



ISSN 2827-8151 (Online)

SRAWUNG: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities

<https://journal.ifpublisher.com/index.php/jssh>

Vol. 4, Issue 1, (2025)

doi.org/10.56943/jssh.v4i1.702

Leadership in Higher Education

A Phenomenological Study on Developing Successful Academic Leadership in Universities in Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

Higher education plays a pivotal role in national development, particularly in rapidly evolving societies like Cambodia. In Cambodia, where the higher education landscape is undergoing rapid transformation and expansion, understanding and developing effective academic leadership is particularly crucial. Strong academic leadership is essential for navigating the complex challenges facing higher education today, including globalization, technological advancements, evolving student demographics, and increasing demands for accountability and quality assurance. Despite the acknowledged importance of academic leadership in higher education, there is a limited understanding of the specific experiences and factors that contribute to successful academic leadership within the unique context of Cambodian universities. A phenomenological study was employed for interviewing and collecting the insights from 12 academic participants in universities. This study examines the experiences and challenges faced by university leaders in Cambodia, as well as the key factors contributing to their success. Drawing on data analysis of career paths and leadership development. The research reveals that Cambodian university leaders bring diverse prior experiences to their roles, including teaching, administration, research, and non-academic work, which provide valuable skills and perspectives. However, they also encounter significant challenges stemming from limited funding, faculty development needs, technological gaps, cultural expectations, and infrastructural limitations. Despite these obstacles, successful university leaders demonstrate visionary thinking, emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, collaborative approaches, adaptability, and a commitment to innovation and transparency. These findings highlight the complex landscape of higher education leadership in Cambodia and offer insights into the qualities and strategies necessary for effective leadership in this context.

Keywords: *Academic Leadership, Leadership, Phenomenological Study*

INTRODUCTION

The higher education fraternity is strongly associated with academia, which is the environment or community involved with research and education. Unsurprisingly, the faculty receives more emphasis in topics related to higher education. However, recent days have seen significant changes in the higher education scene, beginning with an increased interest in a smooth and capable administration to support, enhance, and elevate both research and education aims to new heights (Sathiyaseelan, 2024).

Leadership is viewed as a reciprocal process (Cote, 2017). Leadership is an action that involves transactional behavior between leaders and followers. There is extensive research on what leadership is and is not (Cote, 2017), like Mamula Nikolić et al. (2019), emphasized the importance of leadership in promoting innovation and execution.

According to Bui et al. (2016), leaders should clearly define their tasks, implement efficient procedures, engage in open discussions regarding leadership styles, and establish a continuous flow of communication. It can be difficult to keep individuals of the organization accountable for their activities; thus, developing a communication strategy can help to avoid accountability concerns. Leaders from many organizations have focused more on growing human capital than on developing people. Behaviors are tough to change, but with team encouragement, learning, and the development of a strategic process, stakeholders may eventually share the same vision and work toward a common goal.

The higher education industry confronts problems such as global rivalry, cost-effectiveness, novel research and teaching techniques, and increased production. Changes in university circumstances, such as decreasing government funding, have resulted in more business-oriented processes and increased responsibility. This pressure forces university administrators to take expenses seriously and make changes in procedures and beliefs, which affect academic cultures, study settings, and outcomes (Debrowski, 2015). The leadership gap in higher education is a critical issue, with a growing need for competent leadership and an expected scarcity of qualified personnel (Howell et al., 2022).

This study investigates successful leadership in universities by analyzing existing leaders' experiences and obstacles. It seeks to uncover critical variables that contribute to effective leadership, such as varied origins, skill sets, and resilience. The study's goal is to give significant insights for present and future university leaders, developing a better knowledge of the critical components of effective leadership in higher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of blended teams in higher education needs a change in leadership techniques, necessitating new skills such as training, trust, emotional

intelligence, communication, team building, technology, employee recognition, and adaptive leadership styles (Alward & Phelps, 2019).

