



Research Article

Holistic Student Development Through Integrated School and After-School Care: Evidence from the Village Hive Project and Cambodian Children's Trust

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Abstract

This study evaluated the effectiveness of an integrated school and after-school care program, implemented through the Village Hive Project in partnership with Cambodian Children's Trust to promote holistic student development across three centers: Ang Center, Ratanak Center, and Svay Pao Center. Grounded in the recognition of public education as a critical social investment, the intervention combined school-based improvements, enhanced learning environments, and structured after-school support designed to address students' academic, social, emotional, and nutritional needs. A mixed-methods design was employed, incorporating quantitative student surveys analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques alongside qualitative reflection workshops that captured students' lived experiences and contextual challenges. Findings indicated strong perceived improvements in school safety, cleanliness, teacher–student relationships, academic support, behavioral development, and social skills, with additional *contributions* from family and community engagement. At the same time, qualitative reflections identified ongoing challenges, including bullying, discipline concerns, hygiene practices, and household instability, underscoring areas requiring targeted intervention. Overall, the results suggest that integrated school and after-school programming can contribute meaningfully to academic performance, emotional well-being, and future aspirations among vulnerable students, while highlighting the importance of strengthening child protection mechanisms, expanding academic enrichment opportunities, improving facilities, and enhancing family-centered services to ensure long-term sustainability and program impact.

Keywords

After-School Care Program, Holistic Student Development, Social-Emotional Growth, Behavioral Development, Student Well-Being, Community Engagement, Child Protection

1. Introduction

Public education is a powerful social investment that benefits both individuals and society [1]. Children who receive quality primary and secondary education are more likely to

achieve stable incomes, maintain healthy families, and contribute positively to their communities [2]. They are also less likely to engage in crime or depend heavily on healthcare and social welfare systems. Investing in strong public education is

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more cost-effective than addressing the long-term consequences of underfunded, low-quality schools [3].

The Village Hive strengthens public primary schools, high schools, and the teacher training college through four main strategies. First, it partners with schools to assess and improve infrastructure, including classrooms, toilets, playgrounds, and accessibility for children with disabilities. Second, it enhances classroom environments by ensuring they are safe, well-equipped, and supportive of inclusive learning. Third, it strengthens curriculum and programming by introducing ICT literacy, extracurricular activities, remedial tutoring, pre-school education, and after-school care. Finally, it supports teachers and faculty by providing additional staff, teaching resources, and training in pedagogy, child protection, positive behavior management, and ICT skills. Together, these efforts aim to improve education quality and student outcomes across the community [3].

The Public After-School Care and Preschool Program provides comprehensive support that benefits children, youth, families, and the wider community. Socially, the program strengthens children's interpersonal skills by promoting positive behavior, improving concentration, and fostering a stronger sense of self-worth. Academically, it enhances student performance through improved attendance, remedial tutoring, structured homework support, extracurricular enrichment, and life skills development. The program also supports working families by offering a safe and supervised environment for children before and after school hours, allowing parents and guardians to work with peace of mind. In addition, it contributes to children's health and well-being by providing nutritious meals, access to clean drinking water, and basic hygiene services such as clothes washing and sanitation facilities. While vulnerable families are able to access these services free of charge, the program is also open to other families in the village for a modest fee, generating income that helps sustain and strengthen the participating schools [4].

The findings from the student forums reveal a complex picture of school life, after-school care experiences, and family challenges. Students identified key school-related concerns, including environmental issues such as stray dogs, poor waste management, and classroom hygiene, as well as interpersonal conflicts like bullying, foul language, physical discipline, and classroom disruptions that hinder learning. Despite these challenges, students expressed appreciation for positive aspects of their schools, including supportive teachers, clean classrooms, large playgrounds, trees, and extracurricular activities such as sports. They also demonstrated responsibility by helping maintain school cleanliness. Students called for improvements in infrastructure, stricter discipline, healthier food options, expanded sports facilities, and quieter, more focused learning environments [5].

Regarding the After-School Care Program, students highlighted both challenges and benefits. While some raised concerns about the daily fee for non-vulnerable families and behavioral disruptions among peers, they strongly valued the

program's academic support in subjects such as math, Khmer, English, and computer skills. Nutritional support, healthcare services, rest time, gardening, and extracurricular activities were also widely appreciated for contributing to their well-being and moral development. The program was seen as beneficial for families by providing safety, reducing meal expenses, supporting parents' ability to work, and offering a structured environment after school [5].

At the same time, many students shared significant family-related struggles, including parental conflict, food insecurity, unstable incomes, and involvement in child labor to support household needs. These hardships affected their emotional well-being and academic performance. Students expressed a strong desire for greater financial stability for their families, hoping that stable income sources and homeownership would reduce economic pressures and eliminate the need for child labor. Overall, the forums highlight both the critical challenges students face and the vital role of the After-School Care Program in supporting their education, safety, and future aspirations [5].

Overall, these findings illustrate both the promise and the complexity of integrated educational support in vulnerable communities. While public education and complementary after-school services demonstrate clear academic, social, and health-related benefits, students' lived experiences reveal persistent environmental, behavioral, and economic barriers that continue to shape their development. The coexistence of program strengths and ongoing challenges raises important questions about the depth, consistency, and long-term impact of integrated school and after-school models. Although the Village Hive initiative addresses multiple dimensions of student need, a systematic and rigorous evaluation is necessary to determine how effectively these coordinated interventions translate into measurable improvements across academic, social-emotional, behavioral, family, and community domains.

1.1. Problem Statement

In many low-income and vulnerable communities, schools face persistent challenges that limit their capacity to support students' holistic development [6]. While formal schooling focuses primarily on academic instruction, many children experience additional barriers outside the classroom, including food insecurity [7], limited parental supervision due to work demands, unstable family income, exposure to child labor, and weak social-emotional support systems. These contextual factors can negatively affect students' academic performance, behavior, well-being, and long-term educational outcomes. Although after-school care programs have been introduced as complementary interventions to address these gaps [8], there remains limited empirical evidence on how integrated school and after-school models contribute to students' holistic development across multiple domains.

Specifically, there is insufficient systematic evaluation of

whether integrated school and after-school care programs effectively enhance academic achievement, social-emotional development, behavioral growth, family functioning, and community engagement in a coordinated and measurable way. Existing assessments often focus narrowly on academic outcomes or rely on anecdotal observations rather than combining quantitative indicators with students' lived experiences. Without comprehensive evaluation, program implementers and policymakers lack clear evidence to determine which components are most effective, where gaps remain, and how resources can be optimized to strengthen long-term impact.

Furthermore, while students are the primary beneficiaries of these programs, their voices are frequently underrepresented in formal program evaluations. Understanding how students perceive school safety, classroom engagement, teacher relationships, peer interactions, family support, and the benefits of after-school services is essential to aligning program objectives with actual student needs. The absence of mixed-methods research that integrates statistical trends with qualitative insights limits the ability to capture both measurable outcomes and contextual realities.

