



Op-Ed Series

The Role of University Leadership in Promoting Research in Cambodia

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To set the scene, Cambodia lags behind its neighbours in terms of research and publication.

Based on my analysis, the Kingdom is ranked 8th among the 10 countries in Southeast Asia when considering the total number of research publications indexed in Scopus in the last decade. Scopus is the world's largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature.

To promote research and academic publication in the university setting in Cambodia, more research-focused policies and initiatives at both national and institutional levels are required.

At the national level, we have seen increasing efforts to promote research as evidenced by the development and implementation of a few research-related policies such as Policy on Research Development in the Education Sector (2010), Master Plan for Research Development in the Education Sector (2011) and Policy on Higher Education 2030 (2014).

There have also been unprecedented initiatives from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) to promote research and publication among - Cambodian academics. The [Higher Education Quality and Capacity Improvement Project](#) (HEQCIP) that was funded by the World Bank and ended a few years ago is a case in point.

In 2017, MoEYS established a policy think tank, called [Education Research Council](#), which publishes a biannual education journal, called Cambodia Education Review. So far, there have been a few publications, but the dissemination of research findings has been somewhat limited.

Now MoEYS is embarking on another larger project, called [Higher Education Improvement Project](#), also funded by the World Bank to promote teaching and research in the field of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and agriculture.

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As the project has just begun, its impact remains to be seen. However, the impact of the previous World Bank-funded project (i.e. HEQCIP) on the development of research in Cambodia seemed to be limited, according to [a report by MoEYS](#).

At the institutional level, some universities, such as the Royal University of Phnom Penh, have allocated [funds for research](#) and established academic journals to promote research and publication among faculty members and students. The University of Cambodia has also endeavoured to promote research activities through a few [publication outlets](#).

While policies, projects and initiatives like these are obviously welcomed, other viable solutions to promote research and publication activities, especially in universities, are called for.

One possible avenue that may bring about important change and progress to the development of research and publication in Cambodia involves 'university leadership'.

The role of university leadership in facilitating and enhancing research performance of academic staff is well-documented.

[Research](#) by Carol Bland of the University of Minnesota and co-researchers, for example, shows four qualities of leadership that are conducive for the promotion of research among university academics.

First, university leaders need to be a highly regarded scholar who serves as a research mentor and role model. In other words, they have to be a researcher themselves who leads by example to create change and encourage improvement in research productivity.

Second, university leadership has to be research-oriented. The focus of university missions needs to be on research and that all faculty members are clear about that said missions. Research must take center stage and receive visible and enthusiastic support from leadership, both at the faculty and university levels.

Third, leaders have to be capable of fulfilling critical leadership roles such as managing people and resources, raising funds, advocating research, emphasising university missions and facilitating research activities.

Fourth, and importantly, leadership styles within the university premises are crucial. To facilitate better research performance among academic staff, leaders have to use an assertive, participative style of leadership. This type of leadership seeks and values input and contributions from academic staff when it comes to important decision-making processes. In particular, opinions from faculty members are routinely solicited and seriously considered by leadership in the department or faculty.

Findings from this research has important implications for the promotion of academic research in Cambodian universities.

Given the limited resources and state investment in research in Cambodia, university leadership should play a pivotal role. Leadership in this context can be across various levels, from department to faculty to university levels.

To make use of this idea, the top university leadership such as rectors or presidents should stress research and publication when selecting new members of the management team for the department and/or faculty.

The recruitment and selection of new leadership team members should be based on a strong publication record and dedication to excellence in research. These leaders will serve as a role model and inspiration for other faculty members and students.

In the case of current leadership lacking research orientation, focus or commitment, a reshuffling of position is recommended. The aim is to ensure that someone in the leadership role has to be preferably research-oriented or be able to lead the team such that the research-focused missions of the university shall be realised.

Overall, something has to be done and more research-oriented initiatives have to be introduced and taken to bring about positive change to the current status quo in order to expedite the development of research and publication in Cambodian universities and in other higher education institutions.

Clearly, Cambodia cannot afford to continue to fall behind its neighbours and other countries in the region. Research, innovation and knowledge production are key to participating and competing in the global knowledge-based economy that keeps evolving.

Cambodia must increase its investment in research. University leaders must begin to invest, support and promote research and publication seriously and genuinely.

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CICP is an independent, neutral, and non-partisan research institute based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. We aspire to become a leading institution in Cambodia and we are dedicated to the study of social, political and economic trends in both Cambodia and the region of Southeast Asia as a whole. Our mission is to cultivate broader interests concerning the development of Cambodia and promote wider attention among a community of scholars to engage in research within the fields of political science, international relations, history, peace building, and socio-economics studies in order to better understand the current and future prospects of the country and the region.

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