HOW DO CAMBODIAN ACADEMIC LEADERS DEFINE AND PERCEIVE HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNATIONALISATION?

Introduction

The intense process of globalisation and regional development since the early 1990s has resulted in a significant increase in international activities in higher education globally. The number of students going overseas for their higher education studies doubled between 2000 and 2013, reaching 4.1 million and accounting for 1.8 percent of total global higher education enrolments (UIS 2016). The United States topped the list as the most attractive destination country, absorbing 19 percent of internationally mobile students in 2013, followed by the United Kingdom (10 percent), Australia (6 percent), France (6 percent) and Germany (5 percent). In 2016, the top four countries with most students studying abroad were China (801,187), India (255,030), Germany (116,342) and South Korea (108,047) (UIS 2017). Other activities have seen a remarkable increase such as the development of foreign branch campuses, joint research collaborations and joint degree programs. Policy-wise, internationalisation has moved from the margin to the core of national and institutional policies in many countries.

Internationalisation activities in higher education have increased and diversified in Cambodia, Institute of Technology of Cambodia (ITC), Phnom Penh, Feb 2017

In Cambodia, internationalisation activities in higher education have increased and diversified since the country began to be integrated into regional and international communities in the early 1990s. Those activities have included student and faculty mobility, joint research, and international partnerships. The number of students going overseas

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for their higher education in 2016 was 5,275, with an outbound mobility ratio of 2.4 percent (UIS 2017). The top five destination countries for Cambodian students were, in order of importance, Thailand, Australia, France, United States and Vietnam (Table 1). Several foreign providers are established in the country including Malaysia's Limkokwing University of Creative Technology and Australia's Raffles International College, as well as the satellite campus offices of two Japanese Universities – Nagoya and Hiroshima, respectively offering postgraduate studies in Development and Education.

Table 1: Top five destination countries for Cambodian students, 2016

Destination countries	Number of students
Thailand	1182
Australia	784
France	611
United States	527
Vietnam	381

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2017

Despite the increase in activities, there is a paucity of literature on higher education internationalisation in Cambodia, with the general public holding diverse understandings of it. Studies on Cambodian higher education in the 1990s and early 2000s mainly concentrated on the power dynamics, particularly the dominance of foreign governments and agencies in local higher education institutions (HEIs) through their education assistance (Pit and Ford 2004; Clayton 2006). Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to explore how Cambodian academic leaders have defined and perceived higher education internationalisation within the context of the country's growing regional and international engagement. The rest of the paper begins with the study's conceptual frameworks, followed by methodology, findings and discussion. The paper concludes with some recommendations.

Conceptual frameworks
This section examines first the definitions and then the diverse perceptions of internationalisation in order to provide conceptual frameworks for the study. Internationalisation of higher education has increasingly gained popularity over the past two decades; however, such terms as

international cooperation, international education and international relations have been used since the 1960s. Initially, the term was referred to as a set of activities related to international studies or programs, and language education (Knight 2008). The term has since evolved within the context of the changing global higher education landscape, and has been defined and perceived differently by different stakeholders. The oft-cited definition is by Knight (2008, 21), who describes internationalisation of higher education as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education". Characteristic of this definition is its neutral meaning, suggesting the process can be positive, negative or both, depending on how people view it.

A study conducted in 2015 by the European Parliament argues that universities should also pay attention to the quality of their curricula and learning outcomes – something at home – rather than solely focusing on activities abroad. Extending Knight's working definition, they define internationalisation as "the *intentional* process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of postsecondary education, *in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society*" (de Wit et al. 2015). This definition is inclusive and based on the social equity point of view that internationalisation should be for everyone, rather than being limited to a small number of outgoing students and faculty.

