

The Current Student Services in Higher Education: Key Challenges and Solution Priorities

Moeurn Chantrea^{1✉}

(1) Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia

✉ Corresponding author

[moeurn.chantrea.rupp@moeys.gov.kh]

Abstract

The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports has launched higher education reforms to develop human capital since 2014. In 2024, the big reform was created in response to the vision of the Kingdom Vision 2050. Although higher education institutions have rapidly grown—from 8 in late 1997 to 194 by early 2025—student services remain underdeveloped and lack support. This qualitative study explores challenges in providing student services across Cambodian HEIs. Researchers used purposive sampling and interviewed 97 participants from seven stakeholder groups. Interviews included one-on-one and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis revealed challenges, such as assessment mechanisms, planning, infrastructure, facilities, budget constraints, student perspectives, and the commitment of university management. The findings further indicate that higher education institutions must take proactive and immediate measures to effectively support students' learning trajectories. Drawing on stakeholder insights, this study recommends that Cambodian higher education institutions strengthen student services through comprehensive support frameworks. These measures will enhance student outcomes, institutional resilience, and the overall quality and competitiveness of higher education.

Keywords: *Student Service, Challenges, Solution, Strategic, Higher Education*

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education are essential in developing human capital to fulfill economic and social needs. As stated by Arnold and King (1997), a key goal of higher education is to promote lifelong learning in students. Clifton (2011) highlighted that institutions of higher education are crucial foundations for maintaining a robust economy. Lane (2012) claimed that progress in higher education greatly propels economic growth. Likewise, the World Bank (2012) noted that higher education advantages individual students while also acting as a cornerstone for wider socioeconomic progress. Zimpher (2012) reinforced this perspective, claiming that higher education provides individuals with the expertise and abilities necessary to obtain lucrative employment and create more successful futures.

In the context of Cambodia, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS, 2014) emphasized that the higher education sub-sector is essential for developing intellectual capital as a means of national wealth and prosperity. This procedure aids in current and upcoming socio-economic development. Following the privatization of higher education in Cambodia, there has been a notable rise in the number of higher education institutions. The number increased from 8 in 1997 to 189 in the 2022–2023 academic year (MoEYS, 2024a). In response to changing educational requirements, the Royal Government of Cambodia, via MoEYS, has established multiple strategic plans, policies, and legal structures. These initiatives seek to enhance educational standards and correspond with the needs of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Even with these advancements, students in Cambodian higher education still encounter various challenges, especially individuals from underprivileged backgrounds, such as those from low-income households, students with disabilities, and others dealing with socio-economic difficulties. Audin and Davy (2003) noted that these students frequently face challenges with enrollment, academic issues, and insufficient social and financial assistance. Katrevich and Aruguete (2017) discovered that students without parental support in their studies generally achieve lower

academic performance compared to those who benefit from family guidance. Mackie (1998) highlighted that homesickness is a significant factor leading to student dropouts. McGivney (1996) highlighted that inadequate study skills, trouble adjusting to the academic setting, along personal and financial issues, are major obstacles to student achievement. Nonetheless, MoEYS (2024b) indicated an uptick in the higher education enrollment rate for students aged 18 to 24, climbing from 9% in 2013–2014 to 17.9% in 2022–2023.

Considering these challenges, there is an increasing necessity to enhance student services to more effectively assist both the overall student body and individuals at greater risk of academic failure. Zhai (2004) discovered that a limited number of students make use of the support services that are accessible. Conversely, DiRamio and Payne (2007) showed that access to counseling, career development, and mental health services for students has a positive impact on academic achievement. Jaswinder and Associates (2008) suggested that organized programs play a crucial role in enhancing students' educational experiences and results. UNESCO (2009) reaffirmed this, noting that student services play a crucial role in offering support and opportunities that guarantee access to quality knowledge and skills. Ehrenberg and Webber (2010) indicated that these services particularly assist students facing academic or financial challenges. Ciobanu (2013) also highlighted that institutions that focus on student services usually enhance staff development, academic success, and administrative capabilities. Successful student support systems also lead to increased institutional satisfaction and reduced dropout rates (Ciobanu, 2013). In a similar vein, Siu and Associates (2014) discovered that nurturing environments promote favorable psychological results and boost student competitiveness.

However, studies indicate that numerous higher education institutions fail to effectively organize or emphasize student services. Mucciante (2009) noted that many institutions do not grasp the importance of student support systems. Choudaha (2009) noted that student organizations and volunteer initiatives frequently function with inadequate institutional support. The lack of defined policies and frameworks leads to disjointed services that do not fully meet student needs. Chickering (1969) contended that a primary challenge in student affairs is creating partnerships that foster learning for an improved life, rather than just continual learning. Welch (2008) cautioned that a rise in student enrollment without corresponding service growth hinders the efficiency of support initiatives. Schuh et al. (2017) highlighted that ineffective service integration leads to lost chances for involvement and educational achievement. Copeland (1992) emphasized the crucial role of orientation and career counseling, often neglected by many institutions, even though they are vital for equipping students for the job market.

Political meddling continues to pose a major obstacle. In Cambodia, positions of leadership in higher education are occasionally given based on political ties instead of competencies, hindering reform and diminishing institutional strength. This setting hinders attempts to enhance student services and the quality of academia. Consequently, there is an increasing demand to enhance student services in higher education institutions to more effectively aid student success and fulfill labor market needs. This research explores the difficulties in delivering student services within Cambodian higher education and presents strategic suggestions to enhance student learning results. The study focuses on two key inquiries: What are the major obstacles in providing student services in Higher Education in Cambodia?

Literature Review

Student services are essential for enhancing achievement and retention by supporting students beyond academics through career guidance, wellness programs, and housing assistance, thereby strengthening institutional engagement and improving outcomes (Ciobanu, 2013). In Cambodia, the higher education sector is rebuilding after years of civil conflict, with initiatives such as the "Vision for Higher Education 2030" aiming to align education with labor market needs. While some private institutions emphasize teaching, they often lack resources for comprehensive student support, whereas public institutions are increasingly investing in research and student services to reduce dropouts and attract prospective students (Bucuy, 2023; Chanthavong, 2015).

However, the delivery of student services varies widely, especially in developing nations, due to limited financial resources, administrative priorities, and a lack of qualified staff. Developing countries face challenges like internal inefficiencies and social equity concerns (World Bank, 1994). The difficulty in meeting diverse student needs, which are influenced by socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, further complicates service delivery (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). Additionally, rising student expectations and tuition fees mean that inadequate support can hinder student success, highlighting the need for high-quality services that justify students' financial investment (Bucuy, 2022).

This study identifies six key challenges in implementing student services in Cambodian HEIs: (1) assessment and attention mechanisms, (2) structure and action planning, (3) human resources and digital infrastructure, (4) physical infrastructure and facilities, (5) budget constraints, and (6) perspectives on students in higher education. Each challenge is discussed in detail below. Active engagement from diverse stakeholders is essential to improve the quality, relevance, and sustainability of student services to meet the changing needs of higher education institutions.

Challenges

Assessment Mechanism

A major barrier to the effective delivery of student services in Cambodian higher education institutions (HEIs) lies in the absence of robust systems for quality assurance and assessment. Following the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, Cambodia's higher education system underwent reconstruction, marked by the rapid expansion of public and private institutions. However, this growth occurred before the establishment of a formal quality assurance framework, leaving significant gaps in governance and oversight. The Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC), founded in 2003 to regulate and enhance the quality of higher education, has made strides toward formalizing standards (Say Un & Say, 2018). Yet, its influence remains limited due to the non-mandatory nature of its guidelines. Institutions are not legally compelled to adopt the ACC's quality standards, resulting in uneven implementation across the sector (CEC, 2023). This lack of binding regulation undermines consistency and has contributed to the marginalization of student services in institutional policies and planning. Such regulatory weaknesses illustrate a broader structural challenge in ensuring that student services are fully recognized as integral to higher education quality.

Beyond regulatory limitations, Cambodian HEIs often lack comprehensive mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating student services, which restricts opportunities for holistic student development. Initiatives such as workshops, seminars, and extracurricular activities remain underdeveloped, leaving students with limited avenues for learning beyond the classroom (Choudaha, 2009). Research suggests that many institutions undervalue student services, perceiving them as secondary to academic instruction (Mucciante, 2009; Choudaha, 2009). Consequently, support programs are frequently implemented without clear objectives, systematic organization, or attention to student needs, thereby diminishing their effectiveness. The absence of standardized evaluation tools or accountability measures further weakens institutional responsiveness, as the impact of student services is rarely assessed. This inconsistency in monitoring and improvement reflects a wider pattern in Cambodian higher education, where student support structures remain fragmented and underprioritized. Addressing these systemic shortcomings requires not only regulatory reforms but also attention to other interrelated challenges—such as financial constraints, cultural barriers, and limited technological capacity—that continue to shape the effectiveness of student services in Cambodia.

