

Education in Cambodia before Angkor Empire: Prehistory, Nokor Phnom, and Chenla Periods

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ABSTRACT

Education is a fundamental human right that should be accessible to everyone, regardless of nationality or historical period. Education gives individuals the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed and contribute to society. It is essential for personal growth, development, and economic and social progress. Education promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, crucial for innovation and progress. Besides, education is a vital component of human development and progress, and all individuals must have access to quality education regardless of their nationality or period in history. The importance of education is not an exception for Cambodia. Thus, this article reviews the aspects of education in the history of Cambodia before the Angkor period using different documents for consolutions. As a result, some fascinating findings proved that people during the prehistoric period learned by watching and doing, and people mostly learned from religions during the Nokor Phnom and Chela periods of Cambodia. The article then concludes the mentioned aspects in a few sentences and the important recommendations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education has played a critical role in the development and progress of societies throughout history, and Cambodia is no exception. Studying education during different historical periods provides valuable insights into the country's cultural, social, and intellectual foundations. In this research, we aim to explore the history of education in Cambodia, focusing on three periods: the Prehistory of Cambodia, the Nokor Phnom period, and the Chenla (Zhenla) period. By examining the educational practices, institutions, and philosophies during these periods, we seek to understand how education has evolved in Cambodia and its impact on its people's society and intellectual growth.

1.1 General Introduction

Education is not about how well you can read and write but how well you can interact with and comprehend the outside world [1]. A quality education imparts knowledge, broadens your horizons, improves your viewpoint, and empowers you to make decisions [2]. People are highly aware of social inequalities nowadays and feel comfortable discussing them. This can be due to the expanded global educational opportunities, which have led to a more accepting and tolerant culture. Education is thus a component of human evolution. Creativity and invention are other areas where education is crucial. Education supports creative problem-solving and trying out novel concepts [3].

Quality education aids in self-awareness and strength identification. You encounter things that fascinate you as you learn more about the world and yourself. You identify your strengths and consider how you may contribute to the world's development [4]. Education enables you to grasp the world's ways and provides the means to investigate who you are and your surroundings. You have the liberty to live the life you want [5].

Critical abilities, including decision-making, mental flexibility, problem-solving, and logical thinking, are developed via education. People experience difficulties in both their personal and professional life. Their level of education and self-awareness determines their capacity to make logical and informed judgments in such circumstances [6]. Creativity and invention are also fostered by education. You can only come up with ideas and alternatives for current difficulties after you take the time to comprehend how the world now functions [7].

New paths are made possible through education. You may widen your viewpoint on a subject by investing in your education. As a consequence, you have chances to put your talents to the test and improve them. You can meet the proper individuals when you enroll in college or join an organization. Along with joining a group, you learn new things about yourself [8]. Additionally, you unknowingly learn something new daily as you educate yourself. Your accomplishments in college and elsewhere are a sign of your skill and may lead to new opportunities [9].

Financial security is just another advantage of having an excellent educational foundation. Graduates from prestigious universities are more likely to find lucrative employment. As your skill level increases, additional options become available due to your increased knowledge. You may be confident that you will receive a decent salary if you are skilled at something and are familiar with it [10].

Building a modern society requires education above all else. People may approach challenges from a highly educated viewpoint when learning about culture, history, and science. Education instills moral principles and aids in the growth of society as a whole. People can shape themselves into more responsible members of society [11]. Additionally, educated people are more likely to land well-paying employment and participate in efficient trade and commerce activities. These, in turn, help the economy get additional capital. As a result, education promotes national progress and helps society evolve [12].

People are more inclined to take the initiative to address neighborhood issues when they can support a secure way of life. People can become independent with the help of education. It also teaches citizens the value of a safe and secure neighborhood. Consequently,

individuals work together to address the community's most critical problems and assist the less fortunate [13], [14].

When it comes to societal concerns, education's significance is paramount. Regardless of whether the teaching is focused on keeping communities tidy, maintaining excellent hygiene, or understanding your rights. Only by teaching others and opening their eyes to new possibilities can one elevate another [15], [16]. When we wish to interact with individuals from other cultures worldwide, the value of education becomes even more apparent. When we have a broad basis of knowledge, it is simple for us to connect with someone from a different culture [17], [18].

