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Exploring the Student Academic Achievement, Attendance, and Parent Engagement in Secondary Education in Cambodia

Seila Kim[a,*], Chanthoeun Chhoeung[a], Sreytouch Chamraeun[a], Someas Mon[a], Samnang Pann[b], & Mat Rahimi Yusof[c]

[a]*Preah Sihamoniraja Buddhist University, Phnom Penh, Cambodia*
[b]*Royal Academy of Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia*
[c]*Universiti Utara Malaysia*

Abstract

Research on models that offer integrated support for families and students must continue in order to improve educational equity. One such approach is community secondary schools (COSSs), although further research is required to determine how their methods might result in quantifiable outcomes in a variety of domains, such as academic success, attendance, family involvement, and social-emotional well-being. This study explored the adoption of the community school concept and its effects on student academic performance, attendance, parent involvement, and social-emotional wellbeing in a single community secondary school in the Cambodian context. The study also investigated the relationship between patterns of change and stability and coordinated supports across school, family, and community systems, conceptualized and guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory (EST). This study used an embedded mixed-methods approach, with quantitative data serving as the main focus and qualitative data offering contextual information. This study took place at one COSS in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, with a total enrolment of 480 students in grades 7–12. Several stakeholder groups participated in the study. For attendance records, quantitative data were gathered from all students, while data on academic performance and social-emotional learning were taken from higher grade levels. Ten staff members and teachers took part in one-on-one interviews as part of the qualitative component. A separate teacher/staff questionnaire was completed by 20 teachers and staff members (n = 20), from whom the ten interview participants were drawn. A survey with both closed-ended and open-ended items was also distributed to about 111 parents. These individuals were chosen to offer a varied and comprehensive perspective on how various roles within the school community experience the COSS model. Chi-square tests of independence showed no statistically detectable short-term change in student achievement in Khmer language (KHLA) or Maths, both of which remained consistently high before and after adoption (KHLA $\chi^2(1) = 0.28$, $p = .598$; Maths $\chi^2(1) = 0.19$, $p = .661$). Attendance, by contrast, improved significantly: chronic absenteeism halved from 20.42% before implementation to 10.00% after it, $\chi^2(1) = 40.39$, $p < .001$, $\varphi = 0.15$. While student-reported social-emotional outcomes stayed same, parent engagement rose as a result of better communication and participation possibilities. Results indicated that while academic and social-emotional outcomes may require long-term implementation, early COSS implementation may result in immediate gains in attendance and parent participation. By providing a framework for thinking about more inclusive and successful strategies meant to lower obstacles and promote long-term student achievement, this study hoped to contribute to the larger conversation on educational equity.

Keywords: Attendance, Chronic Absenteeism, Community Secondary Schools, Community School Model, Parent Engagement, Student Academic Achievement

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1. Introduction

Despite its turbulent past, Cambodia is a beautiful country with growing hope for a better future. Cambodia has a long history of genocide, foreign invasion, and civil unrest (Bredenberg, 2022; Chandler, 2008; Mok, 2013). Unfortunately, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge government, which came to power in 1975, are linked to Cambodia. Approximately 1.7 million people died from starvation, torture, and execution during Pol Pot's four-year communist rule. Cambodia also prioritized educational institutions and historical sites. Educational institutions were closed and libraries destroyed (Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Lim, 2023; Yi et al., 2026). To effectively perform in their roles as instructional and

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: kim.seila71@gmail.com

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organizational leaders who are focused on excellence and to motivate all members of the school community to a common commitment, all pertinent stakeholders must acquire specific visionary leadership traits, knowledge, organizational structure, and skills (Bredenberg, 2022; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Lay & Tagniguchi, 2025; Lim, 2023).

The persistent difficulties in Cambodia's educational system emphasize how urgent it is to remove major obstacles to academic achievement. Only 45.50% of Cambodian students met or surpassed criteria in mathematics during the 2023–2024 school year, while 48.50% did so in Khmer language (KHLA)/Literacy (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport [MoEYS], 2026). Chronic absenteeism, on the other hand, is still high; it decreased from a pandemic peak of 40% but remained at 30% during that time, which is significantly higher than the pre-pandemic figure of 15% (MoEYS, 2026). These metrics indicate persistent problems with attendance and academic performance that continue to affect the Cambodian educational performance. The aforementioned difficulties imply that government programs have not been successful in bringing about long-lasting gains. The drawbacks of the MoEYS's education reform highlight the need for more comprehensive, evidence-based approaches that go beyond accountability and standardized testing to enhance student learning (Bredenberg, 2022; Chamraeun et al., 2026; Lay & Tagniguchi, 2025; Mok et al., 2026; MoEYS, 2018a; 2026). Reversing the underperformance trend and guaranteeing that every student has fair access to high-quality education depend on addressing these crucial variables through calculated interventions.

The difficulties that many Cambodian schools encounter are best shown by a secondary school. The school reported a chronic absenteeism rate of more than 30%, a socioeconomic disadvantage rate of more than 80% (MoEYS, 2026). The school responded by applying for and receiving a five-year implementation grant under the grant support for community schools in Cambodia (Bredenberg, 2022; Lay & Tagniguchi, 2025; MoEYS, 2026). The MoEYS provided funding for the award, which started in the 2023–2024 academic year. This award supported an intervention teacher to offer focused academic support and designated Khmer learner supports, as well as a community school specialist to improve attendance and family participation through community collaborations. Examining the community school model's application at this secondary school provided insightful information about how these focused interventions affect student performance, attendance, and parent involvement, adding to our understanding of successful school improvement tactics.

Although the broad challenges described above are shared across many low- and middle-income education systems, the intervention examined here differs from the community school models documented in the existing literature in three specific respects. First, the Cambodian COSS model is administered as a centrally funded MoEYS grant scheme rather than as a district- or NGO-led partnership, which means that the coordination burden falls on a single school-level specialist rather than on a lead partner agency, as in the models reviewed by Maier et al. (2017) and Ferrara and Jacobson (2019). Second, the model deploys a paired staffing structure — one intervention teacher for targeted academic support and one community school specialist for attendance and family engagement — which allows the academic and non-academic strands of the model to be examined as partially separable inputs, an analytic separation that prior single-coordinator studies cannot support. Third, and most importantly for the present study, no published evaluation has yet reported outcome data from the Cambodian COSS scheme. The contribution of this study is therefore not the observation that Cambodian schools face persistent difficulties, which is well established, but the first empirical account of how a specific, centrally funded whole-school model performs against those difficulties within its first two years of operation — including the finding that its effects are unevenly distributed across outcome domains.

Guided by these perspectives, the purpose of this study was to investigate how community secondary schools affect students' academic performance, with a particular emphasis on raising Maths and Khmer language (KHLA) literacy competency in the Cambodian context. Understanding the connections between community school procedures and student outcomes was the main goal of this study. The results advance knowledge of how collaborative school architecture, family partnerships, and integrated services improve student learning and foster academic achievement. This study offered timely insights that could guide future sustainability and program development efforts beyond the grant period. With an emphasis on the particular tactics and tools these schools use to improve academic results, the practices and attitudes of teachers, parents, and students within community schools were investigated. This involved looking at how inclusive and encouraging settings are created and figuring out the main elements that lead to higher academic performance. Additionally, the study examined how community schools use partnerships and community involvement to foster a more equitable learning environment and solve educational gaps. The current study was focused on these areas. These results were anticipated as a result of the family-school collaborations and integrated supports created by the MoEYS award, which is intended to fortify and maintain the model after the initial five-year financing period. By offering data that can direct conversations regarding tactics to bolster school reform initiatives, this study aims to educate educators, legislators, and community stakeholders.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Understanding the Theoretical Framework Used in the Study

By highlighting the dynamic interactions between people and the several environmental systems they are embedded in, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory (EST) offers a holistic view on human development. According to Bronfenbrenner, growth is impacted by a variety of systems, from more general societal and cultural influences (macrosystem) to more specific contexts like family and school (microsystem). Further influencing individual development are the interconnections between these systems (mesosystem) and the effects of external environments like the larger community (exosystem). The chronosystem, which recognizes the impact of life events and transitions on development, captures the idea that these interactions change over time (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

The Figure 1 below shows Bronfenbrenner's five systems of the environment: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006).

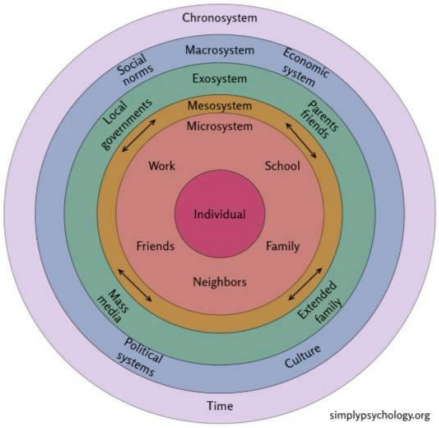


Figure 1. The five environmental systems of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006).

The EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) was especially pertinent to this study because it offered a strong framework for examining the ways in which different environmental elements in community schools affect students' academic performance. In order to promote family and community involvement, community schools are built to combine academic instruction with extensive support services. Using this theoretical framework, the study investigated how interrelated systems—like community resources, school environment, and family involvement—interacted to affect math and KHLA student outcomes. This viewpoint allows for a comprehensive knowledge of the elements that support academic performance while also taking students' social and emotional growth into account. Bronfenbrenner's theory is a suitable option for analyzing these dynamics since the community school model depends on the interactions between inclusive school practices, accessible community resources, and supportive family engagement (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In keeping with the chronosystem notion, this study also looked at how these systems react to and influence student experiences throughout time.

In conclusion, the EST provided a useful framework for comprehending the various factors influencing student progress in community schools. Using this theoretical framework, this study sought to understand how the interrelated support networks seen in community schools enhance students' academic performance and general well-being.