Structure and Action Plan

A second major challenge in strengthening student services within Cambodian higher education institutions (HEIs) is the absence of a clearly defined organizational framework and strategic action plan. An operational framework is essential to ensure that student services align with institutional objectives and effectively address student needs. Without clearly designated responsibilities and coordinated efforts across departments, the efficiency and impact of student support are significantly reduced. Sandeen and Barr (2006) emphasized that student services

should be positioned under direct institutional leadership, recommending that student affairs units be accountable to the university president or other senior administrators. Such an arrangement embeds student services within the institution's core mission, ensuring adequate authority, visibility, and resources. Moreover, a structured framework fosters interdepartmental collaboration, supports policy development, and enhances the institution's capacity to respond to evolving student demands.

Strategic planning for student services must be grounded in empirical evidence and institutional data to ensure relevance and effectiveness. Planning processes should prioritize identifying student needs, allocating resources, and establishing evaluation mechanisms. Cashin et al. (1998) argued that data-driven action plans are vital in shaping services that address both current and emerging student demands. In addition, engagement with external stakeholders—such as international partners and educational networks—through collaborative initiatives and research exchanges can improve the quality and global relevance of student services (Perkins, 1999). Student services should also provide continuous support throughout the academic journey, from enrollment to graduation, equipping students with essential resources and guidance to succeed (Perkins, 1999). Building on this perspective, West (2022) highlighted the importance of designing curricula and student support systems that reflect the diversity of student experiences and challenges. In practice, however, many Cambodian HEIs still treat student services as secondary functions with vague roles and limited influence on institutional decision-making. As a result, the absence of structured planning often leads to fragmented implementation, weak alignment with institutional goals, and inadequate monitoring, thereby limiting the potential of student services to strengthen retention, academic performance, and institutional engagement.

Human Resources and Digital Infrastructure

A third major obstacle to effective student services in Cambodian higher education institutions (HEIs) is the shortage of both qualified personnel and technological resources. The quality of student services depends heavily on the professional competence, training, and continuous development of service providers, as well as the technological systems that support service delivery. Sandeen (1988) argued that student service professionals must demonstrate strong interpersonal and professional skills to address academic, personal, emotional, and career needs. Similarly, Astin (1993) and McAloon (1994) emphasized the importance of training providers to identify and assist students facing social, financial, or psychological difficulties, while Simmons, Barrett, and Simmons (1998) highlighted counseling, active listening, and empathy as essential for trust-building and student well-being. However, many Cambodian HEIs lack sufficient qualified personnel to meet these needs. Jaswinder et al. (2008) found that the absence of trained staff often results in inadequate services, a problem further worsened by low salaries, high turnover, and time constraints among advisors (Hung, 2008; World Bank, 1994; Lea & Farbus, 2000). At the same time, the limited adoption of digital technologies restricts accessibility and efficiency, despite research showing the value of telecommunications and online platforms for modern student support (Himelein, 1995; Baghiropova, 2008; Lundeman, 2008).

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online learning platforms in Cambodia, yet substantial challenges remain in terms of cost, digital skills, and reliable internet infrastructure (Chet et al., 2020; Phyrom & Sopheak, 2023). Many institutions continue to operate with outdated systems that limit the provision of technology-driven services (Forrest, 1987). High internet fees, low English proficiency, and a shortage of qualified IT staff further constrain progress (Loo & Hang, 2007). Rupande (2016) noted that without significant investment in digital infrastructure, institutions cannot deliver high-quality services, while Crawford et al. (2020) stressed the importance of equipping both staff and students with the skills to use digital tools effectively. Although recent efforts indicate greater attention to digital transformation, the persistent lack of financial investment, skilled personnel, and capacity building continues to undermine progress. Addressing these human and technological limitations is therefore essential to strengthening student services and ensuring sustainable improvements in Cambodian higher education.

Physical Infrastructure and Facilities

Infrastructure remains a critical determinant of the effectiveness of student services, yet it continues to represent one of the most pressing challenges facing higher education institutions (HEIs) in Cambodia. Adequate infrastructure—including libraries, laboratories, housing, and healthcare services—is fundamental to supporting both students' academic achievement and their overall well-being. However, many Cambodian HEIs struggle with limited financial resources and inadequate institutional funding, which restrict their ability to develop and sustain essential facilities. UNESCO (2000) observed that higher education in developing countries is often hampered by weak infrastructure, insufficient teaching and learning resources, and underdeveloped laboratories, all of which prevent students from gaining practical competencies and engaging in independent research. In Cambodia, this situation is further aggravated by the scarcity of modern facilities capable of supporting experiential learning, even as student enrollment continues to rise. Dy and Ogunniran (2019) emphasized that the absence of essential science laboratories in many institutions has significantly constrained opportunities for high-quality, practice-oriented education.

In addition, other core components of student support infrastructure remain severely underdeveloped. Library facilities in many Cambodian HEIs are understocked, lacking sufficient academic resources and study spaces to promote independent learning and research (Dem, 2017). Similarly, limited access to student housing—available to only 5% of students in some institutions compared to the global average of approximately 30% (Stewart, 2022)—creates significant challenges, especially for students from rural or disadvantaged backgrounds. Inadequate housing not only imposes financial and emotional stress but can also contribute to attrition (Silva, 2009). Healthcare provision represents another area of concern; many HEIs lack adequate health, mental health, and counseling services, leaving vulnerable students at risk of disengagement or withdrawal. Although the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), alongside development partners, has acknowledged the urgent need to improve infrastructure, progress remains slow and uneven across institutions due to fragmented coordination and constrained budgets. Consequently, inadequate infrastructure continues to limit both the academic and personal development of students and undermines efforts to align Cambodian HEIs with regional and international quality benchmarks.

Budget Constraints

Ongoing financial constraints represent a significant challenge for the provision of student services in Cambodian higher education institutions (HEIs). Budget limitations affect all areas of student assistance, from essential services to long-term initiatives, compelling institutions to operate amidst financial unpredictability. As noted by Tilak (2003) and UNESCO (2009), the combination of increasing student enrollment and insufficient funding exacerbates disparities between the services offered and the actual needs of students. In Cambodia, these limitations restrict the availability of comprehensive support frameworks, including academic guidance, career counseling, mental health services, and extracurricular programs. The impacts of financial shortfalls are extensive: insufficient funding impedes the development of student support programs and limits institutional adaptability to evolving student requirements (Andrews, 2008). Funding deficits also affect staff salaries, training, and retention, as student services personnel frequently earn less than colleagues in other university divisions, resulting in higher turnover and reduced consistency in service delivery (Welch, 2008; Hung, 2008). Keng et al. (2015) further highlighted that many Cambodian HEIs struggle to fulfill their institutional missions due to financial constraints, a challenge exacerbated during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted conventional revenue sources and necessitated resource shifts to online learning platforms (Whitford, 2020). Consequently, outreach initiatives, research projects, and other critical student support services were delayed or suspended, undermining both student success and institutional growth.

The growing financial pressures are compounded by rising costs associated with digital infrastructure, educational technology, and expanding student enrollment (Moeurn, 2025). To manage constrained budgets, some HEIs have reduced spending on research, student engagement, and service development, potentially compromising educational quality and equity. Despite increasing recognition of the importance of student services, funding remains inadequate, reflecting

a broader trend in higher education where academic departments often receive priority over student support. External funding from donors and agencies tends to be project-specific and unsustainable, underscoring the need for stable, long-term investment. Moeurn (2025) found that sustainable financial support is essential for developing inclusive, student-centered environments and for consistently enhancing services in line with national education objectives. Ultimately, financial constraints present a major obstacle to effective student services in Cambodian higher education, necessitating a comprehensive approach that includes increased government funding, improved institutional resource mobilization, and integration of student support within broader higher education policies and strategic planning (Moeurn et al., 2025).

Perspectives on Students

A critical yet frequently overlooked aspect of implementing student services in higher education institutions (HEIs) is the manner in which institutions perceive and engage with students. Recognizing students as active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge is essential for creating inclusive and effective learning environments. Students, as key stakeholders, should be involved in institutional decision-making processes, particularly in areas related to educational services, program development, and policy implementation. Historically, students have not consistently been allowed to influence higher education development. Erickson and Strommer (1991) noted that despite global efforts to enhance the quality of higher education systems, students often remain excluded from both institutional and policy-level discussions. In contrast, adopting a learner-centered approach allows institutions to respond more effectively to the diverse and evolving needs of their students. Perkins (1999) emphasized that students should be regarded as primary clients of the education system, with roles extending beyond classroom engagement to include participation in extracurricular activities, campus governance, and feedback mechanisms that inform institutional improvement. Institutions that embrace this perspective are more likely to develop high-quality student services that directly contribute to student retention and achievement. Moreover, as Zepke (2014) and Bielecki (2017) assert, viewing students as essential clients is crucial for institutional sustainability, reputation, and competitiveness; neglecting this perspective can increase dropout rates and diminish institutional credibility.