Academic leaders use their skills to solve internal and external challenges, promoting growth and adaptability. They strike a balance between faculty and rectorate demands while also managing expectations. Academic administrators in higher education serve as liaisons across departments, building a social tie with society while addressing conventions, external pressures, and perceptions (Al-Khudhiri, 2021).

Ineffective communication may have an influence on businesses by transferring messages, making meaning via information interchange, and changing organizational processes. This study will focus on an understudied environment: higher education (Gigliotti & Ruben, 2017; Jordanoglou, 2018). Higher education leaders make decisions that shape their organization's future trajectory and convey plans for achieving a desired state. Sadiartha & Sitorus (2018) explained how an organization's progress is dependent on leaders' vision and their ability to successfully share it with stakeholders. Leaders' communication efforts can have an impact on both people and corporate procedures.

Historically, higher education institutions (HEI) have not invested in leadership development via programs or training since it is assumed that only a few people are qualified and experienced to lead this endeavor (Dopson et al., 2019). Furthermore, Gigliotti & Ruben (2017) emphasized the value of leadership development in higher education. In today's environment, college and university leaders must develop and apply competencies that go beyond their academic backgrounds. Challenges in post-secondary education need leaders to communicate effectively and build leadership abilities to sustain the business (Renani et al., 2017).

Al-Khudhiri (2021) investigates Azerbaijani executive academics' perspectives on leadership, professional growth, and organizational culture. It highlights the need of transparency, common knowledge, interpersonal skills, and open, collaborative environments for improving academic leadership in higher education.

Academic leaders must acquire key competencies for success in university settings. They should not pass up formal job chances and instead employ simulations, case studies, and action planning. Formal schooling is only part of the process. On-the-job experience is also important. Institutions may help by hosting workshops and training sessions through their human resources departments. (Gmelch & Buller, 2016).

Renani et al. (2017) discovered that communication effectiveness and organizational structure improve understanding of the organization and foster good working relationships. Researchers have researched organizational communication in a variety of circumstances, but their primary focus has been on the direction of speech. Researchers have investigated communication travel in many directions,

including upward, downward, horizontal, and diagonal (Sadia et al., 2017). Communication strategies are also classified as three-dimensional: formality (instructions or job description), complexity (sub-systems or isolation), and centralization (level of authority). In other words, the most common way to study corporate communication is to look at how communications are conveyed under certain settings. Scholars in the field of communication began to investigate messages beyond transference and are interested in understanding communication influence inside the organization.

Academic leadership bears similarities with conventional leadership, but it varies in its systematic framework and overarching purpose. There is little study on academic leadership (Kok & McDonald, 2017). Anthony & Antony (2017) emphasized how conventional leadership is goal-oriented, focused on wage increases and promotions, and offers financial incentives. Traditional and academic leadership share principles such as change management, social skills, self-regulation, individual motivation, trust and credibility, empathy, and establishing a business vision.

Anthony & Antony (2017) investigated whether academic leadership is distinct or has characteristics with regular commercial leadership. This is significant because HEIs have begun to evaluate the nature of leadership and the specific requirements of a good leader. Karadağ's (2017) phenomenological qualitative investigation was carried out using maximum variation sampling. Thirteen managers were interviewed at a Turkish university to better understand the duties and responsibilities of academic leadership. It was acknowledged that academic leaders have a vision to excite and inspire personnel, hence HEI leaders must encourage and influence followers. Collaboration, character, trust, and morale are among the most impactful characteristics studied.

Transformational leadership is associated with high work satisfaction because it helps subordinates and allows employees to submit feedback, which leaders frequently examine (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016). In academics, transformational leadership has been connected to improved organizational results (Herbst & Garg, 2017). Transformational behavior is associated with job happiness (Herbst & Garg, 2017; Nicdao, 2019). Charismatic leadership is defined as a phenomenon in which leaders serve as guides for embracing a set of values or beliefs, which are frequently drawn from the leader's personal characteristics (Cote, 2017).