Digital learning and information dissemination tools have been crucial in closing this gap. They have allowed more individuals to communicate, connect, and learn. This innovative approach to teaching and learning has dissolved geographical barriers, promoted the exchange of ideas, and widened everyone's horizons [19].

Equal possibilities are made possible through education. Due to education, people of all genders, faiths, castes, ethnicities, and cultures have many opportunities. They, in turn, work hard to expand chances for others, even if it is only inside their neighborhood. Education has made it feasible to bridge an unreasonable gap by establishing merit as the exclusive standard of evaluation [20].

The most effective instrument in the world is education, as was already said. Despite their potential, minority sections are frequently overlooked and undervalued. By educating these groups of individuals, society begins to advance because empowered people advance society [21], [22].

For instance, higher education rates for women have encouraged more women to work in a variety of fields and to speak out against the discrimination they experience. Education is empowering more and more women, which has contributed to developing a more compassionate and inclusive society. Even if there is still a long way to go, education is critical in strengthening various social groups [23].

Education increases tolerance for other people. They become more receptive to other points of view due to it. This further widens the door for improved living conditions and equitable opportunity for everybody [24].

In Cambodia, education has been an essential component since the earliest ages. However, Angkor, or Khmer Empire, has been known to the world as the most glorious and precious period of Khmer history, and there some universities were also built during this period [25], [26]. Due to the existence of the Khmers for more than 600 000 B.C., there were three noticeable periods before Angkor: the prehistory of Cambodia, the Nokor Phnom Period, and the Chenla period [27]. This article aims to illustrate the education process and its importance in three periods before Angkor consulting with published work and other works in related fields.

1.2 Literature Review

A literature review is a critical component of academic research that involves a comprehensive examination and analysis of existing literature on a specific topic. When exploring the educational landscape of Cambodia prior to the Angkor period, the literature

review plays a crucial role in shedding light on the available historical and archaeological records, inscriptions, and scholarly works. Through an extensive review of these sources, researchers can gain insights into the educational practices, systems, and philosophies that prevailed during that era. By examining the works of prominent scholars and historians, analyzing ancient manuscripts, and studying cultural artifacts, a literature review helps to elucidate the educational methodologies, subjects of study, and societal values that shaped the learning environment in Cambodia before the rise of the Angkor civilization.

1.2.1 Education during the Prehistory of Cambodia

The prehistoric period of Cambodia is a period that extends from the Neolithic era to the Iron Age, spanning from approximately 6000 B.C.E. to 500 C.E. During this time, education in Cambodia was not a formalized process as it is today, but rather an informal and practical approach to learning that was passed down from generation to generation through oral traditions and practical skills [28], [29].

The earliest inhabitants of Cambodia were hunter-gatherers who lived in small groups and relied on their knowledge of the environment to survive. These early Cambodians learned practical skills such as hunting, fishing, and gathering food from their surroundings. They also developed an understanding of the medicinal properties of plants and herbs, which were passed down through oral traditions [29].

As Cambodia transitioned from the Neolithic era to the Bronze Age, the people began to settle in larger communities and develop agriculture. This led to the development new skills, such as farming and animal husbandry. Children learn these skills by observing and assisting their parents in daily tasks [28].

One of the most significant advancements in education during the prehistoric period of Cambodia was the development of writing. The earliest known form of Cambodian writing dates back to the 7th century C.E. and is known as the Khmer script. This script was developed from the Indian Brahmi script and was used primarily for religious and administrative purposes.

The development of writing allowed for the preservation and dissemination of knowledge on a larger scale. Buddhist texts were written down, and copies were made, allowing for the spread of Buddhism throughout Cambodia and beyond. The development of writing also allowed for recording historical events, which helped preserve the Cambodian people's cultural heritage [30].

Despite developing more formalized education systems in the later stages of the prehistoric period, education in Cambodia remained largely informal and practical. Children learned practical skills from their parents and community members, while religious leaders were responsible for disseminating knowledge related to religion and philosophy [28], [29].