Furthermore, students' perceptions of whether their opinions are valued significantly influence their sense of belonging, motivation, and academic success. Institutions that actively solicit and respond to student feedback tend to experience higher levels of student satisfaction and retention. Partners (2006) highlighted that HEIs incorporating student input into service design and delivery are more successful in achieving educational objectives and fostering campus community. In Cambodia, this approach is particularly relevant given the rapid expansion and diversification of the higher education sector. As institutions seek to support students from varied socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, it is vital to tailor services based on actual student experiences and expectations. Involving students in decision-making processes enables the creation of more inclusive, equitable, and effective support systems. In summary, recognizing students as central stakeholders and collaborators in higher education enhances the quality and efficiency of student services, fostering supportive learning environments that promote academic success, well-being, and institutional excellence.

Higher education management commitment

In Cambodia, the majority of higher education institutions primarily emphasize teaching and learning, often at the expense of research and student support services. Hangchuon (2016) notes that some private HEIs focus heavily on instruction while lacking adequate human and financial resources, limiting their capacity to provide comprehensive support. Similarly, Muccuante (2009) and Chodaha (2009) observe that many universities have yet to recognize the value of student services, resulting in underdeveloped support programs. Some institutions have gained autonomy as PAI public institutions, allowing them to act independently without awaiting external guidance (Moeurn, 2025). Despite this autonomy, there remains a notable reluctance among both public and private HEIs to actively enhance student services, particularly in established institutions with high enrollment rates, where the perceived urgency for such improvements is low.

Institutional leadership is critical in addressing these gaps by prioritizing and systematically planning student services. Leaders must regularly assess and understand student needs to ensure educational and support programs are effective and responsive. Avci et al. (2015) emphasize that leaders require comprehensive knowledge of higher education, coupled with clear vision and strategic recommendations, to drive institutional development. Jaswinder et al. (2008) further highlight that even well-organized student support services cannot meet student needs unless the quality of service provision is ensured and planning aligns with actual student requirements. West (2022) reinforces the necessity of tailoring curricula and support mechanisms to the specific contexts and circumstances of students, underscoring the pivotal role of leadership in fostering meaningful student engagement and success.

Solution Priorities

Higher education institutions rely on several critical components to deliver effective student services, including leadership, staff, organizational structure, budgeting, technology, and evidence-based planning. Effective leadership is essential, as institutional executives must continuously assess student needs and translate them into coherent action plans that support academic and extracurricular development (Avci et al., 2015; West, 2022). Both teaching and support staff play a pivotal role in shaping service quality and student outcomes, with qualified instructors fostering engagement, responsible citizenship, and achievement (Siu et al., 2014; MoEYS, 2024d). Organizational structure and human resources further underpin operational efficiency and holistic guidance, with streamlined support units and competent personnel enhancing sustainability and service delivery (Sandeem & Barr, 2006; Brock, 2010).

In addition, integrating digital technologies improves service efficiency and aligns provision with Generation Z's expectations for instant, user-friendly access (Zeresford Research, 2024; Gupta & Harris, 2010; Yost, 2019). Strategic budget allocation ensures equitable support for all students, particularly disadvantaged groups, and fosters retention, success, and national development (UNESCO, 2009; Husain et al., 2003; Khan, 2009). Active student participation in planning, feedback, and alumni networks further strengthens service responsiveness, institutional development, and financial stability (Feldman, 1969; Heng, 2013; ACER, 2018). Finally, evidence-based assessments and targeted program design allow institutions to align services with student needs, market priorities, and well-being objectives, ensuring efficient resource allocation and the creation of inclusive, high-quality support systems (Ouakrime, 2009; ; Waitwell, 2024).

Conceptual Framework

Higher education institutions (HEIs) play a pivotal role in addressing the challenges associated with student services, as their strategies influence trust-building, financial stability, and the protection of academic freedom. Institutions that cultivate strong relationships with students, stakeholders, and the broader community are better positioned to secure sustainable funding and implement effective programs that enhance student retention and success. This study on student services draws upon Vincent Tinto's seminal theory of student retention and departure, first introduced in 1975 and refined in 1993. Tinto emphasizes that student achievement depends on two forms of institutional integration: academic and social. Academic integration involves active engagement in learning, cognitive development, and participation in educational tasks, while social integration pertains to friendships, extracurricular engagement, and broader involvement in university life. Deficiencies in either domain increase the risk of student attrition.

Student services are essential in fostering both types of integration. Programs such as academic advising, counseling, internships, and life skills initiatives support student engagement, motivation, and persistence. Additionally, services that enhance mental well-being, provide financial support, and facilitate career development help reduce barriers to academic success, particularly for first-generation learners. This research further examines student service models from countries with socio-economic and cultural contexts similar to Cambodia, integrating lessons from international best practices. Based on global research, institutional policies, and local realities, a tailored student services framework is proposed for Cambodian HEIs. The framework merges

theoretical, regulatory, and empirical insights, highlighting the central role of institutions in creating inclusive, effective, and sustainable student support systems.

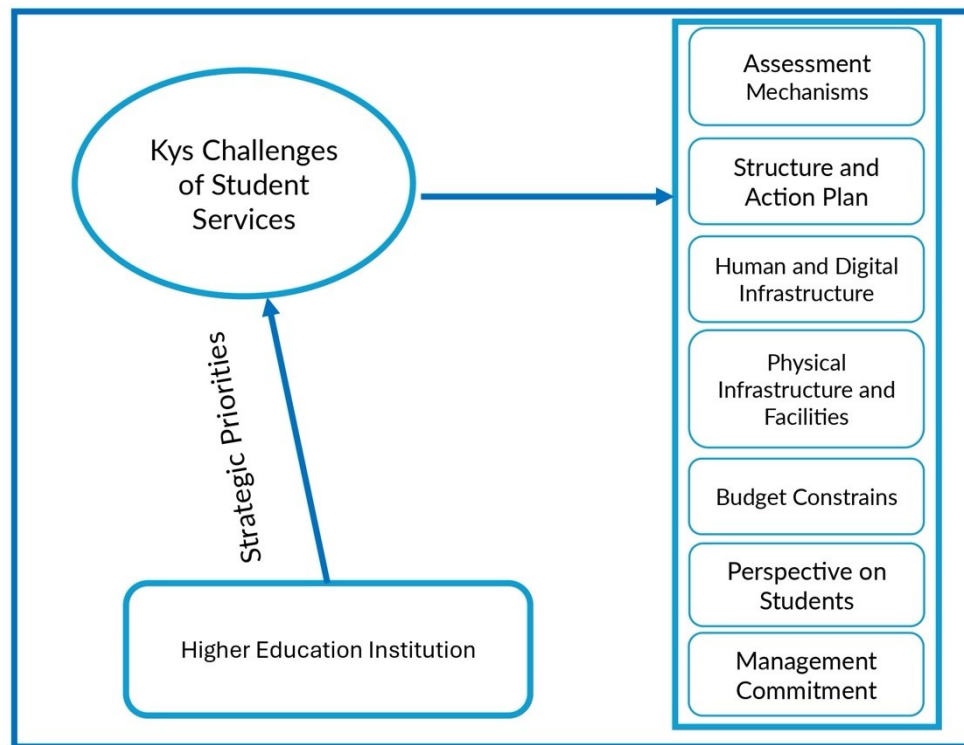


Figure 1: (Sam and Dahles, 2015; Moeurn, 2025; Moeurn et al., 2025; UNESCO, 2009)

METHOD

Research design and sample

Aligned with the objectives and scope of this study, the researchers employed a qualitative research methodology to obtain in-depth and comprehensive information. According to Patton (2002), qualitative approaches facilitate the systematic collection of rich data, particularly when interviews constitute the primary data-gathering technique. Over the past decade, qualitative research has gained prominence due to its ability to provide nuanced and detailed insights into complex phenomena. Creswell (2012) emphasizes that such methods allow researchers to explore participants' lived experiences, thereby achieving a deeper understanding of the contextual factors influencing the study. In the present research, semi-structured interviews were utilized as the principal data collection method, enabling the investigators to capture practical and authentic information while allowing flexibility to probe emerging themes. Schostak (2006) supports this approach, noting that interviews are especially effective for obtaining detailed, transparent, and contextually rich insights from participants.

The study encompassed 97 participants drawn from nine higher education institutions (HEIs). These institutions were selected from the 90 HEIs affiliated with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) and from the broader population of 189 HEIs nationwide (MoEYS, 2024a). The sample focused on public and private institutions affiliated with MoEYS located in Phnom Penh, which represents the largest student population and the highest enrollment rates in Cambodia. Additional criteria included selecting the three HEIs with the highest tuition fees for Bachelor's degree programs. As reported by MoEYS (2024d), Phnom Penh has the largest number among the national student population in 2019, underscoring its strategic relevance to the research. The final selection of six institutions was based on their substantial student enrollment during the 2022–2023 academic year, ensuring the study captured insights from institutions with significant student representation.

