evaluation, and general structure.

Bayram and Canaran (2019) evaluated the effectiveness of the English Preparatory Program (EPP) at the Department of Foreign Languages at an English-

medium foundation university in Turkey during the 2017–2018 academic year. Data was collected from 241 students and 26 teachers through a program evaluation survey and focus group meetings. The findings revealed that while aspects like homework assignments and exams were generally well-received, the program's weaknesses included limited extracurricular activities and online resources. Significant differences were observed between student and teacher perceptions. Based on the findings, recommendations were made for program improvement, including adjustments to the program's pacing, the use of more effective course materials, and revisions to the number and type of portfolio assignments and the speaking exam. The study's findings are expected to contribute to a more effective and student-centered EPP for future cohorts.

Atar et al. (2020) assessed the English preparatory program at Istanbul Medeniyet University's School of Foreign Languages during the 2016–2017 academic year. There were 131 students and four instructors assessed the program's effectiveness across various aspects, including course materials, content, testing methods, assignments, and instructor performance. The findings revealed mixed opinions among students regarding the program's overall effectiveness. Notably, female students, intermediate-level students, and those who voluntarily enrolled in the program demonstrated higher levels of satisfaction compared to their male counterparts, beginner-level students, and those who were required to attend.

Karci Aktaş and Gündoğdu (2020) evaluated the English preparatory curriculum at Aydın Adnan Menderes University using the Bellon and Handler model. Data was collected from students, English lecturers, lecturers from other departments, and students outside the program. Key findings revealed a lack of clear program goals, insufficient skills development, particularly in speaking and listening, and communication challenges within the program. The study also highlighted the need for improved facilities, the integration of professional English teaching, and increased stakeholder involvement in curriculum decisions.

Also, Erdoğan and Mede (2021) employed the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) evaluation model to assess an English preparatory school language program at a Turkish state university from the perspectives of both students and instructors. The findings revealed that while participants generally expressed satisfaction with materials, assessment, and teaching methods, there was a strong need for enhanced focus on speaking and listening skills. Furthermore, the study identified control beliefs, task value, and intrinsic goal orientation as key motivational factors for student success. Finally, the analysis highlighted both strengths and weaknesses in the program, providing valuable insights for future improvements.

Alshehri et al. (2024) examined the link between Saudi EFL learners' English proficiency and their perceptions of their educational environment within a Preparatory Year Program. Utilizing the Dundee Ready Education Environment Measure (DREEM) with 225 female participants across three proficiency levels (beginner, intermediate,

advanced), the study found generally positive perceptions. Statistical analysis revealed a significant association between proficiency level and environmental perceptions, with advanced learners expressing the most positive views. While overall perceptions were positive, the study identified areas for improvement, such as the need for more student-centered teaching approaches and better support systems for stressed learners. These findings offer valuable insights for enhancing the learning environment for Saudi EFL learners.

While the aforementioned studies (Alshehri et al., 2024; Atar et al., 2020; Bayram & Canaran, 2019; Erdoğan & Mede, 2021; Karci Aktaş & Gündoğdu, 2020; Uysal, 2019) focused on the perspectives of the EPP students and English educators on the effectiveness of the English Preparatory Program, nothing has been mentioned on the viewpoint and the experiences of the EPP director who is the main language planner in the English Preparatory Program. Also, there is a scarcity of studies dealing with EPP in international higher educational institutions in the Kingdom of Cambodia.

METHOD

Research Design

The researchers used qualitative research design which seeks to deeply understand the perspectives and experiences of individuals within their everyday lives, focusing on the reasons and motivations behind their actions and beliefs rather than simply describing what happened (Ugwu & Eze Val, 2023). Also, the researchers applied a case study method which gives an in-depth investigation of a particular person, group, or event. By comprehensively describing and analyzing an individual case, a case study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Starman, 2013). The challenges encountered by the EPP director, and the strategies to address those challenges employed by the EPP director in the first year of appointment was investigated.