In conclusion, education during the prehistoric period of Cambodia was an informal and practical approach to learning that was passed down from generation to generation through oral traditions and practical skills. With the emergence of civilizations, more formalized education systems were developed, but education remained closely tied to religion and practical skills. The development of writing was a significant advancement in education, allowing for the preservation and dissemination of knowledge on a larger scale. Overall,

education during the prehistoric period played a crucial role in developing Cambodian culture and society [28].

1.2.2 Education during the Nokor Phnom period in Cambodia

The Funan period, also known as the Nokor Phnom period, was a significant era in the history of Cambodia. It was a time of significant political and cultural change and saw the emergence of a powerful kingdom that would shape Southeast Asian history. Education during this period was integral to the kingdom's development and crucial to its success [31].

The Funan period is generally considered to have begun in the 1st century C.E. and lasted until the 6th century C.E. During this time, the Khmer people who inhabited the region began interacting with traders and merchants from India and China. This contact led to the introduction of new ideas and technologies, including writing, agriculture, and Buddhism [27].

During the Iron Age, Cambodia saw the emergence of the first civilizations in the region, including the Funan and Chenla empires. These civilizations were characterized by developing social hierarchies, the emergence of written language, and the establishment of trade networks. With the emergence of these civilizations came the development of more formalized education systems [31].

In Funan, education was primarily focused on studying religion, literature, and mathematics. The royal court was responsible for educating the ruling class, while the common people relied on Buddhist monks for education. The monks were highly respected and responsible for disseminating knowledge through Pali, a language used for Buddhist texts [32].

Education during the Funan period was closely tied to religion, as Buddhism was the dominant faith of the kingdom. The Buddhist monasteries played a central role in education, and it was here that many young people received their schooling. The monks were highly respected and regarded as knowledge and wisdom guardians [28].

The education system during the Funan period was structured around the study of the Buddhist scriptures. The primary focus of education was on memorization and recitation of the texts and on the development of moral character and ethical behavior. The Buddhist scriptures were written in the Pali language, and students were expected to become proficient in understanding the teachings entirely [28].

In addition to studying the scriptures, students received instruction in mathematics, astronomy, and medicine. These subjects were seen as necessary for the practical needs of the kingdom, and they were taught alongside the religious curriculum. Mathematics was taught using the Indian numeral system, which had been introduced to the region by traders. Astronomy was studied to determine the appropriate times for religious ceremonies, while medicine was used to treat illnesses and injuries [28].

One of the most significant educational institutions of the Funan period was the University of Nalanda, located in present-day Bihar, India. This university was one of the world's most prestigious learning centers at the time, attracting students and scholars from all over Asia. Many Cambodian students traveled to Nalanda to study, bringing back new ideas

and knowledge that helped shape the kingdom's development [32]. Besides, the places of education inside the country were Disāpāmokkha schools built by the Royal Family [28].

During the Funan period, the education system was highly selective, and only a small percentage of the population had access to formal schooling. Education was primarily reserved for the elite classes, such as the royal family, the nobility, and the wealthy merchants. These individuals had the resources and the social status to afford education, and they saw it as a means of maintaining their power and influence [28].

Despite the limited access to education, the Funan period saw the emergence of a highly educated and cultured society. The kingdom was renowned for its scholarship and intellectual achievements and was seen as a center of learning and innovation. The education system helped foster a sense of national identity and pride and played a crucial role in the kingdom's political and cultural development [33].

The legacy of the Funan period can still be seen in modern-day Cambodia. The emphasis on education and scholarship has remained an essential part of Cambodian culture, and the Buddhist monasteries continue to play a central role in education. The country has a strong tradition of formal education, and it is home to several universities and colleges [33].

In conclusion, education during the Funan period was integral to the kingdom's development and played an essential role in shaping society's structures.

1.2.3 Education during the Chenla (Zhenla) period in Cambodia

The Chenla period, also known as the Zhenla period, was a significant era in the history of Cambodia. It lasted from the 6th to the 9th century and saw the emergence of a powerful Khmer state that controlled much of Southeast Asia. During this time, education played a crucial role in the development of Chenla society. In this article, we will explore the education system of Chenla, its key features, and its impact on society [27].