Steffens et al. (2016) investigated authentic leadership, particularly how to achieve true leadership. There are several characteristics that a leader might exhibit that followers view as real. This involves sharing a common interest with the group. Organizational teams evaluate leaders' authenticity based on shared ideas, attitudes, and behaviors that promote a team environment. Leadership behaviors that align with a common interest can boost job happiness, job performance, and assist manage synergy within the work culture (Hart et al., 2017).

According to Hackmann et al. (2017), educational leadership programs designed to equip higher education leaders are becoming increasingly popular. "Effective presidential leadership in the future may depend on an individual's ability to leverage an integrated, shared leadership approach that encourages coordinated and synergistic leadership among many actors." These educational leadership programs (e.g., higher education and associated programs) can equip future college and university presidential candidates to take on leadership responsibilities.

This literature review investigates leadership development in higher education, concentrating on the abilities required of university leaders and the features of effective leadership development programs. It compares data from Latin American countries to those from other areas, highlighting both similarities and differences in the issues encountered by university executives. The evaluation also identifies a lack of clarity about the best design and implementation of leadership development programs, particularly in Latin America. Future directions include conducting further research to determine the efficacy of various leadership development program designs, exploring specific obstacles and possibilities, and developing culturally relevant programs (Kri et al., 2021).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used a phenomenological technique to investigate the lived experiences of outstanding academic leaders at Cambodian institutions. Twelve top university executives from various academic fields and administrative responsibilities at important Cambodian institutions will be specifically chosen to engage in in-depth, semi-structured interviews.

These interviews focused on the participants' leadership experiences, challenges they faced, strategies they used to succeed, and their perspectives on the key qualities and skills required for effective academic leadership in the Cambodian higher education context. The interview data was examined to uncover similar themes and patterns in participants' accounts of their leadership experiences, with the goal of shedding light on the essence of successful academic leadership in Cambodian institutions via an understanding of the shared components of their lived experiences (Gill, 2020; Williams, 2021).

To guarantee rigor and dependability, the reliability of data gathering and analysis was investigated. To reduce inconsistency in data collection, a rigorous interview approach was developed and followed consistently throughout the study. Furthermore, several researchers independently evaluated the interview data, comparing interpretations to uncover potential biases and increase the reliability and consistency of the findings. This collaborative approach to data processing might strengthen the study's findings (Sparby et al., 2020).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The table depicts the career pathways of 12 persons in higher education, indicating that teacher posts predominate, with various entry points. Many advanced through internal promotions and administrative roles, emphasizing the value of experience and expertise. The chart also emphasizes the value of administrative expertise and the range of leadership positions available. It implies that there is no single road to leadership, and that gaining administrative experience is essential for progress.

Table 1. Career Path Summary

Participant	Starting Role	Intermediate Roles	Current Role
1	Faculty (Humanities)	Department manager, Dean	Dean
2	Part-time lecturers	Administrative Roles	Administrator
3	Research Scientist	Grant Administrator	University Leader
4	Student Affairs Prof.	Dean of Students	Vice President
5	Faculty (STEM)	Department manager	Institution director
6	Librarian	Library Administrator	University Leader
7	Faculty (Education)	Program Director	Dean
8	K-12 Leader	Higher Education Administrator	Administrator
9	Faculty (Business)	Associate Dean	Vice President
10	Faculty (Social Sci.)	Department manager	Institution director
11	Faculty (Engineering)	Research Administrator	Dean
12	Faculty (Arts)	Program Director	Vice President

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

This research looks at the various experiences of 12 higher education executives. Academic leadership, research leadership, student-centered experiences, external involvement, and large-scale operations are some of the key topics. Key elements include diverse skill development, context, talent demonstrability, and a focus on effect. According to the study, these experiences help to advance one's profession and can be linked to further education pathways.

Analyzing these experiences can give valuable insights about leadership ideologies and practices.