2.2. Understanding the Benefits of Community Education

Ferrara and Jacobson (2019) argue that community schools have the capacity to revolutionize both education and more general community development. The editors emphasise the significance of community interaction and engagement as essential to tackling societal issues that go beyond academic training through research and case studies. She highlights the importance of the community school model's integrated holistic support systems, which include social-emotional development, academic instruction, health services, and strong family involvement. Parallel findings by Maier et al.

(2017), who similarly emphasize the integration of numerous services as crucial to student achievement, are supported by this wraparound perspective.

Recognizing each community's distinct needs and talents is a major theme in Ferrara and Jacobson's (2019) work, which they contend should direct the planning and execution of community school programs. Community schools are positioned as flexible frameworks designed to serve families in ways that reflect their lived experiences and cultural realities rather than as a one-size-fits-all answer due to their responsiveness to local settings. Heers et al. (2016) emphasize the significance of parental involvement and community investment as crucial for lowering dropout rates and increasing participation, which is similar to the editors' focus on community voice. Ferrara and Jacobson emphasize the significance of successful collaborations between schools and the communities they serve by highlighting the vital role that community members play in seeing problems and developing suitable solutions. The book's chosen case studies support the claim that a responsive, place-based approach can enhance student results by offering specific instances of how community schools have effectively addressed local issues.

Maier et al. (2017) carried out a systematic evaluation that looked at community schools' efficacy as an all-encompassing approach to school reform. Their findings highlighted the many advantages of community schools, such as increased student participation and attendance, improved academic achievement, the development of a healthy school climate, and the fortification of school-community connections. Heers et al. (2016) support the notion that these supports go beyond academics by encouraging long-term family-school collaboration, while Ferrara and Jacobson's (2019) case studies supplement these findings by demonstrating how such features operate in actual scenarios. According to Maier et al. (2017), integrated support services, collaborative leadership, and family involvement are essential components of successful community schools and are crucial to their overall efficacy. Crucially, their conclusions gained legitimacy from the use of both quantitative and qualitative research techniques, such as surveys, interviews, evaluations, and observational data.

Additionally, Heers et al. (2016) provided evidence that community schools are effective in raising student participation, parental involvement, and academic accomplishment. Their research supports the idea that well-designed community schools greatly contribute to excellent educational outcomes by highlighting the significance of community engagement in lowering dropout rates and raising parental participation. Together, Ferrara and Jacobson (2019), Heers et al. (2016), and Maier et al. (2017) showed that community schools are successful because they integrate academic instruction with solid partnerships and family-centered practices, yielding results that go beyond test scores into more comprehensive indicators of the well-being of students and the community.

2.3. Understanding the Community School Models' Limitations and Obstacles

Although Ferrara and Jacobson (2019) provided insightful narrative narratives and in-depth case studies on the use of community school models, the work has significant limitations with regard to its generalizability. Although the qualitative narratives are informative, the lack of strong empirical analysis limits the study's capacity to be applied more broadly in a variety of educational settings. Additionally, the study offers no consideration of the particular requirements of distinct school contexts. This lack of generalizability is consistent with research by Gordon (2024), who found that structural impediments to scaling the community school model include staff turnover, insufficient training, and coordination issues among partner organizations. Similarly, Maier et al. (2017) noted enduring difficulties in the sector, especially with regard to the unequal distribution of access to excellent schools. The study highlights community schools' potential to reduce educational gaps, but it does not provide a precise operational definition of "high quality," which makes it more difficult to assess or duplicate effective models in different contexts. Gordon (2024) went on to show how institutional barriers like uneven funding and leadership changes, which frequently interfere with program continuity, exacerbate these definitional uncertainties.

Together, the descriptive focus of Ferrara and Jacobson (2019), the lack of an operational definition of high-quality schools by Maier et al. (2017), and the documentation of systemic barriers by Gordon (2024) demonstrate that the current body of research provides only a partial understanding of the efficacy of community school models. Although these studies demonstrate the promise of community schools, they also indicate gaps in the definition and measurement of success, which makes it challenging to duplicate effective practices in a variety of circumstances. Future studies should use more rigorous approaches to overcome these shortcomings. Longitudinal studies, mixed-methods approaches, and in-depth case studies are a few examples that can offer a more comprehensive knowledge of the long-

term effects and sustainability of community school efforts. These methods would improve the body of evidence and direct more uniform use across communities.

2.4. Understanding the Student Outcomes and Community School Development in ASEAN and Global Settings

Ajmal et al. (2024) and Phetphan et al. (2024) have conducted substantial research on community school development and its effects on student learning outcomes in worldwide contexts. These studies have yielded valuable insights into techniques that improve educational quality in varied situations. Two important studies, one carried out in Pakistan and the other in Thailand, provide complementary viewpoints on instructional strategies and structural enhancements in community-based education. While Ajmal et al. (2024) showed that classroom practices and instructional quality directly impact quantifiable student outcomes, Phetphan et al. (2024) emphasized how teacher professional development and community participation build school systems at a structural level. In order to ensure sustainability and efficacy, these studies emphasize how crucial it is to match educational practices with local cultural, social, and economic contexts. Additionally, they show that in settings with limited resources, teacher capacity-building and well-organized community participation may have a major impact on student achievement and school performance.

Under the Office of the Basic Education Commission in Thailand, Phetphan et al. (2024) looked into methods for creating and maintaining high-quality community schools. Five stages comprised their research: determining the fundamental elements of high-quality schools, evaluating the need for development, developing strategic frameworks, confirming their viability, and generating an implementation manual. The results showed that teacher and staff development, active community involvement, high-quality teaching and learning, student accomplishment, and technology integration are the five essential elements required for successful community schools. The most important demand among these was community involvement, which was followed by the adoption of technology and the professional development of teachers. Six strategic areas were suggested by the study: (a) encouraging community involvement; (b) advancing technology for education and community services; (c) boosting teacher professionalism; (d) enhancing student knowledge and moral development; (e) fortifying educational management systems; and (f) putting the Sufficiency Economy philosophy into practice. These tactics were proven to be very suitable and workable, providing legislators and educators with a clear path forward for bolstering community-based schools (Phetphan et al., 2024). These priorities align with the findings of Ajmal et al. (2024), who used student accomplishment data to show how improved instructional quality and teacher ability directly enhance learning outcomes in schools with limited resources.

Ajmal et al. (2024) compared the numerical abilities of fifth-grade students enrolled in Basic Education Community Schools (BECS) and feeder schools under the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) in an effort to address educational challenges in Pakistan's non-formal education systems. The researchers evaluated 84 pupils using a mathematics achievement test that concentrated on addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division using a quantitative design and purposeful random sampling. The findings showed that BECS students fared significantly better than NCHD students in every tested area ($p < 0.05$), indicating differences in the two systems' resource allocation and instructional quality. To guarantee fair learning outcomes in non-formal settings, the study suggested putting in place thorough teacher training, ongoing professional development, and culturally sensitive numeracy programs (Ajmal et al., 2024). These suggestions are in line with those of Phetphan et al. (2024), who similarly emphasized the importance of community involvement and ongoing teacher development as key pillars for long-term growth.

When taken as a whole, these studies highlight how intentional resource allocation, community involvement, and teacher development all contribute to better educational outcomes. While Ajmal et al. (2024) show the micro-level effects of instructional techniques on student progress, Phetphan et al. (2024) offered a macro-level framework for creating sustainable community schools. By connecting these viewpoints, it is evident that in order to produce significant results, classroom-level teaching enhancements must accompany systemic reforms. Their findings collectively imply that systemic planning and localized, evidence-based interventions are necessary for the effective growth of community schools. The confluence of these viewpoints supports the notion that, in order to successfully address the different needs of students, worldwide models of community schools must combine broad legislative initiatives with context-specific instructional techniques.

2.5. Understanding the Value of Family Involvement in Students' Achievement

The importance of family involvement in raising student accomplishment has come to light more and more as community-wide initiatives have emerged as crucial tactics for encouraging long-term cooperation in community school research. In order to inform state-level educational policy, Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020) investigated family participation from a community-wide perspective. Ten focus groups from urban, rural, and suburban communities in a Midwestern state participated in their study, which uncovered important themes like the value of solid connections, easily available engagement opportunities, good communication, parent education, and family-centered activities. These results are consistent with those of Abagat et al. (2021), who also showed that engagement opportunities become more equitable and successful when families have access to integrated support systems, such as legal and social services. All of these research show that equitable policy and practice in community schools can be guided by a thorough, inclusive approach to family participation (Abagat et al., 2021; Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). These inclusive methods deal with a variety of requirements, including linguistic diversity, father engagement, and families navigating special education.

Based on this, Abagat et al. (2021) assessed the function of integrated support services, specifically Immigrant Family Legal Clinic, in the context of community schools. Their case study concentrated on school administrators, teachers, legal professionals, and children and families getting help at the clinic. The study included focus groups, questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis to show how the clinic improved family involvement, academic performance, and student well-being. According to this research, schools should work with community organizations to offer comprehensive services, which is in line with Kelty and Wakabayashi's (2020) emphasis on accessibility and inclusive possibilities. These results collectively demonstrate the necessity for services that concurrently fulfil social, legal, and academic requirements (Abagat et al., 2021; Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020).

To emphasize the importance of complete support systems, Jeynes (2022) examined meta-analytical findings on parental involvement in schools, emphasizing the persistent beneficial association between family engagement and student outcomes across varied situations. Unlike previous research, Jeynes (2022) emphasized culturally responsive tactics and context-specific practices, pointing out that when schools purposefully incorporate family voices and cultural perspectives, the benefits extend beyond academic accomplishment to social-emotional maturation. These findings support Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020), who emphasized the importance of broad, community-driven engagement, and extend Abagat et al.'s (2021) conclusions by demonstrating that such engagement strategies are effective across a variety of student populations, including those in multilingual and immigrant communities. These studies demonstrate how targeted, research-informed interventions can improve family-school interactions and student achievement (Abagat et al., 2021; Jeynes, 2022; Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020).

