



ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION AND PREPARATION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN CAMBODIA

Implications for Improving Entrepreneurship Education and Programmes in Universities

Key Highlights

A recent survey study conducted by CDRI found that university students in Cambodia were keen to pursue an entrepreneurial career. The study also found that a simple provision of entrepreneurship education and support programmes at universities fell short of converting those interests into actions. This policy brief presents five recommendations that higher education institutes should consider adopting to increase entrepreneurial activities:

- Involve SMEs in providing internships and other work opportunities to help students learn from business owners.
- Organise innovation and entrepreneurship activities and competitions in collaboration with development partners and the private sector to provide students with hands-on experience and real-world learning opportunities.
- Allocate sufficient resources to sustaining collaboration with partners.
- Provide and strengthen startup support programmes (e.g., incubators and accelerators) and actively encourage students to take part in the programmes.
- Provide more information on how to finance business ideas.

Introduction

Equipping young people with the skills necessary for employment, including for becoming entrepreneurs, is a policy priority for facilitating Cambodia's social and economic transformation (MoEYS 2011; 2019). The provision of entrepreneurship education is one of the key factors in nurturing entrepreneurs (Ferrandiz, Fidel, and Conchado 2018; OECD and ERIA 2014). The entrepreneurship education comprises both learning of theories and knowledge as well as gaining practical experiences. This not only supports young people to acquire the knowledge and skills in setting up businesses but also enhances their

abilities to seize opportunities in a fast-changing society where technology use is ubiquitous (Lee, Chang, and Lim 2005; Sánchez 2013).

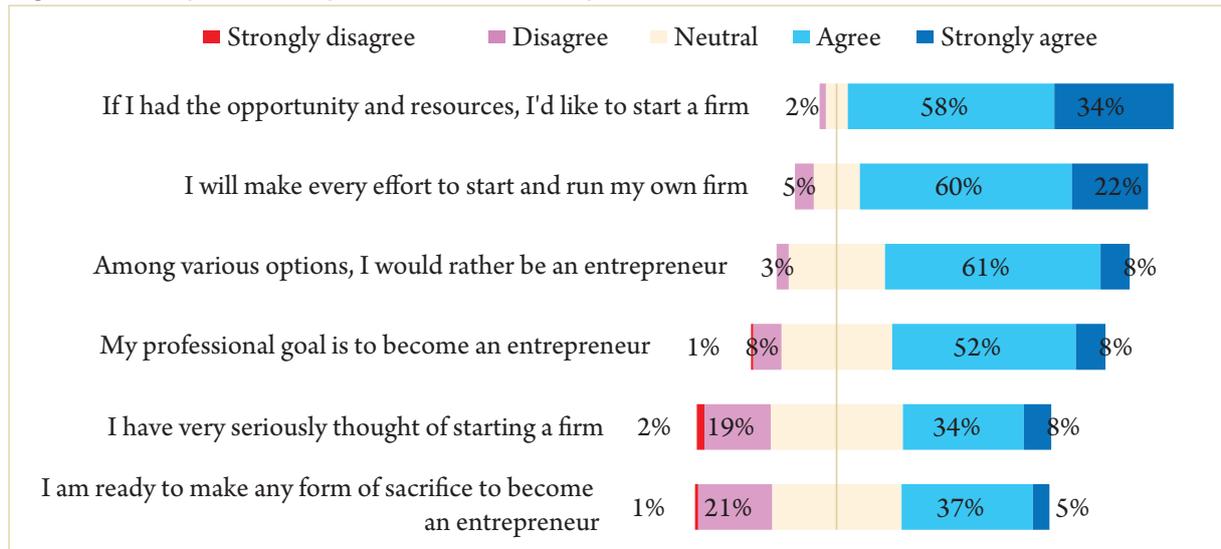
In recent years, higher education institutes (HEIs)¹ are increasingly interested in providing entrepreneurship education to students and running programmes to support innovation (ESCAP 2021), and data is much needed for further enhancing these initiatives' effectiveness and relevance.

