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Topic: Cambodian higher education in transition: A perspective on institutional governance

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Outline

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I. Background of the study

- The transformation of higher education has shared a global trend of a rapid expansion over the last few decades.
- Several reforms are noted: privatization of higher education, corporatization of public universities, introduction of fee-paying programs, and public-private partnership in higher education (Lee & Healy, 2006).
- The provision and management of HE have moved from the state control to the market model (Varghese & Martin, 2014).
- Cambodia has shared a similar pattern since 1997, marking a clear shift toward the market model.
- Some public HEIs have been transformed into autonomous institutions under the Public Administrative Institutions (PAI) status.
- Private HEIs are operated as the predominant providers of HE in Cambodia.
1. Background of the study (cont.)

- The participation of the private sector in the HE sector has opened up an increasingly commercialized environment.
- The competition among HEIs is aimed at tuition fees and search for profit (Dy, 2015).
- HEIs compete by not only reducing the fees but also providing discount and free internet access (Ford, 2013).
- The HE expansion has become almost unregulated and commercialized, with far-reaching consequences (Ford, 2003, 2006, 2013).
- The market forces have caused a growing concern over how HEIs are governed in the competitive HE market.
- Few studies have been conducted on this issue in Cambodia.
II. Research objectives

- To examine how HE providers differ in their governance arrangements.
- To ascertain how Cambodian HEIs are governed to shape the quality of education.
III. Institutional changes: Toward governance reforms

- Universities are encouraged to adopt a corporate model and act entrepreneurially (Clark, 1998).
- University governance structures have changed as universities are incorporating the concept of entrepreneurial universities (Etzkowitz et al., 2000).
- Universities are not only service suppliers to the marketplace but also active players in the marketplace as for-profit organizations – “academic capitalism” (Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997).
- Universities are forced to seek external funding sources and urged to commercialize their knowledge and scientific discoveries – “commercialization” in the US context (Bok, 2003).
- Business model of governance is adopted, thereby blurring the boundary between university and industry at universities in Hong Kong and commercializing their research outputs (Chan & Lo, 2007).
- In Malaysia, under the corporatized status, universities are operated as big business companies in which the board of directors and vice-chancellor hold strong decision making power (Mok, 2007).
IV. Research methodology

• Methods
  ◦ The study, employing a phenomenological approach to inquiry, is based on the qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with 38 key actors from relevant institutions.
  ◦ Fieldwork was mainly conducted in Cambodia from December 2012 to December 2013.
  ◦ Purposive and snowball sampling were applied to select the interviewees for the study as the key resource people based on their academic and professional background in the field.
  ◦ Interviewees were from the government institutions, HEIs, industry, and donor agencies/development partners.
IV. Research methodology (cont.)

- **Data analysis**
  - Three types of HEIs (Public, PAI, Private HEI) were examined.
  - Document analysis was employed as a means of tracking changes and development of the sector.
  - Audio recordings from the interviews were transcribed and imported into NVivo 10 for analysis.
  - The qualitative data analysis follows a thematic coding approach.
  - Key relevant quotes from the interviews were extracted and used where applicable.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Higher education provider</th>
<th>Public HEI (12 members)</th>
<th>PAI (5 – 11 members)</th>
<th>Private HEI (&gt;=5 members)</th>
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| **Board composition**     | - Rector of the university as a chairperson  
   - One representative from the MoEYS  
   - One representative from the Cambodian Ministry of Economy and Finance (MoEF)  
   - One representative from the Office of Council of Ministers (CoM)  
   - Four deans of dependent faculties/colleges or directors of subordinate technical HEIs  
   - One person from outside the university  
   - One academic staff representative  
   - One administrative staff representative  
   - One student representative  
|                           | - One representative from a parent ministry  
   - One representative from the MoEF  
   - One representative from the CoM  
   - The rector of the PAI, as the chief executive officer reporting directly to the governing board  
   - One staff representative (either administrative or academic)  
   - Six others (optional) (as appointed via a government sub-decree with a renewable three-year mandate)  
|                           | - Shareholder(s) or representative(s)  
   - Representative(s) of academic or administrative staff  
   - Dignitary(ies) with experience in HE and management |
| **Administrative system** | - Centralized (Directly under the parent ministry)  
|                           | - Decentralized (Directly under the governing board)  
|                           | - Top-down approach (directly under the owners/shareholders)  

V. Research findings

- **Public HEIs**
  - A board as symbol as HEIs are under the direct supervision of the parent ministry.
  - A rector appears to hold dominant decision making and executive power, following a top-down administrative approach.