2.6. Understanding the Views on Community Schools from Around the World

Studies conducted in other countries offer further information about the community school model's efficacy. In a community school setting in Nepal, Rawal (2022) looked into how teacher-student connections affect students' motivation. Strong interpersonal ties may help students have better academic experiences, as the study showed that favorable interactions greatly increase student motivation and engagement. In areas with low resources, Rawal highlighted the value of relational techniques, pointing out that these connections can assist students in overcoming structural obstacles by encouraging resilience and dedication to learning. Furthermore, Rawal's research highlights the importance of culturally sensitive instruction. Teacher-student interactions are an essential support system in Nepalese community schools, where access to resources may be limited. Onyango et al. (2024), who also emphasized the significance of family engagement in student performance, are related to this emphasis on relational supports. According to the study, improving these connections not only increases student motivation but also helps create a more supportive and caring school environment in general.

Onyango et al. (2024) investigated the function of parental participation in early educational activities in Kenya, broadening the global viewpoint. Parents of children attending private schools were more actively involved in helping their children acquire language at home, according to their study, which polled parents and instructors from Busia County's public and private pre-primary schools. Parental participation was positively correlated with children's linguistic abilities, despite the tiny impact size. The necessity for focused programs, including parent seminars in public schools, to improve early language development and raise knowledge of educational resources was underlined by the

researchers. Similar to Rawal (2022), Onyango et al. (2024) showed that in situations with low resources, fostering student accomplishment requires robust relational support networks, whether they come from parents or instructors.

By reviewing the literature on community schools in 16 African nations, Miller-Grandvaux and Yoder (2002) provided a useful global perspective. The absence of thorough knowledge and documentation on community schools' efficacy in resolving educational issues in these areas is the issue they reviewed. Since the study examined existing literature, there was no direct participant interaction. Instead, their methodology comprised compiling and synthesizing existing research, reports, and data on community schools throughout several African countries. To find recurring themes, patterns, and difficulties, qualitative analytical techniques were applied. The review's main findings acknowledge the potential of community schools to increase educational access, especially in underprivileged areas. The authors acknowledged ongoing issues such insufficient funding, a lack of infrastructure, and sustainability concerns, but they also highlighted the vital role that local ownership, community involvement, and culturally relevant curricula play in these schools' success. Despite being carried out in a different setting, these results support the significance of localized solutions and community ownership, echoing Onyango et al. (2024) and Rawal (2022), who also emphasized culturally appropriate and family-based approaches.

By examining the influence of social-emotional competence on students' academic performance and behavioral development in Saudi Arabia, Alzahrani et al. (2019) further investigated international dimensions. The study, which involved 256 students from different elementary schools, found a strong positive relationship between academic success and social-emotional competency. Academic performance was often greater for kids with stronger social-emotional abilities. Additionally, better behavior, such as fewer behavioral issues and more robust social relationships, was linked to socio-emotional competence. The authors draw the conclusion that incorporating SEL programs into educational institutions may improve behavioral and academic results. This study is especially pertinent to the investigation of community schools since it validated the notion that SEL programs, which are frequently incorporated into community school models, can promote both positive behavior and academic success. Alzahrani et al. (2019) shown that, independent of cultural or national context, strong relational supports and holistic development strategies are critical to student performance, similar to research from Nepal, Kenya, and the African continent. According to their findings, SEL programs have to be a crucial part of educational systems dedicated to the holistic development of students. Alzahrani et al. (2019) demonstrated that relational and holistic development techniques, such as SEL, are important drivers of student performance in a variety of situations, similar to the research from Nepal and Kenya.

These global studies support the idea that interpersonal and family-school interactions are just as important to the success of community school models as institutional frameworks. Relational dynamics appear as crucial drivers of academic accomplishment in a variety of global contexts, whether through the integration of social-emotional learning programs, community ownership, parental involvement, or teacher-student rapport. When taken as a whole, Alzahrani et al. (2019), Miller-Grandvaux and Yoder (2002), Onyango et al. (2024), and Rawal (2022) demonstrate how relational and culturally sensitive practices serve as the cornerstone of resilient and equitable community schools across the globe. These international viewpoints provide important insights for the development and improvement of community school models in other settings, including Cambodia. They emphasize how crucial it is to create interventions that are both structurally sound and firmly based in the development of human connections. In conclusion, the resilience, flexibility, and efficacy of community schools around the world can be improved by incorporating culturally responsive teaching approaches, bolstering family-school partnerships, and integrating SEL into the educational framework. These results highlight the significance of implementing a relational, comprehensive approach to educational reform that places a high priority on the creation of supportive networks in order to promote students' long-term academic and social-emotional development.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

An embedded mixed methods technique was used in this study in order to collect data, which combined a retrospective archival quantitative strand (school years 2021–2022 to 2024–2025) with a concurrent strand in which the survey-based quantitative data and the qualitative data were collected simultaneously during the 2025–2026 school year. The term "simultaneous" therefore applies to the concurrent strand only, and not to the archival outcome data, which necessarily predate it. This method makes it easier to integrate participants' opinions and lived experiences with numerical trends with the qualitative component offering additional insights (30%) and the quantitative component acting as the

dominant strand (70%). When one kind of data enhances and supports the interpretation of findings from the other, this method is very suitable (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). In order to better comprehend complicated educational phenomena, the mixed methods research integrates quantitative and qualitative research techniques within a single study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This method provides a strong framework for tackling complex research topics by fusing statistical analysis with contextual, experience insights.

Because the archival quantitative strand concludes in 2024–2025 while the qualitative strand was generated in 2025–2026, the two strands are not contemporaneous, and the qualitative data are therefore not treated as independent verification of the outcome trends. They serve an explanatory function instead. All interview and open-ended survey participants were teachers, staff and parents who were present at the school throughout the implementation period, and were consequently able to account retrospectively for the conditions under which the recorded changes occurred. The qualitative strand is used to interpret why attendance and parent engagement shifted in the direction the archival records indicate, rather than to establish that they shifted. Reliance on retrospective accounts introduces a risk of recall bias, which is acknowledged as a limitation of this design

3.2. Research Participants and Context

This study was conducted in a Community Secondary School (COSS) in Phnom Penh with about 480 students in grades 7-12. Operating on a comprehensive COSS model, this school provides integrated systems of support that include family engagement initiatives, health and mental wellness services, academic intervention programs, and increased learning opportunities (MoEYS, 2026). By combining school and community resources in a whole-child approach, COSSs are intended to solve both academic and non-academic learning obstacles (MoEYS, 2026). Prior to being designated as a COSS, this location showed strengths in Khmer language (KHLA) and Maths with publicly available data on the MoEYS website (MoEYS, 2026). It also had to deal with a number of serious issues, such as a high chronic absenteeism rate and sizable populations of KHLA learners and students from low-income families. The site is a suitable location for analysing the implementation and possible results of the COSS model because these baseline metrics emphasise the academic achievement levels alongside ongoing equity-related concerns.

The study involved a variety of stakeholder groups. For attendance records, quantitative data were gathered from all students, while data on academic performance and Social-Emotional Learning (SELE)were taken from higher grade levels. Ten staff members and teachers took part in one-on-one interviews as part of the qualitative component. The interview sample and the survey sample are distinct: ten teachers and staff members took part in the one-on-one interviews, while a separate teacher/staff questionnaire was completed by 20 teachers and staff members (n = 20). The ten interview participants were drawn from this larger group of survey respondents. Accordingly, n = 10 is reported for all interview-based qualitative findings and n = 20 for all teacher/staff Likert-type results (Tables 4, 7 and 10). A survey with both closed-ended and open-ended items was also distributed to about 111 parents. These individuals were chosen to offer a varied and comprehensive perspective on how various roles within the COSS experience the COSS model. In order to capture both generalizable trends and contextual perspectives relevant to the COSS concept, the sampling procedures used in this study were in line with the embedded mixed methods design. This methodology guaranteed a range of perspectives and augmented the depth and applicability of the results. The study sought to create a robust and balanced dataset by integrating probability and purposive sampling methodologies to effectively answer its mixed methods research topics.

3.3. Research Tools and Data Collection Procedures

The methodological framework and research questions guided the careful selection of research tools. The archival quantitative data were drawn from the annual National Education Congress report published by MoEYS (2026). The Congress is the Ministry's yearly accountability mechanism, at which every provincial education department submits validated school-level returns covering enrolment, attendance, chronic absenteeism, and standardised assessment band distributions for the completed academic year. The figures reported in Tables 2, 3 and 6 are therefore administrative records compiled and verified by the Ministry, not researcher-collected data, and they were extracted for the study school from the Congress annexes for four consecutive years (2021–2022, 2022–2023, 2023–2024 and 2024–2025). Two consequences follow for the analysis. First, the archival data are released only as school-level aggregate proportions; individual student records were not made available to the research team, which constrains the inferential procedures that can be applied (see Section 3.4). Second, the Congress data and the survey data are independent sources

addressing the same constructs from different vantage points: the Congress supplies the recorded attendance and achievement outcomes, while the parent and teacher/staff surveys supply stakeholder perceptions of those same outcomes. They are therefore treated as convergent evidence read against each other rather than as a single pooled dataset, and Research Question 2 is answered by reading the two sources together rather than by combining them.

Student chronic absence rates, KHLA performance, and Math accomplishment were the outcome variables of interest. These metrics correspond directly with the objectives of the COSS model and are reported using performance bands established by the Ministry. The four years were chosen to capture two years before and two years after COSS designation. Data from the SELE survey were also included to provide further context on how students felt about their well-being, connectedness, and school climate. In order to provide a post-implementation perspective, questionnaires and interviews were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data during the 2025–2026 school year.