Therefore, the central research problem guiding this study is the need to systematically evaluate the effectiveness and impact of an integrated school and after-school care program on holistic student development using a rigorous mixed-methods approach. By examining academic, social-emotional, behavioral, family, and community dimensions through both quantitative and qualitative data, the study seeks to generate evidence-based insights that can inform program refinement, strengthen educational practice, and contribute to broader policy discussions on sustainable models for holistic student support.

Building on the need to address these gaps, the current study was designed to systematically examine how an integrated school and after-school care program can support holistic student development. By moving from the identification of persistent challenges and limited evidence to a structured research framework, the study links the conceptual understanding of students' needs with practical evaluation. This transition establishes the rationale for the research design, highlighting why a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach is essential to assess program effectiveness across academic, social-emotional, behavioral, family, and community domains.

1.2. Objectives of the Evaluation

Grounded in the understanding that education is both a personal and social investment [9], the research sought to explore how coordinated academic, social, and family-centered interventions contribute to improved student outcomes. To achieve this, the study was guided by a comprehensive set of objectives that together provide a structured framework for evaluating the program's impact across multiple dimensions of children's lives.

At its core, the general objective of the study was to evaluate how effectively the integrated school and after-school care program supports students' academic achievement, social-emotional growth, behavioral development, and overall well-being. Rather than focusing solely on academic performance, the study recognized that children's success is shaped by interconnected factors, including school climate, family stability, and community support. As such, the research adopted a holistic lens, reflecting the program's integrated approach.

One key objective was to assess the quality of the school environment and its influence on student well-being and learning. This involved examining students' perceptions of safety, cleanliness, peer relationships, teacher support, and classroom engagement. By exploring issues such as bullying, classroom disruptions, and physical infrastructure alongside positive aspects such as supportive teachers and extracurricular activities, the study aimed to determine how consistently schools provide safe and nurturing learning environments. Understanding these dynamics was essential to identifying both strengths and areas needing improvement.

Another important objective was to evaluate the impact of the after-school care program on students' academic progress. The research sought to determine whether participation in the program contributed to improved study habits, homework completion, and subject-specific support in areas such as Khmer, Mathematics, English, and computer literacy. By analyzing students' perceptions of academic support and enrichment activities, the study aimed to assess how structured after-school programming reinforces classroom learning and strengthens academic confidence.

Beyond academic outcomes, the study also examined behavioral and social development associated with program participation. This objective focused on identifying changes in students' behavior, emotional regulation, communication skills, teamwork, and peer relationships. The after-school care program's emphasis on positive behavior management, extracurricular activities, and life skills development was evaluated to determine how effectively it fosters social competence and moral growth. Recognizing that social-emotional development is foundational to long-term success, this objective highlighted the broader developmental benefits of structured support.

The study further aimed to analyze the role of family support in shaping students' educational and emotional outcomes. Given that many students face economic hardship, food insecurity, or unstable family conditions, the research examined levels of financial assistance, parental involvement, emotional encouragement, and household stability. By identifying disparities in family support, the study sought to better understand how external pressures influence academic performance and well-being, and how the program may mitigate these challenges.

In addition, the research investigated the influence of community support on students' experiences. This objective explored students' perceptions of community engagement, the

availability of safe learning spaces beyond regular school hours, and their willingness to recommend the program to others. By examining community integration, the study acknowledged that educational success is strengthened when families, schools, and communities collaborate.

Another objective was to determine students' overall satisfaction with the integrated after-school care program. Measuring satisfaction provided insight into how students value the program's services, including academic tutoring, nutritional support, healthcare access, rest time, and extracurricular opportunities. Understanding satisfaction levels also helped identify factors contributing to positive or negative experiences across different centers.

Finally, the study sought to identify strengths, variations, and opportunities for improvement through both quantitative indicators and qualitative reflections. By combining statistical analysis with students' lived experiences, the research aimed to generate evidence-based recommendations for program refinement. This integrated approach ensured that findings were not only data-driven but also grounded in the voices of the children themselves.

Together, these objectives created a cohesive framework for evaluating how integrated educational and after-school interventions contribute to holistic student development. By examining academic achievement, behavioral growth, family and community influences, and overall satisfaction, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how coordinated support systems can enhance children's educational experiences and future opportunities.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

The study was evaluative and descriptive, aiming to assess the effectiveness and impact of the integrated school and after-school care program on students' holistic development. It examined multiple dimensions, including academic performance, social-emotional development, behavioral growth, family support, community engagement, and overall satisfaction with the program. By evaluating both strengths and areas for improvement, the study provided evidence to guide program enhancement and inform educational policy.

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys with structured scales and qualitative reflections through open-ended questions. The quantitative component measured trends, patterns, and differences across variables such as school environment, academic performance, behavior, family support, and community involvement. The qualitative component captured students' perspectives, experiences, and suggestions, providing rich contextual insights that numbers alone could not convey. This combination ensured a comprehensive understanding of both outcomes and lived experiences.

The mixed-methods design was appropriate because the research questions required both measurable data and personal perspectives. The quantitative survey provided standardized data that were statistically analyzed for mean scores, variability, and relationships between variables, offering a clear picture of students' experiences and program effectiveness. The qualitative responses complemented this by capturing specific details of students' reflections, including specific challenges, likes, and suggestions for improvement. By integrating these methods, the study was able to validate findings across data types, identify gaps between program objectives and student experiences, and generate actionable recommendations to strengthen the integrated school and after-school care model.

2.2. Population and Method

The study targeted students in Grades 1 through 6 who were enrolled in the after-school care program at Ang Center, Wat Kampheng Center, and Ratanak Center. Only active program participants were included in order to assess the program's effectiveness in supporting academic development, social-emotional wellbeing, behavioral improvement, family functioning, and community engagement.

From a total population of 122 program participants, a sample of 85 students (69.67%) was selected for participation in the study. The sample included 33 students from Ang Center (38.82%), 29 students from Wat Kampheng Center (34.12%), and 23 students from Ratanak Center (27.06%). This distribution reflected enrollment patterns across the centers.

A purposive sampling method was employed to recruit students for both the quantitative survey and qualitative reflection sessions. Participants were selected to ensure adequate representation across age ranges, grade levels, and program sites. This approach allowed the study to include diverse experiences while maintaining feasibility for structured data collection.

Demographic data were collected to describe the sample. Age groups included students under 10 years (44.71%), 10–12 years (43.53%), 13–15 years (8.24%), and above 15 years (3.53%). Gender distribution was nearly balanced, with 44 females (51.76%) and 41 males (48.24%). Grade-level representation included Grade 4 (30.59%), Grade 3 (20.00%), Grade 5 (18.82%), Grade 2 (14.12%), Grade 1 (12.94%), and Grade 6 (3.53%).

The purposive approach supported the selection of a sample that captured a broad range of student experiences within the after-school care program. This ensured the collection of relevant and meaningful data while maintaining manageable study procedures.