Locale and Population

This study was carried out at a private international university in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The university offers a diverse selection of degree programs, encompassing fields such as arts and design, business and economics, engineering and technology, and social sciences. This case study employed a purposive-convenience sampling method. In purposive sampling, also called judgment sampling, researchers intentionally select participants based on their specific qualities. This nonrandom technique does not require theories or a set number of participants; instead, the researcher identifies what information is needed and then seeks out individuals with the right knowledge or experience to provide it (Etikan et al., 2016). It was purposive because only the EPP director of the international university was interviewed. The director was a lecturer before, but she was

suddenly appointed as the EPP director when the previous EPP director resigned. The transition to being lecturer to working as a director piqued the interest of the researchers to conduct this study. The researchers also used convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a non-random method where researchers include participants from the target group who are easily accessible, geographically close, available at a specific time, or willing to join the study (Etikan, 2016; Golzar et al., 2022). Convenience sampling was used in this study since the EPP director at the international university was willing to participate and highly accessible to the researchers, with two members of the research team also serving as lecturers there.

Instruments

The researchers used two data gathering tools: survey and semi-structured interview. The first tool is a Google Forms survey. which was divided into three sections: (1) the bio profile of the participant which includes the name, academic function, and the year the EPP role was assumed, (2) the interview guide which contains 16 research questions, and (3) the consent form.

The second data gathering tool is an online interview. The interview was divided into two sections, one focused on the challenges encountered and one focused on the approaches employed by the participant on dealing with the challenges. Each section consisted of eight questions exploring the key areas of language program planning, including curriculum and instruction, extracurricular and online learning, teacher supervision and development, program management and operations, curriculum evaluation and improvement, policy compliance and institutional alignment, student engagement and motivation, and classroom and behavioral management. The online interview guide was developed by researchers. The online interview took place for 40 minutes via Google Meet.

Data Collection

A Google Forms survey was emailed to the EPP director, explaining the study's objective. Upon getting the participant's confirmation, the researchers scheduled the online interview. The data collection solely relied on in-depth interview conducted entirely in English. Follow-up questions were used to further explore the responses. The interview was audio-recorded, transcribed, member-checked, and painstakingly reviewed by the researchers themselves to ensure data accuracy.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the interview was subjected to coding, which Locke et al. (2022) describe as a qualitative technique aimed at identifying categories based on recurring patterns. This process was utilized to systematically organize and interpret qualitative data. Specifically, open coding—a method focused on

identifying and categorizing recurring concepts and themes in raw data (Riazi et al., 2023)—was employed to classify the interview responses.

Next, the researchers performed cool analysis, wherein patterns, themes, and recurring ideas were systematically identified and examined. Subsequently, the researchers conducted a thematic analysis, wherein the coded data were carefully reviewed and grouped into distinct themes. These themes—The 3Cs—representing broader categories, explained the underlying structure of the challenges and strategies to language program planning. The researchers consulted one another, revised the themes, agreed, and formulated The 3Cs which encapsulates the three language planning challenges encountered by the EPP director and three language planning strategies employed by the EPP director to address those challenges. To further refine the analysis, the researchers employed a repertory grid. Finally, the researchers did warm analysis, a process of interpretation aimed at providing a deeper understanding of the themes and their associated meanings (Finlay, 2021), offering insights into the challenges encountered and strategies employed by the EPP director.

Ethical considerations

To ensure ethical integrity, the researchers sought formal approval from the provost, the academic overseer of faculty and programs at the international university. Once approval was granted, the researchers invited the EPP director through an official communication letter. Before the start of the online interview, the research objective was reminded to the EPP director. She was also oriented that the information that would come out from the interview would remain confidential and that the video recording would not be uploaded to social media. She was given the opportunity to seek clarification on any questions posed. She was assured that the gathered data would be used exclusively for this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 3Cs of Language Planning Challenges

The EPP encounters several challenges that affect its overall effectiveness and the quality of learning. Seven key issues were identified, which can be grouped into the following three main categories: (1) Cultural Conflicts, (2) Classroom Challenges, and (3) Coordination Concerns.

1. Cultural conflicts

Cultural conflicts highlight the challenges posed by individual and cultural differences that impact curriculum implementation. These challenges extend to curriculum and materials development, influencing instructional effectiveness and student engagement.

Cultural differences between teachers and students, including teaching styles, beliefs, and expectations, are a significant challenge in the program's implementation. One issue revolves around teachers insisting on using preferred materials, which creates tension with the program's guidelines.

