


Chapter 12

Challenges in Academic Research for Society: Empirical Study of Cambodian University

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ABSTRACT

Academic research is a cornerstone for societal development and innovation in an increasingly globalized and knowledge-driven world. This chapter examines the challenges faced by Cambodian universities in fostering robust academic research output, drawing on empirical data to identify systemic barriers and potential solutions. Through an analysis of previous studies and institutional policies, this research reveals critical obstacles such as limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, a lack of skilled researchers, and insufficient collaboration between academia and industry. The findings highlight a gap in research capacity building and access to global networks, compounded by socioeconomic constraints and cultural attitudes toward research. It is clear that the importance of collaboration cannot be overstated in overcoming these challenges.

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12.1 INTRODUCTION

Cambodia has 189 universities, 79 public institutions, and 110 private institutions, distributed across 20 provinces, and Phnom Penh. Seventeen ministries and one secretariat manage these universities, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS, 2023). Academic research is a cornerstone of societal advancement, addressing critical global challenges and fostering innovation. Academic research is not just an academic exercise but also a vital engine for societal transformation and innovation. The quest for robust academic research output faces significant hurdles in Cambodia, a nation rich in potential yet constrained by historical and contemporary challenges. However, universities' ability to produce impactful research varies significantly across regions, particularly in developing countries such as Cambodia. This chapter delves into the unique challenges faced by Cambodian universities in cultivating a robust academic research ecosystem, identifying systemic barriers, and exploring actionable solutions. Despite commendable efforts to rebuild its education sector following decades of turmoil, Cambodia's academic research landscape remains underdeveloped. The World Bank (2020) reports that Cambodian universities allocate only a fraction of their resources to research activities, hampered by economic instability and insufficient funding. While education spending as a percentage of GDP is lower than that in neighboring countries, socioeconomic disparities further limit access to higher education and research opportunities (Asian Development Bank, 2020; MoEYS, 2023). These constraints create an uneven playing field for students and faculty, undermining their potential to contribute to global academic discourse.

Cultural attitudes toward research also play a pivotal role in shaping the country's academic landscape. Education is often viewed as a means to secure employment rather than a platform for intellectual growth and societal transformation (UNESCO, 2021). This perspective, coupled with inadequate research infrastructure and limited access to global networks, restricts Cambodia's ability to foster a research-oriented culture. Moreover, the lack of skilled researchers and limited collaboration between academia and industry further exacerbate these challenges. According to Heng and Sol (2022), the absence of joint research initiatives and innovation hubs prevents universities from aligning their academic outputs with market and societal needs. This disconnect hinders the country's capacity to address pressing issues such as sustainable development, public health, and technological innovation (Sam et al., 2025).

This chapter examines these challenges in detail, drawing on empirical data and prior studies to provide a comprehensive overview. By understanding these barriers, we aim to inform policymakers, educators, and stakeholders about the steps needed to enhance Cambodia's research capabilities. The subsequent sections present strategies for improvement, emphasizing the importance of increased funding, infrastructural development, training programs, and collaborative initiatives. Through these efforts, Cambodian universities can better align with global academic standards while addressing the unique socioeconomic realities of the nation.

12.2 CHALLENGES FACED BY CAMBODIAN UNIVERSITIES

Cambodian universities are navigating a complex landscape marked by significant challenges that impede their growth and effectiveness. One of the primary issues is the quality of education, which often suffers from outdated curricula and insufficient resources (Denti et al., 2023; Voelkel Jr & Chrispeels, 2017). World Bank (2020) report and Salmi (2009) highlight that many institutions struggle to align their programs with the evolving demands of the job market, leading to a mismatch between graduates'

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