2.3. Data Collection Method

Data collection followed a mixed-methods sequential design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate a comprehensive understanding of the after-school

care program's influence on students' academic, social, behavioral, and emotional development. Using the same group of students in both phases ensured alignment between quantitative measurements and qualitative insights, enabling a coherent interpretation of their experiences across the three program centers.

The quantitative phase served as the initial stage of data collection. Structured surveys were administered to all selected participants, using closed-ended questions with 5-point and 4-point Likert-type scales. These instruments measured core dimensions of students' school experiences, including perceived safety, cleanliness, incidences of bullying, quality of teacher-student relationships, classroom engagement, academic performance, and levels of family and community support. The use of standardized scales allowed for systematic identification of patterns, strengths, and areas requiring additional support within the after-school care program. The quantitative data provided a foundational understanding of students' perceptions and helped guide deeper exploration in the qualitative phase.

Following completion of the surveys, the same students participated in center-specific reflection workshops designed to gather qualitative data. These sessions were structured to encourage students to express their experiences in their own words, focusing on academic assistance received through the program, interactions with peers, connections with family and community, and overall engagement in after-school activities. Open-ended discussion exercises enabled students to elaborate on issues that emerged in the survey phase and to highlight aspects of the program that contributed most significantly to their personal development.

Two primary instruments supported the data collection process: structured questionnaires for the survey and reflection guides for the workshops. Each tool was deliberately designed to be age-appropriate for students in Grades 1 through 6, ensuring clarity, accessibility, and meaningful participation. Reflection guides provided prompts that facilitated conversation while allowing flexibility for students to share diverse perspectives.

The sequencing of methods allowed for effective triangulation. Quantitative findings from the structured surveys were compared with qualitative themes from reflection workshops and supplementary observational notes. Convergence of evidence across these sources strengthened the reliability and credibility of the study's conclusions. By integrating measurable indicators with experiential narratives, the methodology offered a holistic understanding of the after-school care program's impact on participating students.

2.4. Data Analysis

The quantitative analysis focused on summarizing and interpreting data derived from structured surveys administered across the three program centers. Descriptive statistical methods were applied, including calculation of the mean, standard

deviation, and variance, to assess overall trends and levels of consistency in student responses. The coefficient of variation was used to evaluate relative variability across key dimensions such as school safety, academic engagement, family support, and community involvement. These statistical procedures allowed the study to measure the extent of differences across participant groups and to identify areas with the greatest need for improvement.

The qualitative component centered on open coding and thematic analysis of student reflections gathered during the workshop sessions. Responses were carefully reviewed to identify recurring ideas, meaningful categories, and key themes related to students' lived experiences within the after-school program. Patterns emerged across several domains, including students' worries, the benefits they perceived from program participation, and the improvements they believed would enhance program effectiveness. The open coding process enabled the development of a structured thematic framework that captured both shared and unique perspectives among participants.

Triangulation served as a crucial step in strengthening the validity and credibility of the study's conclusions. By systematically comparing quantitative data with qualitative themes, the analysis ensured that interpretations were grounded in multiple forms of evidence. Alignments between survey trends and workshop reflections reinforced key findings, while discrepancies offered insight into areas requiring deeper examination. This integrative approach provided a more holistic understanding of the program's influence on student wellbeing, academic engagement, and overall development.

Through the combined use of descriptive statistics, thematic analysis, and triangulation, the study achieved a balanced and rigorous examination of the after-school care program's impact, ensuring that both numerical trends and personal experiences were adequately represented in the final interpretation of results.

3. Results

3.1. School Environment and Its Influence on Student Well-Being and Learning

A supportive school environment forms a critical foundation for students' academic success, emotional well-being, and social development [10]. When combined with children's reflections from Ang Center, Ratanak Center, and Svay Pao Center, the findings present a comprehensive picture of how environmental conditions shape learning and overall well-being. Because the survey used a five-point scale, high mean scores represent strong agreement across students, while the coefficient of variation (CV) indicates the level of consistency in responses. Lower CV percentages reflect greater agreement among students, whereas higher CV values indicate more di-

verse experiences. The collective evidence points to a generally positive school climate characterized by safety, cleanliness, strong teacher–student relationships, and high levels of engagement, while also drawing attention to areas that require continued focus—particularly bullying and discipline practices.

Survey responses show a strong perception of safety across the centers. A high mean score of 4.49, combined with a low coefficient of variation of 15%, suggests that students not only feel safe but also share a consistent perception of physical and emotional security. Their reflections strengthen this view, describing organized surroundings, fenced school grounds, active teacher supervision, and reliable daily routines. At the same time, several students highlighted lingering risks such as peer conflicts, unsafe play near ponds, traffic hazards, and concerns about strict or punitive discipline. These concerns reveal that although safety is well established, certain vulnerabilities remain, underscoring the importance of ongoing supervision, hazard prevention, and child protection measures.

Cleanliness emerged as another major strength. The mean score of 4.44, together with a low CV of 15%, indicates widespread and consistent satisfaction with the physical condition of classrooms, schoolyards, toilets, and green spaces. Students frequently mentioned pride in their schools' appearance, suggesting that cleanliness contributes not only to comfort but also to a sense of ownership and motivation. Even so, some children recommended additional trash bins, improved sanitation, and cleaner outdoor areas. Their suggestions reflect a constructive awareness of environmental standards and an eagerness to help maintain hygienic learning spaces.

The issue of bullying presents a more complex pattern. Although the mean score of 4.00 suggests that bullying is not widely reported, the relatively high coefficient of variation of 26% indicates substantial differences in student experiences. Reflections help clarify this variation. Some children described peaceful peer relationships, while others recounted episodes of fighting, rude language, disruptive behavior, theft, or peer pressure. The higher CV confirms inconsistency in behavioral norms and supervision across settings. Strengthened anti-bullying efforts, clearer expectations for behavior, and accessible reporting and support systems would help reduce

these disparities and promote more uniform experiences of safety.

Teacher–student relationships form another positive feature of the school climate. A mean score of 4.35, with a CV of 20%, reflects generally supportive interactions, though with moderate variation across students. Many children spoke about teachers who explain lessons clearly, provide encouragement, and help them build confidence. These relationships were frequently linked to improved motivation, stronger academic performance, and greater enjoyment of learning. However, the moderate CV suggests that not all students experience this support equally. A small number of reflections mentioned fear of strict discipline, highlighting the importance of reinforcing positive discipline practices to ensure respectful and supportive relationships across classrooms.

High levels of engagement in classroom learning add further strength to the school environment. A mean score of 4.45 with a low CV of 16% indicates that students are consistently active participants in lessons and daily activities. Reflections describe enthusiasm for academic subjects, appreciation for homework support, and enjoyment of extracurricular opportunities such as dance, sports, gardening, cooking, and computer classes. The relatively low variation suggests that engagement is broadly experienced across the centers. Many children also expressed interest in additional activities, showing that the school environment nurtures curiosity and sustained academic involvement.