Up to ten teachers and staff members engaged in the COSS model participated in semi-structured interviews as part of the qualitative component. Additionally, two Google Forms questionnaires were distributed: one to about 111 parents and another to educators who work in the COSS model. Both surveys produce qualitative data using open-ended questions and quantitative data using Likert-type items. The structure of the educator survey, which focuses on classroom practice and school operations, is similar to that of the parent instrument. Both surveys underwent peer review to guarantee accessibility, inclusivity, and clarity. Items from surveys and interviews were created to elicit in-depth answers about family involvement, attendance, and academic success within the COSS framework. When used in tandem, these tools supported the research objectives and allowed for data triangulation, which produced quantifiable results as well as rich narrative perspectives reflecting both qualitative and quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

An embedded mixed methods approach was used to collect data, enabling the survey-based quantitative data and the qualitative data to be collected at the same time during the 2025–2026 school year, while the archival outcome data for 2021–2022 to 2024–2025 were obtained retrospectively. This method makes it easier to combine participants' viewpoints and lived experiences with numerical trends. About 480 grades 7-12 students' attendance records were used to collect quantitative data. For grades 7-9, academic performance was examined, and for grades 10–12, social-emotional survey data was examined. This grade-level separation was determined by the structure of the data available from MoEYS rather than by analytic preference. Standardised KHLA and Mathematics results are administered and reported by the Ministry only at the lower-secondary level (grades 7–9), because upper-secondary assessment in Cambodia is organised around the national Grade 12 examination, which uses a different reporting scale and is not comparable across the four study years. Conversely, the SELE instrument was administered to upper-secondary students (grades 10–12), for whom the self-report items were considered developmentally appropriate. Attendance is the only outcome recorded uniformly across grades 7–12, and it is therefore the only outcome reported for the full enrolment of 480 students. Because the academic and social-emotional outcomes are drawn from non-overlapping student populations, they are reported and interpreted separately throughout, and no inference is drawn about the relationship between academic achievement and social-emotional functioning at the individual student level. This is acknowledged as a structural limitation of the design in Section 5.4. The results of KHLA and Math standardised tests were examined for student achievement. Data from district and school attendance records were used for attendance, with an emphasis on chronic absence rates. The results of the SELE survey were analysed for social-emotional well-being, contrasting data from the COSS model before and after adoption.

To answer research questions about teacher and parent perspectives, qualitative data were gathered. Using a combination of purposive sampling for survey selection and voluntary response sampling for interview participation, up to ten educators and staff members engaged in the COSS model were chosen for one-on-one interviews. Teachers and staff who were directly involved in the COSS program were chosen to participate in the purposive sample procedure and fill out the educator survey. Staff members who volunteered received an offer to take part in a virtual interview after completing the educator survey. To provide schedule flexibility, invitations included a calendar link with several time and date possibilities. The first ten responders who accepted the offer were chosen to take part. Ten interviews lasted roughly fifteen to twenty minutes, was done virtually, and was videotaped with the participants' prior consent. Before the commencement of each interview, participants gave their approval for the use of audio recordings. The built-in transcribing tool of the virtual meeting platform was used to automatically transcribe interview recordings, and the researcher checked and edited the transcripts for accuracy before to analysis. Additionally, surveys with Likert-type questions were sent to about 111 parents to find out how they thought their student's participation in school activities

and academic performance were affected by their involvement in the community school. Table 1 provides a summary of the research questions, tools, and data collection techniques employed in this investigation.

Table 1. Summary of Data Source and Data Collection Method for Each Research Question

No.	Research Question	Data Source	Data Collection
1.	What effect does the COSS academic program have on Maths and KHLA achievement scores, and how do educators view its impact on Cambodian students' learning and academic development?	Standardised exam results, attendance logs, teacher/staff survey with Likert-type and open-ended questions.	Quantitative Data: KHLA and Math test scores; teacher/staff Likert-type survey questions Qualitative Data: Teacher/staff open-ended survey responses
2.	What effect does a COSS attendance intervention program have on Cambodian students' overall attendance and chronic absenteeism?	Surveys of parents, teachers/staff, and attendance records	In order to assess chronic absenteeism and overall attendance before and after the COSS model was implemented, quantitative data were obtained from MoEYS National Education Congress school-level returns (2021–2022 to 2024–2025), and stakeholder perceptions were collected separately through Likert-type items in the teacher/staff (n = 20) and parent (n = 111) questionnaires during 2025–2026.
3.	What impact do parents think their involvement in a COSS has on their student's academic achievement and involvement in school events?	Survey of parents	Quantitative Data: Survey of parents with Likert-type questions Qualitative Data: Survey of parents with open-ended response items
4.	What effect does the COSS setting have on the social-emotional health of Cambodian students?	SELE Survey: teacher/staff and survey of parents	Quantitative information gathered from teacher / staff and parent questionnaires, as well as from SELE surveys conducted both before and after the COSS concept was implemented.

3.4. Data Analysis and Statistical Procedures

With quantitative analysis acting as the primary strand (70%) and qualitative analysis offering additional insights (30%), this study used an embedded mixed methods approach. This strategy complemented the pragmatic basis of the study by enabling the simultaneous examination of stakeholder experiences and statistical trends (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This strategy is further supported by EST of Bronfenbrenner (1979), which provides an organised lens

through which to examine how different environmental elements affect stakeholder experiences and student results (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

(1). Descriptive statistics were computed for the quantitative component using Google Sheets, Microsoft Excel with the SPSS add-in tool, and KHLA and Math achievement scores, attendance logs, and SELe survey data. The mean, mode, and standard deviation were among the metrics used to examine general patterns and performance across grade levels and subgroups. To see trends and variations in student performance over time, graphs and charts were created. In order to get more understanding of patterns of association across data sources, correlational analyses were also carried out using SPSS statistical software to investigate links across important factors, such as attendance supports, parent participation, and student outcome indicators.

(2). Software called NVivo was used to analyse qualitative data. Open coding was used at the start of the study to find recurrent ideas in the data, and then codes were refined and arranged into more general themes using an iterative review process. To find recurrent concepts and viewpoints about the use of the community school model, interview transcripts and open-ended answers from parent and teacher/staff surveys were thematically coded. The EST of Bronfenbrenner (1979), which helped arrange emerging themes in accordance with pertinent environmental systems, served as a guide for the analysis. The generation, categorisation, and traceability of themes were facilitated by NVivo's memoring and data visualisation tools, guaranteeing transparency throughout the study process (Zamawe, 2015).

(3). Inferential procedures were applied to both the archival and the survey-based data, with the limits of each data structure made explicit. For the archival outcome data, which MoEYS releases as school-level counts rather than as individual student records, chi-square tests of independence were used to compare the proportion of students classified as chronically absent, and the proportion meeting or exceeding the KHLA and Mathematics standards, between the pooled pre-implementation years (2021–2022 and 2022–2023) and the pooled post-implementation years (2023–2024 and 2024–2025). Chi-square is appropriate here because the outcomes are dichotomous classifications of a known denominator, and it does not require access to individual records. Effect sizes are reported as phi coefficients for 2×2 comparisons and Cramér's V for larger tables, with alpha set at .05. Because the annual cohorts overlap substantially in membership, observations pooled across years are not fully independent; the resulting tests are therefore reported as tests of the difference between year-level proportions rather than between independent samples of students, and the p values should be read as indicative rather than exact.

For the parent survey data, Pearson product-moment correlations were used to examine associations among Likert-type ratings of attendance improvement, academic engagement, perceived effectiveness of COSS supports, and perceived academic assistance. Correlation coefficients are reported with their degrees of freedom, exact p values, 95% confidence intervals and r^2, with alpha set at .05 (two-tailed). Teacher/staff Likert-type responses ($n = 20$) are reported descriptively only, as the sample is small, purposively selected and drawn from a single school. Because the design includes no comparison school and no random assignment, no test reported in this study supports a causal inference; all results describe association and change over time within a single site. These constraints are set out in full in Section 5.4.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

In order to safeguard participants' rights, guarantee voluntary involvement, and reduce potential hazards, ethical concerns are crucial in educational research (Israel & Hay, 2006). Parents, teachers, and staff from a community secondary school participated in this study. A number of ethical procedures were implemented to guarantee participant protection and adherence to study standards because families with young students and school staff were involved. All qualitative participants gave their informed consent, and consent forms were translated and verbally discussed as necessary. Secure data storage and de-identification techniques preserved confidentiality. Every digital file was password-protected, and every report used pseudonyms. Participants may have felt slight emotional or social discomfort when answering questions about delicate subjects, despite the low risk of this study. All tools were made to be courteous and non-intrusive, and participation was entirely voluntary.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Results of Research Question 1: What effect does the COSS academic program have on Maths and KHLA achievement scores, and how do educators view its impact on Cambodian students' learning and academic development?

Results for research question 1, which looked at how the COSS model affected students' performance in Khmer language (KHLA) and Math both before and after it was implemented in Cambodia, are shown in this section. In order to give contextual support for observed improvements in student learning and academic growth, qualitative results from teacher surveys and interviews are presented after quantitative findings comparing pre-implementation and post-implementation standardised assessment data. Table 2 compares student performance prior to and following the adoption of the COSS model, showing KHLA achievement outcomes for grades 7-9 by school year. 1 represents the '*Standard Not Met*', 2 is for '*Standard Nearly Met*', 3 is for '*Standard Met*', and 4 presents the '*Standard Exceeded*.' It is noted that because of rounding, percentages might not add up to 100.