Another critique of Knight's (2008) definition comes from Hawawini (2006), who argues in his study *The Internationalization of Higher Education and Business Schools* that internationalisation should not be narrowly limited to the process of integrating international dimensions into the existing institutional structure and pattern – a unidirectional rather than a two-way process. As such, he proposes a new definition of higher education internationalisation as "an ongoing process of change whose objective is to integrate the institution and its key stakeholders (its students and faculty) into the emerging global knowledge economy" (Hawawini 2016, 5). Similarly, but from a spatial analytical viewpoint, Larsen (2016, 10) defines internationalisation of higher education as

Table 2: Four rationales of higher education internationalisation

Social/cultural	National cultural identity
	Intercultural understanding
	Citizenship development
	Social and community development
Political	Foreign policy
	National security
	Technical assistance
	Peace and mutual understanding
	National identity
	Regional identity
Economic	Economic growth and competitiveness
	Labour market
	Financial incentives
Academic	Extension of academic horizon
	Institution building
	Profile and status
	Enhancement of quality
	International academic standards
	International dimension to research and teaching

Source: Knight 2004

"the expansion of the spatiality of the university beyond borders through mobilities of students, scholars, knowledge, programs and providers". Despite their nuances, this study argues that those arguments share many core characteristics with Knight's (2008) definition, which encompasses a range of dimensions, both "at home" and "abroad". It therefore adopts Knight's definition as the framework to examine how Cambodians define higher education internationalisation.

There are mixed views about the internationalisation process. On the one hand, many people viewed internationalisation as a chance to provide equal educational opportunity to all seeking education. This positive view is commonly reflected through four rationales for higher education internationalisation – social/cultural, political, economic and academic (Knight 2004; de Wit 2002), as indicated in Table 2. These rationales are not mutually exclusive, but may vary in importance over time and space.

As Knight (2008, 25) has pointed out, "rationales dictate the kind of benefits or expected outcomes those involved expect from internationalisation efforts". However, while acknowledging such benefits, many have pointed out that the world has been shaped by inequality and that internationalisation in developing nations has taken place at a cost. According to Altbach and

Knight (2007) and Hoppers (2000), mainstream research and scholarship funds have largely focused on HEIs in such developed countries as the US, Canada and others in Europe, which have rich library/laboratory resources and qualified human capital. International fee-paying students are seen as cash cows, providing major sources of income for those countries. Some of those international students later become skilled immigrants to support the economic development of developed countries, which are perceived to have better working conditions. For instance, the proportion of highly educated emigrants from ASEAN countries to OECD nations dramatically increased around 66 percent in a 10-year period, from 1,679,453 in 2001 to 2,791,727 in 2011 (Batalova, Shymonyak and Sugiyarto 2017, 14). This issue of brain drain has a huge negative impact on the economic and social development of developing countries.

Furthermore, internationalisation as a means to promote English language and Western knowledge, culture and values comes at a cost to developing nations (Altbach and Knight 2007; Altbach 2013). A pertinent example is the recent emergence of massive open online courses (MOOCs). Although viewed as expanding access to higher education globally, MOOCs are very much western-oriented, with the majority of major providers located in the North (Altbach 2014). For these reasons, Altbach

(2014) and Hughes (2008) argue that in some instances internationalisation is simply a form of neo-colonialism. Similarly, Mazrui (1975) refers to the negative impact of the internationalisation of African higher education in the 1960s and 1970s as a form of cultural dependency, noting that African HEIs acted as foreign multinational corporations, serving the interests of Western nations rather than the African people. He offered three strategies to offset the negative impacts of cultural dependency. First is the strategy of domestication, relating the subjects within African universities' curricula to local culture and knowledge. He also suggested that a student's mastery of a local language, history, social and cultural anthropology should be part of the requirements for university admission. Second was the strategy of diversification, calling for the development of a curriculum with a truly global orientation. In this sense, he suggested that African universities should focus not only on Europe and Africa, but also on Indian, Chinese and Islamic civilisations. The last strategy is counter-penetration, creating a unique ethos of scholarship able to make its own impact on world academic centres.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research study design, which Creswell (2012, 16) argues is the most appropriate methodology to explore issues that are new or have been less studied in a certain area. Over a period of six months (August 2016 – January 2017), the research team completed 14 in-depth interviews with respondents who were senior administrators at six Cambodian universities (three private and three public), located in both Phnom Penh and provinces. Those participants were selected purposefully, based on their experience and engagement in internationalisation activities at their respective institutions. Collected data was then analysed qualitatively to understand how each participant defined and viewed internationalisation in Cambodia. Pseudonyms in Table 3 are used in the analysis to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Findings and discussion