Table 1: Participant Geography

Note	Institution	Degree
MNT1	MoEYS	Ph.D
MNT 2	MoEYS	Master Degree
MNT3	MoEYS	Master Degree
MNT4	MoEYS	Master Degree
DPT1	Development Partner	Ph.D
RES1	Researcher	Ph.D
RES2	Researcher	Ph.D
PST1	Private Sector	Master Degree
RET1	Public Higher Education	Ph.D
RET2	Public Higher Education	Ph.D
RET3	Public Higher Education	Ph.D
RET4	Private Higher Education	Ph.D
RET5	Private Higher Education	Master Degree
RET6	Private Higher Education	Ph.D
RET7	Private Higher Education	Ph.D
RET8	Private Higher Education	Master Degree
RET9	Private Higher Education	Master Degree
HSA1	Public Higher Education	Master Degree
HSA2	Public Higher Education	Master Degree
HSA3	Public Higher Education	Master Degree
HSA4	Private Higher Education	Master Degree
HSA5	Private Higher Education	Master Degree
HSA6	Private Higher Education	Master Degree
HSA7	Private Higher Education	Master Degree
HSA8	Private Higher Education	Master Degree
FGD1	Public Higher Education	Bachelor Degree
FGD2	Public Higher Education	Bachelor Degree
FGD3	Public Higher Education	Bachelor Degree
FGD4	Private Higher Education	Bachelor Degree
FGD5	Private Higher Education	Bachelor Degree
FGD6	Private Higher Education	Bachelor Degree
FGD7	Private Higher Education	Bachelor Degree
FGD8	Private Higher Education	Bachelor Degree
FGD9	Private Higher Education	Bachelor Degree

Instruments

The primary data collection tool in this study was the semi-structured interview, selected for its ability to capture detailed and nuanced insights into participants' experiences, perspectives, and emotions. This approach balances structure with flexibility, allowing researchers to focus on key themes while adapting or adding questions to explore emergent, relevant topics in depth (Frakelen et al., 2012). As Cohen et al. (2007) note, interviews serve multiple functions in research, including assessment, hypothesis development, refinement of research questions, and data validation, making them particularly effective for gathering rich, contextually grounded qualitative data.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected from seven key participant groups using semi-structured interviews and were analyzed thematically in alignment with the research questions. Thematic analysis, recognized for its flexibility and capacity to identify meaningful patterns within complex qualitative data (Sharan, 2002; Patton, 2002; Braun & Clarke, 2006), served as the primary analytical approach. Interview transcripts were reviewed multiple times to ensure a thorough understanding, and responses were coded and organized into recurrent themes and primary categories. Direct quotes

were used to highlight participant perspectives and enhance credibility. Following Creswell's (2012) emphasis on reflexivity, the research team collaboratively engaged in segmentation, coding, and classification of concepts. The primary author led the analysis while incorporating guidance from qualitative research experts to ensure rigor, accuracy, and reliability throughout the interpretive process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Challenges

Assessment and Attention Mechanisms

The Kingdom of Cambodia established the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC) in 2003 as the official regulatory body responsible for managing and accrediting the quality of all higher education institutions (HEIs) in the country. Initially operating under the Office of the Council of Ministers, the ACC was transferred to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) in 2013. Accreditation of educational quality is a mandatory requirement for all institutions to confer bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. In 2009, the ACC issued a decision outlining the minimum quality standards for higher education institutions, accompanied by comprehensive guidelines for accreditation procedures.

Within these standards, student services are recognized as a mandatory component, constituting the fifth of the eight overarching standards. Student services are essential for higher education, as they support the holistic development of students by fostering academic achievement, practical skills, personal growth, and behavioral competencies, thereby ensuring that graduates meet both educational and societal expectations. The findings are as follows:

Student services are a key component of higher education quality standards, supporting retention, mental well-being, career readiness, and overall academic success. They are essential for maintaining educational quality and addressing the diverse needs of students. DPT1

Overall, state higher education institutions have yet to prioritize student services as a central component of quality improvement. Evaluations of student service quality should not rely solely on institutional documentation; instead, assessors must consider actual implementation through direct engagement with students and relevant stakeholders. Quality inspections should be conducted confidentially, allowing institutions to provide supporting information while ensuring an objective assessment of best practices. In many cases, institutions report student service activities despite limited or inadequate implementation, highlighting a discrepancy between documented outputs and actual service delivery. This gap is illustrated by the following participant statements:

In Cambodia, the assessment of higher education quality is largely voluntary, and the implementation of student services remains inconsistent across institutions. Many HEIs have yet to fully establish or improve student services, with some lacking dedicated staff or offering services only sporadically. Consequently, evaluation often reveals discrepancies between reported practices and the actual, ongoing provision of student support. MNT2

Quality assessment mechanisms in Cambodian higher education remain largely non-compulsory, resulting in inconsistencies and reluctance among institutions to fully engage in evaluation processes. Consequently, national education standards face persistent challenges in enhancing the quality of training to meet evolving regional and global benchmarks. Notably, even institutions with established reputations or public trust demonstrate limited competitive incentives, both domestically and in comparison with foreign higher education institutions, which may hinder efforts to achieve higher standards of academic excellence.

Structured and Action Plans

One significant obstacle facing student services in Cambodian public higher education institutions is that the establishment of new offices or units requires approval from the Ministry of Education in coordination with the Ministry of Public Works, which can delay or constrain service

development. Although some private higher education institutions have established structured student service units, implementation remains inconsistent due to unclear lines of responsibility and the absence of designated personnel to oversee service delivery. The study's findings are summarized as follows:

The current arrangement remains fragmented, with colleges or departments operating independently without a clear institutional structure, policy, or strategic plan to guide student services effectively. MNT1

Student service providers often lack the capacity to offer curriculum-related guidance. While some institutions maintain student counseling offices, their effectiveness is limited, as service providers frequently lack awareness of their role in supporting curriculum development. Institutional leadership indicated that student service staff are responsible for collecting student feedback related to curriculum adjustments; however, direct inquiries revealed that staff were unaware of this responsibility. In practice, student services are predominantly associated with counseling, internships, community engagement, and general policy guidance, leading to confusion regarding their mandate. These findings are reflected in the following student group quotations:

I want the institution to organize additional programs and initiatives that provide greater opportunities for volunteerism and engagement in community service activities. FGD7

Higher education institutions have yet to establish a clear and coherent organizational structure, presenting ongoing challenges for effective implementation. Student services are often dispersed across multiple offices and units, resulting in procedural complexity and delays. Moreover, the delivery of student support activities remains largely unplanned, frequently dependent on ad hoc circumstances, which undermines service quality and consistency.

Human and Digital Infrastructure

Human resources within student services at Cambodian higher education institutions currently lack specialized technical experts capable of providing professional guidance. Existing technical consultants are primarily experienced staff who have participated in limited short-term training focused on basic services, while some have not received any formal or advanced training. Illustrative insights from the research are presented in the following quotations:

With only three staff, including the principal, student services are limited, overburdened, and largely reactive due to constrained staff capacity. HSA4

The adoption of technology to streamline student services in Cambodian higher education remains limited and has not kept pace with current digital trends. Most students belong to Generation Z, who are accustomed to online, interactive platforms, yet many institutions continue to rely on traditional, face-to-face services and manual paperwork. This approach results in prolonged and complex processes for tuition payments, administrative procedures, and application submissions, often requiring long queues and extensive waiting times. Only a few institutions have begun modernizing the delivery of educational and administrative services. The following quotations illustrate these findings:

Students recognize the benefits of the Internet for research, language acquisition, and learning; however, many higher education institutions have yet to fully integrate these digital resources into teaching and learning. RES2

Human resources in student services remain insufficient, particularly regarding the deployment of sector-specific experts and technical specialists, which continues to impede service quality and development. These deficiencies not only limit improvements but may also undermine

confidence in higher education institutions. Furthermore, many institutions have yet to leverage technology to enhance service accessibility, persisting with traditional, time-consuming procedures. Even well-established and reputable higher education institutions continue to rely on conventional service delivery methods, limiting efficiency and responsiveness for students.

Physical Infrastructure and Facilities

Student service infrastructure in Cambodian higher education institutions remains inadequate and insufficiently responsive to student needs. Observations and participant interviews indicate that facilities are underdeveloped, poorly organized, and not aligned with the core functions of student services. In many cases, installed equipment is outdated, inefficient, or merely decorative, and service locations often operate in small, multi-purpose spaces that are ill-suited for counseling and other student support activities. The following quotations from ministry leaders illustrate these findings:

Higher education institutions often lack dedicated facilities to provide adequate student services. In some cases, service rooms are underutilized, with equipment such as computers left idle or improperly arranged, particularly during evaluation periods, limiting their effectiveness in supporting students. MNT2

Student service resources remain insufficient, as service providers often lack adequate offices and departmental support to manage their responsibilities effectively. The provision of student services requires appropriate material and infrastructural support to ensure efficiency and the timely delivery of assistance.