Table 2. Presenting the KHLA Achievement Before and After COSS Implementation (Grades 7–9)

Implementing Test	KHLA Achievement Implementation				
	School Year	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)
Before Testing	2021-2022	11.60	16.86	18.27	53.35
	2022-2023	10.58	9.88	20.79	58.82
After Testing	2023-2024	11.72	12.43	17.40	58.53
	2024-2025	17.79	9.05	22.76	50.49

KHLA accomplishment results by school year are seen in Table 2, which compares student performance before and after the COSS model was put into place. Prior to implementation, 71.58% of students met or exceeded the standard in 2021–2022, and that number rose to 79.57% in 2022–2023. After the standard was put into place, the percentage of students who met or exceeded it stayed mostly consistent, at 75.89% in 2023–2024 and 73.21% in 2024–2025. The overall pattern shows that a sizable majority of students remained to meet or surpass KHLA criteria across all four years, even though post-implementation rates were marginally lower than the peak seen in 2022–2023. Two features of this pattern require comment rather than description. First, the highest KHLA performance across the four years occurred in 2022–2023, the final year before COSS designation, and post-implementation rates in both 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 fell below that peak. The trajectory across the observation window is therefore flat to mildly declining rather than merely unimproved. Second, a chi-square test of independence comparing the pooled pre-implementation with the pooled post-implementation proportion of students meeting or exceeding the KHLA standard confirmed that the difference is not statistically distinguishable from zero, $\chi^2(1) = 0.28$, $p = .598$, $\varphi = 0.01$. The equivalent test for Mathematics was likewise non-significant, $\chi^2(1) = 0.19$, $p = .661$, $\varphi = 0.01$. The honest reading of these results is that two years of COSS operation produced no detectable change in measured academic attainment in either subject. This null result is examined against the resourcing of the model in Section 4.2.

A visual comparison of KHLA performance over four academic years is shown in Figure 2, which separates students who met or exceeded the benchmark from those who almost met or failed to meet it.

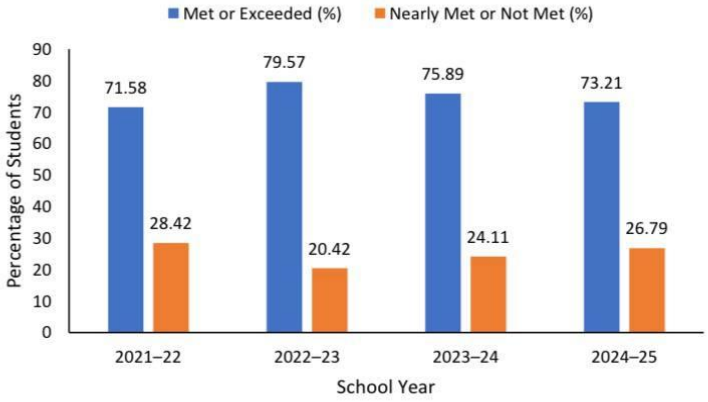


Figure 2. Presenting the KHLA School Years Before and After COSSs Implementation

As seen in Figure 2, findings illustrate how the percentage of students who met or exceeded the standard stayed largely constant between the years before and after implementation, with post-implementation levels being similar to those seen before the COSS model was adopted.

In addition, Table 3 shows the Math accomplishment outcomes for students in grades 7-9 by school year, comparing performance prior to and during the COSS model's implementation. It should be noted that percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Table 3. Presenting the Math Achievement Before and After COSSs Implementation (n=480)

Implementing Test	School Year	Math Achievement Implementation			
		1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)
Before Testing	2021-2022	17.87	18.54	24.60	39.08
	2022-2023	10.81	18.75	20.97	49.54
After Testing	2023-2024	10.42	19.59	23.57	46.50
	2024-2025	14.92	19.22	26.09	39.85

Referring to Table 3, it compares student performance before and after the community school concept was implemented, showing math accomplishment scores by school year. Prior to implementation, 63.64% of students in 2021–2022 met or exceeded the benchmark, and that number rose to 70.47% in 2022–2023. After the standard was put into place, the percentage of students who met or exceeded it was mostly constant, at 70.03% in 2023–2024 and 65.90% in 2024–2025. The overall record shows that most children maintained to meet or exceed mathematics standards during all four years, even though post-implementation rates did not surpass the high seen in 2022–2023.

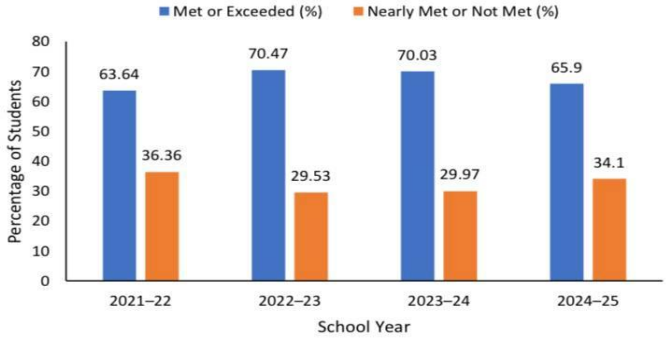


Figure 3. Presenting the Math School Years Before and After COSSs Implementation

In term of perceptions of academic impact by teachers, teachers' answers to Likert-type survey questions about academic attainment and instructional assistance were summarised using SPSS statistical software in terms of response frequencies and percentages. 1 presents as the '*Strongly Disagree*', 2 is as the '*Disagree*', 3 is the '*Neither Agree nor Disagree*', 4 is the '*Agree*', and 5 is the '*Strongly Agree'*. These findings were utilised to investigate general trends in teachers' assessments of the community school model's impact on academics, as showed in Table 4.

Table 4. Presenting the Teachers' Views of the COSS Model's Effect on Academics

No.	Statement	Teachers' Views (n=20)				
		1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
1.	Students' academic performance has improved.	-	-	5 (25%)	12 (60%)	3 (15%)
2.	A community school offers enough academic help.	-	-	4 (20%)	13 (65%)	3 (15%)
3.	Students more motivated and involved in their education.	-	-	4 (20%)	13 (65%)	3 (15%)

Table 4 revealed that while 25% of teachers chose neither agree nor disagree, the majority of teachers (65%) agreed or strongly agreed with the item evaluating observed gains in students' academic achievement. Similar trends were seen for questions about student engagement and the sufficiency of academic supports; 84.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the COSS model enhanced student engagement and offered adequate academic supports. Positive opinions of the COSS model's academic impact were regularly expressed in teacher replies. No respondents selected disagree or strongly disagree for any of the three survey items, while the majority of teachers indicated agreement or strong agreement. Because the teacher/staff sample was small (n = 20), purposively selected, and drawn from a single school, these Likert-type responses are reported descriptively and are interpreted as perceptions held by respondents

rather than as measured effects on student outcomes. No inferential test was applied to them. The patterns described below therefore characterise the distribution of respondents' views, and should not be read as evidence of a statistically established change in academic performance. These response patterns show that teachers generally agree that students' academic performance has improved, that academic support is adequate, and that students are more motivated and engaged.

The teacher survey's open-ended questions provided the qualitative data. Four teachers that responded to the survey wrote on their impressions of student learning and their experiences with the COSS model. In order to find recurrent ideas and more general themes pertaining to academic effect, responses were subjected to a thematic analysis using NVivo qualitative data analysis software through an open coding procedure. Teacher survey responses were open-coded to create codes. Extended Learning Opportunities (EXLO), Academic Support (ACSU), Student Engagement (STEN), and Family and Student Support (FASS). Table 5 presents the teachers' views of the COSS model's effect on academic performance.

Table 5. Presenting the Codes and Teacher's Responses on COSS Model Impacting

Name of Codes	Teachers' Perception
EXLO	Activities that take place both during and after school hours. They enjoy the educational assemblies, art program, and after-school activities.
ACSU	Giving students the help, they require. Assisting families and students who require more affection and assistance.
STEN	the improvement in the students' perspectives toward going to school, participating in the community, and staff involvement. I see a general improvement in student-to-student and staff interactions, as well as kids being more conscious of their decisions and behaviours.
FASS	Assisting students and families who require additional love and support. Establishing relationships and experiences with other people.

As presented in Table 5, the quantitative academic results linked to the community school concept were further contextualised by qualitative results from open-ended teacher survey replies. Increased student support, better engagement, and stronger family-school ties were the most common ways that teachers described the academic benefit. The most fulfilling part of working at a COSS, according to a number of educators, is "*giving students the help, they require*" and "*assisting families and students who require more affection and assistance*." Teachers also saw improvements in student involvement, mindfulness, and peer interactions, as well as favourable changes in students' attitudes toward going to school and being a part of the COSS. Additionally, students consistently said that extended learning opportunities—such as after-school activities and school-wide events—were the things they loved the most, indicating that enrichment programming helps to promote academic engagement and preparation. When taken as a whole, these qualitative results show how academic education in the COSS model is enhanced by relational, instructional, and enrichment-focused assistance.

4.1.2 Results of Research Question 2: What effect does a COSS attendance intervention program have on Cambodian students' overall attendance and chronic absenteeism?

The purpose of this research question is to explore the chronic absenteeism and overall attendance rates for four consecutive school years of 2021–2022 and 2022–2023, which correspond to the time before the school became a COSS, and 2023–2024 and 2024–2025, which correspond to the time following the COSS model's implementation. The MoEYS (2026) provided the data. In order to address this research question, attendance trends prior to and following the adoption of the COSS model were compared using chronic absence rates. Missing 10% or more of the academic year is considered chronic absenteeism. The chronic absenteeism rates from 2021–2022 to 2024–2025 are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Presenting the Rates of Chronic Absenteeism Before and After COSS Implementation

No.	School Year	**COSS Implementation** (n=480)	
		Phase	**% of Chronic Absenteeism**
1.	2021-2022	Before Implementation	21.42
2.	2022-2023	Before Implementation	19.32
3.	2023-2024	After Implementation	8.32
4.	2024-2025	After Implementation	11.72

Chronic absenteeism declined following COSS adoption. Rates were 21.42% in 2021–2022 and 19.32% in 2022–2023 prior to implementation, falling to 8.32% in 2023–2024 — the lowest level observed across the four years — before rising modestly to 11.72% in 2024–2025. Pooling the two pre-implementation years against the two post-implementation years, the proportion of students classified as chronically absent fell from 20.42% to 10.00%, a difference of 10.42 percentage points, 95% CI [7.24, 13.60]. A chi-square test of independence confirmed that this difference was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 40.39$, $p < .001$, with a small-to-moderate effect size, $\varphi = 0.15$; the odds of chronic absence in the pre-implementation period were 2.31 times those in the post-implementation period. A four-year test of the same classification was likewise significant, $\chi^2(3) = 43.26$, $p < .001$, Cramér's V = 0.15, and the single largest year-on-year change occurred between 2022–2023 and 2023–2024, the transition year into COSS designation, $\chi^2(1) = 24.52$, $p < .001$, OR = 2.64.

