

# **The Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Cambodia**

OUM Ravy,

Royal University of Phnom Penh, Russian Federation Boulevard, Toul Kork,  
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Corresponding Author: OUM Ravy ([oumravy@yahoo.com](mailto:oumravy@yahoo.com))

**To cite this article:** Oum, R. (2021) The Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Cambodia. *Cambodia Journal of Basic and Applied Research (CJBAR)*, 3(2-1), 1–6.

## **Abstract**

Internationalization is the worldwide trend in the education sector. The growing of internationalization of Higher Education (HE) in the globe is not a new paradigm. It can be found through partnership in education and research activities between respective universities/institutions of different countries in the world. The internationalization of HE provides opportunities for Cambodia to establish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and strengthen its academic foundation and human capital. Currently, Cambodia's HEIs are approaching to internationally recognize quality education and assurance.

## **Higher Education in Cambodia at a Glance**

In civil war in the past decades, all infrastructures were destroyed, especially within the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979). Majority of Cambodian human resources were killed. Once the war ended, it left the country nearly nothing and turned everything into zero. The remarkably historic milestone emerged after twenty years of conflict and civil war, the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements on 23 October 1991 launched Cambodia on a process of democratic reconstruction and transition to a market economy. The contemporary Cambodia state was born in 1993. Now Cambodia is in peace and everything has constantly improved to a harmony and unity. Within this noteworthy peaceful condition, Cambodia tends to promote international cooperation globally. In this connection, Cambodia became a full member of ASEAN in 1999.

It can be noted that HE in Cambodia has been reborn since 1980s toward the reforming and restructuring of HE system within 1990s. Private HEIs has been launched since 1997. From 1997 to 2010, the number of HEI has increased from 8 to 76. Currently, there are 110 universities in Cambodia. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) has made a remarkable progress in increasing the number of student enrolment at higher education institutions from 137,253 to 216,053 equaled 57% between 2009 and 2013 (MoEYS Education Strategic Plan 2014-2018).

Moreover, the number of scholarship students in public higher education institutions (HEIs) has doubled from 9,097 to 18,906. This is a sterling effort to increase quantity of students to enroll in HEIs. In addition to the quantity enlargement, quality has been taking care to reach a satisfactory target. In the pursuit of strengthening planning and monitoring, managing research grants and scholarships, and gaining more funds for programs expansion, the Directorate General for Higher Education team and HEIs have put strong commitment to build their capacity and quality of their teachers and curricula.

MoEYS also attempt to establish an annual higher education forum and a national coordination mechanism for development of higher education with efficiency and quality. In addition to this, MoEYS also aims at improving higher education capacity and system development program by updating regulations according to Education Law and improve existing regulation related to establishment, management, and HEI autonomy. In the meantime, MoEYS has been also creating a research culture and implementing of an innovative research grant program by promoting stronger regional cooperation, collaboration and jointly implemented activities.

In order to discuss and debate on higher education issues and facing challenges, the Higher Education Technical Working Group has been established to participate in a forum. The mismatch between the needs of the labor market in terms of skills, critical thinking ability and knowledge and the current products on the market has been a major challenge for the group, students, parents, and relevant stakeholders to be addressed.

Furthermore, MoEYS is committed to maintaining high quality programs, internationally acceptable certification within an affordable pricing structure. In short, the government has

realized the importance of increasing quantity by providing opportunities to students in higher education and the importance to assuring relevance and quality.

## **Internationalization of Higher Education at RUPP**

RUPP set up its Strategic Plan 2014-2018 to enhance higher education in Cambodia. This strategic plan is to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of services provided by all levels of staff of the RUPP from senior management through faculty, center and department levels. This work includes the essential contribution of the administration, finance, and academic offices of the university. The strong commitment of the entire team of the RUPP will guarantee the operationalization of our vision, missions, goals, and strategies as outlined in this plan for reform. With our common belief, education is the most important factor which can alleviate poverty and rapidly develop the country since higher education institution is regarded to be the think tanks that support the government on its policy making. In terms of this spirit, the Royal University has been playing very vital roles to potentially contribute a significant stride in improving human resources for Cambodia.

The Royal University of Phnom Penh will continue to be the leading higher education institution in Cambodia and be committed to becoming the Cambodia's flagship university, focused on excellence in teaching and learning, research, community services and making a contribution to the development of Cambodian society.

