The Role of Student Services in Improving Student Learning in Higher Education in Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

The Royal Government of Cambodia envisions transforming the country into a middle-income nation by 2030 and a developed nation by 2050, focusing on building human capital to foster a knowledge-based society. As a result, Cambodia's number of higher education institutions (HEIs) has grown significantly over the past decade. Notably, student services have been identified as the fifth criterion to ensure that Cambodian higher education meets regional and global standards. However, up to now, there has been much research focused on student services in Cambodia HEIs. This study, therefore, strives to fill this gap by identifying the benefits of student services in Cambodia's higher education sector. This study explores the impact of student services on student learning outcomes in higher education in Cambodia, an area that has received limited attention from researchers and relevant education sectors. Using a qualitative approach, purposive sampling was used to conduct semi-structured interviews with 38 key informants from various institutions. The interviews included face-to-face discussions with key informants and focus group discussions with students. The research identified four main benefits of student services: academic development, personal development, career development, and citizenship development. The findings suggest that enhancing student service quality is essential for HEIs to create a supportive environment that promotes student learning and ensures overall HEI quality. Key recommendations are given for policymakers and HEI stakeholders in Cambodia based on the findings, particularly the potential advantages for HEIs in using student services to guarantee their financial stability and greater quality of education.

Keywords: *Student Services, Higher Education, Academic Performance, Career Development, Social Responsibility*

INTRODUCTION

Higher Education (HE) is crucial for shaping a skilled and accessible workforce necessary to drive socioeconomic development (Heng, 2013). Furthermore, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) has highlighted the vital role of higher education in building human capital as a key driver of wealth and prosperity, contributing significantly to both present and future economic and social progress (MoEYS, 2014). From the early 1980s until the mid-1990s, the HEIs in Cambodia did not allocate much budget to support their function (Hangchoun, 2016). Thenceforward, the Cambodian government has undertaken significant initiatives to enhance both physical and institutional infrastructure while increasing budgetary allocations for higher education (Corrado et al., 2019). The privatization policy in the higher education sector was implemented in late 1997, enabling private entities to participate in higher education and allowing public institutions to offer private classes (Un & Sok, 2018). This policy facilitated improved staff remuneration within public higher education, enhancing its ability to attract qualified personnel.

Aftermath, the number of higher education institutions in Cambodia has dramatically increased from 8 in late 1997 to 189 in 2024 (MoEYS, 2019, 2024). The higher education student population grew significantly, rising from approximately 10,000 in 1990 to 237,243 by 2024 (Un & Sok, 2018; MoEYS, 2024). The Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC) was established in 2003 as a legal mechanism to ensure the quality of higher education throughout the country (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2003). Initially operating under the supervision of the Office of the Council of Ministers, it transitioned to the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport in 2013 (ACC, 2023). Un and Sok (2018)

noted that maintaining the quality of higher education in Cambodia has been challenging, as the legal framework for accreditation is relatively new compared to many higher education institutions.

Six years following the establishment of the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC), the Minimum Standards for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions were officially delineated into nine fundamental standards (Moeurn et al., 2024). These standards encompassed: (1) Mission, (2) Governing Structure, Management, and Planning, (3) Academic Program, (4) Academic Staff, (5) Students and Student Services, (6) Learning Resources and Support, (7) Physical Facilities, (8) Financial Planning and Management, and (9) Information Dissemination (ACC, 2009). Subsequently, the ninth standard, Information Dissemination, was revised and replaced by Quality Assurance to better align with evolving educational priorities (Un & Sok, 2018).

The transition from secondary to higher education presents students with numerous academic and non-academic challenges. Many students experience significant emotional stress during this period of adjustment (Parker et al., 2003). According to Elwick and Cannizzaro (2017), attending university represents not only an opportunity for deeper academic engagement but also a step toward personal growth, independence, and lifelong learning. However, first-year students in higher education often face a high dropout rate (Els et al., 2018). For example, Tao et al. (2000) found that students in higher education frequently struggle with mental health issues as they adapt to new learning environments. Furthermore, Doygun and Gulec (2012) identified several factors contributing to students' lack of confidence in college, including excessive expectations, insufficient career guidance, and inadequate mental health support. Saleh et al. (2017) found that 90% of students struggle academically with issues like stress, anxiety, despair, and future planning. Johnson (2002) also found that most first-year students face some major problems, including academic, socio-cultural, stress, and depression. In the context of Cambodia, Moeurn et al. (2024) noted significant challenges confronting students, primarily stemming from insufficient preparedness and inadequate university infrastructure. Similarly, Heng et al. (2023) emphasized the limited resources and infrastructure available within Cambodia's higher education system, further compounding these difficulties.