These tests establish that the observed reduction is unlikely to reflect year-to-year sampling variation. They do not establish that COSS implementation caused it. The design includes no comparison school, and the 2023–2024 decline coincides with the post-pandemic national recovery in attendance reported by MoEYS (2026), which cannot be separated from any intervention effect within this dataset. The result is therefore reported as a significant improvement associated with, but not demonstrably caused by, COSS implementation.

A graphic depiction of these patterns offers more insight into how chronic absenteeism has changed over time. In addition to the tabular data, Figure 4 shows the chronic absenteeism rates for each of the four school years, emphasising the decrease that took place after the COSS concept was put into place.

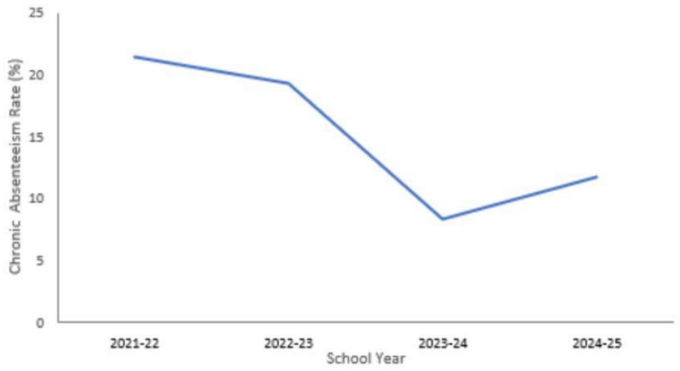


Figure 4. Presenting the Rates of Persistent Absence During Four Academic Years (n=480)

The line graph in Figure 4 illustrates the statistically significant decline in chronic absenteeism during the first year of COSS implementation. The graphic depiction clearly shows a marked change in attendance patterns between 2022–2023 and 2023–2024. The graph's overall trend indicates that absenteeism remained much below pre-implementation levels, despite a modest increase in 2024–2025.

Likert-type survey items associated with this research question were used to investigate teacher/staff opinions of attendance outcomes (n = 20). To summaries response distributions, descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means (M), and standard deviations (S.D.) were computed using SPSS statistical software. As Table 7 illustrates, the results showed consistently good evaluations across all attendance-related items. For this survey, 1 presents as the '*Strongly Disagree*', 2 is as the '*Disagree*', 3 is the '*Neither Agree nor Disagree*', 4 is the '*Agree*', and 5 is the '*Strongly Agree'*.

Table 7. Presenting the Teacher/Staff Opinions of Attendance Outcomes

No.	Statement	Attendance Outcomes (n = 20)						
		M	**S.D.**	**1 (%)**	**2 (%)**	**3 (%)**	**4 (%)**	**5 (%)**
1.	Students' attendance has increased since implementation.	4.10	0.55	-	-	3 (15%)	7 (35%)	10 (50%)
2.	Students can attend community schools on a regular basis with assistance.	4.25	0.64	-	-	3 (15%)	7 (35%)	10 (50%)
3.	Students anticipate attending because of the programs and rewards.	4.20	0.71	-	-	3 (15%)	7 (35%)	10 (50%)

As seen in Table 7, most teacher/staff respondents agreed or strongly agreed that student attendance improved after the COSS model was implemented (85%, M = 4.10, S.D. = 0.55). In a similar vein, 85% agreed or strongly agreed that social-emotional resources and attendance interventions provided by COSS assisted students in attending class on a regular basis (M = 4.25, S.D. = 0.64). Additionally, 85% agreed or strongly agreed that neighborhood school programs, events, and attendance incentives made students look forward to going to school (M = 4.20, S.D. = 0.71). For every item pertaining to attendance, no respondent chose '*Disagree*' or '*Strongly Disagree*,' demonstrating a high degree of agreement and little variation among teachers and staff respondents.

For parent perceptions on the attendant outcome, the Likert-type survey items associated with this research question were used to investigate parent perceptions of attendance outcomes (n = 111). To summaries parent responses, descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means (M), and standard deviations (S.D.) were computed using SPSS statistical software. For this survey, 1 presents as the '*Strongly Disagree*', 2 is as the '*Disagree*', 3 is the '*Neither Agree nor Disagree*', 4 is the '*Agree*', and 5 is the '*Strongly Agree'*. Table 8 shows how parents feel about students' willingness to go to school, the success of COSS attendance assistance, and improvements in attendance.

Table 8. Presenting the Parent Perceptions on the Attendant Outcome

No.	Statement	Attendance Outcomes (n = 111)						
		M	S.D.	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
1.	Attendance has increased.	3.98	0.87	-	-	20 (18.02%)	35 (31.53%)	56 (45.05%)
2.	The school offers assistance with attendance.	3.95	0.69	2 (1.80%)	2 (1.80%)	20 (18.02%)	32 (28.82%)	55 (49.55%)
3.	The student eagerly anticipates going to school	3.91	0.82	3 (2.70%)	3 (2.70%)	20 (18.02%)	30 (27.03%)	55 (49.55%)

Table 8 shows that 81.98% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their student's attendance had improved since enrolling in the COSS (M = 4.32, S.D. = 0.76), while 18.02% neither agreed nor disagreed. A further 78.38% agreed or strongly agreed that COSS attendance support helped their student attend school consistently (M = 4.23, S.D. = 0.93), with 18.02% expressing no opinion. Finally, 76.58% agreed or strongly agreed that school events, programmes and attendance incentives made their student look forward to going to school (M = 4.18, S.D. = 1.00). Compared with teacher/staff responses, the parent distributions show greater dispersion, indicating agreement that is generally favourable but more variable across respondents.

The effectiveness of COSS attendance supports, attendance improvement, and parent views of academic engagement and motivation were all examined using a Pearson correlation analysis, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Presenting the Comparable Variables of Perceptions of Parent Attendance

No.	Study Variables Comparison	Perceptions of Parent Attendance (n=111)	
		r	p-value
1.	Academic Motivation and Engagement Versus Increased Attendance	0.58**	< 0.001
2.	Academic Motivation and Engagement Versus Attendance Support	0.75**	< 0.001
3.	Increased Attendance Versus Attendance Support	0.79**	< 0.001

*Note: ** $p < 0.001$*

As shown in Table 9, reported attendance improvement and academic engagement were moderately and positively correlated, $r(109) = .58$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.44, .69], $r^2 = .34$. Academic engagement was also strongly correlated with the perceived efficacy of attendance supports, $r(109) = .75$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.66, .82], $r^2 = .56$. The strongest association was between perceived attendance improvement and perceived effectiveness of attendance supports, $r(109) = .79$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.71, .85], $r^2 = .62$, indicating that parents who reported stronger attendance supports were also more likely to report improvements in their student's school attendance. Because both variables were measured within the same parent questionnaire, these correlations describe the internal coherence of parent perceptions and cannot be read as independent corroboration of the recorded attendance trend.

Measures of central tendency were computed for teacher/staff and parent Likert-type survey responses in order to further investigate attitudes on attendance across stakeholder groups. To summaries general impressions of attendance improvement, the efficacy of community school services, and student motivation to attend school, means (M) and standard deviations (S.D.) were calculated, which is presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Presenting the Sample's Category, Item Survey, Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (S.D.)

No.	Category of Sample	Item Survey	Descriptive Statistics		
			n	M	S.D.
1.	Teacher/Staff	COSS offers resources to assist students with consistent attendance.	20	4.25	0.84
2.	Teacher/Staff	COSS model makes students want to go to school.	20	4.20	0.71
3.	Parents	Student's attendance has improved after taking part in the COSS.	111	4.01	0.77
4.	Parents	COSSs offer resources to support student's regular attendance.	111	3.99	0.85

Descriptive statistics for the attendance items reported by parents and teachers/staff are shown in Table 10. Teacher/staff respondents agreed that students looked forward to attending school because of COSS programmes and incentives (M = 4.35, S.D. = 0.75) and that COSS supports helped students attend school regularly (M = 4.35, S.D. = 0.75). Parent respondents likewise agreed that their student's attendance had improved after the COSS model was implemented (M = 4.32, S.D. = 0.76) and that COSS supports contributed to regular attendance (M = 4.23, S.D. = 0.93). Mean scores for every item exceeded 4.00, indicating consistent agreement across both stakeholder groups, although the wider standard deviations in the parent sample indicate greater variability of opinion than among teachers and staff.

4.1.3 Results of Research Question 3: What impact do parents think their involvement in a COSS has on their student's academic achievement and involvement in school events?

In order to answer this research question, the Likert-type items in the parent survey (n = 111) were used to gather quantitative data in order to investigate parent impressions of how involvement in the COSS affected their student's academic achievement and involvement in school activities. Using SPSS statistical software, descriptive statistics were computed to summaries parent responses in four domains: communication about school events, academic performance improvement, academic engagement and motivation, and parent engagement encouragement. For this survey, 1 presents as the '*Strongly Disagree*', 2 is as the '*Disagree*', 3 is the '*Neither Agree nor Disagree*', 4 is the '*Agree*', and 5 is the '*Strongly Agree'*. Table 11 below shows specific parent responses for each Likert-type item.