The combined quantitative and qualitative results create a clear portrait of school life across the three centers. Safety, cleanliness, and classroom engagement consistently stand out as areas with high mean scores and low coefficients of variation, indicating both strong approval and shared experiences among students. Teacher relationships also contribute meaningfully to student well-being [11], though moderate variability suggests room for strengthening consistency in positive discipline practices. Bullying, while not highly prevalent on average, shows the greatest variability, signaling the need for targeted interventions to ensure that all students experience a uniformly safe and respectful environment. Overall, the findings reflect a learning environment with substantial strengths and clear opportunities for continued growth and refinement.

Table 1. *School Environment and Its Influence.*

Variables	N	Mean	SE	SD	Variance	CV (%)
School Safety	85	4.49	0.072	0.666	0.443	15%
School Cleanliness	85	4.44	0.072	0.663	0.439	15%
Bullying Frequency	85	4.00	0.114	1.047	1.095	26%
Teacher Relationship	85	4.35	0.094	0.869	0.755	20%
Classroom Engagement	85	4.45	0.076	0.699	0.488	16%

3.2. Academic Progress, Behavior, and Social Development in the After School Care Program

Academic progress and positive behavior stand at the core of effective after-school programming, shaping not only short-term outcomes but also long-term trajectories in learning and development [12]. Evidence indicates that participation in the After-School Care Program has contributed meaningfully to students' academic performance, study habits, behavioral growth, and social skills.

Academic performance shows a steady upward trend. A mean score of 4.25, along with a coefficient of variation (CV) of 17 percent, indicates broad agreement that students' achievement has improved since joining the program. Students across all centers described the supports behind this progress—regular homework help, targeted assistance in Khmer, Mathematics, and English, and step-by-step guidance for learners who need more time to process information. Younger students in Grades 1–3, in particular, highlighted gains in reading, writing, and structured instruction. These experiences align closely with the quantitative results, suggesting that academic improvement is not limited to a few students but is a shared outcome made possible by consistent, structured academic support.

The strongest result relates to homework and study support, which received a mean score of 4.48 and a CV of 16 percent. Students consistently viewed the program as a dependable place to finish assignments, ask questions comfortably, and receive clear explanations of challenging lessons. Access to materials, school supplies, and a quiet environment strengthens this support, making it both practical and motivating. The low variation across responses suggests these benefits are experienced widely—across centers, grade levels, and ability groups—showing that academic reinforcement is a core part of the program rather than something offered irregularly.

Extracurricular participation, which received a mean score of 4.08, shows the greatest variation (CV = 28 percent). This spread reflects diverse experiences. Many students described active involvement in dance, sports, gardening, cooking, painting, and computer classes, emphasizing how these activities bring enjoyment and balance to their school day. Others

participated less often, often due to differences in interest, availability of activities, or access to space and equipment. Students also expressed interest in expanded sports, more playground resources, and additional arts opportunities. The higher variability here may not signal a problem but rather uneven access or differing preferences—an area where strengthening facilities and activity options could lead to more consistent engagement.

Behavioral development also shows encouraging progress. A mean score of 4.22 with a CV of 18 percent indicates that most students perceive positive changes in their behavior at school. Many credited moral education, clear routines, and positive discipline for helping them regulate emotions, follow rules, and interact constructively with peers. While students still noted challenges such as fighting, rude language, or classroom disruptions, these issues were generally described as concerns being actively addressed. Structured activities, adult guidance, and consistent expectations appear to be shifting daily interactions toward calmer, more respectful norms.

Social skill development—especially teamwork and communication—emerges as another key area of growth. A mean score of 4.32 with a CV of 17 percent reflects consistent improvement in working collaboratively, helping peers, participating in group projects, and taking on small leadership roles. Students often described supportive friendships, encouragement from peers, and teacher-facilitated group work as experiences that helped them build confidence and interpersonal skills. Many also expressed a desire for even stronger unity and mutual respect, showing a growing awareness of how positive group dynamics shape their learning environment. These reflections point to real gains in cooperation, problem-solving, and empathy—skills that matter both in school and beyond.

When the findings are viewed together, a clear and steady pattern of benefit emerges. Academic performance improves through guided support; behavioral growth is strengthened through structure and positive discipline; and social skills develop through intentional collaboration in both academic and extracurricular settings. The low CVs in most areas show that these advantages are widely shared rather than concentrated among a small group of participants. The one area with higher variability—extracurricular engagement—reflects differing interests and access to resources, highlighting a promising direction for future enhancement.

Table 2. *Academic Progress, Behavior, and Social Development.*

Variables	N	Mean	SE	SD	Variance	CV (%)
Academic Performance	85	4.25	0.077	0.706	0.498	17%
Homework Support	85	4.48	0.080	0.734	0.538	16%
Extracurricular Participation	85	4.08	0.122	1.126	1.267	28%
Behavioral Improvement	85	4.22	0.081	0.746	0.557	18%

Variables	N	Mean	SE	SD	Variance	CV (%)
Social Skills	85	4.32	0.079	0.727	0.529	17%

3.3. The Role of Family Support in Academic, Emotional, and Social Outcomes

Family support plays a central role in shaping students' educational experiences. It influences access to school, concentration, motivation to learn, and emotional resilience [13]. The study examined financial assistance, household food security, parental involvement, and emotional and academic support, demonstrating how each contributes to students' well-being and learning. Mean scores reflect overall trends, while the coefficient of variation (CV) indicates the degree of consistency in students' responses. Lower CV values suggest stronger agreement across students, whereas higher CV values reflect greater disparities in experience.

Financial assistance helps reduce pressures associated with school-related expenses. Because this item was measured on a two-point scale, the mean score of 1.89, combined with a coefficient of variation of 16%, indicates that most households consistently report receiving some form of financial support. The relatively low CV suggests limited variation across families, meaning that assistance is broadly shared. This support often includes school materials, food packages, and transportation assistance that reduce daily financial strain. Students described how these resources ease the burden on their families, allowing parents to work more consistently and ensuring that children attend school regularly. The close alignment between the statistical findings and students' reflections confirms that financial support from after-school programs and community partners plays a significant stabilizing role.

Household food security presents a more balanced picture than previously observed. On the five-point scale used in this study (1 = Always facing food-related challenges; 5 = Never), higher scores indicate better food security. The mean score of 3.56 suggests that, on average, students experience relatively adequate household food security, although some families continue to face food-related challenges. Rather than indicating frequent food insecurity, this mean reflects that most households experience food shortages only occasionally or infrequently. Furthermore, the coefficient of variation (25%) indicates moderate variability in students' experiences, suggesting that while many families have relatively stable access to food, others remain vulnerable to periods of food insecurity. The qualitative findings reinforce this interpretation. Across the three after-school care program sites, children identified lack of food at home as an ongoing concern, particularly among families experiencing economic hardship. At the same time, many students emphasized that the after-school care program helped address these challenges by providing lunches,

fruit, food packages, and other forms of nutritional support that reduced household expenses and ensured children had regular meals. Students also described how these services improved their concentration, participation in learning, and overall wellbeing. Together, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that although household food security is generally moderate to good, food insecurity continues to affect a proportion of families, and the after-school care program plays an important role in mitigating these challenges through both direct nutritional assistance and indirect economic support.