Although computer practice hours are scheduled, there is no dedicated practice room due to an insufficient number of computers. As a result, students reported that they only received theoretical instruction without the opportunity for practical application. FGD1

Infrastructure and facilities in Cambodian higher education institutions remain inadequate to meet actual student needs. Many institutions face significant shortages, including the absence of health counseling rooms, counseling workshops, specialized counseling and psychiatric services, dormitories, laboratories, practice rooms, and sufficient computer facilities. Additional gaps include limited transportation stops, sports venues, discussion spaces, and essential study facilities such as adequately equipped classrooms, LCD projectors, and designated areas for student programs. These deficiencies present substantial challenges for both institutional management and student service providers.

Budget Constraints

Some public higher education institutions in Cambodia continue to rely on guidance and directives from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). At the same time, several institutions have not yet secured sufficient budgets to adequately support student services. Moreover, student services in many institutions lack clearly defined policies and guiding principles, further constraining their effectiveness. The results are presented as follows:

Financial constraints limit student services, as most resources are allocated to teaching, leaving insufficient funds for consistent support. MNT1

Several institutions reported that the preparation and delivery of student services require substantial and recurring financial investment; however, limited budgets, primarily allocated to teaching and other institutional priorities, constrain their capacity to allocate sufficient resources. This finding is reflected in the participants' quotations below:

Some universities employ staff with limited skills and competencies, primarily as a cost-saving measure to reduce salary expenditures. However, this practice often results in low-quality outcomes and hinders the effective delivery of student services. RES1

The allocation and preparation of budgets to support student services in higher education institutions remain insufficient and inadequately prioritized. Instead of directing adequate financial resources toward student support, institutions often allocate significant portions of their budgets to other expenditure areas, leaving student services underfunded.

Perspective on Students

When higher education institutions fail to provide supportive services that foster confidence, a sense of belonging, and responsiveness to student needs, students are more likely to withdraw and transfer to other institutions. Ensuring that institutional decisions and actions prioritize student interests is therefore essential for enhancing retention and engagement.

*University leaders must prioritize student needs, recognizing students as key stakeholders and **primary** beneficiaries of higher education services. RET4*

The three public higher education institutions included in this study did not explicitly recognize students as key stakeholders or “customers” of their services. In contrast, private institutions actively engage in marketing strategies aimed at attracting and retaining students. Illustrative insights from development partners are presented in the quotations below:

Prominent universities often give limited attention to student services, assuming student enrollment is assured. While they may compare themselves locally and perceive their performance as adequate, regional comparisons reveal significant gaps. Despite substantial funding from alumni associations, these institutions provide few services and activities relative to their resources. DPT1

Students represent central stakeholders in higher education, requiring comprehensive institutional support to facilitate their academic and personal development. Moreover, students serve as key contributors to institutional revenue through tuition payments and other direct financial support. However, public higher education institutions in Cambodia have yet to fully recognize students as “customers” and integrate this perspective into their strategic and operational priorities.

Higher education management commitment

Leaders in many higher education institutions rarely prioritize student services. Even in institutions with substantial budgets and the capacity to enhance these services, limited institutional commitment and low prioritization by leadership hinder effective implementation, preventing student service activities from functioning optimally.

As autonomous entities, higher education institutions are primarily responsible for improving student services and must act proactively without relying solely on Ministry directives. MNT2

Some institutions with high student enrollment exhibit limited managerial interest in student services. In certain cases, leadership recognizes the importance of these services but is reluctant to allocate financial resources to strengthen them.

Some higher education leaders demonstrate limited commitment to advancing student services, often delegating responsibility to a single individual or addressing initiatives in a fragmented, ad hoc manner. DPT1

Overall, the findings indicate that limited leadership commitment and inadequate resource allocation significantly hinder the development and effectiveness of student services, even in institutions with high enrollment, resulting in fragmented and inconsistent support for students.

Solution Priorities

Higher education institutions serve as the primary implementers of student services within their jurisdiction, operating in accordance with existing legal frameworks and relevant policies, without awaiting additional directives. Institutional leaders must recognize and actively prioritize student services as a critical component for enhancing educational quality and fulfilling the institution's mission. These findings are illustrated in the following quotations from development partners:

Without leadership commitment, student services cannot develop, as most institutional proposals to development partners prioritize learning materials and capacity building rather than enhancing student support. DPT1

Institutions should develop clear action plans to address student needs comprehensively. Organizational units, including colleges, departments, and other institutional divisions, ought to offer supplemental career counseling, extracurricular programs, and initiatives beyond formal instruction to foster student confidence and motivation. Certain competencies are best cultivated through workshops and events that enhance academic and personal development, rather than through traditional coursework alone:

Higher education institutions should develop comprehensive action plans encompassing employment support, health and wellness programs, sports activities, and community engagement. Clear and structured planning enables more effective implementation and enhances the impact of these initiatives. MNT1

Students in higher education encounter various challenges, including mental health concerns and the need for counseling services, which institutions have yet to adequately address. In some instances, institutions are aware of student dropouts, particularly among provincial migrant students, yet appropriate interventions are lacking. Effective student services require the involvement of trained psychologists and service providers who continuously enhance their qualifications, acquire new knowledge, and adopt innovative approaches to meet student needs. Additionally, service providers must demonstrate empathy, commitment, and a genuine willingness to support students. These findings are illustrated in the quotations from institutional leaders below:

Effective student services require staff who are committed, student-centered, and guided by high professional ideals, with a genuine dedication to advancing student development beyond mere occupational duties. RET4

The language and conduct of service providers represent a critical concern, as the use of harsh or disrespectful communication has been widely criticized. Providers are expected to uphold professional standards, guided by the principle that recipient satisfaction reflects the quality of service delivery. Findings indicate that some providers in higher education institutions employ inappropriate or impolite language when interacting with students. These observations are illustrated in the following student quotations:

Students reported that some service providers behave rudely, treating them as inferior and showing reluctance to address their concerns. They emphasized the importance of respectful and professional communication, noting that, as paying members of the institution, they expect courteous and constructive interactions rather than dismissive treatment. FGD5

Key actors in higher education—including institutional leadership and strategic planning, teaching and non-teaching staff, organizational structure, digital resources, budgeting, and research—play a critical role in enhancing the quality and effectiveness of student services.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Implications Challenges

The results of this research indicate that the process for assessing the quality of student services in Cambodian higher education institutions (HEIs) functions voluntarily, leading to the inconsistent and incomplete execution of student services. This is consistent with the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC, 2023), which asserts that engaging in quality assurance processes is still optional. As a result, this policy presents considerable difficulties in improving the quality of higher education, especially regarding student services on both national and international scales. Additionally, the research shows a widespread deficiency in institutional focus and awareness related to student services in Cambodian higher education institutions. These results reflect the insights of Choudaha and Mukherjee (2009), who observed that a small number of HEIs acknowledge the significance of student services and frequently do not incorporate them effectively into their operations.

The lack of organized frameworks and action plans was highlighted as an urgent issue. Participants noted that student services are executed in an unplanned way, lacking systematic organization, defined departmental roles, or designated time allocation. This aligns with the results of Sandeen and Barr (2006), who noted that inadequate structure in student affairs hinders thorough student support. Cashin et al. (1998) highlighted the significance of organizational structure in facilitating student participation in both local and international academic and extracurricular events.

Issues concerning human resources and digital infrastructure were also widespread. Participants pointed out the lack of qualified workers and the insufficient use of technology in providing services. In numerous organizations, untrained personnel are placed in student service positions, frequently exhibiting unprofessional conduct and inadequate service delivery. These issues reflect previous studies (Lea, 1988; Farbus, 2000; Sandeen, 1991; World Bank, 1994), which indicated that HEIs in developing nations frequently do not have sufficiently trained student affairs personnel. Researchers like Rasciani (2011), Emily (2018), McAloon (1994), and Krise (2009) have likewise highlighted the importance for service providers to have both technical skills and interpersonal abilities. The insufficient use of information and communication technologies in Cambodian higher education institutions reflects the results of Forest and Loo (1987) and Hang (2007), who pointed out that technological obstacles are a vital concern in improving educational services. Additionally, the study uncovered significant shortcomings in physical infrastructure and facilities for student welfare. Sources from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS), along with organizational heads and student delegates, highlighted the absence of suitable infrastructure for student support services, such as counseling centers, first-aid facilities, student housing, and properly equipped offices. These results are consistent with earlier studies (Brandmayr, 2009; Silva, 2009; Stewart, 2022; UNESCO, 2000), highlighting that inadequate infrastructure restricts HEIs from delivering quality education and assistance.