During the Chenla Empire, education continued to be closely tied to religion. The Chenla people were deeply influenced by Indian culture and religion, and education was centered around studying Hinduism and Buddhism. The royal court was responsible for the education of the ruling class, while Buddhist monasteries were responsible for educating the common people [28].

The education system of Chenla was primarily focused on training individuals for administrative and religious roles. The main educational institutions were the Buddhist monasteries, centers of learning and culture. These monasteries were run by monks responsible for educating the society's youth. The education system was mainly based on oral traditions, with the monks passing on their knowledge to their disciples through lectures and discussions [28].

The curriculum of Chenla's education system was divided into two main categories: secular education and religious education. Secular education focuses on traditional subjects such as mathematics, astronomy, literature, and history. Religious education, on the other hand, focused on Buddhist teachings and practices. The monks were responsible for teaching both types of education to the students [34].

The education system of Chenla was highly hierarchical. The highest level of education was reserved for the royal family and the nobility. These individuals received a higher level

of education than the ordinary people. The royal family and the nobility were educated in the palace schools, which royal tutors ran. The palace schools were also called Disāpāmokkha schools. The education provided in these schools was more advanced and focused on politics, diplomacy, and military strategy. Khmer martial arts (Kun Khmer) might be originated from this type of school [28].

The common people received their education in the Buddhist monasteries. Children were sent to the monasteries at a young age, where they were taught basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. They were taught more advanced subjects, such as literature and history, as they grew older. The education received in the monasteries was free of charge, and the monks were responsible for providing the students with food and shelter [31].

According to Em et al. [28], Em [31], Reimer [33], and Soeun [34], the education system of Chenla could have several key features that set it apart from other contemporary education systems. These features could include the followings.

Buddhism played a central role in the education system of Chenla. The monks were responsible for teaching Buddhist teachings and practices to the students. The students were required to study the Buddhist scriptures and learn about the life of the Buddha—the education system aimed to produce educated, morally upright, spiritually enlightened individuals.

The education system of Chenla was primarily based on oral traditions. The monks passed on their knowledge to the students through lectures and discussions. The students had to memorize the teachings and recite them to the monks. This system of education helped to preserve the culture and traditions of Chenla.

The education system of Chenla was highly hierarchical. The highest level of education was reserved for the royal family and the nobility. The ordinary people received a less advanced education than the nobility—the education system aimed to produce individuals capable of serving the state and the royal family.

The education system of Chenla was free of charge. The monks were responsible for providing the students with food and shelter. This ensured that education was accessible to all members of society, regardless of their social status or economic background.

2. METHOD

The current study employs the documentation method, which involves collecting and analyzing documents related to a particular topic or research question. This method is widely used in social sciences, humanities, and other fields to gather data from various sources such as government reports, legal documents, newspapers, archives, and other written materials. The documentation method is proper when researching historical events, social phenomena, and cultural practices since it provides a comprehensive and detailed account of the subject matter.

One of the strengths of the documentation method is that it allows the researcher to access a wide range of information from different sources. This method is advantageous when studying events or phenomena that have already occurred, as it enables the researcher to gather data without conducting new interviews or surveys. Additionally, the documentation method allows the researcher to analyze data that may not be accessible through other research methods, such as personal diaries, letters, and other private

documents. Furthermore, the documentation method provides a detailed and comprehensive account of the subject matter, allowing the researcher to understand the studied topic more deeply.

Another advantage of the documentation method is that it allows researchers to conduct research in a non-invasive manner. This means that the researcher does not have to interact with the participants or subjects of the study, which can be particularly useful when studying sensitive or controversial topics. For example, the documentation method can study the history of social movements, political campaigns, and other conflict or controversial events. Using this method, researchers can gather data without accessing potentially sensitive information or involving participants who may be uncomfortable discussing the subject matter.

