



ENHANCING RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE AND PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH PROFESSORSHIP TITLES IN CAMBODIA: STRIKING A BALANCE

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Abstract: Education plays a crucial role in building a nation and making educational agents very important for educational reform in every country. The title of professor is one of the incentives that help improve the quality of education through research activities. Recently, Cambodia began awarding professorships to state university lecturers and some of those working at the higher education level. This award is based on the requirements of the person concerned, such as research articles, books, and scientific documents that the individual has published. This research reviews the benefits of granting a professorship, the challenges of unethical research practices, and the balance of professorships. This study found some benefits, challenges, and things that must be done to balance the professorship. The study also recommends several ideas for improving the future of professorships in Cambodia.

Keywords: Professorship, Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, Royal Degree

Abstrak: Pendidikan memegang peranan yang sangat krusial dalam membangun suatu bangsa. Menjadi agen pendidikan sangat penting bagi reformasi pendidikan di setiap negara. Gelar profesor merupakan salah satu insentif yang membantu meningkatkan mutu pendidikan melalui kegiatan penelitian. Baru-baru ini, Kamboja mulai memberikan gelar profesor kepada dosen universitas negeri dan beberapa dari mereka yang bekerja di tingkat pendidikan tinggi. Pemberian tersebut didasarkan pada syarat yang dimiliki yang bersangkutan seperti, artikel penelitian, buku, dan dokumen ilmiah yang telah diterbitkan oleh individu tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meninjau manfaat pemberian gelar profesor, tantangan praktik penelitian yang tidak etis, dan keseimbangan gelar profesor. Studi ini menemukan bahwa terdapat beberapa manfaat, beberapa tantangan, dan beberapa hal yang perlu dilakukan untuk menyeimbangkan gelar profesor. Studi ini juga merekomendasikan beberapa ide untuk meningkatkan masa depan jabatan guru besar di negara Kamboja.

Kata Kunci: Jabatan Profesor, Profesor, Profesor Madya, Asisten Profesor, Gelar Kerajaan

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INTRODUCTION

Cambodia has a long history of education. This country's education used to reach the top during the Angkor period and failed at the bottom during the Khmer Rouge regime. Even though many hard things happened to this country, it still tries to achieve better steps in education (Em et al., 2022). In pursuing academic excellence, recognizing and rewarding scholarly achievements are pivotal in fostering a culture of research and innovation (Caprara, 2006). For a developing nation like Cambodia, establishing a robust

research ecosystem is crucial to its socioeconomic growth (Heng, 2020; Heng & Sol, 2021; Heng et al., 2023). One way to incentivize and enhance research knowledge and productivity is by providing professorship titles based on the publication of books, research and review articles, and scholarly documents (Amara et al., 2015).

There have been some issues with the Royal Degree granting professorship titles nominating professors, associate professors, and assistant professors for those who work in government Higher Education institutions (see Hang, 2023). While this system holds great potential, it is not immune to exploitation by some individuals seeking professorship titles without the necessary effort. Thus, this article explores the benefits of providing professorship titles through publication and identifies the challenges posed by those who seek to obtain the titles through unethical means. It also aims to strike a balance of professorship titles ethically.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Conditions For Obtaining The Professorship Titles

According to Hang (2023), obtaining professorship titles in Cambodia has different phases. The evaluation committee will use the concepts, practices, and prerequisites for promotion from the first phase of review to choose professors for each faculty.

A scientific council created by the appropriate Higher Education Association and approved by the Education Ministry will oversee the second stage of higher education.

The committee that oversees professorships in the field of education and recommends professor appointments and assignments to the government is in charge of the third phase, and according to the declaration by MoEYS (2020), distinct criteria for professorship titles are as follows.

An assistant professor must have written a textbook relating to their area of expertise with at least one recognizable title or published at least three research articles in their field in national or international scientific journals, and the Scientific Council must recognize them. He or she must also have at least five years of teaching and research experience and have never been incarcerated for a felony or misdemeanor.

An associate professor must hold a doctorate or a master's degree for at least five years or more. He or she must have delivered at least five presentations at national or international conferences and published original research in at least five national or international scientific journals in their discipline. He or she must have written textbooks in their specialty with at least one recognizable title and have never been incarcerated for a felony or misdemeanor.

A professor must have a Ph.D. for at least ten years and have presented at or been a guest speaker at seven national or international conferences. Besides, he or she must have published research articles in at least seven national or international scientific journals in their field of competence. He or she must also have two published textbooks on well-known disciplines and be an expert in their fields who has never been incarcerated for a felony or misdemeanor.