Monetary constraints were also recognized as a significant obstacle. Conversations with MoEYS officials, development partners, and institutional leaders indicated that funding for student services is still inadequate. Numerous higher education institutions struggle to gather resources or obtain governmental funding to enhance service quality. These results correspond to the regional issues encountered by ASEAN member countries, where insufficient government financing has obstructed education reforms (ASEAN Secretariat, 2022). Budget cuts after the crisis have further undermined service quality, as noted by the Cambodian Higher Education Association (2023), which indicated that financial limitations diminish institutions' capacity to provide effective support services. Finally, the research emphasizes the need to acknowledge students as key stakeholders and important clients in the educational process. Officials from MoEYS, partner organizations, and institutional representatives emphasized the importance of institutions in exceeding purely academic teaching by providing holistic student support that nurtures confidence and satisfaction.

Nevertheless, this perspective was not consistently held by administrators of public higher education institutions. In support of this viewpoint, previous researchers (Beile & Zeckhauser, 2017; Kuh & Pike, 2014; Perkins, 1999) highlighted the strategic importance of viewing students as customers to improve institutional reputation and foster student loyalty.

The findings also indicate that limited leadership commitment and insufficient resource allocation substantially impede the development and effectiveness of student services, even in institutions with high enrollment, leading to fragmented and inconsistent support for students (Moeurn, 2025; Moeurn et al., 2025).

Solution Priorities

The research underscores the pivotal role of higher education institutions (HEIs) as the primary implementers of student services, with institutional leaders, department heads, and student representatives identifying six core components essential for effective support: leadership and planning, academic and non-academic staffing, organizational structure and human resources, digitalization, budgeting, and research-based service design. Effective internal governance and strategic action planning are critical for aligning student services with institutional objectives and evolving student needs, corroborating prior findings by Avcici (2005), Jasderet et al. (2008), and West (2002). The study further highlights the importance of active engagement by teaching and non-teaching staff, emphasizing role clarity, professional competence, and commitment to service excellence, consistent with Bliss (2014), who identifies staff professionalism, ethical conduct, and technical proficiency as key determinants of service quality.

Digitalization emerged as another essential factor, with stakeholders noting that digital tools enhance efficiency, transparency, accessibility, and responsiveness, a conclusion supported by Duke et al. (2014) and Palumbo et al. (2019), particularly in meeting the expectations of technologically adept student populations. Finally, sustainable budgeting, continuous student participation, and evidence-based planning were identified as critical to optimizing service delivery. MoEYS officials, development partners, and HEI leaders emphasized that ongoing investment, regular needs assessments, and participatory feedback mechanisms are necessary to ensure resources are used effectively and services remain responsive, aligning with previous research that affirms the centrality of participatory and data-informed approaches in designing and delivering high-quality student services (Coates, 2005; Feldman, 1969; Heng, 2013; Husain et al., 2003; Khan, 2009; Nota, 2009; Ouakrime, 2009; Sawal, 2009; Waitwell, 2024).

Conclusion

Research indicates that students enrolled in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Cambodia face substantial challenges that hinder their academic progress. These obstacles underscore the urgent need for coordinated action and collaboration among stakeholders, particularly HEIs, to cultivate supportive and inclusive learning environments. Failure to address student needs can contribute to elevated dropout rates, inadequate career preparedness, and diminished institutional reputation. Evidence suggests that student services in many Cambodian HEIs suffer from insufficient strategic planning and limited recognition by institutional leadership, despite their critical role in maintaining educational quality, institutional prestige, and diversified income streams. This neglect disproportionately affects vulnerable student populations, including individuals with disabilities, those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and members of ethnic minority groups.

Moreover, the reluctance of some longstanding institutions to modernize their student services poses risks to financial sustainability and stakeholder trust. As students increasingly exercise choice in selecting institutions that meet their expectations, the quality of student services has become a key factor in institutional competitiveness. Active engagement of both internal and external stakeholders is essential for developing well-rounded, skilled graduates who can contribute meaningfully to national development. Strategic investment in student services not only enhances student outcomes but also strengthens institutional reputation, fosters global recognition, and supports Cambodia's broader socio-economic advancement.

Implications

To enhance stakeholder confidence and the overall quality of student services, the study identified the improvement of these services as a critical and urgent priority for higher education institutions. Although the research is limited to institutions with the highest student enrollment, tuition levels, and regional standing under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, and involves a relatively small number of stakeholders, it offers valuable insights and recommendations for advancing student services in Cambodian higher education.

Higher education institutions should prioritize the provision of high-quality student services that respond to students' needs, enhance their confidence, and encourage active participation in institutional activities. Investment in student services represents a sustainable strategy, as institutional revenue is derived not only from tuition fees but also from alumni engagement and contributions to institutional development. Furthermore, strong student services enhance institutional reputation, foster trust, and facilitate collaboration with the private sector and external projects.

Key recommendations include: 1) **Recruitment and Training of Staff:** Increase the selection of student service providers with broad knowledge, technical proficiency, and digital skills to ensure effective and high-quality service delivery. 2) **Stakeholder Engagement:** Strengthen communication and collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, leveraging not only financial support but also practical knowledge, up-to-date skills, and experiential learning opportunities for students. 3) **Career Guidance and Planning:** Provide targeted career counseling that aligns with labor market demands, including guidance on values, skills, talents, and personal interests, to prepare students for high-demand occupations identified by the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (2024). 4) **Experiential Learning Opportunities:** Expand internships, community service, and applied learning programs to develop students' practical skills and professional readiness. 5) **Continuous Quality Improvement:** Regularly evaluate and enhance student service programs to ensure responsiveness, relevance, and sustainability, thereby fostering institutional prestige and long-term development.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research:

This qualitative study, focused on the large and the highest price public and private HEIs, used semi-structured interviews. As such, generalizability is constrained. Future studies should: Include HEIs under other ministries, employ mixed-methods approaches for broader insights, use diversified data collection tools, conduct annual research on evolving student needs, explore comparative studies on student services across institutions, and investigate the experiences of international students studying in Cambodia.

CONCLUSIONS

Students in Cambodian higher education face significant challenges that hinder academic progress, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated action among stakeholders, particularly higher education institutions (HEIs), to create inclusive and supportive learning environments. Insufficient attention to student needs can increase dropout rates, compromise career preparedness, and undermine institutional credibility. Research indicates that student services in many HEIs suffer from inadequate strategic planning and limited institutional recognition, despite their critical role in maintaining educational quality, diversifying income, and enhancing reputation—an issue that disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, including students with disabilities, low-income backgrounds, and ethnic minorities.

Moreover, the reluctance of some long-established institutions to modernize student services threatens financial stability and stakeholder confidence. As students increasingly exercise choice in selecting institutions that meet their expectations, high-quality student services have become central to institutional competitiveness. Active engagement of internal and external stakeholders is essential for developing well-rounded graduates who contribute meaningfully to national development. Strategic investment in student services not only advances student outcomes but also strengthens institutional reputation locally and globally, while supporting Cambodia's broader socio-economic progress. Sustained improvements require robust policies, committed leadership, and a sector-wide focus on enhancing student support.

REFERENCES

- Ahren, C., & Khemmerer, P. (2002). *Higher education development and donor aid: Case studies in Cambodia*. UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000120021>
- Andrews, R. (2008). Student support services in resource-constrained higher education systems. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 45(3), 345–357. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.2031>
- Arnold, J., & King, C. (1997). *Human resource management*. Financial Times/Prentice Hall. <https://nibmehub.com/opac-service/pdf/read/Human%20Resource%20Management-%202nd%20edition.pdf>
- Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. Jossey-Bass. [file:///Users/macbook/Downloads/What Matters in College Four Critical Years Revisited.pdf](file:///Users/macbook/Downloads/What%20Matters%20in%20College%20Four%20Critical%20Years%20Revisited.pdf)
- Audin, K., & Davy, J. (2003). Student support and the experience of first-year students in a UK university. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 40(3), 263–274. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1470329032000103806>
- Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). (2018). *National report on student engagement in higher education*. <https://www.acer.org/>
- Avci, R., Ulas, E., & Yilmaz, B. (2015). The effects of university students' perceptions of leadership on their academic performance. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 4(4), 66–75. <https://iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/55115/56927>
- Azoury, N., Daou, L., & Khoury, C. E. (2014). University image and its relationship to student satisfaction: Case of the Middle Eastern private business schools. *International Strategic Management Review*, 2(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ism.2014.07.001>
- Baghiropova, N. (2008). The role of digital technologies in student support services. *Educational Technology Review*, 17(1), 24–33. <https://doi.org/10.47392/IRJAEM.2024.0299>
- Bielecki, J. (2017). Students as customers: Rethinking higher education service delivery. *International Journal of Education Management*, 31(2), 164–178. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-09-2016-0190>
- Bishop, J. (2009). Reducing bureaucracy in public service: A one-stop-shop model. OECD. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2020/05/one-stop-shops-for-citizens-and-business_1fff6e8b/b0b0924e-en.pdf
- Bresciani, M. J. (2011). Identifying barriers in implementing learning outcomes. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2011(149), 73–84. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1062653.pdf>
- Brock, C. (2010). *Human capital and education: The state and civil society in Cambodia*. Symposium Books.
- Bucuy, R. M. (2022). Comprehensive student services and institutional value: A case study. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 44(3), 345–359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2022.2029951>
- Bucuy, R. M. (2023). Student services and institutional competitiveness in Southeast Asia. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 96, 102703. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2022.102703>
- Chanthavong, P. (2015). Enhancing student support services in Cambodia's public universities. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 16(2), 213–224. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-015-9378-2>
- Chet, C., Sophal, P., & Sopheak, H. (2020). E-learning transition in Cambodia: Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. *Cambodian Journal of Education*, 6(1), 45–62. file:///Users/macbook/Downloads/0.2+-+Editorial_updated_24_Jan_2025.pdf
- Chickering, A. W. (1969). *Education and identity*. Jossey-Bass. https://www.scirp.org/pdf/OJN_2017092114555793.pdf
- Choudaha, R. (2009). Role of student affairs and services in supporting international students. *International Higher Education* (54), 12–14. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000128118>
- Ciobanu, A. (2013). The role of student services in the improving of student experience in higher education. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 92, 169–173. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.08.653>

