



Ministry of Education Youth and Sport
Education Research Council

Editorial

Why Does Academic Research Matter?

Leang Un

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Royal University of Phnom Penh
(Correspondence: leangrupp@gmail.com)

Citation: Un, L. (2018). Why does academic research matter? *Cambodia Education Review*, 2(1), 1–3.

Francis Bacon (1561–1626) once said “knowledge is power.” The issue is, then, how can knowledge be obtained? Knowledge can be gained through personal experiences, tradition, religion and expertise. However, the knowledge that derives from these sources is not always powerful enough to transform human existence and lead society to a better future in sustainable and innovative ways. The movement towards producing scientific knowledge to guide the evolution of human existence and society towards a desired condition first emerged in the West in the 18th century. Since then, belief in scientific knowledge has been spread across the globe, especially since the start of the age of globalization.

The process of arriving at scientific knowledge is called *research*. Research describes the process in which data/information is collected, analyzed and interpreted in order to advance our understanding of a topic or issue or to find a new solution for a particular problem. Research findings are very useful for establishing communication and a dialogue with policy-makers, planners and practitioners and to guide practical development interventions. Moreover, research provides positive impacts for education, the economy, the environment, industries, healthcare and society.

However, research is not just about designing or implementing a development project. In addition to this, simply copying a development project from one place and implementing it in another might not work depending on the specific context. Therefore, we just cannot apply “lessons from elsewhere” to solve Cambodian problems. For Cambodia to develop, we need to create new ideas here and now in order to solve our local problems. All new ideas and development program for contemporary Cambodian human and social issues must come from research conducted by local universities either alone or in cooperation with more experienced researchers from overseas.

Scientific research usually consists of three steps: posing questions for investigation, collecting and analyzing data/information and presenting the findings concerning the research questions. There are two different types of research: academic research and applied research. Each type is used for a specific purpose and has a specific research design methodology and paradigm analysis. Academic research has traditionally been done by professors and students at universities to advance new knowledge and ideas, while applied research is conducted to solve specific and urgent problems. In Cambodia, research has been mainly conducted by national and international organizations to track the progress of or to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of development projects. This has resulted in more applied research being done than academic research. Local universities are not very involved in academic research-related activities due to either a lack of financial resources or limited manpower. In many cases, research has been conducted through the theses required to fulfill the requirements of bachelor or master’s degrees at universities. While there are some local scholars who conduct research, these researchers have been deeply dependent upon international research funds and outsider interests, directed by other’s goals and aims rather than pursuing his or her own research interest.

In a research-intensive or research teaching university, research is an obligation that faculty members must carry out in order to advance their professional careers and to be recognized by their peers. But our concern here is why faculty members at any particular university in Cambodia need to do research? The answer is not always straightforward. Career advancement for academics in Cambodia does not require any outstanding research publications or experiences nor there is any peer pressure for recognition. The only incentive that Cambodian researchers at any particular university are getting or seeking for conducting research is their researcher’s fee. However, sometimes this research fee is not geared

towards academic research inquiry but, rather, towards development consultation-oriented projects. This type of research is not *research* as we defined it above: research is not about implementing a development project in whatever form.

Recently, there has been a growing demand for evidence-based policy among Cambodian ministries and policy-makers. This demand has been translated into investment in and a turn towards building a research culture among Cambodian universities. The attempt to build a research culture in Cambodia by the government is evident through the availability of research grants for university researchers through the US \$23 million Higher Education Quality and Capacity Improvement Project (HEQCIP) 2010–2015/17, which is funded by the World Bank and implemented by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. Since its implementation, some universities are actively promoting their research activities.

With limited conduct and investment in academic research, new technology, knowledge and innovation have rarely emerged in Cambodia. We strongly believe that for Cambodia to develop technologically, economically and socially, academic research must be strengthened and the research community become more active. To meet this aim, the Cambodian government has placed more investment in research in Cambodia through the upcoming Higher Education Improvement Project 2018–2023, which has a total budget of more than US \$90 million. With this investment, government strongly believes that a few selected universities that benefits from this project will improve their academic research culture.