Parental involvement emerged as one of the strongest protective factors. A high mean score of 4.28, with a relatively low coefficient of variation of 18%, indicates that families generally and consistently take an active role in supporting their children's education. Students reported that parents encourage learning, monitor academic progress, and provide motivation. Where families face time or economic constraints, teachers and mentors at the centers often supplement this support. The low variability suggests that parental engagement is widely experienced and serves as a stable foundation for academic development.

Emotional and academic support from families also contributes meaningfully to student success. The mean score of 4.14 reflects generally positive support, though the coefficient of variation of 26% indicates moderate differences across households. Many students described receiving help with homework, guidance during academic challenges, and emotional encouragement. Safe and supportive environments—both at home and within after-school programs—provide reassurance and help students manage stress. However, the higher variability suggests that some students receive less consistent support, underscoring the importance of additional mentoring and structured academic assistance through school-based programs.

Despite notable strengths in financial assistance and parental involvement, the study reveals that family circumstances affect students differently. Parental conflict, separation, illness, reduced income, and unstable living conditions contribute to disparities in food security and emotional support. These challenges help explain the higher coefficients of variation observed in these domains. Families facing instability may struggle to provide consistent material and emotional resources, which can affect students' academic readiness and overall well-being.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that family support strongly shapes educational outcomes [14]. Financial assistance and parental involvement show consistent and positive patterns across households. Emotional support remains generally strong but less evenly distributed. Food security,

however, stands out as the most concerning and uneven dimension, with a low mean and high variability indicating frequent challenges for many students. Expanding nutrition as-

sistance, strengthening targeted support for vulnerable families, and reinforcing academic mentoring remain critical steps toward promoting equitable learning opportunities and improving student well-being.

Table 3. *The Role of Family Support.*

Variables	N	Mean	SE	SD	Variance	CV (%)
Financial Support	85	1.89	0.034	0.310	0.096	16%
Food Security	85	3.56	0.095	0.879	0.773	25%
Parental Involvement	85	4.28	0.083	0.766	0.586	18%
Emotional/Academic Support	85	4.14	0.115	1.060	1.123	26%

3.4. Community Support and Its Influence on Students' Learning and Well-Being

Community support forms a vital foundation for strong educational environments, shaping both school life and after-school care experiences. When communities contribute to safe spaces, supportive relationships, and access to meaningful activities, students benefit academically, socially, and emotionally [15]. The findings integrate statistical results with qualitative reflections to show how students perceive community involvement, the value of after-school opportunities, and the extent to which others might benefit from joining the program.

Students generally view their communities as highly supportive of their education. A mean score of 4.14, accompanied by a coefficient of variation of 21%, indicates strong overall approval with relatively moderate variability. While most children perceive their communities as supportive, the CV suggests that experiences are not entirely uniform across all respondents. Students described clean and safe school grounds, supportive teachers, and structured activities that make school feel organized and welcoming. Many also recognized the role of social workers, peer cooperation, and well-maintained spaces for study and play. Security measures, reliable routines, and orderly campuses reinforced the sense that learning could take place without distraction. In several cases, families were able to work more consistently because the after-school program provided dependable care, further strengthening the link between community stability and student readiness to learn.

The after-school care program offers meaningful opportunities that complement formal education. This is reflected in a mean score of 3.67 on a four-point scale, a notably high result given that the scale has no neutral midpoint. Within this framework, students must lean toward either positive or negative responses, so a high average indicates strong recognition of benefit. The coefficient of variation of 16% demonstrates

low variability, suggesting consistent appreciation across centers. Academically, students described homework assistance, extra classes in Khmer, mathematics, and English, as well as guided reading, writing, and computer lessons. Clear explanations, practice exercises, and access to learning materials helped make difficult lessons more manageable and strengthened academic confidence.

Beyond academics, the programs provide social and personal development opportunities that students value highly. Although not measured as a separate quantitative item, reflections indicate that participation in dance, sports, football, gardening, meditation, moral education, teamwork exercises, and life-skills sessions fosters communication, cooperation, and self-belief. Students reported improvements in reading fluency, stronger motivation to study, more positive attitudes toward learning, and greater comfort collaborating with peers. The consistency reflected in the low CV for program opportunities supports these qualitative accounts of broad-based benefit.

Students' willingness to recommend the program to other families is reflected in a high mean score of 2.82 on a three-point scale. Because this item uses a shorter scale, numerical values appear lower than those derived from four- or five-point scales. Within this scoring structure, a mean close to the upper limit indicates strong endorsement. The coefficient of variation of 16% shows low dispersion in responses, meaning that students are largely aligned in their positive recommendation of the program. Qualitative reflections reinforce this interpretation, highlighting appreciation for teachers, structured learning activities, supportive environments, and improvements in well-being. Although minor concerns—such as peer conflicts, rough language, or occasional issues related to safety or cleanliness—were mentioned, these concerns were relatively limited compared to the overwhelmingly favorable views.

Overall, the findings illustrate how community support en-

hances students' educational experiences [16]. Community involvement shows strong approval with moderate consistency ($CV = 21\%$), while perceptions of after-school opportunities and program recommendation demonstrate both high mean scores and low variability ($CV = 16\%$), indicating widespread agreement about program value. Strengthening partnerships through safe facilities, engaged staff, peer cooperation, and coordinated family support can further amplify these gains. Addressing minor concerns and ensuring equitable access will

help maintain and extend the positive outcomes already observed.

The overall picture is clear: when communities and after-school programs work in harmony, students experience more stable routines, higher motivation, and stronger engagement with learning [17]. The alignment between high mean scores and relatively low coefficients of variation confirms that community support and after-school programming provide a broadly shared and meaningful foundation for academic growth and holistic development.

Table 4. *Community Support and Its Influence.*

Variables	N	Mean	SE	SD	Variance	CV (%)
Community Support	85	4.14	0.093	0.861	0.742	21%
New Opportunity	85	3.67	0.063	0.585	0.343	16%
Recommend Program	85	2.82	0.048	0.441	0.195	16%

3.5. Students' Satisfaction and Experiences in the After-School Care Program

The quantitative findings on overall program satisfaction show an exceptionally high level of approval, with a mean of 4.61 and a low coefficient of variation. These results indicate that positive experiences are widely shared among participants. Children's reflections align closely with the statistical pattern, illustrating that the program's impact is not only measurable but also deeply felt in their daily lives.

A major source of this strong satisfaction comes from what children consistently described as effective and caring academic support. Across all centers, students spoke about teachers who explain lessons clearly, provide homework help, and offer additional classes in Khmer, mathematics, English, and computer skills. These learning supports helped many children gain better understanding of their subjects, improve reading abilities, and develop stronger motivation to study. Such reflections show that the academic aspects of the program are functioning well and meeting students' needs, directly contributing to the high satisfaction levels observed in the quantitative results.

