

**S**arina Monh, a lecturer at the prestigious Royal University of Phnom Penh's (RUPP) Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL), comes from a family of teachers. Her father's family taught Khmer literature and mathematics, while her mother's family members were doctors, nurses, and midwives who trained and mentored others. Still, she said, "I didn't expect to become a teacher. I accidentally liked the English language."



**Sarina Monh has been a lecturer at the Royal University of Phnom Penh's Institute of Foreign Languages since 2005.**

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Because of her family’s background, it is fitting that Ms. Monh’s first experience learning a language was studying with her mother—but she was learning French, not English. “I liked learning French,” she said, “but as I grew up and started university, my father encouraged me to study English because he believed English would replace French as our country’s second language. I wasn’t very enthusiastic to change languages, but I unexpectedly started to enjoy learning English. I liked the sound and the equality of English. I mean that you don’t need to use special words to address people of different positions. Everyone is ‘you.’” And, she added, “It was also much easier to learn the grammar rules of English than French!”

Ms. Monh’s interest in English continued, and after she graduated from the IFL in 2005 with a Bachelor of Education degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, she became a lecturer at her alma mater. By doing so, she continued the family tradition of teaching others. “My father and his family just thought that teaching is a humble but stable job,” she said. She went on to earn her master’s degree in Educational Administration from Hiroshima University, Japan, in 2010.

Ms. Monh has been employed at RUPP, which hosts over 12,000 students, for nine years and has been teaching in the English for Business and English for Professional Communication programs in the IFL since 2013. She is one of 14 female lecturers—on a staff of 80—at the IFL and has the opportunity to work closely with her former mentors and lecturers, such as Keuk Chan Narith. She remembers that as a student, she saw him as an enthusiastic teacher; now, as peers, they are working together on a research project about reflective teaching. “He always motivates me to work harder and inspires me to develop myself as a professional,” she said.

Students in Cambodia begin studying English in primary school, in fourth grade. But the students can have vastly different experiences learning English, depending on their location, their school, and their teachers. Ms. Monh can depend on her classroom at the IFL in Phnom Penh having electricity and working lights, while teachers in some rural parts of the country cannot rely on having that luxury. She also has access to teaching resources and professional-development opportunities that rural teachers often lack: basic resources such as textbooks for students and opportunities for training are in short supply.

To address these discrepancies and to support rural English teachers, Ms. Monh has co-facilitated teacher-training workshops with English Language Fellow Kimberly Chilmonik in provincial teacher-training centers and in high schools around Cambodia. “I like sharing my good and bad experiences in teaching with other teachers,” Ms. Monh explained. “They can use teaching techniques they find useful and avoid ineffective practices they think are not useful.”

Ms. Monh also worked with Ms. Chilmonik when they co-facilitated the Year 4 Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) Professional Communication Skills for Leaders (PCSL) project seminars in 2015. Her co-facilitating responsibilities are in addition to her full-time teaching load, but she believes that “I could learn more practical learning activities and activate my knowledge and motivation about teaching by co-facilitating the LMI PCSL seminars. I teach the PCSL curriculum in my classes, such as presentation skills and impromptu speaking, and my students said if they had learned these lessons earlier, their presentation skills would have been much improved.”

At the IFL, Ms. Monh typically teaches five classes, or about 18 instructional hours. Four of the classes she taught in a recent semester were senior-level Communication Skills courses, and one was a Core English class for sophomore-level students. There are about 32 to 35 students in each of her classes. She also serves as a project supervisor for master's degree students and as a Lead Coordinator and Manager of the LMI PCSL community of practice in Cambodia.

Ms. Monh described her students as “very respectful and active, but they have varying levels of English proficiency.” Undergraduate students at the IFL are given an exam before beginning their studies and grouped in classes according to their test results. Ms. Monh said that students should be at the intermediate level to pass the exam, but during their time at the IFL, they progress at different rates. As a result, she said, “We end up having various language-level students in senior year. Also, they like doing two degrees, such as English degree and Economics degree at the same time, which affects their time for self-study.”

One strategy Ms. Monh uses to differentiate lessons is to adapt materials and follow Bloom's Taxonomy when planning activities. “I organize

activities from easiest to most difficult,” she explained. “I will start with something like true/false questions and later on discussion and evaluation questions. If my lower-level students can answer the true/false questions and feel confident, they will continue with the activity even if it is very difficult for them.” The varying levels of English proficiency in each class and her students' incomplete homework can be challenging, but she enjoys teaching because “learning about [students], their motivation, and their personal interests are the inspiration of being a teacher.”