Extract 1: *"We always have problems with teachers insisting the material that they want, while we have freedom for teachers to teach the subjects and the skills however they want, as long as they're following the syllabus and the topics."*

As emphasized, while the teachers are given freedom to apply their preferred methodologies, they are required to strictly follow the syllabus and teach all the topics. However, teaching methods often fail to align with students' cultural contexts, making it difficult to engage them effectively. Cultural sensitivity is, therefore, vital in shaping both teaching approaches and the overall learning experience.

Extract 2: *"Sometimes there are so many teaching styles that just do not work with the culture that the students have here, so advising teachers to maybe change a little bit just the context to contextualize it with the students that we have. Sometimes that could be a challenge."*

The local and cultural context are seen as obstacles in effective learning. The participant emphasized how the culture of the students impacts their learning. As noted, the culture of the teachers also plays a vital role in their effectiveness.

Extract 3: *"I feel like culture plays a very, very important role within the teachers as well. Different cultures, different teaching styles, different beliefs. So, it's a bit difficult."*

Curriculum constraints also contribute to instructional challenges, particularly regarding syllabus adherence, material selection, and the need for engaging and contextualized content. Teachers struggle with the balance between using pre-designed materials and creating their own resources, which can hinder the efficiency of the program.

Extract 4: *"For instruction, we tried to make the materials as robust as possible so that the teachers don't need to make their own material, so they will just prepare using our own materials."*

Additionally, traditional lecture-based methods and the repetitive nature of daily lessons are viewed as ineffective for an English learning program, leading to student disengagement.

Extract 5: *"Some teachers are very lecture-based, which I feel is not suitable for an English learning program. The routine or repetitiveness of daily lessons makes it hard to keep students engaged."*

Cultural conflicts pose significant challenges in curriculum implementation, due to the differences in teaching styles, beliefs, and expectations between teachers and students. These differences affect not only teaching materials development but also instructional effectiveness and student engagement. Teachers often face difficulties in aligning their teaching methods with students' cultural contexts, highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity in education. Additionally, curriculum constraints, such as the need for syllabus adherence and the balance between pre-designed and teacher-created materials, further complicate effective instruction. The reliance on traditional lecture-based methods and repetitive lessons also contributes to student disengagement.

2. Classroom challenges

Classroom challenges encompass the dynamics between students and teachers, the effective use of materials, and the overall student engagement and achievement. These challenges are often identified through student feedback and evaluations, providing valuable insights into areas that require attention and improvement.

Challenges related to student engagement and motivation are evident, particularly in a program characterized by repetition. Teachers often struggle to maintain students' interest and enthusiasm for learning.

Extract 6: *"Teachers don't give enough stimulation inside the classroom that keeps the student engaged and motivated, especially in this kind of program, which is, I would say, very repetitive in nature."*

It was also mentioned that students frequently express dissatisfaction with the monotony of lessons, calling for more interactive and dynamic approaches, such as games and more lively teaching styles. Teachers often neglect the importance of fitting their learning style to the classroom. When teachers fail to fit their approaches students lose interest and get disengaged.

Extract 7: *"Evaluation all the time. Sometimes it's a teacher factor. Even with advice to the teachers, some teaching styles may not be suitable for the students. Some students may find it boring."*

In addition, as highlighted in the extract below, teachers are also preferred to be livelier when explaining and the preference on games was also emphasized.

Extract 8: *"One of the students' complaints is they wanted more games in the classroom. They wanted their teacher to be more lively in explaining."*

Furthermore, the repetitive nature of the program, where students meet the same teacher daily, further contributes to feelings of boredom and disengagement.

Extract 9: *"Our program meets every day, so it is bound sometimes to be boring because they're meeting the same teacher at the same time every day."*

Additionally, students' sense of entitlement and lack of motivation can negatively affect classroom behavior, as some students fail to engage actively in learning.

Extract 10: *"They're very entitled—with how the teachers treat them, how they ask for favors, or even how the university treats them. There's still a very big gap between the status of the people, so you can really see the children who are very entitled. Sometimes it affects their behavior inside the classroom. They also appear to be very lazy inside the classroom. They're the ones who are very vocal with complaints."*

The participant also emphasized that teachers often resist feedback on their teaching methods, perceiving suggestions as personal criticisms rather than opportunities for professional growth.