- **Public Administration Institutions**
  - PAI is able to administer itself under the direction of a new governing board rather than the parent ministry.
  - Most if not all, PAIs choose to have only five core members as the board members to meet the minimum requirements.
V. Research findings (cont.)

- Private HEIs
  - The governing board comprise mainly shareholders. In some cases, student or lecturer representatives in the board are shareholders.
  - The board will play an advisory role if the rector while the rector is the final decision maker if he or she is the owner.
  - The rector is hired by the board of shareholders, he cannot make any decisions, but report to the board for final decision.
V. Research findings (cont.)

- **Toward commercialization**
- With the fee-paying programs, public HEIs are expanded with more buildings to increase students enrolments, but with limited resources.
- Most tend to offer limited study areas due to the concentrated student enrolments and less costly operation.
- Lecturers are extremely busy teaching, having no time for research and professional development and for student consultation.
- The teaching service becomes almost the only means to generate income while other core missions such as research and public services are almost non-existent.
V. Research findings (cont.)

- Private HEIs are generally known to be operated as for-profit organizations.
  - “They [private HEIs] try to make profits or at least to survive their business rather than prioritizing societal needs and country development” (Personal interview)
- They offer mainly market-friendly programs and enlarge their class size to reduce their expenses albeit aware of affected quality.
- Tuition fees are reduced and waived to attract students.
- Entry requirements are set moderate and applied flexibly to absorb as many students as possible.
- They are expanded rapidly with limited resources.
V. Research findings (cont.)

- **Toward politicization**
- Top leadership at public HEIs are mostly appointed based on their connection, loyalty, and services to the ruling political party.
  - ...generally some [public HEIs] are more politically involved... [leaders] are required to be the members of the political party [the ruling party]...they are appointed according to the membership of the political party...[public HEIs] have to generate more income for political purpose. So it can be hard for some HEIs if they want to strengthen the quality as the income may decrease within a short time.
V. Research findings (cont.)

- PAI governing board is perceived as not having independent function.
  - ...the governing boards are not designed to represent all the stakeholders at all. They are designed to protect their institutions having power and political allies who stop any actions that might be demise to the institutions and the interest. How the concept that has been distorted is applied. (Interview)
V. Research findings (cont.)

• Most if not all private HEIs are known to be aligned with a political party, particularly the ruling party.

• Presidents or owners hold senior positions in the government. If not, they would be tempted to have themselves connected with the ruling party for promotion as high-ranking officials to sustain their business.

• Some private HEIs are awarded the title of Excellency as they are appointed as advisors to some high-ranking officials in the government.
VI. Conclusion

- Public HEI governance aims to attach importance to stakeholder involvement to take into account different perspectives for institutional development. However, the practice has not shown to work out in such a way.

- The PAI model also aims to involve stakeholders in the board but full participation in the board composition has never been realized due to the absence of the external stakeholders.

- Private HEIs are tempted to adopt business-like model, involving mainly shareholders in the board composition, which is prone to fundamental conflict of interest.
The market and political forces have influenced the sovereignty over HE in Cambodia.

The transition from free education to a fee-based system has made public HEIs become increasingly similar to private HEIs.

Their commercial practice is moving away from the entrepreneurial university concept (Clark, 1998; Etzkowitz, 2008), academic capitalism (Mars & Rhoades, 2012; Mars & Rhoades, 2012; Mars, Slaughter, & Rhoades, 2008), commercialization (Bok, 2003), practiced in developed and emerging economies.
VI. Conclusion (cont.)

- The paradigm shift in the HE sector toward devolution has implied a financial cutback from the government, providing institutional autonomy for public HEIs and increased freedom for private HEIs.
- Profit orientation in the provision of teaching services has appeared to overshadow the other core missions of HEIs in research and public services.
VII. Conclusion (cont.)

- Implication and contribution

  This study contributes to a broad research debate on institutional governance in Cambodia and the region where scholars can further investigate the issues of politicization, commercialization, and the potential impacts while HEIs are granted an increased autonomy and moving toward profit-seeking activities.

  Board members need to be carefully selected based on their qualifications in the related fields and independently of political party connection.

  Collective decisions and commitments with the governing boards need to be promoted for institutional development.
VII. Suggestions for future research

- Future research should investigate the same issues from the perspectives of internal stakeholders such as faculty members and students to give deeper insights into the on-the-ground implementation of the institutional governance.
- The Cambodian ministry of education has recently issued a new regulation on the board composition for public HEIs, which was not covered in the current study. This gap suggests that future study examines the implementation of the new regulation to provide insights into the current practice of public HEI governance.
References

References (cont.)


Thank you for your attention.