Benefits of Providing Professorship Titles Through Publications

The provision of professorship titles through publications encourages research culture. Professorship titles based on published books, research and review articles, and scholarly documents encourage a robust research culture among academics. It incentivizes scholars to engage in rigorous research activities, promote intellectual curiosity, and contribute to expanding knowledge within their respective fields (see Ridley, 2011).

Besides, the provision of professorship titles through publications enhances research productivity. The pursuit of professorship titles motivates researchers to produce high-quality work. The desire to achieve recognition encourages individuals to invest time and effort in conducting innovative research, increasing research output and productivity (Dundar & Lewis, 1998).

Moreover, the provision of professorship titles through publications ensures quality assurance. The publication requirement before obtaining a professorship title ensures a certain level of quality assurance. It provides that individuals who receive the titles have demonstrated their ability to contribute to the scholarly community through rigorous research and publications in reputable peer-reviewed journals (Ingvarson & Rowley, 2017).

In addition, the provision of professorship titles through publications promotes collaboration. The pursuit of professorship titles encourages collaboration among researchers. The researcher can pool their expertise and resources by working together on research projects, enhancing research outcomes, and establishing interdisciplinary collaborations (D'este & Perkmann, 2011).

Challenges Posed By Unethical Practices

Unethical research practices have also posed challenges. One of the challenges is diminished research integrity. For example, paying others to write articles to obtain a professorship undermines the research process's integrity. It compromises the authenticity and credibility of research output, leading to a decline in the overall quality of scientific discourse (Anderson et al., 2013; Em, 2023a).

Moreover, some individuals may ask others to write instead. Some university lecturers might use different means to have books, journal articles, or scholarly documents published under their names. Those individuals might use the money to employ others to work for them (Em, 2023a).

Another challenge is the inequitable distribution of the titles. Exploitative practices create an uneven playing field by favoring those with financial resources over individuals with genuine research capabilities. It can lead to the devaluation of academic titles and hinder the recognition of deserving researchers who may not have the means to engage in unethical practices (see Sarna-Wojcicki et al., 2017).

One of the other challenges is stifled intellectual growth. When individuals seek professorship titles solely for prestige or financial gain, they may neglect personal growth and fail to develop the necessary research skills and knowledge. It hampers the development of a robust research community and limits the potential for meaningful contributions to scientific advancement (Adler & Harzing, 2009).

Striking a Balance

There are different steps to make the provision of professorship titles a balance. Ethical guidelines and oversight are one of those steps. The Cambodian academic community should establish clear ethical guidelines and mechanisms to evaluate research quality. Implementing rigorous oversight and ensuring adherence to ethical standards will help safeguard the integrity of the research process and deter unethical practices. These suggestions could be made by seeing the examples from the other authors. For example, there were some examples of making these things better posed by Nguyen and Meek (2015) in their community.

Another step of making a balance is through emphasizing research skills development. Institutions should prioritize the development of research skills among academics. By providing adequate training and mentoring, researchers can enhance their abilities to produce high-quality research independently, reducing the temptation to engage in unethical practices (Hendriarto et al., 2021).

Moreover, recognition of non-publication contributions is also another means. While publication is crucial, non-publication contributions, such as patents, policy influence, and community engagement, should also be considered in evaluating professor titles. This broader perspective recognizes the diverse ways individuals can contribute to advancing research knowledge and productivity (see Hook et al., 2018).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study relies heavily on the review of documents, with a particular focus on current publications. The study aims to comprehensively understand the latest findings, theories, and advancements by analyzing recent scholarly articles, research papers, and other relevant publications. This approach enables the researchers to stay up-to-date with the most recent developments and incorporate the latest knowledge into their study. By examining current publications, the study ensures that the information and data used are based on the most recent and reliable sources, enhancing the validity and relevance of the research findings (Gratton & Jones, 2004).

Furthermore, reviewing current publications allows the researchers to identify gaps or limitations in the existing literature (Pickering & Byrne, 2014). By critically analyzing the recent work done in the field, the study can identify areas that have not been adequately addressed or require further investigation (Suri, 2011). It helps shape the current study's research questions and objectives, ensuring that it contributes to the existing body of knowledge by addressing the field's most pressing and relevant gaps. Additionally, by building upon the existing literature, the study can establish a solid foundation for its methodology, theoretical framework, and overall research design, thus enhancing the rigor and credibility of the study (Hulstijn et al., 2014).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Finding

During the document consultation, several essential findings emerged that shed light on the issues. The analysis revealed important insights and information that are

worth discussing in detail. These results provide a comprehensive understanding of this topic and serve as valuable input for decision-making and further research.

