

FACULTY ENGAGEMENT IN THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As internationalisation in higher education has grown from individually initiated activities or programs, into a process that is comprehensively and strategically operated, key stakeholders, such as university leaders, academics and administrative staff at higher education institutions (HEIs) near and far have been required to participate in internationalisation initiatives. Predominantly they have had limited awareness of what the process is, should, or could be (Buckner and Stein 2020). To date, many attempts have been made to define higher education internationalisation, and there has not yet been any agreement on a definitive definition of the term. Despite that, the working definition proposed by Knight (2004, 11), describing internationalisation as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education”, has been the most frequently cited. To make the term less elitist and more inclusive, de Wit et al. (2015, 29), proposed a revised version - “the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society”. This put the focus on the intent of HEIs to internationalise, through infusing international, inter-cultural and global dimensions into purpose, function and delivery to serve both economic growth and societal needs. Further, internationalisation is believed to

present a vast variety of benefits to HEIs: it can improve the quality of academic programs, increase the international awareness of students and global engagement, attract talent, and boost international reputation and ranking. Research and knowledge production, international partnerships and cooperation, and revenue generation are among the most reported benefits (Knight 1994; 2004). With this, HEIs around the world have put substantial efforts into incorporating international dimensions into key areas of institutional operation, including teaching and learning, research and community services.

The Cambodian Context

Cambodia’s higher education system was first modernised during the 1960s when the French introduced the formal western education system to the Cambodian traditional form. Since then, the system has experienced various changes, largely driven by colonialism, Buddhist socialism, republicanism, Maoist communism, Vietnamese communism, UN transactional authoritarianism, and a more hybrid democratism (Chet and Un 2019; Sam, Zain and Jamil 2012). Some might say that these foreign influences have made a major contribution to the rehabilitation and advancement of higher education. However, such a notion is inappropriate in today’s context as the development assistance could, in some ways, bring about an imbalance between the local and international aspects within higher education. Consequently it would have an impact on institutional autonomy, the use of local language, and the relevance of discourse to the labour market (Leng 2013). Although this might be the case, Cambodian HEIs still make use of international cooperation to streamline their institutional development, as the process is perceived to be assisting the institutions to attain international academic standards, innovative curriculum design, the creation and acquisition of new knowledge and technology, and the development of human resource capacity

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(Chet and Un 2019; Yun 2014). Internationalising curriculum has also been cited by Dash (2017) as an effective strategy to expose students, especially those who are immobile, to international content to develop the skills necessary to compete in the regional and global labour markets. Therefore, more and more internationalised curricula are necessary for educating and training the future workforce for the culturally diverse world that is full of intricacies. Even so, previous research has indicated that the internationalisation of Cambodian HEIs is still at an early or infancy stage (Chet 2006; Hill, Hell and Cauter 2021; Yun 2014), with most of the associated activities seen through the mobility of students and staff, and other activities, such as recruiting and hosting foreign students, are still insignificant (Chet 2006; Dash 2017). Policy-wise, countless efforts have been made to tackle issues within higher education, but only one has explicitly addressed the issues of internationalisation. The Higher Education Roadmap 2017-2030 and Beyond sets three key indicators in order for Cambodia to boost its international engagement and prepare its higher education sector for regional and global integration. Those are: (1) enhancing inbound and outbound mobility for students and faculty members; (2) promoting academic programs and institution mobility; and (3) upgrading selected academic programs offered by Cambodian HEIs to reach regional and international standards (MoEYS 2017, 8). Unfortunately, such processes are not always clearly understood and their realisation remains patchy. This results in different approaches being taken by individual HEIs. For some, the term simply refers to those activities that enhance the quality of teaching and learning and the university brand image, such as an updated and internationally recognised curriculum, the adoption of English as a medium of instruction, international research collaboration, and the development of institutional infrastructure. Others view it as a way to boost inter-cultural understanding that can be achieved through student and staff exchanges (Tek and Leng 2017; Yun 2014). Considerations relating to dual degrees, transnational programs, and branch campuses are still minimal in the Cambodian context.

Although extensive research has been carried out on various topics related to the internationalisation of Cambodian higher education, studies about the role and engagement of faculties in such a context

remains rare. Faculty members have long been considered to have a major impact on institutional missions, including teaching, research and services as they have a direct influence on curricular content, research and collaboration, and other areas. Hence, this paper intends to succinctly review relevant literature related to faculty engagement in university internationalisation to examine its characteristics and the factors influencing the decision of faculty members to participate in such activities.

This paper first gives a brief overview of the recent evolution of the internationalisation concept and narrows it down to the Cambodian context. It then presents various forms of international engagement by faculties, and examines the factors and mechanisms that encourage this active participation. The paper concludes by discussing the implications for the development of Cambodia's higher education. Further research is also proposed.