Table 2. Valuable Experiences by Participant

Participant	Valuable Experiences
1	Leading curriculum reforms, managing cross-departmental initiatives
2	Corporate leadership roles, strategic decision-making
3	Managing large research projects, leading diverse teams
4	Working with students, crisis management, community building
5	Leading interdisciplinary research teams
6	Managing library budgets, digital transformation projects
7	Developing teacher training programs
8	Leading a school district, managing large teams and budgets
9	Consulting for businesses, understanding organizational challenges
10	Leading international research collaborations
11	Managing large-scale research projects
12	Producing large-scale arts events

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

The table emphasizes the value of mentoring and role models in higher education leadership. Participants choose academic luminaries, institutional leaders, and leaders from different industries as mentors or role models. Key topics include formal mentoring programs, observation of leaders in action, and cross-sector learning. The table recommends linking mentoring data to career path summaries and important experiences to better understand the aspects that contribute to successful leadership development in higher education.

Table 3. Mentors and Role Models

Participant	Mentors/Role Models
1	Doctoral advisor, former university president
2	Former CEO
3	Senior colleague in research lab
4	Former vice president
5	Former institution director
6	Library director
7	Mentor in doctoral program
8	Superintendent
9	Business leader
10	Former institution director
11	Senior faculty member

12	Mentor in arts community
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Source: Processed Data by Researchers

The table shows the fundamental experiences and skill development of 12 participants in a variety of professions, including academic administration, student affairs, research administration, library administration, teaching and industry interaction, and K–12 leadership. These jobs lay the groundwork for future leadership positions, including as budgeting, faculty governance, resource management, and stakeholder management. The wide skill set underlines the significance of these jobs in managing complex organizations. The study might be useful for prospective leaders and institutions looking to develop leadership ability.

Table 4. Earlier Roles and Skills Developed

Participant	Earlier Roles	Skills Developed
1	Teaching, department manager	Understanding faculty needs, budgeting
2	Part-time lecturers	Bridging academia and industry
3	Grant administration	Funding challenges, resource allocation
4	Student affairs roles	Crisis management, community building
5	Department manager	Faculty governance, budgeting
6	Library administration	Resource management, user-centered design
7	Program director	Accreditation, program evaluation
8	K-12 leadership	Stakeholder management, budgeting
9	Associate dean	Academic policy, faculty development
10	Department manager	Faculty dynamics, resource allocation
11	Research administration	Funding, compliance
12	Program director	Curriculum development, student engagement

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

The table provides a thorough examination of official training programs completed by 12 participants in higher education. These programs span from specialized jobs to overall leadership programs, displaying a strong commitment to professional growth. The participants' program selection shows a systematic approach to skill building, with an emphasis on topics important to their unique career pathways. The study also emphasizes the significance of mentors and role

models in influencing participants' decision to engage in formal training programs. This study can be useful for people aspiring to leadership positions as well as organizations looking to develop leadership potential.

Table 5. Formal Training Programs

Participant	Formal Training Program
1	Leadership development program for academic administrators
2	Executive MBA program
3	Certificate in higher education leadership
4	Master's in higher education administration
5	Leadership academy for STEM faculty
6	Leadership program for academic librarians
7	Doctoral degree in educational leadership
8	Master's in educational leadership
9	Executive education program in leadership
10	Leadership program for academic leaders
11	Leadership program for engineering faculty
12	Leadership program for arts administrators

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

This table displays the frequency and proportion of respondents who recognized different obstacles. Limited money is the most serious issue, impacting 83.3% of responders. Faculty development is also a big concern, reported by 66.7%, followed by student preparation (58.3%). Half of the respondents face technological deficiencies, while 41.7% face problems due to government restrictions or cultural expectations. Infrastructure is a difficulty for 33.3% of responders, while research restrictions, student employability, and COVID-19 effect all pose challenges for 25%. In summary, the data reveals major barriers to finance, faculty development, student preparation, and systemic concerns, indicating the need for deliberate interventions and resource allocation to address these common challenges.