Table 1. The results of the review

Benefits of providing the professor titles	Challenges of unethical practices	Striking a balance
Encouraging research culture	Diminished research integrity	Ethical guidelines and oversight
Enhancing research productivity	Inequitable distribution of titles	Emphasizing research skills development
Ensuring quality assurance	Stifled intellectual growth	Recognition of non-publication contributions
Promoting collaboration	Employing others to write instead	Regular training

Providing professorship titles encourages a vibrant research culture within academia. By bestowing the titles of professorship upon distinguished scholars, institutions acknowledge and value their commitment to advancing knowledge through research. This recognition strongly motivates professors to actively engage in research activities, pursue novel ideas, and push the boundaries of their respective fields. Moreover, professorship titles enhance research productivity by granting professors access to various resources, such as funding opportunities, laboratories, and research assistants, which are crucial for conducting high-quality research. The titles also carry a significant responsibility to maintain the highest standards of academic excellence, ensuring quality assurance in the research conducted by professors.

Furthermore, professorship titles foster collaboration among researchers. Professors often collaborate with peers within and outside their institutions, leading to interdisciplinary research, knowledge exchange, and the generation of innovative solutions to complex problems. In summary, professorship titles are pivotal in promoting a thriving research culture, enhancing research productivity, ensuring quality assurance, and fostering academic collaboration.

While providing professorship titles carries certain benefits, it is essential to acknowledge that unethical practices are associated with this system. One such concern is the potential for diminished research integrity. In some cases, individuals may prioritize acquiring titles over conducting rigorous and innovative research, thus compromising academic work's overall quality and credibility. Additionally, the distribution of professorship titles may not always be equitable, with specific individuals, often those with more privilege or connections, receiving titles despite lacking the necessary qualifications or contributions. It can undermine the titles' credibility and perpetuate inequality within academia.

Furthermore, emphasizing titles can stifle intellectual growth by promoting a hierarchical environment that discourages collaboration and open dialogue. Finally, there is a risk of employing others to write on behalf of professors, which undermines the authenticity and originality of scholarly work. These unethical practices ultimately erode the integrity and value of professorship titles within the academic community.

The involvement of government bodies and education ministries is crucial to ensure a balanced approach in awarding professorship titles. To begin with, establishing Ethical Guidelines and Oversight mechanisms can safeguard against any potential biases or favoritism in the selection process. These guidelines would ensure transparency and fairness, promoting a merit-based evaluation of candidates. Additionally, emphasizing the development of research skills is essential. Professorship titles should be granted to individuals who have demonstrated proficiency in conducting rigorous research, contributing to advancing knowledge within their respective fields. Recognizing and valuing non-publication contributions, such as teaching excellence, mentorship, and community engagement, is equally important. It allows for a holistic evaluation of a candidate's impact and recognizes their diverse academic contributions. Lastly, regular training programs for selection committees and evaluators can enhance their understanding of evolving academic standards, methodologies, and ethical considerations. These training initiatives help maintain the integrity and quality of the professorship title awarding process, ensuring that it remains relevant and adapted to the changing landscape of higher education.

Discussion

The assignment of professorship titles within academia has long been a topic of interest and discussion. This paper explores the benefits of providing professorship titles, the challenges associated with unethical practices, and the importance of striking a balance in academic research. By comparing previous studies and proposing more ethical approaches, this discussion sheds light on the complex dynamics surrounding professorship titles and their impact on the research landscape.

Recognition and Prestige: Professorship titles recognize scholarly achievements and expertise within and outside the academic community. This recognition can enhance the reputation of individuals and the institutions they belong to, attracting talented researchers and fostering a culture of excellence (Adler & Harzing, 2009).

Career Advancement and Job Security: Professorship titles often accompany promotion and tenure, providing career stability and increased job security. It can incentivize researchers to pursue long-term commitments to their fields and institutions, allowing them to contribute meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge (Brown & Kurland, 1990).

Influence and Leadership Opportunities: Professorship titles often come with enhanced authority and leadership roles within academic departments. It allows professors to influence research directions, mentor junior colleagues, and drive positive change within their fields of expertise (Johnson, 2006).

Credential Inflation: Unethical practices like issuing undeserved professorship titles can lead to credential inflation. It devalues the significance of genuine professorship and undermines the integrity of the academic system (Verrone, 1999).

Research Misconduct: Unethical practices can also contribute to research misconduct. When individuals with inadequate qualifications hold professorship titles, they may be ill-equipped to conduct rigorous research, leading to biased or flawed results. It can compromise the credibility of the research and negatively impact the scientific community (Holtfreter et al., 2020).