This policy brief provides compelling evidence of Cambodian university students' interests and actions taken in starting their own businesses. The data was derived from a nationally representative survey

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¹ While the authors are aware that nurturing entrepreneurs requires multiple stakeholders' participation, this paper's recommendations are intended for HEIs. Please refer to the Working Paper titled 'A Quantitative Study on Entrepreneurial Intention of University Students in Cambodia' for the complete study and recommendations for other stakeholders.

Figure 1: Self-reported entrepreneurial intention in percent



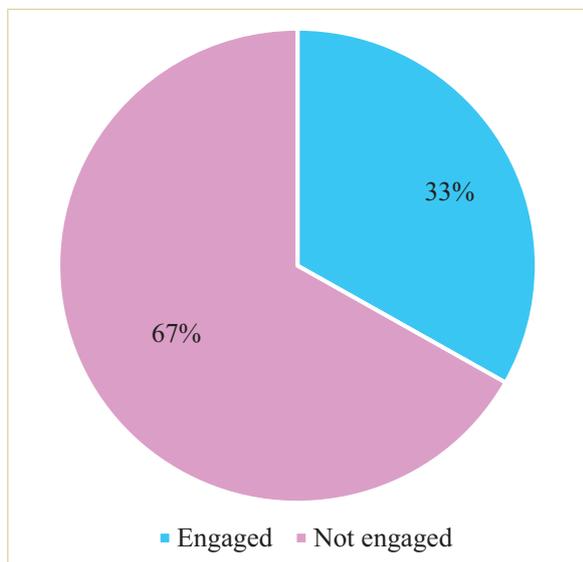
conducted in 2021 with a sample of 834 students from 19 public and private HEIs in Cambodia. Based on the findings, the study provides five recommendations for HEIs to improve their provision of entrepreneurship education and relevant support.

Key findings

1. Students have strong entrepreneurial intention but lack hands-on business experience

Entrepreneurial intention has been identified as one of the key predictors of actual entrepreneurial actions - the acts of establishing and running one's own businesses (Bird 1988; Ajzen 1991; Sheeran 2002). The present study assessed students' entrepreneurial intention using their responses to six statements. The results show that participants hold overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards becoming entrepreneurs (Figure 1). For example, most students agreed that if they had the resources and opportunity they would like to start their own firms.

Figure 2: Business engagement of all students in percent



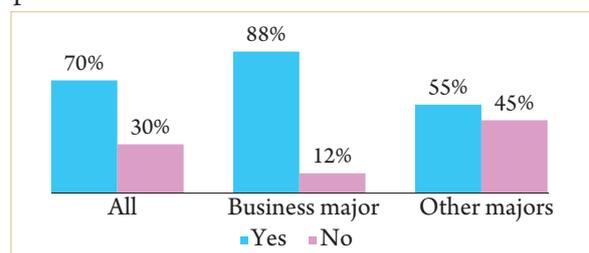
Although the students had strong intentions to start their own businesses, only a small number of them turned such intention into action. The survey finds that 33 percent (n=277) of the students had experience in business formation and/or operation (Figure 2). There appeared to be a gap between their intention and actions.

2. Most students received entrepreneurship education, yet they rarely joined supporting programmes that led to start-up experiences

Around two-thirds of the respondents confirmed that they received entrepreneurship education during their time in university (Figure 3). Students learnt about entrepreneurship mainly through undertaking courses in their respective universities. Those enrolled in business-related majors were more likely to have received entrepreneurship education than those enrolled in other majors.

The entrepreneurship education that was received was viewed by the students as effective in increasing their knowledge and motivation, as well as ability to identify business opportunities. For instance, students who had received entrepreneurship education, comparing to those who had not, were much more likely to say that their university courses increased their understanding and interest in running their own businesses; they were

Figure 3: Receiving entrepreneurship course in percent



also more likely to say that the courses increased their motivation to set up a new business (Figure 4).

Given the importance of practical experiences (Ferrandiz, Fidel, and Conchado 2018), we asked the respondents whether they knew of and participated in a range of support programmes provided by the universities or other organizations (see Figure 5).