Children's sense of enjoyment and emotional well-being also plays an important role in shaping overall satisfaction. Many expressed that learning feels fun and engaging, supported by teachers who are not only knowledgeable but also patient and attentive. Activities such as dance, sports, gardening, cooking, and creative exercises create a lively and welcoming environment where children feel happy and included. These emotional responses—feeling safe, encouraged, and excited to learn—mirror the low variation in satisfaction scores, suggesting that the positive atmosphere is experienced widely

rather than by a select few.

Material support is another significant contributor to children's high satisfaction. Students across all centers described receiving meals, fruit, food packages, school supplies, clothing, hygiene items, and needed study materials. Families benefited from reduced daily expenses, new opportunities to work, and in some cases, access to skill training or small sources of capital. These supports are particularly meaningful for children who expressed concerns about food insecurity, financial hardship, or instability at home. By addressing basic needs alongside academic growth, the program eases family burdens and creates a more secure foundation for children's learning. This holistic support system strongly reinforces the high levels of satisfaction expressed in both the qualitative and quantitative results.

Children's future aspirations offer another layer of insight. Many spoke about dreams of becoming doctors, teachers, engineers, police officers, or business owners. These ambitions reflect a growing sense of confidence and possibility. The program's emphasis on moral education, leadership opportunities, life skills, and nurturing guidance appears to strengthen children's belief in their ability to achieve long-term goals. When children feel supported, capable, and hopeful about their future, overall satisfaction naturally rises.

Although some concerns were mentioned—such as occasional fights among students, use of rough language, noise, or cleanliness issues—these were minor compared with the extensive positive feedback. Importantly, the concerns often reflected children's desire to see the program become even better, focusing on discipline, teamwork, cleanliness, and safety. The complete absence of major concerns in some centers, such as Ratanak Center, further highlights the program's strong performance.

Collectively, the qualitative data from Ang Center, Ratanak Center, and Svay Pao Center provide clear, compelling support for the high satisfaction score of 4.61. The alignment between numerical results and children's lived experiences confirms that the after-school care program is not only effective but also deeply valued. By offering academic help, emotional

support, safe environments, essential materials, and meaningful opportunities for growth, the program positively shapes children's learning experiences and overall wellbeing. The consistency of these reflections across centers demonstrates that the program's impact is strong, genuine, and widely shared.

Table 5. Students' Satisfaction and Experiences.

Variable	N	Mean	SE	SD	Variance	CV (%)
Overall Satisfaction	85	4.61	0.071	0.656	0.431	14%

4. Discussion

4.1. Comparing Previous-Year Qualitative Findings with Current Mixed-Methods Results

Understanding the impact of school and after-school care programs on students' academic, social, and emotional development requires both in-depth insight and empirical measurement. Last year's study relied solely on qualitative data, capturing rich narratives from student forums across multiple centers [5]. Students highlighted numerous challenges and areas of concern, including classroom distractions, peer conflicts, bullying, hygiene issues, and environmental disruptions such as stray dogs or accumulated garbage. They also expressed a strong appreciation for extracurricular activities, including sports, dance, gardening, and creative arts, which supported engagement and personal development. Moreover, reflections revealed the significant role of family support and the challenges faced by students from vulnerable households, including food insecurity, unstable incomes, and, in some cases, child labor. While these qualitative insights provided deep understanding of individual experiences and student perceptions, they could not quantify how widely shared or consistent these experiences were across the student population.

The current study expands upon this foundation by employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative surveys with qualitative reflections. Survey data quantified students' perceptions of school safety, cleanliness, teacher relationships, engagement, academic progress, social skill development, and family and community support. High mean scores paired with low coefficients of variation highlighted areas of consistent strength, such as safety (mean = 4.49, CV = 15%), cleanliness (mean = 4.44, CV = 15%), engagement in classroom activities (mean = 4.45, CV = 16%), and overall satisfaction with the after-school care program (mean = 4.61, CV = 14%). Academic support through homework assistance,

structured guidance, and subject-specific instruction was consistently appreciated across centers, confirming qualitative observations that students benefited from targeted learning opportunities. Similarly, social skill development and behavioral improvements reflected both students' narratives and survey data, reinforcing the effectiveness of structured after-school activities.

The mixed-methods data also provided new insights into variability, highlighting areas requiring targeted attention. Experiences with bullying exhibited the highest variation among school environment variables (CV = 26%), reflecting the inconsistencies noted qualitatively in peer interactions and disciplinary practices. Extracurricular participation showed the greatest variability (CV = 28%), illustrating differences in interest, access, or availability of activities across students. Household food security presented a more balanced picture than suggested by the previous qualitative findings. The survey produced a moderate-to-high mean score (3.56) and a coefficient of variation of 25%, indicating that, overall, students reported relatively adequate household food security, although important differences remained among families. These findings align with the qualitative reflections, which showed that some children continued to express concerns about insufficient food at home and economic hardship, while many also emphasized that the after-school care program provided lunches, fruit, food packages, and other forms of nutritional support that reduced household expenses and improved their wellbeing. Rather than indicating widespread food insecurity, the mixed-methods evidence suggests that food-related challenges are concentrated among a subset of vulnerable households, underscoring the continued importance of targeted nutritional and family support interventions.

Together, the qualitative and quantitative findings provide a complete picture of school and after-school experiences. Qualitative data offer depth, capturing students' emotional responses, aspirations, and lived realities, while quantitative measures provide breadth and consistency, showing how widely these experiences are shared across populations. The integration of these methods strengthens the reliability of the

findings, confirming the program's strengths in providing safe, clean, and engaging environments, robust academic support, and opportunities for social development. At the same time, the results emphasize areas for continued growth, particularly in reducing variability in bullying experiences, expanding access to extracurricular activities, and continuing to provide targeted support for vulnerable families experiencing food insecurity and other socioeconomic challenges.

In conclusion, comparing the two sets of findings highlights the value of mixed-methods research. While qualitative data provide essential insight into the lived experiences and concerns of students, the addition of quantitative measures allows for systematic assessment of the prevalence and consistency of these experiences. By combining detailed perspectives with measurable evidence, the study offers a clear understanding of program effectiveness, highlighting both accomplishments and areas for improvement. These findings support evidence-based decision-making, ensuring that school and after-school programs can continue to enhance student well-being, academic progress, and holistic development across diverse contexts.

4.2. Directions for Future Research

The current study highlights numerous strengths in school environments, after-school programming, and family and community support. At the same time, several areas exhibit variability across student experiences, suggesting valuable avenues for future research. A longitudinal approach would be particularly beneficial, tracking individual students over multiple years to determine whether improvements in academic achievement, social skills, and emotional well-being are sustained over time. By distinguishing short-term gains from long-term developmental outcomes, such research could clarify the enduring impact of after-school care programs and inform strategies for continuous support.