Extract 11: *"So many teachers feel insulted if you correct their teaching style."*

The monotonous nature of the program, coupled with students' desire for more dynamic and interactive learning, highlights the need for more engaging teaching approaches as a primary classroom concern. Additionally, the sense of entitlement and resistance to feedback from some students can negatively affect classroom behavior and the overall teacher-student relationship.

3. Coordination concerns

Coordination concerns encompass challenges related to the involvement of various stakeholders and the administration. These challenges also include the university's investment in the program, which affects the overall effectiveness and sustainability of its initiatives.

The implementation of the program is hindered by challenges related to cooperation with administrators and financial constraints. Coordinating with administrators and other departments is often difficult, particularly when managing programs like blended learning that require cross-departmental collaboration.

Extract 11: *"Managing online learning programs like the blended learning that we have needs cooperation from the administrators [deans of certain majors and other administrators], but sometimes it could be difficult making plans or achieving goals."*

Extract 12: *"Achieving goals alone cannot happen without the support of other people."*

Financial limitations are also seen as a challenge, as decisions related to program improvements, curriculum revisions, and resource allocation are often impacted by budget constraints.

Extract 13: *"Sometimes with everything that involves this one—money."*

Furthermore, commitment concerns on the side of the students are also prevalent, as they tend to only participate in extracurricular activities or self-study when grades are involved. This lack of intrinsic motivation diminishes the overall learning experience.

Extract 14: *"Students don't attend extracurricular activities as much. They will only attend if it's graded, but they don't see the importance of extracurricular activities overall."*

It was also highlighted that the program faces limitations in monitoring student learning outside the classroom. Although students are encouraged to engage in self-study to prepare for classes, they often fail to do so.

Extract 15: *"We cannot monitor the students all the time. The only thing that we can do is to advise them to self-study so that they are prepared for their class. But then again, we don't monitor the students all the time. So, students tend to ignore self-study."*

Capital constraints are also identified as it affects professional development and the resources necessary to support the program. Teachers face difficulties in accessing professional development opportunities due to lengthy approval processes, which slows the implementation of career growth initiatives.

Extract 16: *"For professional development, I would give this to the university as a whole. The university has a professional development plan where they encourage teachers to further their professional careers."*

Extract 17: *"It takes a lot of time, so I would say the main obstacle with this one is with the people who approve certain plans that you need to do."*

Moreover, budget limitations often prevent curriculum revisions and hinder the ability to address critical areas for improvement, as administrators may not fully grasp the need for change.

Extract 18: *"When a university or a certain institution gets bigger and bigger, they get disconnected from what's happening in the core of the university, which is the classroom."*

Extract 19: *"It's not well supported because they don't know what's really happening there. They don't know why a curriculum needs to be revised. They don't know why we need certain changes."*

Extract 20: *"Especially if it involves budget, especially since our program affects the students who will eventually go into different majors in the university."*

The 3Cs of Language Planning Strategies

The program director implemented a range of strategies designed to mitigate or overcome challenges encountered and improve the quality of both teaching and learning processes, which include: (1) curriculum customization, (2) classroom engagement, and (3) communication.

1. Curriculum customization

Curriculum customization involves strategies that focus on contextualizing the curriculum and materials, incorporating collaborative approaches to enhance both curriculum and material development. This ensures that learning is relevant, meaningful, and engaging for students.

The EPP director acknowledged the importance of contextualizing and incorporating culturally relevant content into the curriculum to foster stronger connections between students and the material. Furthermore, small adjustments were also emphasized such as using familiar local names, to enhance student engagement.

Extract 21: *"We always believe that when it's more contextualized—even the smallest thing, you know, with English learning—if you contextualize it instead of saying 'John ate yesterday,' if we change it to 'Bopha ate yesterday,' changing these little things in the curriculum connects the student with the material."*

Moreover, it was suggested that integrating culturally relevant content allows students to see their identities reflected in their learning making it meaningful, which can increase motivation and participation.