Education is widely seen to be cross cutting focus of the ASEAN Community in 2015, as it will play a key role in sharing and increasing the awareness of history, languages, culture and common values, particularly among the youth (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009). As a member of ASEAN University Network, the Royal University of Phnom Penh has been actively involved with and participated in many meaningful events regionally and globally in order to promote mutually educational partnership. For instance, RUPP has attended numerous university-level forums, the 8th ASEAN Student Exchange Programme in November 2008 in Kuala Lumpur, the ASEAN Plus Three Higher Education Policy Dialogue in Thailand in March 2009, the presidents and representatives meetings, the 2nd AUN Rectors' Conference on "A Strategic Management and New Challenges Ahead for University Collaboration" in January 2009 in Brunei Darussalam, the

1st Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Rectors Conference in October 2008 in Berlin, Germany (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009), and so on.

In a new trend of ASEAN integration, RUPP has emphasized on the reform of the diversity of curriculum structure, contents, syllabi and choice of language as the medium of instruction (RUPP's Strategic Plan 2014-2018). Furthermore, RUPP has realized that class teaching, learning, vocational education and training system are the foundation to this integration. According to ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint to be able for ASEAN community to maximize its economic standard it requires the commitment in human development among the education sectors especially the higher education of all of the ASEAN nations.

Those commitments include advancing and prioritizing education, investing in human resource development, promoting decent work, promoting information and communication technology, facilitating access to applied science and technology, strengthening entrepreneurship skills for women, youth elderly and persons with disabilities, and building service capacity. In term of this, RUPP has put sterling efforts and strong commitment to work closely with other universities intra ASEAN region to better understand the different socio-cultural, political and economic contexts of each nation that leads to different focus on course structure to fulfill the demand of their own nation. In the meantime, RUPP has prepared a standard and guideline on internal quality assurance to attract more exchange students and regular foreign students. In order to globalize with other universities from worldwide around the world, RUPP has established various links in order for the sake of internationalization.

In 1999, RUPP became a member of the ASEAN University Network (AUN). The AUN, established in 1995 to enable capacity building and collaboration among South East Asian higher education institutions, provides opportunities for staff and students to attend training courses, meetings, forums and conferences in other ASEAN nations. More significantly, RUPP has a strong international focus. It has signed Memoranda of Understanding with many international universities. These MOUs provide for academic cooperation between the universities, including staff and student exchanges and curriculum development assistance. Up to date, the RUPP holds active MOUs with the following universities and research centers in Australia, China, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, Lao PDR, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Vietnam, USA and Thailand.

The support of the Royal Government of Cambodia, particularly the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) is critical to the Royal University of Phnom Penh. All degrees and programs at RUPP have been approved by the Government. RUPP has also fostered direct links with donor groups such as bilateral, multi-lateral and NGOs across the world.

In order to promote international educational cooperation especially with the objective of facilitating mutual friendship between Cambodia and China, RUPP has so far established amicable academic partnership by ratifying agreements for academic exchange and cooperation, and memorandums of understanding with 8 prestigious China's Universities.

Through the agreed and remarkable cooperation, we have potentially contributed fruitful outcomes and major strides in enhancing academic research and educational opportunities for faculty members and students in terms of encouraging the exchange of the faculty members and researchers, the exchange of students, the exchange of information and publications, and organization of joint research projects, including conferences and meetings. With regard to aforementioned activities and implementation, many faculty members and students of RUPP have gained extraordinary knowledge, hand-on experiences, and intercultural perspectives from esteemed China's universities. More significantly, RUPP is always optimistic to develop and enlarge university network and links intra the Asian region and around the globe.

## References

- ASEAN Secretariat. (2009). ASEAN socio-cultural community blueprint. Jakarta. ISBN.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (2014). Education Strategic Plan 2014-2018
- Royal University of Phnom Penh (2014). Strategic Plan 2014-2018: Transforming RUPP into Cambodia's Flagship University
- Royal University of Phnom Penh's Handbook 2012-2016
- Solingen, E. (1999). ASEAN, "Quo Vadis"? Domestic coalitions and regional cooperation. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 21(1), 30-53. ISEAS.
- Wongboonsin, K. P. (2012). Preparation of Integration of ASEAN Community in 2015. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.