Another important direction involves exploring the sources of variability in student experiences. High coefficients of variation observed in bullying ($CV = 26\%$) and extracurricular participation ($CV = 28\%$) indicate that these areas remain the greatest sources of variation among students' school experiences. Although household food security also showed moderate variability ($CV = 25\%$), the overall mean score (3.56) suggests that most students reported relatively adequate food security, with challenges concentrated among a subset of vulnerable households. Future studies could investigate factors contributing to this unevenness, including differences in teacher supervision, access to school and program facilities, family background, and individual student characteristics. Particular attention should be given to understanding why some families continue to experience food-related hardship despite the availability of after-school support. Understanding these influences would enable the design of targeted interventions to support students who face less consistent benefits.

The current findings also suggest the need to evaluate the effectiveness of specific program components. Academic support, social skill development, and moral education are all highly valued by students, but their relative contributions to overall satisfaction and development are not fully quantified. Experimental or quasi-experimental research could test the impact of individual program elements—such as homework support, gardening, sports, or creative arts—on learning outcomes and student well-being. Such studies would provide evidence for prioritizing resources and optimizing program design.

Family and community factors emerged as critical determinants of student outcomes, indicating another key avenue for future inquiry. Systematic research could examine how parental engagement, household stability, and community resources interact with after-school programming to support development. Mixed-methods approaches, combining surveys, interviews, and case studies, would be especially useful for understanding the experiences of at-risk households and identifying the social or economic barriers that may limit student success.

Although the quantitative findings indicate generally moderate household food security, qualitative evidence shows that some families continue to experience food-related challenges. Future studies could assess the effectiveness of school-based meal provision, nutrition support, food assistance, and basic health interventions in improving concentration, academic performance, and overall well-being, particularly for children from economically vulnerable households. Linking health outcomes to educational engagement would underscore the holistic benefits of after-school programs and inform strategies for integrating nutrition and wellness initiatives with learning objectives.

Comparative studies across regions, school types, and program models could further strengthen understanding of effective practices. Research that considers cultural, economic, and infrastructural differences would help identify scalable interventions and best practices, supporting broader applicability of successful program designs.

Finally, student-centered and participatory approaches should remain central to future investigations. Involving children directly through forums, reflections, or participatory action research ensures that research captures their priorities and lived experiences. Studies could explore how student feedback informs program adaptation and continuous improvement, fostering responsive and inclusive learning environments that address both educational and personal development needs.

In sum, future research should adopt longitudinal, mixed-methods, and participatory approaches that examine variability, evaluate program components, and integrate family, community, and health factors. Such investigations will deepen understanding of how after-school programs and supportive environments contribute to equitable, sustainable, and holistic student development.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Implications of the Findings

The comprehensive findings from Ang Center, Ratanak Center, and Svay Pao Center present strong evidence that the After School Care Program functions as a deeply impactful and holistic educational intervention. When quantitative results are examined alongside children's reflections, a consistent pattern emerges: the program strengthens academic performance, emotional wellbeing, behavioral development, and social growth while simultaneously reducing structural barriers to learning. The evidence implies not only effectiveness, but also sustainability, trust, and systemic support across multiple layers of children's lives.

At the foundation of these positive outcomes lies a supportive school environment. High mean scores across safety, cleanliness, teacher-student relationships, and classroom engagement indicate that students generally experience school as secure, structured, and motivating. Low variability in most measures suggests that these positive conditions are widely shared rather than limited to specific classrooms or groups. Students' reflections reinforce this interpretation, describing fenced school grounds, active supervision, orderly routines, and clean facilities. Such conditions are not merely environmental conveniences; they form the psychological and physical stability necessary for meaningful learning. When children feel safe and comfortable, they are better able to focus, participate, and build confidence.

Academic improvement stands out as one of the program's strongest implications. Students report steady progress in reading, writing, mathematics, and language learning, particularly in the early grades where foundational skills are critical. Homework support, structured instruction, and clear explanations contribute to a dependable academic framework that reinforces classroom learning. The relatively low coefficients of variation in academic measures suggest that these benefits extend broadly across participants. This indicates that academic gains are not incidental or limited to high-performing students; rather, they are the result of intentional, structured support embedded within the program's daily operations.

Beyond academics, the program demonstrates meaningful influence on behavioral and social development. Students describe improvements in self-regulation, cooperation, teamwork, and respectful communication. Moral education, positive discipline, and consistent routines appear to guide children toward calmer and more constructive interactions. While some variability remains in areas such as bullying and peer conflict, these differences point toward opportunities for refinement rather than systemic failure. Strengthening anti-bullying systems, reinforcing consistent behavioral expectations, and maintaining active supervision can help reduce disparities and further stabilize peer relationships.

A significant implication of the findings is the program's holistic nature. The After School Care Program does not focus

solely on academic reinforcement; it addresses emotional wellbeing, social skills, and material needs simultaneously. Extracurricular activities—including dance, sports, gardening, cooking, art, and computer lessons—foster creativity, confidence, and engagement. Although participation varies somewhat across centers, the overall positive response indicates that students value these opportunities. These activities provide balance, reduce stress, and cultivate life skills that extend beyond academic achievement.

Material, nutritional, and family support further strengthen the program's impact. Financial assistance, school supplies, meals, and food packages reduce the burden on families and stabilize children's daily routines. The quantitative findings indicate that most students experience relatively adequate household food security, although qualitative reflections reveal that some families continue to face food-related and economic challenges. For these vulnerable households, the program's nutritional and material support provides an important safety net by helping to reduce household expenses and ensuring that children have regular access to meals and learning materials. By supporting children's basic needs alongside their educational development, the program helps minimize barriers to learning and promotes more equitable opportunities for student success.

Family and community involvement amplify these effects. High levels of reported parental engagement and emotional support indicate that learning extends beyond program hours. Teachers, social workers, and community actors contribute to a coordinated support network that surrounds the child. The alignment between school, family, and community strengthens consistency in expectations and encouragement. Such integration enhances sustainability, as improvements in student wellbeing are reinforced across multiple environments rather than confined to a single setting.

Perhaps the most compelling implication emerges from the exceptionally high overall satisfaction score. A mean of 4.61 with low variability reflects deep trust, appreciation, and positive lived experiences among participants. Children consistently describe feeling supported, valued, and motivated. Their aspirations—to become doctors, teachers, engineers, police officers, and entrepreneurs—reflect growing confidence and belief in future possibilities. High satisfaction is not merely an emotional reaction; it signals that students recognize tangible benefits in their academic progress, personal growth, and daily wellbeing.

Viewed as a whole, these findings indicate that the After School Care Program has created a stable and nurturing ecosystem that integrates academic reinforcement, emotional security, social development, and material support. While certain areas—such as bullying prevention, extracurricular access, and continued support for vulnerable families experiencing food-related or socioeconomic challenges—require ongoing attention, they represent opportunities for refinement rather than indicators of weakness. The overall structure is sound, and the benefits are widely distributed.