Inequity and Diminished Meritocracy: The unethical practice of awarding professorship titles can perpetuate inequalities within academia. If titles are granted based on factors unrelated to scholarly achievements, such as nepotism or personal connections, deserving candidates may be overlooked, resulting in a diminished meritocracy (Van den Brink, 2010).

Transparent and Rigorous Evaluation Processes: Implementing transparent evaluation processes based on objective criteria, such as publication records, teaching evaluations, and external peer reviews, can ensure that professorship titles are awarded to deserving individuals. This approach minimizes the risk of unethical practices and promotes a fair and merit-based system (Gu & Levin, 2021).

Regular Evaluation and Performance Reviews: Regular evaluation and performance reviews can help maintain the currency and relevance of professorship titles. It ensures that professors continue to meet the standards expected of their positions, fostering ongoing professional growth and accountability (Em et al., 2021).

Institutional Support and Oversight: Institutions should provide clear guidelines and oversight mechanisms to prevent unethical practices. It includes promoting a culture of integrity and accountability, establishing whistleblower mechanisms, and implementing consequences for misconduct (Zeng & Resnik, 2010).

Professorship titles are crucial in recognizing scholarly achievements, offering career advancement opportunities, and fostering academic leadership (Crawford et al., 2012). However, unethical practices can undermine the system's integrity and compromise the research quality (Resnik & Elmore, 2016). Striking a balance entails implementing transparent evaluation processes, conducting regular performance reviews, and providing institutional support and oversight (Staunton et al., 2019). Finally, it could be noted that by learning from previous studies and adopting more ethical approaches, academia can ensure the continued value and credibility of professorship titles while upholding the principles of fairness, meritocracy, and excellence in research.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the academic landscape in Cambodia can benefit from a thoughtful approach to enhancing research knowledge and productivity through professorship titles. Providing professorship titles based on publication achievements can serve as a positive incentive, encouraging academics to engage in high-quality research and contribute to advancing knowledge. This recognition can foster a culture of excellence and inspire individuals to strive for academic excellence.

However, addressing the challenges posed by unethical practices that may arise in pursuing professorship titles is crucial. Stringent measures should be implemented to ensure that publications are rigorously vetted for quality and adhere to ethical standards. Peer review processes must be robust and transparent, and plagiarism and other academic misconduct should be strictly prohibited. By upholding academic integrity, we believe the credibility and reputation of the research community can be safeguarded.

Furthermore, we are confident that striking a balance is essential when providing professorship titles based on publication achievements. While publication is vital to academic productivity, it should not be the sole criterion for granting such titles. Other factors, such as teaching experience, mentorship, and contributions to the academic community, should also be considered. A comprehensive evaluation system that considers multiple facets of academic work can ensure that deserving individuals are recognized for their contributions to the field.

Moreover, we firmly believe that professorship titles should not be limited solely to educational staff working at higher education institutions to ensure a balanced and inclusive approach. It is essential to recognize that expertise and knowledge are not exclusive to a particular level of education. High school teachers and professionals working at lower educational levels possess valuable skills and qualifications that make them equally deserving of recognition as professors. Besides, we believe that by extending the opportunity to earn professorship titles to individuals across all educational levels, a sense of equality is fostered and acknowledges the diverse contributions made by educators at every stage of a student's academic journey. This approach promotes professional growth, encourages excellence in teaching (see Em, 2023b), and allows for the dissemination of specialized knowledge, ultimately benefiting the entire education system.

Ultimately, the goal should be to foster a research environment that promotes quality and integrity. We accept that by providing incentives for research productivity while maintaining ethical standards, Cambodia can nurture a vibrant academic community that contributes significantly to advancing knowledge and the country's development. Striking a balance between the benefits of providing professorship titles through publication and the challenges posed by unethical practices is crucial for the long-term growth and success of the academic sector in Cambodia. Moreover, we recommend that publications made with predatory journals must not be credited or avoided since they give novice research knowledge in the Cambodian context a lousy reputation.

Finally, we are sure that to comprehensively understand and address the challenges of conducting research in Cambodian contexts, it is crucial to implement studies that utilize different research designs. By employing diverse methodologies, such as qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, and case studies, academics can better understand the challenges that may arise. Each research design offers unique insights and approaches, enabling the exploration of various aspects related to the cultural, social, economic, and political dimensions of conducting research in Cambodia. This comprehensive approach will enhance the validity and reliability of the findings,

facilitating the development of effective strategies and solutions to overcome the identified challenges. Furthermore, by employing different designs, researchers can capture the distinctions and complexities of the Cambodian context, allowing for more context-specific and tailored recommendations.

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