- Clifton, J. (2011). *The coming jobs war*. Gallup Press. <https://cdn.bookey.app/files/pdf/book/en/the-coming-jobs-war.pdf>
- Coates, H. (2005). The value of student engagement for higher education quality assurance. *Quality in Higher Education*, 11(1), 25–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538320500074915>
- Copeland, R. (1992). Orientation and employment counseling: A neglected part of student services. *Journal of Career Planning & Employment*, 52(3), 45–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241286360>
- Crawford, J., Butler-Henderson, K., Rudolph, J., & Glowatz, M. (2020). COVID-19: 20 countries' higher education intra-period digital pedagogy responses. *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*, 3(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2020.3.1.7>
- Cutrona, C. E., Cole, V., Colangelo, N., Assouline, S. G., & Russell, D. W. (1994). Perceived parental social support and academic achievement: An attachment theory perspective. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66(2), 369–378. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.66.2.369>
- Dem, H. H. (2017). Infrastructure constraints in Cambodian higher education institutions. *Cambodian Journal of Education Policy*, 3(2), 72–84. <file:///Users/macbook/Downloads/CJER31-12Aug2023.pdf>
- Dickson, R. (2024). *NGO collaboration and student success in Southeast Asia*. Routledge. <file:///Users/macbook/Downloads/JJ24+WEB.pdf>
- DiRamio, D., & Payne, R. (2007). Assessing the academic and social integration of student veterans. *NASPA Journal*, 44(1), 73–93. <https://journal-veterans-studies.org/articles/188/files/submission/proof/188-1-1161-1-10-20200907.pdf>
- Dy, S., & Ogunniran, M. O. (2019). Addressing Infrastructure Gaps in Cambodian higher education: Perspectives from a Developing Nation. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 39(3), 311–326. <https://cdri.org.kh/publication/a-brief-review-of-cambodian-higher-education>
- Dy, S. S. (2015). Education reform in Cambodia: Towards a holistic approach. UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000120021>
- Eborn, J. (2023). *Digital equity in higher education student services*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12795>
- Ehrenberg, R. G., & Webber, D. A. (2010). Student services and student outcomes at public colleges and universities. *Economics of Education Review*, 29(3), 329–341. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2009.10.002>
- Ellucian. (2018). *Improving student services through technology and innovation*. [Publisher info not specified]. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2024.100577>
- Emily, S. (2018). *Human capital and student success: The service provider's role*. Oxford Education Press. <https://docs.iza.org/dp9885.pdf>
- Erickson, B. L., & Strommer, D. W. (1991). *Teaching college freshmen*. Jossey-Bass. <https://doi.org/10.20429/ijstol.2009.030136>
- Etzko, M. (2003). *The Triple Helix in Southeast Asia: Application in Buddhist economies*. Springer. https://cdri.org.kh/storage/pdf/Cambodian%20PSET%20in%20the%20Global%20Knowledge%20Societies_1648631240.pdf
- Feldman, K. A. (1969). The impact of college on students. *Sociology of Education*, 42(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429339059>
- Ford, D. (2004). International aid and higher education in Cambodia. *Harvard Education Review*, 74(3), 337–368. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2006.44.7912>
- Forrest, D. (1987). Barriers to implementing digital student services in developing nations. *Journal of Higher Education Technology*, 8(2), 122–135. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3560107.3560135>
- Frakelen, T., Paulsen, J., & Moran, A. (2012). *Qualitative interviews in educational research: A methodological guide*. <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1602156>
- Good University Guide. (2017). *Best practices in student support services*. Times Higher Education. <https://postgraduatestudentexperience.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/PGSE-Good-Practice-Guide.pdf>

- Gupta, S., & Harris, J. (2010). How eWOM influences consumers' digital behavior in higher education. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 24(2), 102–115. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.01.015>
- Habtom, G. H. (2020). Governance and stakeholder cooperation in higher education in Africa. *African Education Review*, 17(3), 12–29. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003222705>
- Hang, C. (2007). Internet accessibility and the digital divide in Cambodia. *Southeast Asian Education Review*, 4(1), 41–55. [https://cdri.org.kh/storage/pdf/Book%202015 Cambodia%20Education%202015 e 16172 48044.pdf](https://cdri.org.kh/storage/pdf/Book%202015%20Cambodia%20Education%202015_e_16172_48044.pdf)
- Hang, C. N. (2016). The current state of higher education in Cambodia: Challenges and prospects. *Cambodia Development Review*, 20(2), 8–15.
- Harper, S. R. (2012). The illusion of inclusion: Black male student engagement in high-performing institutions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(5), 845–871. [https://rossierapps.usc.edu/facultydirectory/publications/231/Harper%20\(2012\)%20Black %20Male%20Success.pdf](https://rossierapps.usc.edu/facultydirectory/publications/231/Harper%20(2012)%20Black%20Male%20Success.pdf)
- Heng, S. (2000). The quality and accessibility of higher education in Cambodia. *Cambodia Education Review*, 2(1), 24–38. <file:///Users/macbook/Downloads/CJER11-FINAL.pdf>
- Hengles, K. (2017). Political influence in Cambodian higher education leadership. *Asian Journal of Education and Training*, 3(1), 8–15. <https://www.willbrehm.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Brehm-2019.pdf>
- HERI (Higher Education Research Institute). (2004). *Spirituality in higher education: A national study of students' search for meaning and purpose*. UCLA. http://capabilities.templeton.org/2004/pdf/SPIRITUALITY_HIGHER_ED.pdf
- Herndon, M. K., & Histo, J. A. (2004). Parent involvement and student retention in college. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 5(2), 137–156. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.6044>
- Himelein, K. (1995). Digital support systems in education: The promise of telecommunications. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 24(1), 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.1344/der.2020.37.343-360>
- Hung, P. (2008). Human resource challenges in Cambodian universities. *Journal of Asian Higher Education*, 5(3), 211–224.
- Husain, M., Khan, M. A., & Mirza, M. (2003). Human capital development and educational spending. *Journal of Human Resource Development*, 12(3), 22–37.
- Kalsner, L., & Pirtle, P. (2003). Advising parents of college students. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 40(3), 15–22.
- Kasmad, K., Mahmud, M., & Abdullah, Z. (2015). One-stop service system in Indonesia: A reform agenda. *Asian Journal of Public Administration*, 37(1), 33–49.
- Katrechich, A. V., & Aruguete, M. S. (2017). Recognizing challenges and predicting success in first-generation university students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 18(2), 175–192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025115584748>
- Keng, P., Chan, V., & Reth, K. (2015). Financing higher education in Cambodia: A review. *Higher Education Finance and Policy*, 9(2), 95–112. <file:///Users/macbook/Downloads/FinanceinPublicHigherEducationinCambodia.pdf>
- Khan, A., Ismail, M., & Hussain, S. (2021). Rising expectations and diminishing support: The paradox of student services in South Asia. *Asian Journal of Comparative Education*, 2(1), 35–49. <https://doi.org/10.24112/ajce.211008>
- Khan, M. A. (2009). Education and human capital: Global competitiveness. *Journal of Development Studies*, 45(4), 529–550. <file:///Users/macbook/Downloads/12862-Article%20Text-38357-1-10-20200527.pdf>
- Kuhate, R. (2001). Student engagement and staff development: A comparative study. *Higher Education Review*, 33(1), 45–57.
- Lane, J. E. (2012). Building a smarter university: Strategies and trends. In D. B. Johnstone, M. J. Barr, & P. G. Altbach (Eds.), *Higher education systems 3.0* (pp. 59–75). SUNY Press.
- Laposhy, J. (2020). Cost and sustainability of educational technology in developing countries. *International Journal of Education Technology and Society*, 23(1), 44–56.