In conclusion, the program's impact extends far beyond homework assistance. It strengthens educational engagement, builds resilience, reduces inequities, and fosters a sense of belonging and hope. By combining structured academic guidance with holistic care and community partnership, the After School Care Program provides a powerful model of how educational initiatives can promote both immediate learning gains and long-term developmental outcomes. The alignment between statistical evidence and children's lived experiences confirms that the program is not only effective but transformative—shaping not just students' performance in school, but their confidence, stability, and vision for the future.

5.2. Recommendation Based on Children's Reflections and Program Observations

The reflections collected from children across Ang Center, Ratanak Center, and Svay Poa Center reveal both the strengths of the after-school care program and the areas that require targeted improvement. A recurring theme across all centers is the need to strengthen child protection and positive discipline practices. Many students expressed concerns about fighting, the use of bad language, peer pressure, and fear of physical punishment by teachers or parents. To address these issues, schools and programs should provide regular training for teachers and staff on non-violent classroom management, restorative practices, and respectful communication. Establishing clear anti-bullying policies, confidential reporting systems, and structured conflict resolution strategies, including peer mediation or student leadership initiatives, can create a safer and more inclusive school environment. Reinforcing these protective measures ensures that discipline supports growth rather than fear, promoting respectful and supportive peer and teacher-student interactions.

Closely linked to discipline is the need to enhance safety measures within schools and after-school programs. Children reported hazards such as playing near ponds, climbing trees, encountering unsafe individuals, and theft of materials, as well as risks from traffic near school grounds. Strengthening fencing, increasing adult supervision during breaks, and improving secure storage for bicycles and learning materials can help reduce preventable hazards. Collaboration with local authorities and community members to address traffic and external safety risks further reinforces a secure learning environment. Enhancing physical safety contributes to children's sense of security, allowing them to focus on learning and social engagement without distraction.

Cleanliness, hygiene, and environmental conditions also emerged as critical factors influencing students' satisfaction and well-being. While many children praised their schools for being clean, they identified challenges including garbage accumulation, inconsistent bathroom hygiene, and limited waste disposal facilities. Schools should establish student-led environmental clubs or rotating cleaning teams to foster shared re-

sponsibility and ownership of school spaces. Improving sanitation facilities, increasing the number of trash bins, and integrating hygiene education can strengthen overall health and comfort. Expanding green spaces, planting trees, and promoting sustainable environmental practices not only enhance aesthetics but also provide opportunities for experiential learning and increased student engagement.

Academic enrichment and access to learning resources are highly valued by children and were highlighted as essential contributors to the program's success. Students appreciated homework support, extra classes in Khmer, mathematics, and English, computer instruction, and access to libraries, while expressing interest in additional digital resources and language programs. Expanding computer literacy, increasing the availability of reading materials, and providing supplemental learning tools can support differentiated instruction and help meet diverse academic needs. Strengthening teacher capacity through professional development ensures that instructional quality remains high and responsive to students' varying abilities, while continuing remedial support helps slow learners build confidence and succeed academically.

Beyond academics, life skills, leadership development, and social-emotional learning are vital components of children's holistic development. Students highly valued activities such as moral education, meditation, gardening, cooking, teamwork exercises, and opportunities for leadership. Integrating structured life skills programs into daily routines and establishing student leadership groups can cultivate cooperation, responsibility, and self-confidence. By promoting positive peer interactions and encouraging children to participate actively in school life, these programs support social competencies that enhance both academic and personal growth.

Recreational and extracurricular activities complement academic and life skills learning by fostering physical health, creativity, and motivation. Children requested improved playground equipment, additional sports facilities, arts programs, educational trips, and opportunities to engage in traditional games. Expanding recreational infrastructure, organizing structured sports and arts events, and facilitating safe excursions will enrich the learning environment while promoting well-rounded development. Engaging students in meaningful leisure and cultural activities can increase school attachment, teamwork, and overall well-being.

Family-related concerns continue to influence students' educational experiences, although the quantitative findings indicate that most students report relatively adequate household food security. Qualitative reflections nevertheless reveal that some children continue to worry about food shortages, parental conflict, illness, unstable income, and limited transportation. Programs should therefore continue providing targeted support for vulnerable families through food assistance, school materials, and transportation support where needed, while maintaining universal services that benefit all students. Additionally, economic strengthening initiatives such as skills

training, small-scale income-generating opportunities, and parental guidance workshops can further enhance household stability. Strengthening referral systems for families experiencing violence, severe economic hardship, or other social vulnerabilities will help ensure that children's basic needs are met, enabling them to attend school regularly and participate fully in learning activities.

At the same time, the qualitative findings highlight the importance of sustaining and scaling effective program components. Children valued supportive teachers, homework assistance, safe environments, food provision, and structured learning opportunities. Preserving these elements, while documenting and sharing best practices across centers, ensures consistency and quality. Continued professional development for staff and stable partnerships with families and communities will sustain the program's impact and enable gradual expansion where needed.

Finally, children expressed ambitious career aspirations ranging from healthcare, education, and law enforcement to entrepreneurship, the arts, and leadership roles. Early exposure to career awareness programs, goal-setting workshops, and mentorship initiatives can help students understand and plan for future opportunities. Introducing vocational and STEM-based activities, combined with guidance from role models, strengthens motivation and highlights the practical relevance of education to long-term success. Supporting these aspirations fosters hope, engagement, and a sense of agency among students.

In conclusion, the after-school care program demonstrates substantial strengths in providing academic support, safe and clean learning environments, and meaningful personal development opportunities. At the same time, targeted improvements in child protection, safety, hygiene, academic enrichment, social-emotional learning, recreational activities, and family support can enhance its effectiveness. By addressing these areas holistically, programs can sustain and expand their positive impact, ensuring that all children experience a supportive, enriching, and safe educational environment that nurtures both academic success and overall well-being.

Abbreviations

CCT	Cambodian Children's Trust
CV	Coefficient of Variation
N	Number of Respondents
SD	Standard Deviation
SE	Standard Error

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Author Contributions

Sophorn Ngath: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Data Availability Statement

The data is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Biography



Sophorn Ngath is a researcher and educator specializing in education and community development. He holds two Master's degrees, in Teaching English as a Foreign Language and Business Administration, and is currently pursuing a PhD in Economics, all from Build Bright University. He serves as a lecturer at Build Bright University and as the full-time Research and Development Manager at Cambodian Children's Trust, where he focuses on program evaluation and implementation. With over five years of professional experience, he has contributed to initiatives aimed at improving access to quality education, holistic child development, poverty reduction, and child protection. His work integrates quantitative and qualitative research methods to assess program effectiveness and inform policy. Beyond research, he actively mentors young scholars and promotes evidence-based interventions in education.

Research Field

Sophorn Ngath: education and community development, child protection and welfare, poverty reduction strategies, program evaluation and assessment, holistic student development, mentoring and capacity building.