Forms of Faculty Engagement in the Internationalisation of Higher Education

Faculty members play a major role in institutional development, and their engagement strongly affects the level at which they participate in such activities; notwithstanding, research focusing on this particular group has mostly been absent from studies on the internationalisation of higher education (Childress 2010; Finkelstein, Walker and Chen 2013; Friesen 2013; Stohl 2007). Through international teaching and research, joint research publications and reviews, membership of international research networks, and international development projects, faculty members have enjoyed opportunities to explore the world and to bring back knowledge and experience to share with students and their colleagues on their home campus. Childress (2010) echoed the idea when she pointed out that faculty members have a direct influence on the teaching, research and services of HEIs as they are closely involved in composing the program curricula, the development and implementation of joint research studies with foreign partners, and with international development projects. Using their authority and power, they can decide to infuse international, global and cultural dimensions into their curricula, research projects and services or can even take part in their university's internationalisation process.

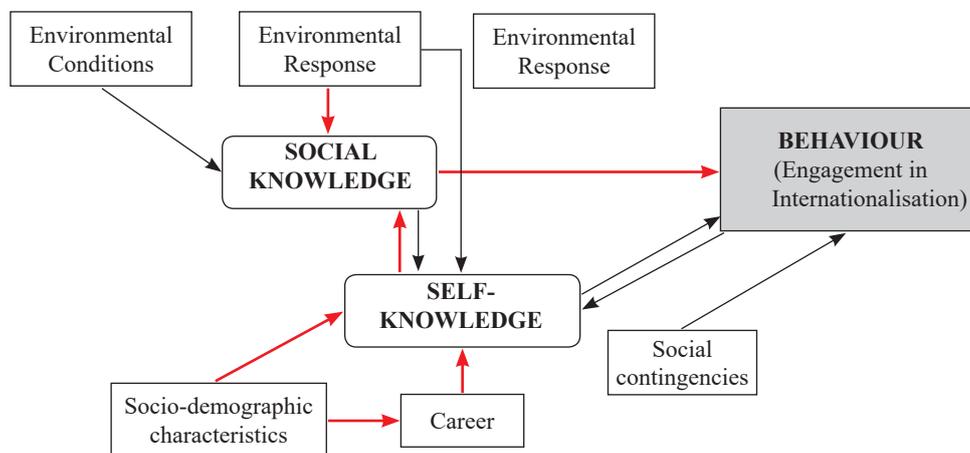
Regarding faculty international engagement, Knight (1994) identified several academic activities and services that are carried out, or should be taken into account, for the development and implementation of internationalisation plans. Those activities consist of curricular development, students’ international exposure, international student mentorship, mobility programs, foreign language courses, international development projects, international partnership agreements, joint international research, area/theme studies, cross-cultural training, extracurricular activities, and other institutional services with international dimensions. All of these require the active engagement of faculty members. In another way of looking at it, faculty international activities can be classified into four specific types – research and teaching, curriculum development, overseas study programs, and other areas such as alumni networks, university partnerships, joint or dual degree programs, and international research committees (Dewey and Duff 2009). Beatty (2013) provides more details about each category by positing that many activities can be considered as forms of faculty international engagement. These include internationalising curricula through the inclusion of international students as learning resources for academic programs, incorporating global issues into the courses, presenting research findings at international academic conferences, reviewing and publishing articles in international journals, leading students on exposure or field trips abroad, participating in

inter-cultural and international training programs and other professional development, such as being of service to a committee focusing on university internationalisation or belonging to other international associations. However, involving faculty members in internationalisation activities can be quite challenging as some view this as additional work and are not willing to participate unless rewards are given, and institutional support and guidance are available (Beatty 2013; Childress 2010; Clarke and Yang 2019; Dewey and Duff 2009; Friesen 2013). Otherwise, even those with the passion to carry out international initiatives are not able to make any significant impact.

Factors Influencing Faculty Engagement in the Internationalisation of Higher Education

A large volume of literature has been published describing faculties’ motives for engaging in international initiatives. One of the earliest in the field, Blackburn and Lawrence (1995), identified two sets of internal characteristics as the determinants behind such involvement (Figure 1). One is self-knowledge, which is a kind of self-assessed competence that is necessary to attain certain tasks or goals, and is closely associated with the performance of faculty roles; it includes the interests and preferences, commitment, self-belief, attitudes, and disposition, and those components are strongly affected by socio-demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity, international educational experience, and career features, including rank,

Figure 1: Faculty decision-making and behaviour framework



Note: The thick red arrows represent the strong influences from one component to another, while the lighter black ones signify a lower level of influence.

Source: Blackburn and Lawrence (1995)

career age, the field of specialisation and the type of affiliated institution. The second, social knowledge, embraces individuals' perceptions of their social environment, particularly how they think about their institution's prime agendas, values, and culture as well as collegiality. Other social and cultural contingencies such as marriage and childbirth are also considered in the faculty decision-making and behaviour model of Blackburn and Lawrence (1995) (Figure 1).

