



Editorial

Significance of Professorship Implementation at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Cambodia

CHET Chealy *, THOU Reno, SOK Serey, RATH Sethik

Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), Russia Federation Boulevard, Khan Toul Kork, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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A well-known saying by Matshona Dhlwayo is, “Life is a thorough university; pain and hardship are its distinguished professors.” In most countries, a professor is the highest academic rank at a university. For example, in Europe, the United States of America, and Canada, the professorship title is awarded to most post-doctoral academics, so a larger proportion are thus nominated than in other countries. According to [al-Gharbi \(2023\)](#), the most basic requirements of being a tenure-line professor are having a Ph.D. degree (doctorate), being involved in research, and having papers published by well-recognized academic publishers. An academic in European countries such as France, Germany, or Italy who wishes to get promoted as a professor must first write an extensive academic paper that designates what contribution s/he has made to knowledge through their research activities. The paper is similar in length and nature to a Ph.D. thesis, and the assessment is conducted by a panel of professors with a background in the applicant’s research field. This process of approval from the academic community of one’s academic credentials for professorship is called habilitation. When the panel judges the academic as worthy of professorship, s/he is eligible to apply for available professorships, but selection is not certain.

In the United Kingdom, professorship promotion does not rely upon habilitation, as each university has policies and regulations for upgrades at any level. It decides whom to promote or appoint to professorship based on the stipulated criteria. Any academic who wishes to be considered for promotion must submit an application that indicates how they meet the university’s standards. A different route to a professorship in the United Kingdom involves academics simply applying for any advertised vacant professorships and being selected by the institution.

This editorial explores the significance of professorship implementation at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in

* Corresponding author: Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), Russia Federation Boulevard, Khan Toul Kork, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
E-mail addresses: rector@rupp.edu.kh (C. Chealy)

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Cambodia. The article also provides a brief discussion of the origin of the practice of appointments to the professorship position, ranks of professorship, and some primary outcomes of implementing the process of designating professorships for academic faculty in Cambodia.

The appointment to professorships has a long history. Professorship originated in medieval Europe, and the title evolved from lectureships, accelerating in the 1540s. The title was created when the Tudor King of England, Henry VIII, established five chairs or regius professorships in divinity, civil law, medicine, Hebrew, and Greek. At this point, endowed lecturers or teachers became more commonly denoted as professors¹. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) reveals that the professorship evolved from a synonym of magister or doctor to indicate distinction within a gradually transforming hierarchy of teachers².

In Latin, the language, from which the term “professorship” is derived, refers to a person who professes. Such a person is often an expert with an academic teaching position at a university in their field. At many universities worldwide, professorship is a qualified title of academic rank denoting only the most senior academic position and is also known as full professor (European University Institute, 2017). In the late 14th century, the title of professor signified “one who teaches a branch of knowledge,” particularly at a university, with the term coming from the Old French term “professeur”. The term was derived from the Latin definition of professor, “a person who professes to be an expert in some art or science; a teacher of the highest rank,” which was based on the verb “profiteri,” meaning “to lay claim to, declare openly”. As a title prefixed to a name, it dated from 1706. The short form “prof” was earliest recorded in 1838. This usage can be traced in the Oxford English Dictionary to the 1530s, but perhaps resulted from its revival by the English Puritans in the 1400s, used to designate “one who openly professes religious faith³.”

The Oxford English Dictionary avers: “The right originally possessed by any Master or Doctor to teach publicly in the schools of a faculty was gradually restricted to an inner circle of teachers, and the term professor came eventually to be confined to the holders of salaried or endowed teaching offices, or the highest class of these, such titles as reader, lecturer, instructor, and tutor being given to teachers of lower rank”. Universities also appoint other titles as associate professors and assistant professors, senior lecturers, and lecturers (Hartley, 2017).

At university, professorship has become important for ensuring academic excellence, and professors require a lifelong dedication to learning, a passion for their field, and a desire to give lectures. To become a professor, university faculty must prepare for the responsibilities and roles, earn high academic degrees, and publish research articles⁴. In the United States of America, professors are tenure-track or tenured faculty. There are three ranks of professor: Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Full Professor⁵ (Table 1). A

professor is involved in obligations, which are typically classified under the headings of research, teaching, and services. Most professors at higher education institutions in the United States of America teach one or two courses per semester.