Extract 22: *"One strategy could be to incorporate culturally relevant content into the curriculum. This way, it enables students to see their identities reflected in their learning."*

It was also emphasized that continuous collaboration among teachers is essential to ensure that the curriculum remains aligned with the diverse backgrounds and needs of students. As the director claimed, the curriculum has evolved through the contributions of multiple teachers, focused on maintaining cultural relevance which can be achieved by involving all educators who directly engage with the students. As emphasized in the following excerpt, these small adjustments made collectively help the curriculum better resonate with the students, ensuring a more meaningful learning experience as noted in the following extract.

Extract 23: *"Our curriculum has been through so many teachers. While maintaining cultural relevance can be achieved by involving all the teachers who are also teaching the students. These little things that we change in the curriculum have aligned more with the students."*

Also, the use of worksheets, which are edited by teachers, accommodates a variety of teaching styles and adapts to the evolving needs of students. It also allows teachers the flexibility to select their own materials and methods, fostering a more personalized approach.

Extract 24: *"...they don't have to follow the worksheets that we have to the teaching because they have different teaching styles and different students. So, it's good for teachers to tailor their methods and materials to the needs of the students."*

Extract 25: *"And I always tell teachers, and so many teachers also do it, they don't just stick to the material that we have. As long as they're following the topics in the syllabus, I would say it's OK to encourage teachers to have differentiated instruction."*

To address challenges related to student feedback, task-based learning and collaborative learning have been implemented.

Extract 26: *"Even with how the worksheet looks now, it's been improved already. We've incorporated more task-based learning, more group activities, and more interactive discussions, especially in grammar."*

2. Classroom engagement

Classroom engagement encompasses strategies designed to address instructional challenges and enhance student participation. Its goal is to foster a more interactive and dynamic learning environment.

As mentioned, lack of real-life practice opportunities for students is one of the concerns in the program. To address this, the director emphasized the necessity to implement communicative language teaching.

Extract 27: *"As many interactive activities as we can, because one thing that the students are lacking here is the opportunity to actually practice their English skills."*

Similarly, that the traditional, "bookish" approach to learning English in Cambodia's basic education, where grammar is learned in isolation, without the opportunity for real-world application was pointed out. The director highlighted the use of more interactive and hands-on activities to engage students and enhance their learning experiences.

Extract 28: *"Providing opportunities for students for collaboration and hands-on activities will enhance student engagement. Here in Cambodia, in high school, students learn English in a very 'bookish' way. They just learn grammar like it's a set of numbers, but they don't have the chance to actually use this knowledge in real-life experiences."*

In the same note, efforts in adding support that helps students apply their learning beyond simple memorization, fostering a deeper understanding of the language is implemented.

Extract 29: *"We have added more additional support in the worksheets to help students apply their learning beyond memorization."*

On the other hand, to ensure that students enjoy extracurricular activities, the Student Council, the official organization of the student body, was involved in crafting events and activities to ensure that they are of interest and relevance to the students. These events are held at a learning lab dedicated only for EPP students where they can also self-study.

Extract 30: *"The participation of the Student Council students has helped a lot in creating extracurricular activities that the students would actually like."*

Extract 31: *"We have a learning lab for students to self-study."*

Finally, to address concerns on lack of monitoring for self-study, the program opt to hire an assistant language teacher whose function is to oversee self-study

sessions, check attendance, and provide guidance on complex activities where students require additional support.

Extract 32: *"So, one thing that we can do is put an assistant language teacher who can check attendance, watch the students, and sometimes explain certain things to encourage students in their online learning."*

Extract 33: *"For online learning, we are planning to include assistant language teacher who will watch and guide the students in their self-study."*

3. Communication

This strategy focuses on fostering clear communication and active involvement of stakeholders, such as teachers and students, in the decision-making process. It emphasizes the importance of using feedback to improve instructional materials, recognizing diverse teaching styles, and maintaining professional relationships to ensure effective curriculum implementation.

The director emphasized that clear and open communication, along with active stakeholder engagement, is essential for the smooth implementation of language programs. Involving teachers and students in the decision-making process ensures that policies are effectively communicated and applied.