Ms. Monh prepares for her lessons by reading relevant books or articles related to the topic of the lesson. She also searches online for effective communicative activities that allow students to use the target language of the lesson. The British Council LearnEnglish website and Penny Ur's *Grammar Practice Activities* and *Five-Minute Activities* (cowritten with Andrew Wright) books are some of her favorite resources, as are colleagues and senior lecturers.

She has created and established a classroom routine that facilitates active and participatory learning while also creating an environment where students feel



**Ms. Monh (left) discusses with a seminar participant about how to agree and disagree diplomatically in a professional setting.**





**Seminar participants practice their diplomatic English with Ms. Monh (right).**

comfortable using English and expressing their opinions. She begins class with a review of the previous lesson, introduces the new objective of the day's lesson, assesses students' background knowledge, and has students share their experiences with the topic. "My favorite part of teaching is when my students are active and share their ideas in class and in groups," she said.

Another important component of her classroom routine is to have students take time to reflect on their learning. She said, "This academic year, I introduced a closure activity called 'ticket out of the door,' where students are required to spend five to ten minutes before the class ends to write on what they have learned during the session. This activity has proved to me to be a more effective way to assess students' understanding of the lesson without formally testing them.

"Teaching a session requires pacing and steps," Ms. Monh explained. "I like having a handout for students that has the steps of the activity and exercises written down. Plus, simplified activities so the students can easily understand and save time. I also try to make listening activities instead of following the book's questions, create new questions, or provide guiding questions. In short, something more than just what is in the textbook."

Ms. Monh also brings a thoughtful approach to the layout of her classroom. She believes the design of the classroom can promote learning and engagement, so she prefers that desks in her classroom be arranged in a U-shape for the beginning of the lesson. With that arrangement, she said, students "feel equal, and it's easy for me to ask them questions or make them fully engage in the lesson activities. But this is not the only arrangement. A variety of arrangements like sitting in groups or pairs also appear as the session goes on."

Outside the classroom, Ms. Monh actively seeks out and participates in professional-development activities and events. She regularly attends workshops, regional conferences such as Cambodia Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (CamTESOL), and seminars while also "keeping myself informed by reading journals or magazines about teaching and doing research." She pursues research and scholarship opportunities with her colleagues and is a founding member of the IFL's English Teaching Department community of practice.

The members of the IFL community of practice are current lecturers and MATESOL students who meet once per month to troubleshoot classroom challenges and share activity ideas and teaching strategies. Ms. Monh said she



At the entrance of the Royal University of Phnom Penh's Institute of Foreign Languages

enjoys “meeting new teachers so that I can listen to their successful stories about teaching and selectively apply practices in my class.”

In 2016, she was selected from a competitive group of applicants to represent Cambodia in Hanoi, Vietnam, at the LMI Women’s Leadership Forum. By participating, Ms. Monh feels that she has “gained more confidence in myself as a woman, not to feel inferior to other male colleagues. The LMI Women’s Leadership Forum provided me with a better understanding of how my community, Cambodia and ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations], and other organizations are working toward improving women’s status. I have already introduced my students to the Wedu and WECREATE programs [see <http://www.weduglobal.org/tag/cambodia/> and <http://cambodia.wecreatecenter.com/> for information about these programs] and HeForShe website so that they can apply to be Rising Stars and mentors.”

In the fifth and final year of the LMI PCSL project, Ms. Monh was promoted to be the Lead Coordinator and Manager for Cambodia’s LMI PCSL community of

practice. She is excited for this leadership opportunity because “my professional goal is to become a member of a management team.”

Clearly, the IFL and the field of TESOL in Cambodia have gained a future leader with a positive vision of the future of English language teaching in Cambodia. Ms. Monh predicts that in her country, English will become “even more popular, and parents will increasingly send their children at an early age to study English.” She strongly believes that “English should be taught as early as possible, possibly from grade one.” And, as a reflection of her own approach, she advocates that “English language teachers should focus more on fluency and creativity—and to make language learning more meaningful and fun for students.”

This article was written by **Kimberly Chilmonik**, who was an English Language Fellow for the Lower Mekong Initiative Professional Communication Skills for Leaders project in Phnom Penh. Kimberly enjoyed *tuk-tuking* around Phnom Penh and finding the most beautiful architecture and the coldest air-conditioning.

Photos by Kimberly Chilmonik