During interviews, participants provided various answers about internationalisation, referring to it as partnerships with foreign institutions or colleagues, overseas scholarships and exchange programs for students and staff, joint research collaborations, international curricula, and particularly the use of English as a/the medium of instruction. According to participant SI1, "internationalisation refers to the mobility of students and staff through scholarships and exchange programs. It implies no-border or cross-cultural interactions. It involves

Table 3: List of participants and their affiliations

Participant	Affiliation	Position
SI1	University A	Vice Rector for Academic Affairs
SI2	University B	Deputy Director for Cooperation and Research
SI3	University C	Head of International Relations Office
PI1	University D	Vice President for University Relations and Students Affairs
PI2	University D	Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs
PI3	University D	Director of International Studies Program
PI4	University D	Director (branch campus)
PI5	University D	Assistant Director (branch campus)
PI6	University D	Deputy Assistant Director (branch campus)
PI7	University E	International Affairs Coordinator
PI8	University E	Director of Research
PI9	University E	Lecturer
PI10	University E	Head of Nursing Department
PI11	University F	Vice Director (branch campus)

Figure 1: Word cloud of the vision of the six studied HEIs
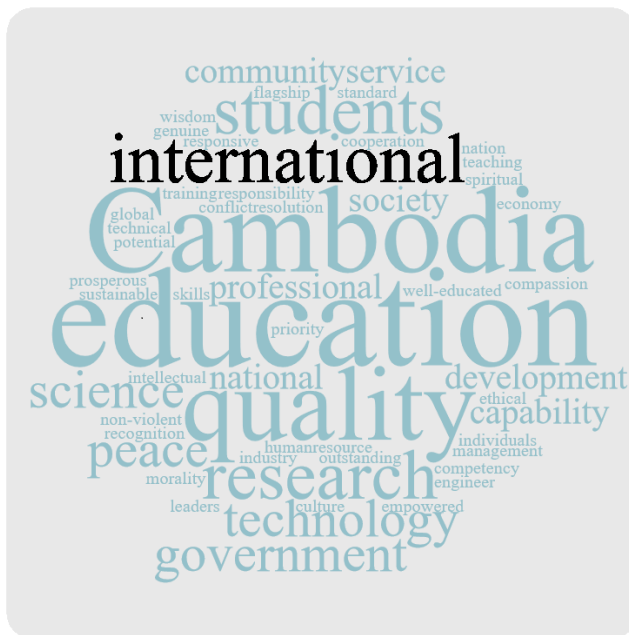
Words	Frequency
education	8
Cambodia	7
quality	6
international	4
research	4
students	4
technology	3
government	3
science	3
peace	3

Source: Authors

engagement at the regional and global levels". Important to note, however, when asked further, most participants seemed to limit their elaborations to outbound mobility and the adoption of English in the curriculum. Only a few of them who were working at one private university held a broader understanding of internationalisation, defining it as a wide range of international activities, both at home and abroad. As participant PI1 emphasised, "It does not mean that we only have to go out [of the country] to be engaged in internationalisation. We can also engage in it within Cambodia."

In-depth interviews further suggested that the lack of understanding of internationalisation within Cambodian HEIs was mainly due to the lack of internationalisation strategies and policy at both institutional and national levels. This clearly points to the present local orientation of Cambodian higher education, although the term "international" appears in the vision of four of the six studied universities. Figure 1 shows that the international component is one of the important parts of the visions of those HEIs.

In terms of positive views on internationalisation, the academic rationale was widely discussed in the study. Participant PI1 pointed out that international activities could improve the quality of teaching and learning as well as build the image of his institution. He further suggested that his institution has adopted internationally recognised curricula and used English as the medium of instruction to keep abreast of a rapidly changing world and globalisation. Another participant from a public university echoed the same view, adding that international partners can help build his institution's infrastructure and facilities, including research laboratories, which would otherwise be too costly and beyond the reach of most Cambodian HEIs (SI1).