Table 6. Most Significant Challenges

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Limited funding	10	83.3%
Faculty development	8	66.7%
Student preparedness	7	58.3%
Technological gaps	6	50.0%
Government regulations	5	41.7%
Cultural expectations	5	41.7%
Infrastructure	4	33.3%
Research limitations	3	25.0%
Student employability	3	25.0%
COVID-19 impact	3	25.0%

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

This table shows statistics on cultural and societal difficulties, with hierarchical culture being the most prevalent concern, impacting 58.3% of respondents. Gender roles and resistance to change are equally important problems, affecting 41.7% of individuals. Family duties are a burden for 33.3% of respondents, while language hurdles and the urban-rural split affect 25%. These findings indicate that deeply rooted cultural norms, societal expectations, and structural disadvantages pose considerable challenges for a sizable percentage of the population included in this study.

Table 7. Cultural and Societal Challenges

Cultural/Societal Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Hierarchical culture	7	58.3%
Gender roles	5	41.7%
Resistance to change	5	41.7%
Family obligations	4	33.3%
Language barriers	3	25.0%
Urban-rural divide	3	25.0%

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

This table shows the frequency and percentage of responses using various tactics. Partnerships are the most popular option, chosen by 66.7% of respondents. Prioritization is also widely utilized, with 58.3%, followed by innovation at 50%. 41.7% of people raise money, while 33.3% utilize government advocacy and efficiency improvements. Grants and community participation are the least popular techniques, with each used by 25% of respondents. Overall, the results point to a considerable dependence on teamwork and strategic focus, with a modest emphasis on resource production and external relationships.

Table 8. Addressing Limited Resources

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Partnerships	8	66.7%
Prioritization	7	58.3%
Innovation	6	50.0%
Fundraising	5	41.7%
Government advocacy	4	33.3%
Efficiency improvements	4	33.3%
Grants	3	25.0%
Community engagement	3	25.0%

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

This table shows the frequency and proportion of responders who use various tactics. Communication is the most often reported approach, with 83.3% of respondents using it. Transparency is also widely utilized, with 66.7%, followed by cooperation at 58.3%. Fifty percent of respondents use feedback methods, whereas

41.7% use flexibility as a technique. 33.3% of respondents utilize conflict resolution and strategic planning, while 25% choose lobbying as their least common technique. Overall, the data demonstrates a considerable emphasis on open communication, transparency, and collaborative approaches, with modest attention to feedback, flexibility, and planning, and less focus on lobbying.

Table 9. Balancing Stakeholder Expectations

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Communication	10	83.3%
Transparency	8	66.7%
Collaboration	7	58.3%
Feedback mechanisms	6	50.0%
Adaptability	5	41.7%
Conflict resolution	4	33.3%
Strategic planning	4	33.3%
Advocacy	3	25.0%

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

This table highlights how six distinct individuals addressed various difficulties with particular options or solutions. Participant 1 responded to budget cuts by reallocating resources and prioritizing essential programming. Participant 2 successfully settled a faculty strike via discussion and compromise. Participant 3 responded to student demonstrations by engaging in conversation and partially rolling back tuition increases. Participant 4 addressed a plagiarism controversy by enforcing stronger academic integrity norms. Participant 5 helped the transition during COVID-19 by investing in digital technologies and online learning courses. Finally, Participant 6 responded to corruption charges by conducting an internal investigation and adopting anti-corruption measures. In summary, the table demonstrates a number of problem-solving strategies in response to various institutional issues.

Table 10. Examples of Difficult Decisions

Case Study	Participant	Decision/Solution
Budget cuts	Participant 1	Reallocated resources and focused on core programs
Faculty strike	Participant 2	Negotiated with faculty and offered compromises
Student protests	Participant 3	Engaged in dialogue and partially rolled back tuition hikes
Plagiarism scandal	Participant 4	Implemented stricter academic integrity policies
COVID-19 transition	Participant 5	Invested in digital tools and training for online learning

Corruption allegations	Participant 6	Conducted an internal investigation and implemented anti-corruption measures
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Source: Processed Data by Researchers

This table provides a quantitative overview of attributes and talents, including the frequency with which they were cited. The most commonly referenced concepts are visionary thinking and integrity/ethics, each with four citations. Communication skills, emotional intelligence, and flexibility are all stated three times. Collaboration and invention are less commonly mentioned, both appearing twice. According to the research, imaginative thinking and ethical behavior are regarded as highly significant abilities, followed by interpersonal and adaptive skills, with teamwork and creativity being acknowledged but underemphasized.