- Lea, J., & Farbus, L. (2000). Faculty perceptions of student support: Constraints on academic advising. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 5(3), 325–340.
- Lim, D. (1999). Quality assurance in higher education: A study of developing countries. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 24(4), 379–393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0260293990240401>
- Loo, M., & Hang, S. (2007). Technology and learning: Challenges in Cambodia. *Asian Journal of Education*, 28(3), 233–249. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387739>
- Lundeman, K. (2008). Managing student data in large-scale institutions. *Journal of Institutional Research and Policy*, 13(2), 56–73.
- McAloon, R. (1994). Supporting students with special needs in higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 35(5), 423–431.
- McGivney, V. (1996). *Staying or leaving the course*. National Institute of Adult Continuing Education. [https://www.academia.edu/111922684/Staying or Leaving the Course Non Completion and Retention](https://www.academia.edu/111922684/Staying_or_Leaving_the_Course_Non_Completion_and_Retention)
- McKenzie, K., & Schweitzer, R. (2001). Who succeeds at university? Factors predicting academic performance in first-year Australian university students. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 20(1), 21–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07924360120043621>
- Merdi, P. (2022). Financial sustainability and student services in Southeast Asia. *International Journal of Higher Education and Research*, 12(1), 67–83. <https://www.doi.org/10.31891/2307-5740-2020-288-6-14>
- Ministry of Cults and Religions. (2022). *Annual report on religious education*. Phnom Penh.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). (2012). *Student services and grievance policy*. Phnom Penh.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). (2014). *Education strategic plan 2014–2018*. Phnom Penh.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). (2015). *National accreditation standards for higher education*. Phnom Penh.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). (2022). *Higher education quality assurance guidelines*. Phnom Penh.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). (2024a). *Education statistics and indicators 2022–2023*. Phnom Penh.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). (2024b). *Higher education enrollment report*. Phnom Penh.
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS). (n.d.). *Vision for higher education 2030*. Phnom Penh: Royal Government of Cambodia.
- Mitchell, C., Nolan, A., & Thomas, R. (2020). Collaborative governance and service quality in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 42(4), 377–391.
- Moeurn, C. (2025). The Role of Student Services in Improving Student Learning in Higher Education in Cambodia. *Journal of Education Research*, 6(2), 427–441. <https://doi.org/10.37985/jer.v6i2.2281>
- Moeurn, C. (2025). The Challenges and Strategic Recommendations for Student Services in Higher Education in Cambodia. *Educative: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 3(2), 83–110. <https://doi.org/10.70437/educative.v3i2.1316>
- Moeurn, C., Sam, C., & Mok, S. (2025). The Practice of Student Services in Cambodia: A Case Study of Public Higher Education Institutions. *Cambodian Research of Education and STEM*, 3(1), 66–102. <https://doi.org/10.62219/cjes.2025314>
- Mooney, M. (2005). Religion and campus behavior. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(5), 590–607.
- Munoz, C. (2017). *Private-public partnerships in higher education*. Springer. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/project-documents/45181-001-tacr-01.pdf>
- Murray, C., Ireland, M., & Armour, M. (2015). Evaluating models of student support in higher education: Diversity and complexity. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 52(3), 282–293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2015.1067223>
- NASPA. (2022). *The state of student affairs in higher education*. NASPA Reports.

- Oketch, M. O. (2016). Financing higher education in sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for equity and quality. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 46, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1035719X0300300213>
- Perkins, J. (1999). Students as stakeholders in higher education. *Journal of Student Affairs*, 12(1), 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.21272/mmi.2018.2-30>
- Peterson, B. (2015). Patronage politics and higher education reform in Cambodia. *Asian Politics & Policy*, 7(4), 537–556. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12179>
- Phyrom, S., & Sopheak, C. (2023). Digital transformation in Cambodian universities post-COVID-19. *Cambodian Journal of E-Learning*, 2(1), 11–29. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-5914-0.ch018>
- Prince, D. (2015). The impact of support services on student outcomes in higher education. *Education and Urban Society*, 47(2), 180–204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124513495276>
- Royal Decree. (1993). *Royal Decree on higher education accreditation*. Phnom Penh.
- Royal Government of Cambodia. (2017). *Public service delivery improvement plan*. Phnom Penh.
- Rupande, G. (2016). ICT infrastructure and student service delivery in African universities. *International Journal of Education and Development using ICT*, 12(3), 79–91. <https://www.adeanet.org/clearinghouse/sites/default/files/docs/dol ICT eng.pdf>
- Sam, C. (2016). Stakeholder involvement in Cambodian higher education. Royal University of Phnom Penh. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1124851>
- Sam, C., & Samles, N. (2015). Development partner contributions to Cambodian higher education. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 16(1), 85–97. <https://cdri.org.kh/storage/pdf/Book%202015 Cambodia%20Education%202015 e 16172 48044.pdf>
- Samles, N., & Dahles, H. (2015). Private sector partnerships in Cambodian higher education. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, 8(2), 199–219.
- Sandeen, A. (1988). *Student services: A handbook for the profession*. Jossey-Bass. <https://dl.icdst.org/pdfs/files4/3e2a7609971054b58fe75b965926ea73.pdf>
- Sandeen, A., & Barr, M. J. (2006). *Critical issues for student affairs: Challenges and opportunities*. Jossey-Bass. https://pillars.taylor.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1080&context=acsd_growth
- Silva, M. (2009). Student accommodation and academic success in Asia. *Asian Journal of Student Services*, 7(1), 14–27. <file:///Users/macbook/Downloads/9335-Article%20Text-26826-1-10-20170530.pdf>
- Siu, A., Lam, J., & Cheung, C. (2014). Psychological support and academic outcomes in Asian universities. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Education*, 34(3), 312–329.
- Siu, K. W. M., & Associates. (2014). Positive psychology and student development: Building skills and resilience. *Journal of Student Affairs*, 10(2), 15–28.
- Solution Parth. (2023). *The role of digital technology in enhancing student support*. <https://solutionparth.com>
- Sokvy, C. (2020). The role of Buddhism in Cambodia's education system. *Cambodian Buddhist Studies Review*, 6(1), 12–26. <https://cefcambodia.com/2020/12/25/the-role-of-buddhist-pagodas-in-supporting-education-in-cambodian-society/>
- Steinberg, L. (1975). Community and institutional support in student success. *American Journal of Education*, 83(4), 467–481.
- Stewart, R. (2022). Student housing and university retention: Global perspectives. *Journal of Higher Education Housing*, 45(2), 102–115. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dustin-Grabsch/publication/356474805_CUE-ing_student_success_Evaluating_academic_support_spaces_in_residential_communities/links/619d5aaf07be5f31b7b2d7ac/CUE-ing-student-success-Evaluating-academic-support-spaces-in-residential-communities.pdf
- Tilak, J. B. G. (2003). Higher education and development in Asia. *Asian Development Review*, 20(2), 1–36. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-3368-7_56

- Turner, P. (2012). *Integrated service delivery in the public sector*. Routledge. <file:///Users/macbook/Downloads/IntegratedServiceDeliveryCMRB2010.pdf>
- UNESCO. (2000). *Higher education in developing countries: Peril and promise*. UNESCO Publishing. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000125690>
- UNESCO. (2009). *Student affairs and services in higher education: Global foundations, issues and best practices*. UNESCO Publishing. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000183221>
- UNESCO. (2009). *Trends in global higher education: Tracking an academic revolution*. UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000183219>
- Welch, A. (2008). Access and equity in Southeast Asian higher education: Patterns and issues. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, 1(1), 36–57. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203828540>
- West, A. (2022). *Rethinking curriculum planning in higher education*. Springer. <https://link.springer.com/series/16311>
- Whitford, E. (2020). COVID-19 budget cuts hit student services. *Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/06/22/student-services-hit-hard-college-budget-cuts>
- Wiseman, A., Sam, C., & Phan, L. (2016). Youth engagement in Cambodian education policy. *Journal of International Education Development*, 47(2), 155–168. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-02/undp-kh-report-on-youth-engagement-in-cambodia-ndc.pdf>
- Wintre, M. G., & Yaffe, M. (2000). First-year students' adjustment to university life. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 15(1), 9–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558400151002>
- World Bank. (1994). *Higher education: The lessons of experience*. World Bank. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/246081468764409867>
- World Bank. (2012). *Putting higher education to work: Skills and research for growth in East Asia*. World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-0-8213-8694-6>
- World Bank. (2017). *Higher education for development: An evaluation of the World Bank Group's support*. World Bank. <https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/evaluations/higher-education>
- Yaun, X., Tang, C., & Li, F. (2020). Skills transfer and student employability. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 21(3), 187–196. https://www.ijwil.org/files/APJCE_18_2_87_99.pdf
- Zepke, N. (2014). Student engagement research in higher education: Questioning an academic orthodoxy. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 19(6), 697–708. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2014.901956>
- Zeresford Research. (2024). *Generation Z in higher education: Characteristics and trends*. <https://zeresfordresearch.org>