The proportion of students who participated in the programmes or practices examined in this study was generally below 50 percent. The most popular programmes were training or workshops on

entrepreneurship (49 percent), entrepreneurship promotion events (30 percent) and business start-up programmes (26 percent). The least used programmes were accelerators (7 percent) and external business plan competitions (10 percent).

Concerningly, even when students knew of the programmes, their willingness to take part in the programmes remained low. More than 50 percent of respondents knew of but were rarely engaged in the following: mentoring, consultation, and business plan competition.

Figure 4: Usefulness of courses received at universities perceived by respondents who received EE and those who did not

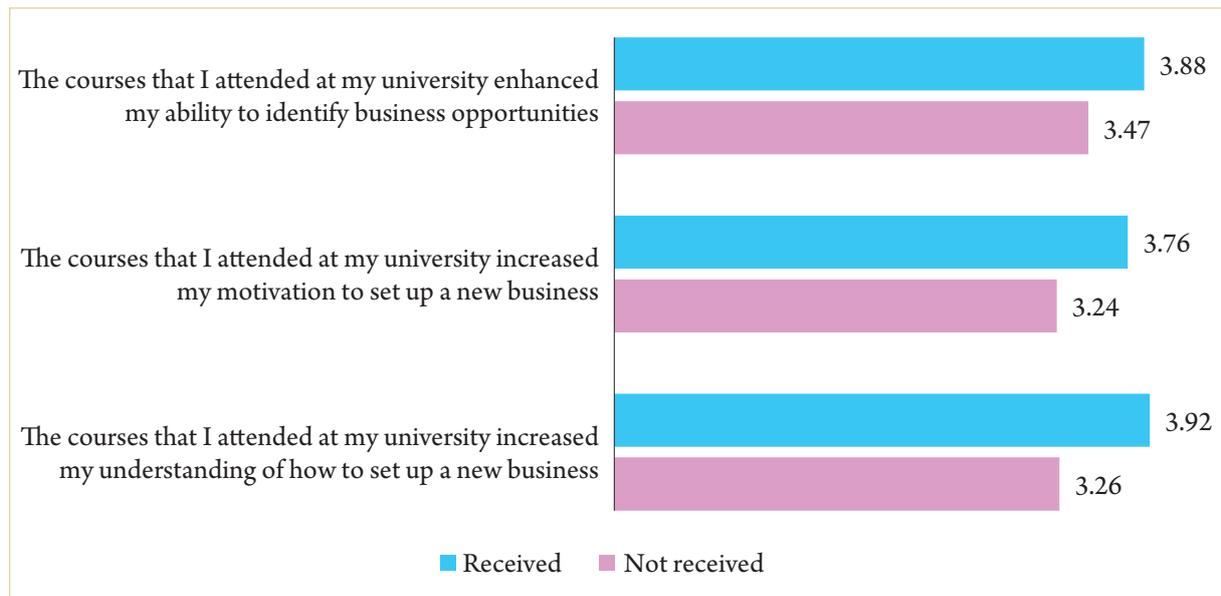
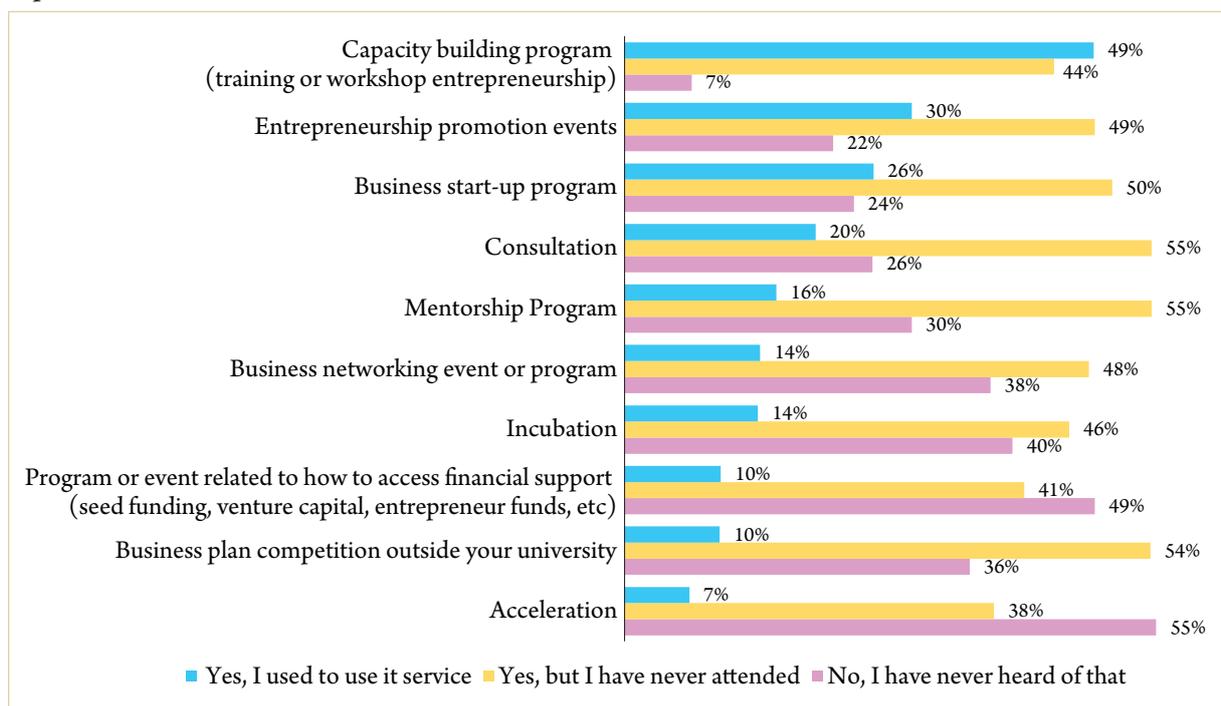