Table 11. Presenting the Student Outcomes and Parent Perceptions of Engagement

No.	Statement	**Parent Survey** (n=111)				
		1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
1.	Since enrolling at the COSS, the student's academic performance has improved.	3 (2.70%)	3 (2.70%)	25 (22.53%)	38 (34.24%)	42 (37.83%)
2.	COSS's programs and teaching style have increased student's interest in and motivation for learning.	3 (2.70%)	3 (2.70%)	22 (19.81%)	25 (22.53%)	58 (52.26%)
3.	My participation in school programs and parent engagement opportunities is actively encouraged by COSS.	-	-	26 (23.42%)	40 (36.03%)	45 (40.54%)
4.	COSS keeps me updated about events that are coming up.	-	-	22 (19.82%)	26 (23.43%)	63 (56.76%)

As presented in Table 11, it shows that parents' opinions of the COSS model's participation opportunities and academic results were consistently favorable. Between 72.07% and 80.18% of parents agreed or strongly agreed across the four survey areas: 72.07% reported improved academic performance (M = 4.02), 74.77% reported increased interest and motivation to learn (M = 4.19), 76.58% reported that the school actively encouraged their participation (M = 4.17), and 80.18% reported being kept informed about upcoming events (M = 4.37). Neutral responses accounted for between 19.82% and 23.42% of replies, and explicit disagreement did not exceed 5.40% on any item. These distributions indicate that parents perceive their involvement in the COSS as positively associated with both academic outcomes and participation in school events, while noting that these are perceptions rather than measured effects.

The association between parent participation and parent perceptions of academic support at the COSS was investigated using a Pearson correlation analysis, as shown in Table 12. Table 12 shows a moderate positive association between parents' judgement that the COSS offered adequate academic assistance and their sense of being well informed about upcoming school events, $r(109) = .58$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.44, .69], $r^2 = .34$. A moderate positive association was also found between perceived academic assistance and encouragement to participate in school activities, $r(109) = .51$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.36, .64], $r^2 = .26$. These results indicate that more favourable parent perceptions of academic support

were associated with higher reported levels of parent participation, though the direction of this association cannot be determined from cross-sectional survey data.

Table 12. Presenting the Comparable Variables of Perceptions of Parent Engagement

No.	Study Variables Comparison	Perceptions of Parent Engagement (n=111)	
		r	p-value
1.	Perceived Academic Support Versus Feeling Knowledgeable about School Activities.	0.58**	< 0.001
2.	Perceived Academic Support Versus Encouragement to Engage in School Activities	0.51**	< 0.001

*Note: ** $p < 0.001$*

For qualitative data, the parent survey's open-ended questions yielded the results. NVivo was used to import and analyze open-ended responses thematically. Recurring ideas on student involvement, school climate, and academic progress were found using open coding. These ideas were arranged into more general themes that reflected parents' opinions on how involvement in the COSS affected their child's academic achievement and involvement in school activities through iterative coding and continuous comparison. In addition, parent responses showed largely favorable opinions of the COSS model's engagement-related and academic results. Improvements in KHLA development and basic abilities, as well as a friendly and encouraging school environment marked by solid relationships with teachers and staff, were the characteristics that parents most frequently highlighted in regard to academic advancement. Additionally, a lot of parents emphasized how excited students were about taking part in extracurricular activities, school-based programs, and incentive-based events, which suggests that they are more motivated to attend and participate in school. The overall qualitative findings show that parents believe their involvement in the COSS has a positive impact on their student's academic performance, sense of belonging, and participation in school activities, despite a small number of responses reflecting neutral or mixed experiences.

The COSS model's perceived academic progress and instructional assistance emerged as a major theme in the qualitative analysis of parent open-ended survey responses. The COSS approach was most commonly linked by parents to favorable academic results, especially in the areas of early literacy development, KHLA proficiency, and general instructional strength. The responses focused on both more general measures of academic confidence and quantifiable skill progress, such as language fluency and reading acquisition. When taken as a whole, these themes imply that parents believe their involvement in the COSS environment has a significant impact on their student's educational experiences and academic development. By participating in extracurricular, social, and incentive-based events, parents further highlighted how much their students enjoy school. Opportunities including after-school programs, peer connections, and school-based prizes were crucial in promoting motivation and engagement. These results imply that parents view chances for engagement and enrichment as essential to maintaining students' enthusiasm in going to school.

A tiny percentage of parents reported neutral or conflicting experiences, while the majority of parent replies showed favorable opinions. For instance, there was little perceived difference when one parent said, "*I believe that nothing has changed*," while another said, "*Uncertain*." Concerns about staffing changes and instructional continuity were also voiced by one parent, emphasizing how varied family experiences within the same school environment can be shaped by contextual circumstances. Qualitative results show that parents believe their involvement in the COSS has a beneficial impact on their student's participation in school activities, sense of belonging, and academic achievement. The inclusion of neutral and mixed viewpoints emphasizes the significance of taking into account heterogeneity in family experiences, whereas themes pertaining to academic advancement, supportive connections, and pleasurable school experiences were consistently represented across parent replies. When taken as a whole, these findings enhance the quantitative survey results and offer a more comprehensive, parent-centered picture of how families engage in a COSS setting.

4.1.4 Results of Research Question 4: What effect does the COSS setting have on the social-emotional health of Cambodian students?

This research question examined how the COSS environment affected the social-emotional wellbeing of the students. SELE surveys were conducted twice a year crossing several academic years prior to and following the adoption of the COSS model, provided the quantitative data. Teacher/staff and parent survey responses, which included Likert-type items pertaining to students' social-emotional well-being, were added to these data. These data sources were combined

to look at how students' social-emotional outcomes changed over time and to evaluate how stakeholder views and student-reported social-emotional well-being indicators converged.

Student-reported SELE outcomes varied across domains and survey administrations, with a number of domains exhibiting stability or slight improvement when the COSS model was put into place. When compared to emotion control and growth mindset, categories like sense of belonging, social awareness, and school safety consistently showed comparatively higher favorable response rates during the pre-implementation phase. Positive answer rates in the majority of domains stayed mostly unchanged from pre-implementation levels after implementation, with a few domains showing minor drops, such as self-efficacy, school safety, and sense of belonging. The general pattern indicates that students' social-emotional well-being was maintained and, in certain dimensions, slightly strengthened during the post-implementation period, despite variations seen across individual survey cycles. These descriptive results lay the groundwork for later inferential analyses that look at cross-source convergence with teacher/staff and parent evaluations of student's social-emotional well-being as well as pre- and post-implementation variations.

Pre-implementation mean SELE composite scores were marginally higher than post-implementation means SELE composite scores. Overall SELE ratings were comparatively consistent between survey administrations, despite some drops seen once the community school model was implemented. This trend offers a quantitative basis for further analyses looking at stakeholder perceptions and cross-source convergence and implies continuity in students reported social-emotional functioning over time. Changes in the degree of consistency or variability among SELE domains within each administration, which shows variations in the standard deviation of SELE composite scores across survey administrations. While higher S.D. values indicate more differentiation among domains within a particular administration, lower S.D. values indicate more consistent student perceptions across intrapersonal, interpersonal, and overall SELE dimensions. The S.D. trends indicate that, with very slight change across administrations, social-emotional functioning remained largely consistent across domains during the implementation period.

Post-implementation findings from student, teacher/staff, and parent data sources show convergent trends, especially in the relational and school-connectedness elements of social-emotional well-being. All stakeholder groups consistently reported favorable opinions of the social-emotional support offered within the COSS setting, despite slight difference across post-implementation SELE administrations.

4.2. Discussion

The results showed that the COSS model's introduction in Cambodia was linked to increased student attendance, including substantial decreases in chronic absenteeism. When analysed across several years of implementation, academic achievement outcomes showed no statistically detectable change, remaining high but flat across the four years. Parent impressions of communication, chances for involvement, and the impact of engagement on students' academic performance and involvement in school activities were consistently favourable, according to findings of parent engagement. When considered collectively, these results imply that the COSS model improves student outcomes by providing coordinated supports that boost family-school relationships, maintain academic progress, and increase attendance. Together, these results show how the COSS model affects student outcomes in the areas of academic performance, attendance, and family engagement, offering a thorough answer to the key study question. The methodology allowed for the triangulation of outcome trends and stakeholder views within a single school context, which is consistent with mixed-methods methodologies used to assess comprehensive school reform programs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Four research questions (academic performance, attendance, parental involvement, and social-emotional well-being) are served as the study's compass. The results showed that throughout the early stages of the COSS model's deployment, there were diverse patterns of influence across outcome categories. Early implementation was anticipated to be linked to improvements in academic, attendance, engagement, and social-emotional outcomes, in line with the study's premise; however, the degree to which these results were realised varied by domain. Throughout the four school years under investigation, student success in KHLA and Maths remained high, with most students achieving or surpassing state requirements before and after implementation. However, throughout the first two years of deployment, there was no statistically detectable short-term change in academic results (KHLA $\chi^2(1) = 0.28$, $p = .598$; Maths $\chi^2(1) = 0.19$, $p = .661$). This pattern is in line with research that indicates academic improvements linked to comprehensive school reform programs frequently appear gradually and may need to be implemented consistently over a number of years, especially in schools that serve large percentages of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (Blank et al., 2012; MoEYS, 2026; Sanders, 2014; Watson et al., 2021).