The academic rationale was followed by the sociocultural rationale as a number of participants mentioned opportunities for sharing culture, through such activities as student exchange programs. To quote from participant PI1, "bringing more international students to our campus will allow students to learn more about foreign cultures, while at the same time, share our culture and traditions with their foreign peers". According to him, intercultural understanding is crucial to promoting mutual understanding and peace among different nationalities. This approach of bringing more international students and faculty to the campus was also less expensive than sending students abroad.

The other two rationales were barely elaborated during the study. Political rationale emerged only when the participants, especially those working in the public sector, discussed educational assistance programs funded by various government agencies with the purpose of improving country-to-country relations. Discussions about economic rationale centred on the ASEAN Economic Community

(AEC), which was launched in December 2015 to promote freer flow of labour, capital and goods among countries in the region. As such, Cambodia needs to work harder to produce qualified human resources that can promote Cambodia's competitiveness in the region and beyond. Other than that, little was discussed about Cambodian HEIs' strategies, for instance, to attract foreign students and scholars to increase their revenue. This is understandable given the poor quality and the dearth of resources of the majority of HEIs. Plus, relatively few of them offer programs in English – a barrier to Cambodian HEIs becoming more engaged with their foreign counterparts, in the opinion of many participants.

Despite the positive views indicated through the above rationales, some respondents expressed negative criticism of internationalisation. Participant SI1 said that his institution was not ready to join the regional and international academic communities due to limited budget and capacity, and had thus far limited its programs to local orientation. According to him, the AEC process was unavoidable, but without preparation and readiness, his institution was pressured to accept outside knowledge and ideologies. This was echoed by Participant PI1 who asserted that it was very common in Cambodia for people to simply copy and paste materials and contents from abroad to use in their teaching.

Moreover, some international programs are very much donor-driven, giving little space for local adaptation (Participant SI2). Some of the participants also raised concern about the growing use of English and other languages, including Chinese, Korean and Japanese at the cost of the local language, with negative implications for local culture, knowledge and values.

Recommendations

The discussions above suggest that internationalisation remains a relatively new concept in Cambodia, with many people still associating it with the traditional form of outbound mobility or foreign language as the medium of instruction. Also, while many positively view internationalisation as opportunity, concerns have also emerged surrounding such issues as the dominance of foreign culture, language, knowledge and ideologies. A number of recommendations are proposed below to move Cambodian higher education towards internationalisation:

First, since many people are still not aware of the concept of internationalisation of higher education and its importance, it is crucial that government provides overall supporting guidelines and strategies for the internationalisation of Cambodian HEIs. These should include a range of initiatives ranging from providing overseas scholarships to establishing programs to attract foreign talent and foreign-educated Cambodians to come to Cambodia to help rebuild the education system.

Second, it is clear that internationalising the curriculum has not been well understood and appropriately followed by many Cambodian HEIs. The fact that the majority of HEIs in Cambodia have adopted foreign curricula and teaching and learning materials with little local adaptation raises a serious question of relevance to the Cambodian education system – an issue of academic dominance or cultural dependency. To deal with such issues, Cambodia should adopt Mazrui's three strategies of domestication, diversification and counter-penetration. Cambodia needs to localise foreign knowledge by making it relevant to the Cambodian context. Each university student, regardless of specialisation, should be well versed in Cambodian culture, language and history. Cambodian HEIs should include in their curricula knowledge of other countries in the ASEAN region and beyond. And Cambodia should (re)build its own scholarship scheme, particularly through establishing and combining research rigour with indigenous knowledge in various disciplines, and promoting it along with Cambodian language and culture at the international level.

This paper has provided a bird's eye view of the definition and perceptions of Cambodian higher education internationalisation. Building on this basic understanding, future research can delve further into the meanings and rationales of internationalisation from the perspectives of other stakeholders. Other aspects of Cambodian internationalisation should also be explored in more depth, including outbound and inbound mobility, the adoption of foreign languages and international curricula, the establishment of branch campuses of foreign HEIs in Cambodia, and cross-border partnerships in teaching and research.

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