Figure 5: Students' participation in programs that provide support to start-ups and that offer "hands-on" experience



Implications for Higher Education Institutes

The study found that entrepreneurship education, which mainly took the form of university courses, was viewed by many students as helpful to improve their understanding of and motivation in starting a new business as well as to improve their abilities to identify business opportunities. However, there was a gap between intention and actions among many students. In other words, students were interested in starting their own companies, but few took actions. Also, there is limited student participation in startup supporting programmes that could have provided them with hands-on experiences and led to success in realising their startup plans. We put forward five recommendations that HEIs may consider to narrow the “intention-action gap” and to increase student participation in the supporting programmes.

- HEIs should involve small-and-medium enterprises (SMEs) in providing internships and other work opportunities for the university students. This would be beneficial to both students and SMEs and would also help increase entrepreneurial activities as students learn from business owners. The internship experience could also help ensure students’ readiness to work in those SMEs; this could potentially incentivise SMEs to collaborate with HEIs. In addition, HEIs should consider other types of support (i.e., counselling services for students) to provide meaningful internships that benefit both students and SMEs.
- It is advisable that HEIs collaborate with development partners and private sector actors to organise innovation and entrepreneurship activities and competitions. This, on the one hand, will further strengthen the entrepreneurial culture and, on the other, will extend students’ professional networks to enable discussions for starting their own businesses.
- The two options above will require dedicated resources from universities to ensure sustainable and effective collaboration between them and their partners.
- There is a need for providing and strengthening startup supporting programmes in universities. Incubators, accelerators, and startup programmes are effective ways to encourage students to act on their entrepreneurial intention and realise their business plans. For HEIs that have already been providing such experiences, they should more actively encourage students to take part in those programmes. For the less resourceful HEIs,

considerations should be made to utilize the existing startup support network in Cambodia, which comprises of impact hubs and innovation centres run by the government, NGOs and social enterprises.

- Additionally, the HEIs should consider providing more information on how to finance business ideas, as this study finds such information lacking.

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