Extract 34: *"Implementing program policies means engaging stakeholders—the teachers, the students—in the decision-making process and clearly communicating these policies."*

Additionally, open communication among all involved parties helps facilitate the implementation of program policies, making the process more efficient and effective.

Extract 35: *"Just having open communication with everyone involved makes the implementation of program policies easier."*

The role of teachers as curriculum implementers was also highlighted. Teachers play a crucial role in refining instructional materials. Their feedback is actively considered to update and improve teaching resources. Hence, collaborative lesson planning further enhances teacher support, ensuring that instructional activities remain relevant and effective.

Extract 36: *"I would say with supporting teachers, the preparatory school is very collaborative. I always document teachers' comments, like when they say, 'This activity does not work,' and I try to change it. Having more collaborative lesson planning with teachers can also help them."*

The importance of recognizing and embracing the diverse teaching styles and strengths of teachers. Rather than focusing on their weaknesses, the approach centers on leveraging their strengths to enhance the learning experience. When intervention is necessary, the director provides constructive guidance based on student feedback gathered through evaluations, ensuring that support is targeted and beneficial for both teachers and students.

Extract 37: *"Again, with diverse backgrounds and teaching styles, I think it's important to recognize and acknowledge teachers' individual strengths. If a teacher is having more complaints than the rest, we try to find their strengths and maximize them."*

Extract 38: *"Sometimes it's just about giving advice, because at the university, we don't normally observe teachers in the classroom—we depend on student evaluations. Based on these evaluations, we try to help the teachers. For example, if a teacher isn't providing enough active activities, we help by suggesting more interactive classroom activities."*

The director emphasized the importance of maintaining a professional working relationship, focusing on ensuring that teachers fulfill their contractual responsibilities rather than fostering a "family-like" dynamic. This approach allows for greater acceptance of individual differences and promotes a more structured and effective curriculum implementation.

Extract 39: *"I don't care if we don't have a 'family-like' relationship. For me, as long as the teachers are delivering inside the classroom and doing what's stipulated in their contract, I think it's fine. We have to embrace differences in work culture with different backgrounds and stop forcing teachers to act like a family."*

As highlighted in the responses, to address specific challenges in language planning and program implementation, the EPP director used varied and targeted strategies. In addressing cultural and instructional challenges, the program implemented several key strategies aimed at balancing structure with flexibility. Recognizing the tension between teacher autonomy and curriculum adherence, the program developed a standardized yet adaptable syllabus, giving teachers methodological freedom while ensuring coverage of required content. Efforts were also made to enhance cultural sensitivity among instructors, particularly foreign teachers, through orientation sessions and ongoing pedagogical support that encouraged contextualizing materials and adjusting teaching styles to fit students' cultural learning preferences. To reduce overreliance on lecture-based methods, the program introduced interactive materials and discouraged rote instruction by providing structured, communicative lesson plans. Furthermore, robust in-house

teaching materials were developed to minimize inconsistencies, support instructional alignment, and reduce teacher workload—ultimately improving student engagement and fostering a more culturally responsive classroom environment.



Figure 1. Research Simulacrum

Discussion

The current study explored the challenges encountered and strategies used in language planning by the English Preparatory Program (EPP) director. The findings highlight two important areas. One, the program faces a range of challenges categorized under cultural conflicts, classroom challenges, and coordination concerns. Second, several strategies have been implemented to address these challenges, focusing on curriculum customization, classroom engagement, and communication.

The findings reveal that cultural conflicts significantly impact curriculum implementation. Differences in teaching styles, beliefs, and expectations between teachers and students make it difficult to create a harmonized learning environment, as noted by Barre-Parrales and Villafuerte-Holguín (2021). Teachers' reliance on personal material preferences and the challenge of aligning teaching methods with students' cultural contexts exacerbate these issues as highlighted by Karimi et al., (2019). Despite these obstacles, the director's strategy of customizing the curriculum to be culturally relevant has shown promise in fostering stronger student-teacher connections. By integrating familiar names and culturally reflective content, teachers can increase engagement, demonstrating the value of cultural

sensitivity in enhancing learning outcomes as supported by the findings in the study of Yaguara et al., (2021). Additionally, classroom challenges such as student disengagement due to repetitive lessons and inadequate stimulation remain prevalent, reflecting concerns raised by Yaguara et al. (2021). Students' calls for more interactive and dynamic approaches, such as games and hands-on activities, emphasize the need for more engaging and practical methods.

