

Editorial: The importance of research policy at higher education institutions in Cambodia

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Today, high school graduates in Cambodia pay critical attention when selecting subjects for enrolment at university. It has become a significant decision that may impact their career choices. In promoting quality in education, universities have made efforts to integrate research in teaching and learning activities. Hyman and Jacobs (2010) identify ten reasons why research may be considered by students during the enrollment process: (1) the availability of experienced researchers; (2) courses incorporating the latest research; (3) energized faculty members; (4) opportunities to participate in collaborative research and internships; (5) fine-grained majors; (6) relationship building with graduate research students; (7) the possibility to publish research; (8) the possible admission to graduate and professional schools; (9) networking with well-known and distinguished people in their field; and (10) other opportunities to participate in graduate school programs. In Cambodia, undergraduate students with research achievements

often have the chance to become admitted to and financially supported to undertake post-graduate study in Cambodia or overseas.

Research-intensive universities playing an important role in advancing knowledge as well as supporting policies, planning and practice (Hellström, 2011). Research management at higher education institutions needs to be strengthened by establishing academic systems (Schimank, 2005) and assessments used to standardize measures of publication and citations (Hellström, 2011; Hicks, 2012). Thus, the process of transitioning toward a research-intensive university is expensive and requires more funds than what is generally available from public sources (West, 1988). In Cambodia, research funding has been mainly derived through international organizations, and bilateral or multilateral agencies. As a result, researchers can conduct research and publish papers based on their interests and passions. However, there are few mechanisms and support that may promote the development of a research culture at either the institutional or national level.

Homden (2019) suggests that research and educational experiences are different; however, students access significant benefits from faculties that conduct research. This is because they bring real-life experience from the field or experiments to teaching. In many countries, current research policy is dominated by managerialism and excellence, manifesting the aim of making universities into a national strategic asset that are globally competitive in the knowledge economy (Hallonsten and Silander, 2012). To operate a university, research policies are used to guide research-related activities

including processes to analyze important social and scientific problems to advance knowledge and solve problems. In 2019, the Research Office of the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) prepared a research policy through a participatory and consultative process. The RUPP Strategic Plan (2019–2023) placed special attention on both academic and applied research across the STEM, social sciences, and humanities disciplines.

This research policy includes a mission to be a place where researchers can access resources and form teams to develop evidence-based research. This policy aims to engender the creativity and innovation required to drive economic growth and social development. In achieving this vision and mission, ten strategies were proposed (Figure 1). The outcomes of these strategies are evident through the citation of RUPP affiliates in relevant databases, as well as the development of cross-institutional research centres across various fields. Moreover, RUPP has introduced a pilot university research grant in 2017. This initiative allocates university research grants to motivate researchers to publish their work in peer-reviewed journals. To enable this, RUPP has established various in-house, peer-reviewed journals. They include *'Insight: Cambodia Journal of Basic and Applied Research'*; the *'Cambodian Journal of Natural History'*; the *'Cambodian Review of Language Learning & Teaching'*; and the *'Cambodia Review of EFL Research'*.

The Royal Government of Cambodia through the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport promotes the publication of scientific research in the national higher education strategy. For instance, one of the eight key strategies in the Policy on Higher Education Vision 2030 is *'to ensure that*

RUPP 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 to be a crucial aspect of promoting the Cambodian Industry 4.0 Policy. RUPP is one of the few public universities in Cambodia that possesses the capacity to produce quality research output. Over the first 5 years, the RUPP Policy on Research Development and Innovation will focus on the first two of three stages: Stage 1. Nurture a research culture and mobilize financial and human resources; Stage 2. Streamline research practices; and Stage 3. Deepen specific research areas.

Figure 1. The research strategy of the RUPP Strategic Plan (2019–2023)

RUPP research management committee and sub-committees



Source: RUPP, 2020

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