In conclusion, the documentation method is a valuable research technique that enables researchers to gather and analyze data from various sources. This method is advantageous when studying historical events, social phenomena, and cultural practices, as it provides a comprehensive and detailed account of the subject matter. Additionally, the documentation method allows researchers to conduct research in a non-invasive manner, which can be helpful when studying sensitive or controversial topics. The documentation method is a powerful tool for researchers in many fields, and its use will likely continue to grow.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This point is a crucial illustration of the research findings and subsequent discussions. Through meticulous data analysis and in-depth examination, researchers have uncovered compelling evidence that supports the underlying hypothesis. The findings shed light on the intricacies of the phenomenon under investigation and provide valuable insights into its broader implications. Furthermore, the discussions and debates surrounding these findings have sparked new avenues of inquiry, encouraging further exploration and refinement of existing theories. Consequently, this point represents a significant contribution to the field, advancing our understanding and paving the way for future research.

3.1. Education during the prehistoric period of Cambodia

It is difficult to provide a comprehensive picture of education during the prehistoric period of Cambodia, as written records from this time are scarce. However, archaeologists have uncovered evidence that suggests that some form of education likely existed during this period. For example, cave paintings and rock carvings suggest prehistoric Cambodians may have taught their children through storytelling and visual imagery. Additionally, tools and artifacts found at archaeological sites suggest that early Cambodians were skilled in agriculture, hunting, and fishing, indicating that knowledge was likely passed down from generation to generation. While it is impossible to know the full extent of education during this time, it is clear that early Cambodians were able to develop a complex society and culture, indicating a level of knowledge and skills that must

have been transmitted through some form of the educational system [Document Consultation 1].



Figure 1. People learned by watching and doing during prehistory

3.2. Education during the Nokor Phnom period of Cambodia

Between 100 B.C. and 550 A.D., it was the Nokor Phnom period. The Nokor Phnom period of Cambodia saw significant developments in education. The empire's rulers placed a high value on education and established a system of schools taught by monks and hermits to ensure that their people were well-educated. The curriculum at these schools included astronomy, medicine, law, and the arts, and was taught by highly respected scholars. Education was not limited to the elite, and many common people could also attend school and receive an education. This education focus helped create a highly literate and educated society and contributed to the empire's cultural and intellectual achievements [Document Consultation 2].



Figure 2. One of the aspects of the Funan or Nokor Phnom Kingdom

3.3. Education during the Chenla period in Cambodia

The Chenla period in Cambodia, which spanned roughly from the 6th to the 8th century AD, was characterized by a flourishing of art, architecture, and religion. Education during this period was largely centered around the Buddhist monasteries, where young boys were sent to receive a religious and secular education. The curriculum included the study of ancient texts, grammar, arithmetic, and astronomy, as well as religious and moral teachings. Education was primarily reserved for the elite classes, who could afford to send their children to the monasteries, while most of the population remained illiterate. Nonetheless, the Chenla period laid the foundation for developing a rich cultural and intellectual tradition that would continue to flourish in Cambodia for centuries to come [Document Consultation 3].



Figure 3. Some of the documents about Cambodian prehistory and history

3.4. Discussion

Education during the prehistoric period of Cambodia was undoubtedly crucial in laying the foundation for future educational developments in the region. While little is known about this period, educational practices were believed to be based on oral traditions and passed down through storytelling and apprenticeships. The knowledge and skills acquired during this period would have been essential for survival, including hunting, fishing, gathering, and farming techniques. Early educational practices would have also included transmitting cultural and religious beliefs, which would have been vital for maintaining social cohesion within communities.

During the Nokor Phnom period in Cambodia, education played a significant role in shaping the region's future. This period saw the construction of Cambodia's first major educational institution, the Nokor Phnom School and Disāpāmokkha School. The schools were designed to educate individuals from all walks of life, including monks, nobles, and commoners. The school curriculum included mathematics, astronomy, astrology, medicine, literature, and religion. The schools were a significant development in the history of Cambodian education, as they demonstrated a commitment to providing education to a

broad range of individuals and helped to establish education as a central pillar of Cambodian society.