Coordination concerns, particularly related to cooperation among administrators, financial constraints, and students' commitment to extracurricular activities, also hinder the program's effectiveness. Barre-Parrales and Villafuerte-Holguín (2021) highlight how limited resources and resistance to feedback, coupled with the difficulty in securing administrative and financial support, present ongoing challenges. Despite these difficulties, the director's emphasis on collaboration with teachers, open communication, and continuous feedback has led to improvements. Strategies like incorporating, as claimed by Karimi et al. (2019), task-based learning and fostering collaborative lesson planning help address student and teacher needs, ensuring that the curriculum remains relevant and adaptable.

The findings suggest that while challenges related to cultural conflicts, classroom dynamics, and coordination persist, strategic adjustments such as curriculum customization, interactive engagement, and coordination have contributed positively to the program's development. The implementation of culturally relevant materials, alongside active teacher involvement in curriculum design addresses the varied and changing needs of students. Despite financial and logistical hurdles, the program's emphasis on flexibility, collaboration, and stakeholder engagement has fostered resilience, allowing it to adapt and thrive in a complex educational landscape—one shaped by culturally diverse faculty and students, inconsistent teaching styles, limited resources, and the need for culturally relevant yet academically sound content.

CONCLUSION

The current study examined the challenges and strategies in language planning by the English Preparatory Program (EPP) director. The findings highlight key challenges, including cultural conflicts, classroom dynamics, and coordination issues. These challenges, such as differences in teaching styles and disengagement due to repetitive lessons, challenged the program's effectiveness. However, the director has implemented several strategies to address these concerns, focusing on curriculum customization, interactive engagement, and coordination.

The study reveals that cultural conflicts significantly impact curriculum implementation, with teachers' personally preferred materials and the difficulty of aligning teaching methods with students' cultural contexts exacerbating the issue. Despite this, the strategy of integrating culturally relevant content has fostered stronger connections between students and teachers. Classroom engagement has

been improved through more interactive teaching methods, such as games and hands-on activities. Additionally, coordination concerns, including limited resources and resistance to feedback, have posed challenges. However, the director's emphasis on collaboration and open communication has led to positive changes, with strategies like task-based learning and collaborative lesson planning ensuring that the curriculum remains adaptable.

While the study presents challenges encountered by the EPP director and strategies employed by the EPP director, the study has its limitations. Firstly, the study employed retrospective case study. The researchers recommend the application of other types of case studies such as snapshot case study and diachronic case study to be able to explore other angles of EPP language planning. Secondly, the adjustment period mentioned in the study is one year only. Because not all people adjust at the same pace, other researchers can also explore a two-year adjustment phase or a longer adjustment period to address an EPP director's challenges and strategies covered by those years. Thirdly, this study focused on one EPP director from one institution only. Future researchers can conduct a study that would be able to interview more EPP directors, so myriad data can be gathered.

Despite its limitations, it has implications. Firstly, the findings of this study can be an ideal guide for EPP or English instructors who are to assume an administrative role, enabling them to adjust from being a lecturer to accepting a director role. Secondly, higher educational institutions might consider modifying their hiring process that would include demo teaching, so the instructor's classroom management, mastery of lessons, and pedagogical knowledge and practices will be rated. Thirdly, this study also highlights strengthening team communication in a multicultural work environment. The management and the teaching force of EPP come from different countries with different views and cultures but still can work harmoniously despite cultural differences. This study implies how multicultural work environment can be challenging but possible to manage and achieve.

Finally, while challenges persist, the strategic adjustments made by the director have contributed to the program's growth. Customizing the curriculum, enhancing engagement, and promoting collaboration have addressed the evolving needs of students. Despite logistical and financial limitations, the program's flexibility and focus on stakeholder involvement have fostered resilience, allowing it to adapt and continue to thrive in a complex educational landscape.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the valuable insights and experiences shared by the EPP Director. Appreciation is also extended to the international university for granting approval to conduct this study.

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