Since then, several studies have been carried out to test the model. For instance, Finkelstein et al. (2013), who examined the factors influencing faculty decisions to collaborate with foreign partners in research, confirmed that both social and self-knowledge are the key variables in predicting faculty engagement in international research. Perceptions relating to collaborative working conditions are critical: it was discovered that those who worked in an institution in which internationalisation activities were driven by academia, were more likely to take part in cross-border research projects than those whose institutions were administrator-led. Speaking of self-knowledge, faculty interests and role preferences did contribute significantly to international research collaboration, as certain efforts being put into certain tasks were strongly associated with the level of interest and the types of work responsibility that individual faculty members had. These results are supported by Nyangau (2020), as she postulates that strong belief in, and favourable attitudes towards the institutional environment have a robust effect on faculty engagement in internationalisation. Thus, the perceived self-competence and positive perceptions about the social environment appear to be critical in faculty engagement in the journey towards the internationalisation of higher education.

Other demographic and career features also deserve a mention as contributing factors to the international engagement of faculties. Vabø et al. (2014) draw attention to the gender difference in faculty international engagement: they reveal that a higher percentage of male faculty members were involved in projects that required cross-border mobility, whereas their female counterparts were more active in supporting internationalisation through at-home activities. International exposure has also been identified as an enabling factor in the pursuit of faculty engagement in internationalisation

activities because the wider the range of international experience faculty members have, the higher their level of engagement becomes; and with this kind of exposure, they are also likely to have a more positive attitude and greater belief in the process. Consequently, they would have a higher level of participation (Calikoglu, Lee and Arslan 2020; Friesen 2013; Romani-Dias, Carneiro and Barbosa 2019; Schwietz 2006).

Contrary to the internal constructs discussed above, Knight (1994, 7) reminds us to also give importance to institutional aspects. She emphasises that "it can permit (or prohibit) the integration of an international dimension into primary functions of institution". The explicit expression of commitment and support from university leaders is essential for the successful implementation of internationalisation, especially if those activities require the active engagement of everyone within the institutions, especially the faculty members (Beatty 2013; Calikoglu, Lee and Arslan 2020; Childress 2010; Li and Tu 2016; Nyangau 2020). From a clear vision and objectives, precise strategic actions can emerge in terms of resource mobilisation, and staff performance evaluation and promotion. However, HEIs should be cautious about the possible misalignment between the institutional strategic documents and faculties' understanding of institutional rationales relating to internationalisation; to ensure that correct information is effectively disseminated, Friesen (2013) proposes a number of actions to be taken: first, there should be clear communication about internationalisation, its meaning, purpose, and value among all staff; next, dialogues should be held to provide opportunities for university management, academic and administrative staff, and other relevant stakeholders to discuss the issues; last, an enabling environment should be established to support faculty engagement in internationalisation. That said, Li and Tu (2016) argue that improving external circumstances alone (i.e., material and social support) would not have much effect on faculty engagement in internationalisation. It is vital that the ability of faculties concerning international engagement, such as foreign language proficiency and inter-cultural competency, be improved so that they can proactively take part, or even initiate internationalisation plans both at their home campus and abroad.

Conclusion and Implications

This paper aimed to examine the characteristics of faculty engagement in internationalisation and the factors influencing the participation of faculty members in such a process. The literature consistently pointed out that faculty members play a significant role in institutional quests for internationalisation as they have a direct influence on most international activities, and their self- and social knowledge strongly affect the way in which they participate in such activities. Generally, their international pursuits can be seen through teaching and curriculum innovation, cross-border mobility, international research collaboration and networks, and the implementation of development project.

The review indicated that self-knowledge and the perception toward the institution's work environment are the keys to boost faculty international engagement. Once faculty members are confident that they have all the necessary knowledge and skills to perform tasks with international nature, there would be a higher chance they are fully dedicated to those tasks. Commitment and support explicitly expressed by institutional leaders also strongly affect faculty participation in international activities as this has a direct link to work recognition and reward system.

In general, therefore, HEIs must take into account faculty's influential roles and their engagement so as to guarantee the successful implementation of internationalisation plans and to achieve the ultimate goal of an improvement in education quality and an expansion in access. To enhance the international engagement of faculties and to upgrade their internationalisation development status, Cambodian HEIs should first ensure that their faculty members are equipped with the competences to implement international tasks. These are typically foreign language proficiency, inter-cultural and communication skills, and technical knowledge. Effective communication channels should be in place so that faculty members can understand more comprehensively the rationales behind, and process of institutional internationalisation. Incentives and a reward system are other important measures to encourage faculties to take part in such international endeavours. Last, but most importantly, an effective funding mechanism is needed to boost the international engagement of faculties. Cost-sharing, whether it be between faculty members

and institutions, or institutions and third parties, also comes into play as Cambodian HEIs most often face financial constraints, particularly for this costly quest towards internationalisation.

Several questions in need of further investigation emerged from this literature review. Not much is known about faculty engagement in internationalisation in Cambodia due to the lack of existing literature about it. Therefore, a nationally representative study should be carried out to determine the current status of higher education internationalisation as well as faculty engagement in related initiatives. How faculty members have been involved and encouraged to participate in the process is also a question that emerged from this review. With the indicators set in the Higher Education Roadmap 2017-2030 – facilitating student and faculty mobility, promoting international academic programs and overseas branch campuses, and upgrading academic programs to international standards – another important question emerges: what roles do faculty members play towards achieving these internationalisation aspirations?

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