Student support services are integral at all educational levels for fostering academic success and personal growth. These services provide tailored mentoring and resources to address students' needs and enhance their academic experiences. According to the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC, 2018), student services play a critical role in supporting student learning in higher education. Similarly, Tinto (1993) emphasized that student support services help reduce dropout rates and enable students to adapt constructively to new learning environments. Okpych et al. (2020) demonstrated that student services enhance learning outcomes by addressing academic needs and enriching students' skills. UNESCO (2002) further highlighted that a key function of student services is to encourage students to engage more actively in social work. Johnson et al. (2022) found that these services improve learning completion rates, promote academic success, and enhance overall student performance. Moreover, Chao et al. (2018) asserted that student services boost academic achievement and motivation.

Furthermore, student services support students' intellectual, physical, moral, and social development, enabling them to concentrate on their education (Haddad, 2009). Consequently, both academic and non-academic support services are vital for helping students overcome barriers to success (Morga, 2012). These services are tailored to address the diverse needs of students, encompassing a wide range of areas such as study skills guidance, career counseling, housing assistance, part-time job opportunities, personal development, health-related concerns, welfare benefits, and financial challenges (Choudhry, Gujjar, & Haffez, 2008). Samarita et al. (2024) noted that student services offer a range of tools, guidance, and support to ensure students' well-being and holistic development. Learning opportunities can impact students' experiences both within and outside of the classroom (Astin, 1984; Roberts & Styron, 2010; Sanford, 1962).

Despite the critical role of student services, numerous studies have highlighted that many higher education institutions (HEIs) have yet to prioritize adequate support for these services (Moeurn et al., 2024). Furthermore, UNESCO (2000) identified several significant challenges faced by HEIs in developing countries, including inadequate infrastructure, limited human resources, insufficient laboratory facilities, outdated technology, and underdeveloped research capacities. Few

HEIs place substantial emphasis on or allocate sufficient resources to student services (Chodaha, 2009; Muccuante, 2009). Tilak (2003) reported that the high student population and lack of governmental support in many ASEAN nations prevent them from raising the standard of higher education. Welch (2008) highlighted the insufficient funding allocated to student services by higher education institutions. Similarly, Hung (2008) noted that employees in this sector receive lower salaries compared to other professions, resulting in frequent staff turnover.

In the context of Cambodia, the Royal Government's new Pentagonal Strategy for the seventh mandate emphasizes human capital as a cornerstone for building a strong and developed nation aligned with the government's Vision 2050 (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2023). Therefore, Hangchoun (2016) reported that most HEIs in Cambodia primarily focus on teaching and learning while neglecting other essential services. Similarly, Heng et al. (2022) found that some Cambodian higher education institutions do not yet have sufficient resources to improve the quality of education. Many research studies found that university students are in need of both academic and non-academic support to get career goals. For instance, CDRI (2025) found that graduated students have insufficient skills and knowledge to meet the job requirement. Some students are likely to drop their academic journey when they face challenges without any support from the university (NCYD & UNFPA, 2020). Having a lack of soft skills is intended to be a big barrier for finding and retaining jobs to graduate students (MLVT, 2024). Consequently, there is a growing recognition of the need to enhance student services across HEIs to motivate and support students in completing their degrees and meeting the demands of the labor market. The purpose of this study is to explore the critical role of student services in higher education in Cambodia. Specifically, it aims to address the following research question: What is the role of student services in higher education in supporting student learning in Cambodia?

Literature Review

Hill et al. (2003) identified student services and support as the most significant determinants of educational quality. Similarly, UNESCO (2002) emphasized that a primary function of student services is to facilitate student engagement in social activities. Beyond direct interactions with faculty, students also collaborate with various stakeholders, contributing their knowledge, skills, and experiences through community service and internships (UNESCO, 2002). Likewise, Dhillon et al. (2008) argued that well-structured student support and assistance systems benefit both students and higher education institutions. Sota (2009) underscored the critical role of professional student affairs officers in fostering student success. Moreover, Dickson et al. (2024) demonstrated that student services enrich the academic experience by providing extracurricular opportunities.

Similarly, Botha et al. (2005) highlighted the significance of student counseling services, which are recognized for their role in student development, emotional well-being, and retention within higher education institutions. Numerous studies underscore the importance of student services in enhancing the quality of higher education and improving student learning outcomes. UNESCO (2009) further asserted that student support services empower students to succeed in their academic pursuits while ensuring inclusivity in higher education.

This section outlines four key benefits of student services in higher education institutions that contribute to enhancing student learning outcomes. These benefits include academic development, personal growth, sociocultural development, career planning, and the cultivation of global citizenship.