Cambodia has transitioned from a labor-intensive to a knowledge-based society (World Economic Forum, 2022). Therefore, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), through the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS), promotes teaching quality, research, and the publication of scientific research in higher education in its national higher education strategy. For instance, one of the eight key strategies in the Policy on Higher Education Vision 2030 is ‘to ensure that academic staff and students, especially postgraduate students, contribute to improving the research and development culture in Cambodia to serve national development needs.’ The publication of scientific research is considered a crucial aspect of promoting the Cambodian Industry 4.0 Policy. Implementing professorship is essential to engender the creativity and innovation required to drive economic growth and social development.

Table 1. The three ranks of professorship.

Title	Description
Assistant Professor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A beginner-level and tenure-track professor with a six-year contract, and in the fifth year, they apply for tenure. The tenure application process commonly takes a year, and the position is then reviewed. If the assistant professor passes the review, they receive tenure and are promoted to associate professor. They are asked to leave the university within a year if they do not pass. Promotion to associate professor commonly includes tenure, increased respect, greater tasks, and incentives.
Associate Professor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mid-level professor is responsible for expanding their research and building their body of work. After approximately six years, they can apply for promotion to a full professor. The promotion commonly requires their work to grow substantially, especially increasing their reputation among their colleagues, and their research significantly impacts their field of study. If they are not promoted, there is no change in their current position, and they can keep their job. The application is a long process, commonly taking a year, and involves an in-depth review. Not all associate professors can apply for promotion or are granted the promotion to full professorship. Many of them may stay at the rank

1 See detail at <https://gmw.ethz.ch/en/die-professur.html>.
 2 See detail at <https://professors.leeds.ac.uk/what-is-a-professor/when-did-the-title-professor-first-start-to-be-used/>.
 3 See detail at <https://www.etymonline.com/word/professorship>.
 4. See detail at <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/how-to-become-a-history-professor>.
 5 See detail at <https://marktomforde.com/academic/undergraduates/Ranks-of-Professors.html>.

	of associate professor until their retirement.
Full professor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a senior-level professorship with the task of expanding their research and building their body of work even further. They are responsible for taking a leadership role and may get involved in key departmental and administrative tasks. This highest rank is seldom achieved before an educator reaches their mid-40s. Full professors with a distinguished professorship frequently receive extra salary, greater prestige, and more perks, and their teaching load may be decreased even to zero classes, enabling them to concentrate mainly on their research.

Source: Marktomforde, 2023⁶

In Cambodia, the implementation of professorship has also been important in promoting the quality of teaching, research, innovation, and development. On 29 January 2013, the Royal Decree on Professorship was issued to promote the quality of education and human resource development at higher education institutions (HEIs) in Cambodia. After ten years, the first batch of those granted professorship status became a reality. Based on the Royal Decree, professorships were conferred on 52 educators on 9 June 2023 and 276 others on 20 July 2023. The appointment of a professorship also aims to increase efficiency at universities and is an incentive for higher education instructors. The professorships were conferred to academic staff from the Royal University of Phnom Penh, Royal University of Law and Economics, National University of Management, Institute of Technology of Cambodia, Svay Rieng University, Tboung Khmum, and Phnom Penh Teacher Education College (Fig. 1 & 2).

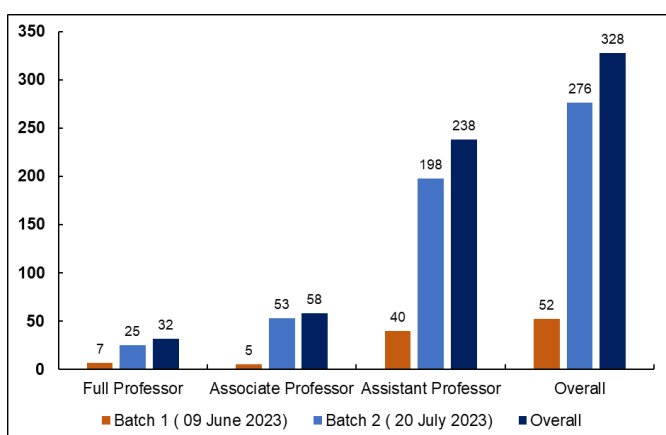


Fig. 1. Number of professorships appointed by His Majesty the King of Cambodia. Source: The Royal Palace of Cambodia, 9 June 2023.