Table 11. Analysis of Leadership Qualities and Skills

Quality/Skill	Frequency of Mention
Visionary Thinking	4
Communication Skills	3
Emotional Intelligence	3
Adaptability	3
Integrity/Ethics	4
Collaboration	2
Innovation	2

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

This table highlights the frequency with which various techniques are referenced. Open communication is the most often cited strategy, with five mentions. Shared decision-making is also a popular technique, as noted four times. Recognition of contributions is mentioned three times, while team-building activities and feedback methods are each mentioned twice. This implies that open communication and collaborative decision-making are highly appreciated tactics, along with the importance of contribution appreciation. Team-building and feedback systems are cited less frequently, although they are still regarded as effective tactics.

Table 12. Fostering Collaboration and Trust

Strategy	Frequency of Mention
Open Communication	5
Shared Decision-Making	4
Recognition of Contributions	3
Team-Building Activities	2
Feedback Mechanisms	2

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

This table displays the frequency with which certain techniques were suggested. The most commonly listed tactics are pilot projects, technology integration, and collaborations, each of which appears three times. Data-driven decisions and innovation problems are referenced less frequently, each only twice. This shows a high emphasis on experimentation, technology leveraging, and cooperation, as well as some attention on data analysis and overcoming innovation barriers.

Table 13. Driving Innovation and Change

Strategy	Frequency of Mention
Pilot Projects	3
Technology Integration	3
Partnerships	3
Data-Driven Decisions	2
Innovation Challenges	2

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

This table provides a quantitative overview of the information sources cited, including the frequency with which each is mentioned. Conferences and journals are the most often referenced sources, appearing four times. Global networks and internet resources are each referenced three times. Benchmarking studies and alumni involvement are mentioned less frequently, each only twice. This data indicates that conventional academic channels (conferences/journals) are the most popular information source, followed by broader professional ties (global networks) and easily available digital content (online resources). Benchmarking and alumni involvement, while still used, are less commonly depended on for information

Table 14. Staying Informed About Global Trends

Source of Information	Frequency of Mention
Conferences/Journals	4
Global Networks	3
Online Resources	3
Benchmarking Studies	2
Alumni Engagement	2

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

This table provides a quantitative summary of adaption tactics, including the frequency with which they were referenced. Contextualization is the most often cited technique, appearing four times. Community participation and sustainability are both mentioned three times. Pilot testing and policy alignment are less commonly referenced, both appearing twice. This research reveals that customizing techniques to unique circumstances is the most important adaptation strategy, followed by incorporating community opinions and concentrating on long-term

viability. Experimentation via pilot testing and verifying alignment with current regulations are also explored, but to a lesser level.

Table 15. Adapting Global Trends to the Cambodian Context

Adaptation Strategy	Frequency of Mention
Contextualization	4
Community Engagement	3
Sustainability	3
Pilot Testing	2
Policy Alignment	2

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

The results show that "Integrity" is the most often referenced ethical value, appearing five times. "Trust" is the second most common, with four references. "Accountability" and "Social Responsibility" rank third, with each being cited three times. Finally, "equity" is the least referenced ethical principle in the summary, with only two occurrences. This quantitative summary indicates a significant emphasis on honesty and trust within the ethical framework under consideration.

Table 16. Role of Ethical Leadership

Ethical Principle	Frequency of Mention
Integrity	5
Trust	4
Accountability	3
Social Responsibility	3
Equity	2

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

The quantitative summary shows that "Open Communication" is the most often suggested technique, appearing four times. "Feedback Mechanisms" and "Independent Oversight" are tied for second place, with each cited three times. "Audits and Reviews" and "Public Reporting" are the least common techniques, each occurring twice. According to this statistics, open communication is the most stressed method, followed by feedback and supervision, with audits and public reporting receiving less emphasis in contrast.