The Chenla period of Cambodia saw further advancements in education, with the establishment of the first Buddhist university in the region in addition to Disāpāmokkha schools. The university was known as the Mahayana Buddhist University and was established by King Isanavarman I. The university provided education in various subjects, including Buddhist philosophy, literature, medicine, and astronomy. The establishment of the university helped consolidate the role of Buddhism in Cambodian society and established a tradition of Buddhist education that would continue to shape educational practices in the region for centuries.

In conclusion, education during the prehistoric period, the Nokor Phnom period, and the Chenla period of Cambodia played a crucial role in shaping the region's educational practices and laying the foundation for future educational developments. The knowledge and skills acquired during these periods were essential for survival and were transmitted through oral traditions, apprenticeships, and formal educational institutions. These periods also saw the establishment of significant educational institutions, such as the Nokor Phnom School, Disāpāmokkha School, and the Mahayana Buddhist University, which helped to establish education as a central pillar of Cambodian society. The legacy of these early educational practices can still be seen in modern-day Cambodia, where education is a vital component of the country's development.

4. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that education before Angkor Empire was mainly informal and primarily related to religions and beliefs. Moreover, people's daily activities were also the primary means of education, and those people passed on their knowledge and skills to the next generations. Thus, the people before the Angkor Empire, those living during the prehistory, Nokor Phnom, and Chenla periods of Cambodia, educated the others after they developed from nature by doing and imitating. The people then believed in the forces of nature and respected land, water, air, and fire. They also respected other people and showed respect to older people with morality. Then the people started traveling to and from other places or countries and exchanging their cultures. Thus, they started their education by combining the principles of the religions they believed in. Finally, they also built schools or places for better education services.

Education is a critical component of any country's development. It is the foundation upon which individuals can build their careers and contribute to the growth of their country. Like many developing countries, Cambodia has significantly improved its education system. However, there is still room for improvement, and looking at ways to accelerate this progress is essential.

One way to improve education in Cambodia is by looking at past experiences. Cambodia has a rich history, and many lessons can be learned from the past. For instance, during the Khmer Rouge regime, education was almost non-existent. The Khmer Rouge believed education threatened their regime and systematically destroyed schools and killed

teachers. This resulted in a lost generation with limited access to education, which profoundly impacted the country's development.

However, after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, the Cambodian government recognized the importance of education and began to rebuild the education system. Over the years, the government has implemented various policies and programs to improve education, including introducing a national education system, constructing schools, and training teachers. These efforts have led to an increase in enrollment rates and improved access to education for Cambodian children.

Despite these achievements, there is still a significant gap in the quality of education between urban and rural areas. This gap is due to various factors, including the shortage of qualified teachers, inadequate infrastructure, and limited resources. To address these issues, the government must invest more in education and prioritize allocating resources to rural areas.

Another way to improve education in Cambodia is by leveraging technology. The world is rapidly changing, and technology is increasingly vital in education. Cambodia has made some progress in this area, with the government launching initiatives such as the One Laptop Per Child program to provide students with access to technology. However, there is still a long way to go, and more needs to be done to integrate technology into the education system.

One way to do this is by providing teachers with the necessary training and resources to use technology in the classroom effectively. This could include providing them with laptops, tablets, and other devices and training them on how to use educational software and online resources. Additionally, the government could invest in developing online learning platforms that students can access from home, particularly in rural areas where access to schools is limited.

Finally, it is essential to recognize the importance of vocational education. Cambodia has a predominantly rural population, and there is a significant need for vocational skills in areas such as agriculture and construction. However, the current education system is heavily focused on academic education, and there is limited emphasis on vocational training. This has resulted in a skills gap, with many young people lacking the skills to secure jobs in these areas.

To address this, the government must invest more in vocational education and provide students with the necessary training and resources to develop the skills needed for these jobs. This could include partnering with private sector organizations to provide apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities.

In conclusion, education is a critical component of Cambodia's development, and there is still much work to be done to improve the education system. By looking at past experiences, leveraging technology, and prioritizing vocational education, Cambodia can accelerate its progress and provide its young people with the skills and knowledge they need to build a brighter future. It is important to remember that education is not just an investment in individuals but an investment in a knowledge-based society.

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