The evaluation has been based on the criteria to be met when conferring the status of assistant, associate, and full professor (Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4). For each university, the Rector Council of Cambodia submits a proposal for the number of professorships to be granted through the Ministry of

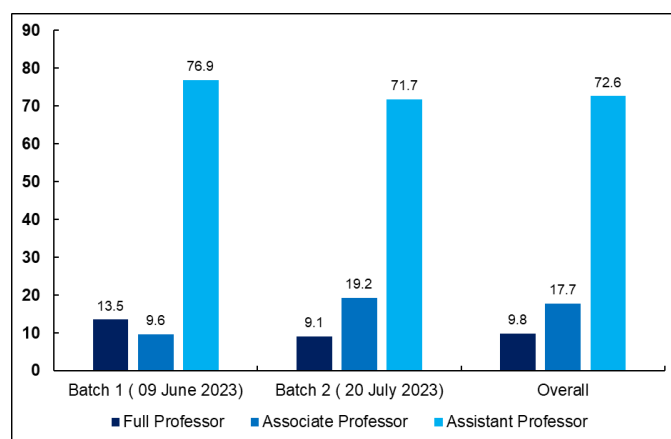


Fig. 2. Professorships appointed by His Majesty the King of Cambodia by title. Source: The Royal Palace of Cambodia, 20 July 2023.

Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS). The minister can then submit a recommendation to the Royal Government of Cambodia for review and decision. Implementing a professorship appointment system by the RGoC is an important means to improve institutional support and promote research culture and an enabling environment in higher education. While individual faculty members and academics at various universities have published scientific research, this was previously driven by personal interests, passions, and an ability to mobilize external resources. Professorship appointment has become an effective mechanism for promoting the development of a research culture at the institutional or national level.

Implementing a professorship system will also lead to more viable and sustainable academic and applied research within institutions. This is vital for fomenting the quality of teaching, as well as the knowledge flows, technological advancement, and social dialogue required to realize the development vision of Cambodia.

Table 2. The minimum criteria for an assistant professor.

No.	Criteria	Explanation
1	Degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has completed a Ph.D. degree for at least two years or a Master's degree for at least five years.
2	Articles or textbook publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published at least three articles in national or international journals or one teaching textbook title in the relevant field with a recognized publisher.
3	Teaching and research experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having at least five years of experience in teaching and doing research recognized by the scientific council of the university.
4	Professional ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Never had any professional misdemeanor

⁶ See detail at <https://marktomforde.com/academic/undergraduates/Ranks-of-Professors.html>.

		and never been convicted of a crime.
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Source: MoEYS, 2023.

professorwho-on-academic-email etiquett e/ from 28 November 2017.

World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/events/world-economic-forum-annual-meeting-2022>

Table 3. The Minimum criteria for an associate professor.

No.	Criteria	Explanation
1	Degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has completed a Ph.D. degree for at least five years or a Master’s degree for at least ten years.
2	Articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published at least five articles in a national or international journal
3	Workshop participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presented at least five national or international workshops
4	Textbook publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published at least one teaching textbook title in the relevant field with a recognized publisher.
5	Professional ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Never had any professional misdemeanor and never been convicted of a crime.

Source: MoEYS, 2023.

Table 4. The Minimum criteria for a full professor.

No.	Criteria	Explanation
1	Degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has completed Ph.D. degree for at least ten years.
2	Articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published at least seven articles in national or international journals
3	Workshop participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presented at least seven national or international workshops
4	Textbook publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published at least two teaching textbook titles in relevant fields with recognized publishers.
5	Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Received recognition for professionalism.
6	Professional ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Never had any professional misdemeanor and never been convicted of a crime.

Source: MoEYS, 2023.

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