Table 17. Ensuring Transparency and Accountability

Strategy	Frequency of Mention
Open Communication	4
Feedback Mechanisms	3
Independent Oversight	3
Audits and Reviews	2
Public Reporting	2

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

Finding 1: Prior Experiences University Leaders in Cambodia Believe Best Prepared Them to Serve in Their Roles

University leaders in Cambodia, like their colleagues elsewhere, depend on a vast tapestry of past experiences to help them serve effectively in their professions. These experiences include teaching, administrative responsibilities, research, and even non-academic activities, each of which adds distinct value to their leadership qualities. Several major themes emerge from the data analysis of career trajectories and leadership development, highlighting the earlier experiences that Cambodian university leaders are most likely to appreciate.

“Cambodian university leaders possess a diverse range of prior experiences, including teaching, administrative roles, research, non-academic roles, mentorship, formal training, student affairs, and international experience. Teaching provides a deep understanding of faculty and student needs, while administrative roles offer hands-on experience in budgeting, resource allocation, and policy implementation. Research and project management skills are crucial for managing large-scale projects and ensuring compliance with funding requirements. Non-academic roles, such as corporate or K-12 settings, offer unique perspectives and can bridge the gap between academia and industry. Formal training and advanced degrees provide the theoretical foundation for senior administrative roles.”

Finding 2: Challenges Encountered by University Leaders in Cambodia

Financial limits, cultural expectations, infrastructure limitations, and the need to reconcile multiple stakeholders demands all provide significant obstacles for Cambodian university directors. These issues are strongly established in the country's socioeconomic and cultural background, making leadership in higher education a difficult and demanding task. The following is a thorough examination of the significant problems that these leaders faced during their careers.

“Cambodian university leaders face numerous challenges, including limited funding, faculty development, student preparedness, technological gaps, government regulations, cultural expectations, resistance to change, infrastructure limitations, research limitations, student employability, COVID-19 impact, and urban-rural divide. These challenges are deeply rooted in the country's socio-economic and cultural context, making leadership in higher education a complex and demanding role. Balancing these demands requires innovative strategies, strong leadership, and collaboration among stakeholders.”

Finding 3: Key Factors Contributing to Being Successful University Leaders

Successful university leadership involves a blend of personal characteristics, strategic abilities, and a thorough awareness of the academic and social environments. According to the data analysis of 12 participants' comments, many important elements emerge as crucial for effective higher education leadership.

These include visionary thinking, emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, teamwork, flexibility, and a dedication to innovation and openness.

“Successful university leaders possess visionary thinking, emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, collaboration, shared decision-making, adaptability, commitment to innovation, transparency, global awareness, inclusivity, diversity, effective communication skills, sustainability commitment, empowerment, mentoring, balancing tradition and innovation, and community engagement. These qualities enable them to set long-term goals, understand challenges, anticipate global trends, and foster a culture of trust, transparency, and sustainability.”

CONCLUSION

The study looks at university leadership in Cambodia, concentrating on three major themes: past experiences, problems encountered, and variables leading to success. It emphasizes the necessity of recognizing different perspectives and encouraging many paths to leadership. Financial limits, faculty development, student preparation, technical gaps, government rules, cultural expectations, and infrastructural limitations are among issues that university executives must address. Visionary thinking, emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, cooperation, flexibility, and a dedication to innovation and sustainability define successful university leadership.

RECOMMENDATION

This study on university leadership in Cambodia emphasizes the value of long-term experiences, comparative studies, gender roles, technology's influence, and community participation. It implies that leaders must navigate the complexities of higher education by valuing diverse pathways, addressing financial constraints, improving faculty development, bridging student preparedness gaps, closing technological gaps, navigating government regulations, promoting diversity, and encouraging innovation. Future study might help us better understand university leadership and develop methods to improve higher education in resource-constrained settings.

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