This study investigates the causes of school drop-out in rural Cambodia longitudinally, using *event history analysis*. This method allows researchers to observe patterns of occurrence, compare those patterns among groups and model their analyses over time. It is very appropriate for quantitative studies on school dropout, because dropout is a dynamic process, rather than an event. In fact, it is caused by accumulation of experiences and events before a decision of dropout is finally made. Such a study that observes these changing patterns is of a great value for policy application; for it can help identifying at-risk students earlier so that some kinds of treatment can be provided on time to reduce the dropout rates. It is a very new way of looking into the drop-out phenomenon in Cambodia, longitudinally. It tries to answer three research questions:

1. What force Cambodian students to leave school so early?
2. Are the causes different among grades?
3. How much can the findings from the main study be generally to other settings?

In order to answer to the three questions above the whole research was divided into two independent studies.

The first study answered the two first questions by including three cohorts of sample students from five primary schools and five lower secondary schools in a rural province of Cambodia. In total, 887 students, 282 of whom were in grade one, 286 were in grade four and 337 were from grade seven, participated in the study. The data obtained were analyzed by means of cox regression.

The results showed that the causes of school drop-out varied from grade to grade. At individual student level, some characteristics of students had much adverse influence when students were in primary schools. It was found that entering school at older ages made students leave school earlier. Cham students (minority group) started to leave school at an alarming rate when they were in higher grades of primary schools. Their leaving period was short but the rates were so high. Meanwhile, preschool experience was positively associated with later academic outcomes of students. Its positive relationship started since students stayed in lower grades, but it became strong and marked when they proceeded to higher and higher grades of schooling.
As regards the predictors on academic affair and behavior domains, this study could detect some insightful findings that provided firm evidence for dropout literature in Cambodia. A few times of repetition did not matter much when students were in lower grades, for they were still young. These grade retention experiences put students at a very high risk of school termination when they reached higher grades. Repetition and relative achievement patterns of influence were very similar. High number of absences and low frequency of homework completion were signs where school administrators and teachers could use to identify at-risk students. This study could observe that before students finally dropped out, they started to have irregular attendances and completed fewer assigned homework. Though these symptoms were quite logical, in Cambodia, no empirical evidence has been so far mentioned this relation. It was also found that good quality of student-student relationship increased survival rates of the first-cohort students while high self-esteem quickly lowered dropout rates of the second and third cohort students.

At family level, the two studies suggested that primary school students whose parents were divorced or passed away tended to end their educational careers faster than did the normal students. Parental education attainment might have some significant but weak influence on their children’s schooling once they were in primary schools; however, it is very certain that their influence disappeared in lower secondary school. Compared to other predictors in this level, parental aspiration and family academic support tended to play some roles in dropout events. Usually the families who involved in their children’s schooling and set high aspiration levels for their children were likely to keep their children in schools longer, regardless of their wealth conditions or their heads’ education levels.

Being in some specific schools or communities could put students at higher survival or hazard rates, according to the results from Cox Regression and Kaplan Meier analyses. Unfortunately, due to small sample size of schools, further analyses could not be performed to dig out which parts of school that energize the impact.

The second study was conducted to check whether the findings from the main study can be generalized to other research settings. It used the sample students of grade one and five of the main study. Plus, it included more sample students from another rural province – Prey Veng Province. The logistic regression was employed to analyze the data. The logistic regression showed that there were many consistent findings between the results from the two provinces, though little variation could be observed.

In the first grade, there were two predictors that appeared to be significant in both provinces. Despite little variation in its effect size, late school entry was found to be so harmful for rural Cambodian children’s schooling. Also, the children who maintained good relationship with others inside school had high possibility of school survival, in both provinces. Meanwhile, academic achievement was found significant in Prey Veng, while it was statistically insignificant in Kampong Cham. The results continued to prove that one standard deviation increase of the students’ test scores would result in a drop-out possibility deduction by .354 times in Prey Veng. On the family level, two predictors were found to explain the reasons why many rural Cambodian children were not in school. As expected, the education level of the parents greatly affected their children’s schooling in both provinces. However, in Kampong Cham, the divorce of the parents negatively affected their children’s length of stay inside school.

In grade five, most of the significant variables appeared in both provinces. First, late school entry remained exerting its crippling effect on children’s schooling. When students proceeded up to this grade, their academic achievement turned to be a key indicator for their parents to balance the trade-off between their children’s schooling and early employment. Third, preschool experience did not matter much when the students were in grade one, it was so vital for their schooling lives in this grade level. The analysis also revealed that the more frequently the students repeated the grades, the higher possibility they possessed in drop-out. However, parental
education background remained explaining why children in Prey Veng made a school pathway only. On contrary, in Kampong Cham, the results confirmed that if a child who stayed with their living parents had much higher school survival rates than the child whose parents passed away. By and large, at this level, there was minor inconsistency in the significant variables found in both provinces. That indicated that, a large extent, the findings from the main study are applicable to other rural settings in Cambodia.

The application of event history models to the current study of student departure was a very information-enriched way to clearly identify when students departed and how parameters evolved themselves from lower to higher grades of schooling. Superior to normal static models where variables are often thought to be time-invariant, this method permitted researcher to control for factors that were unmeasured or unobserved, that even made the results more robust. The estimation of competing events improved a better understanding of the complex interdependencies between events that are typically modeled independently. In Cambodia, it is the first attempt to longitudinally study school dropout as a process, rather an event. It expanded empirical understanding of this problem by providing new evidences to an existing literature of the country. Further, it added much better understanding of this phenomenon by time. That is, results from this study could inform educators and policy makers of what stages each predictor starts its impact.