The absence of academic movement warrants more scrutiny than the developmental-lag explanation alone provides. The COSS grant funded two additional full-time positions at the study school for a five-year period, and an evaluation conducted at the two-year mark cannot avoid the question of whether that allocation is delivering proportionate return. Three interpretations are consistent with the present data and cannot be distinguished with the evidence available here. The first is genuine developmental lag: coordinated supports operate first on proximal outcomes such as attendance and family contact, and academic effects accumulate only once those proximal changes have been sustained long enough to alter instructional time and engagement — the reading favoured by Blank et al. (2012) and Maier et al. (2017). The second is a ceiling effect: between 63% and 80% of students already met or exceeded standard in both subjects before implementation, so the margin available for improvement on this metric was narrow, and the band-level reporting used by MoEYS may be too coarse to register growth occurring within bands. The third, which this study cannot rule out, is that the academic strand of the model is under-specified relative to its attendance strand: the intervention teacher role was defined as targeted support rather than as sustained alignment with core instruction, and the qualitative data reported in Table 5 show teachers describing the model overwhelmingly in relational and enrichment terms — extended learning opportunities, engagement, family support — with little reference to changes in classroom instruction itself. If the third interpretation holds, additional implementation time will not by itself produce academic gains, and the model would require deliberate re-specification of its instructional component. Distinguishing among these three accounts requires a comparison school and student-level data, neither of which was available for this study, and this is the single most consequential limitation of the present evaluation.

On the other hand, attendance results showed a marked improvement after the COSS model was put into practice. Data showed a statistically significant decrease in chronic absenteeism over the post-implementation period, $\chi^2(1) = 40.39$, $p < .001$, $\varphi = 0.15$, which is consistent with earlier studies that identified attendance as an early and responsive result of COSS implementation (Lay & Tagniguchi, 2025; MoEYS, 2018a, 2026). The results of the parent and teacher/staff survey, which showed strong agreement that attendance interventions, family outreach, and coordinated supports contributed to better student attendance, supported these objective improvements. Additionally, correlational analysis showed a high positive correlation between parents' reported changes in their student's attendance and their views of attendance supports. This link implies that perceived attendance results and attendance intervention supports are aligned (Sirait, 2016; UNESCO, 2021; Taniguchi & Hirakawa, 2016; Teodorovic, 2011).

The results of parent participation also showed improvements in the early stages of implementation. Increased views of participation possibilities, access to school resources, and efficient communication about school events were revealed by parent survey replies. Parents' opinions of communication and engagement encouragement showed a very high positive correlation, according to correlational research, suggesting that these engagement activities are interrelated rather than standalone tactics (Lay & Tagniguchi, 2025; Pov et al., 2021). These findings align with research on family-school partnerships that highlights the importance of communication and relational trust in promoting meaningful engagement (Hara et al., 2020; MoEYS, 2018a; 2026; Sanders, 2014). Qualitative parent responses, which highlighted improved ties with the school, greater involvement in events, and perceived advantages for students' academic motivation, further supported these conclusions.

Over the course of the study, SELE results stayed largely consistent. Although relational and school-connectedness categories consistently revealed positive perceptions, student-reported SELE data did not show measurable quantitative improvement throughout the early implementation phase. Convergent views of a friendly and encouraging school environment were shown by triangulating student, parent, and teacher/staff data, especially in areas pertaining to relationships, belonging, and school climate. This is in line with earlier studies showing that social-emotional competence takes time to develop and is impacted by ongoing relational and instructional support (Lay & Tagniguchi, 2025; Alzahrani et al., 2019; MoEYS, 2018a, 2026; Skoog-Hoffman et al., 2024). These results imply that in order to measure SEL change, longer implementation periods could be required.

All things considered, the results suggest that while academic success and social-emotional outcomes may need longer implementation periods to show quantifiable improvement, the COSS model may yield early benefits in attendance and family engagement. Coordinated supports across school, family, and community systems seem to first affect more proximal outcomes, like attendance and engagement, in line with the ecological theory that guides this study (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As their effects accrue across systems, these supports may eventually lead to changes in more distant academic and social-emotional outcomes. In order to better capture the effects of comprehensive COSS programs, these results emphasise the significance of longitudinal evaluation and support recommendations in the literature for longer implementation windows, such as 5-, 10-, or 15-year evaluations (Balkis et al., 2016; Blank et al., 2012).

5. Conclusion

5.1. Conclusion

This study examined how the community secondary school model in Cambodia affected students' academic achievement, attendance, parental engagement, and social-emotional health. The study explored changes related to the implementation of MoEYS education reform by comparing student outcomes from the pre-implementation era (2021-2022 and 2022-2023) with those from the post-implementation period (2023-2024 and 2024-2025) (MoEYS, 2026). The study looked at how integrated supports across school, home, and community systems interact to affect student outcomes, guided by EST of Bronfenbrenner (1979). The results show that while academic achievement and SELE outcomes seem to need longer implementation times to show measurable improvement, the community school model may produce early, quantifiable gains in attendance and parent participation. According to stakeholder opinions and quantitative data, the most immediate and reliable result of implementation was a statistically significant decrease in chronic absenteeism, from 20.42% to 10.00%. These increases in attendance are consistent with earlier studies that found that integrated student support models and COSS implementation had an early, responsive effect on attendance (Maier et al., 2017; MoEYS, 2026).

These results collectively imply that family-centered interventions, coordinated assistance, and relational outreach serve as fundamental mechanisms that improve children' access to class time and school-based resources. During the early stages of implementation, parent engagement also showed improvements. Parents reported better communication, more opportunities for involvement, and more encouragement to get involved in school events. Strong correlations between parent-reported engagement measures imply that access, encouragement, and communication function as integrated elements rather than separate tactics. These results emphasize the significance of integrating family engagement into regular school structures and support the fundamental roles of relational trust, reciprocal communication, and shared accountability within COSSs.

5.2. Recommendations for Practical Implications

The findings of this embedded mixed-methods study have several important implications for educational practice, particularly for districts and schools implementing or considering the COSS model to improve student outcomes. According to EST of Bronfenbrenner (1979), the results indicate that varied patterns of influence across outcome categories are associated with integrated support from school, home, and community systems, illustrating the complex and interacting processes of student development. The COSS model appeared to influence outcomes sequentially rather than equally across many dimensions, with more rapid effects observed in attendance and family participation, while changes in academic success and social-emotional learning were more delayed. This implementation pattern aligns with prior studies on COSSs. Together, these findings highlight the importance of early, context-specific evidence in forming successful and long-lasting COSS initiatives and provide crucial guidance for school administrators, district administrators, and legislators as they decide on resource allocation, implementation schedules, and impact expectations. From an implementation standpoint, four recommendations follow.

1. These results imply that giving attendance-focused techniques top priority in the early stages of COSS adoption may result in early, quantifiable improvements that support more general school improvement objectives. Students' access to instructional time and school-based assistance may be improved through relational interventions that address underlying social, emotional, or logistical issues, focused outreach to families facing obstacles, and regular monitoring of attendance patterns.

2. These results imply that rather than viewing family engagement as a supplementary endeavor, COSSs might benefit by integrating it into the day-to-day operations of the school. Families can have more access to school-based activities by using tactics like bilingual communication platforms and consistent outreach that goes beyond compliance-based messaging.

3. While encouraging cooperation between teachers, intervention workers, and COSS staff, schools should place a high priority on maintaining academic supports that are directly related to core curriculum. For academic assistance to transition from extra services into ingrained instructional practices that can eventually provide significant academic results, there must be such coherence.

4. Instead than approaching SELE as a stand-alone project, schools using the COSS model should place a higher priority on integrating social-emotional supports into regular instructional practices, routines, and interpersonal interactions. In order to foster deeper intrapersonal skill development and to capture longer-term social-emotional change in future evaluations, it may be necessary to maintain these settings over time.

5.3. Recommendations for Further Research

Although the results of this study add to the expanding body of knowledge on the implementation of COSSs, a number of suggestions for further investigation become apparent.

1. Longitudinal research is required to investigate the long-term effects of the COSS model on academic success and SELE outcomes, given the time-limited focus of the current study. According to earlier studies, comprehensive school reform programs may have long-term consequences. A more thorough knowledge of how early improvements in attendance and parent engagement translate into longer-term academic and social-emotional results may be possible with future research looking at 5-year and longer than 5-year trajectories.

2. In order to improve contextual knowledge and generalizability, future research should take into account comparative or multi-site designs. Because this study concentrated on a single COSS, it was possible to thoroughly examine implementation procedures and results, such as academic success, attendance, parent involvement, and social-emotional wellbeing.

3. To better understand the extent of COSS influence, future research may benefit from looking at other outcomes like school climate, teacher capability, student behavior, and long-term academic trajectories. However, looking at several COSSs in diverse organizational, geographic, and demographic contexts may help find patterns of leadership styles, resource coordination, and implementation fidelity linked to differing results.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

Six limitations constrain the interpretation of these findings and are stated here in one place rather than distributed across the manuscript. First, the study was conducted at a single community secondary school and includes no comparison school, so no counterfactual is available and no causal claim can be supported; the significant attendance improvement reported in Section 4.1.2 coincides with the post-pandemic national recovery in attendance and cannot be separated from it. Second, the archival outcome data were released by MoEYS only as school-level aggregate proportions, which precludes student-level modelling, prevents adjustment for cohort composition, and means that observations pooled across years are not fully independent. Third, the observation window covers only two years of post-implementation operation, which the literature on comprehensive school reform suggests is shorter than the period over which academic and social-emotional effects typically emerge. Fourth, the academic and social-emotional outcomes derive from non-overlapping grade bands (7–9 and 10–12 respectively), so no individual-level relationship between the two can be examined. Fifth, the teacher/staff sample is small (n = 20), purposively selected and drawn from a single site, and only four teachers responded to the open-ended items; teacher/staff Likert results are therefore reported descriptively and should be read as the views of these respondents rather than as generalisable perceptions. Sixth, the qualitative strand was generated in 2025–2026 while the archival strand ends in 2024–2025, so participants were accounting retrospectively for conditions during the implementation period, which introduces a risk of recall bias. Taken together, these limitations mean that the study is best read as a descriptive, single-site account of early implementation, and that its central finding — significant improvement in attendance alongside no detectable change in achievement — requires replication in a multi-site design with student-level data before it can be generalised to the wider Cambodian COSS programme.

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