Academic Development

Students are provided with opportunities to enhance their capacities, abilities, knowledge, and attitudes through services offered both within and beyond the classroom. For example, Rafal et al. (2018) emphasized that student services play a vital role in fostering students' academic growth and success in higher education. Jacobs (2009) noted that these services equip students with effective learning methods and strategies to improve their skills and overall knowledge. Similarly, Chao et al. (2018) highlighted that students can achieve their learning outcomes by utilizing student support services. Additionally, Abiola and Paul (2019) found that student counselors contribute significantly to high academic performance among students. Some higher education institutions also provide specific programs to enhance students' speaking and writing skills (Roberts & Styron, 2009). Rovai

and Downey (2010) reported that academic counseling helps students achieve their educational objectives while improving academic performance. Students' capability outside of the classroom is further strengthened via community-based activities (Reeves and Hare, 2009). Students who receive extra tutoring are more likely to pass the following semester and receive excellent grades during the current one (Grillo & Leist, 2013; Shaheen et al., 2020). HEI students who receive counseling are better equipped to succeed by improving their academic life skills. Ciobanu (2013) further emphasized that student services are instrumental in ensuring high-quality education and successful academic experiences, underscoring their importance in helping students thrive throughout their academic journey.

Personal Development

Higher education institutions play a vital role in motivating students to focus on their studies by creating a conducive learning environment through student support programs. Fisher (1989) highlighted that homesickness is a significant challenge that hinders students' ability to adapt to a new environment. Similarly, Thompson et al. (2021) found that students often struggle with feelings of loneliness and being overwhelmed while adjusting to higher education settings. These support systems not only foster emotional well-being but also strengthen students' commitment to learning independently. Hull (2009) demonstrated how accommodation services, including housing assistance, counseling, application support, and collaboration with stakeholders, can help students address accommodation-related challenges. Steward et al. (2015) reported that financial support significantly enhances students' commitment to their education. Similarly, Azfredrick (2015) argued that counseling services contribute to students' emotional and psychological well-being, which are critical factors affecting their overall quality of life. Higher education institutions also address health-related needs by offering services such as first aid kits, free medication, health counseling, and wellness programs (Goosen, 2009). Moreover, Duniway (2012) highlighted that financial aid is a key component in ensuring students' successful graduation, underscoring the importance of comprehensive support services in higher education. Supporting services at universities offer various guidance and assistance to students in areas such as housing, financial support, wellness and counseling, health, orientation and migration, and ethnic student support (Shaheen et al., 2020).

Career Development

Employment counseling services play a critical role in helping students recognize their abilities and align their skills with the qualifications demanded by the job market. According to CDRI (2015), many students graduate from higher education with inadequate skills, and even high-performing students often fail to meet job market requirements. The National Employment Agency (2020) identified ten essential soft skills currently in demand in Cambodia's job market. Additionally, the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (2024) emphasized the importance of having a clear career plan, noting its significant role in preparing students to meet market demands. Research indicates that career counseling is essential for higher education students during their academic journey (Leao et al., 2011; Shaheen et al., 2020). Lenz-Rashid (2018) found that student services contribute significantly to career planning by equipping students with accurate information on job readiness, both during their studies and after graduation (Wallace & Rachinger, 2009). Ribchester and Mitchell (2004) noted that students with clear career goals tend to achieve better academic outcomes than those who lack career plans. Similarly, Tinto (1987) argued that students with well-defined career objectives are more adaptable and academically successful than those without a career plan.

Citizenship Development

Higher education institution (HEI) students come from diverse backgrounds and possess varying educational experiences, which can present challenges in building friendships and social networks. Students from different ethnic groups, in particular, may encounter cultural barriers that complicate their integration (Parker et al., 2017). Tinto (1983) argued that students facing communication challenges in university settings are at a higher risk of dropping out, particularly in institutions characterized by large campuses, complex administrative structures, and diverse student populations. Bateson and Taylor (2004) emphasized the importance of orienting students to the

campus environment, noting that such efforts can facilitate participation in academic and extracurricular activities and ease the transition to higher education. Social support has been shown to significantly influence student learning outcomes. Student services play a pivotal role in fostering the development of critical skills such as problem-solving, community engagement, creativity, critical thinking, responsibility, cultural awareness, and adaptability (Husseiny, 2009). Feldman (1969) highlighted that higher education provides a platform for students to utilize their abilities and skills for the benefit of society and global well-being.

HEIs are expected to produce skilled human resources to support socio-economic development and promote national identity and culture (RGC, 2002). Student services also enable students to engage in social work activities, contributing to their overall development (UNESCO, 2002). The Royal Government of Cambodia (2023) underscores the social responsibility of educational institutions in advancing sustainable development. Additionally, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS, 2024) highlighted the role of educators in guiding young people to become responsible citizens, actively contributing to achieving Cambodia's Vision 2050.

Conceptual Framework

Research findings from both developed and developing countries have consistently demonstrated that student services in higher education play a pivotal role in enhancing students' learning outcomes and supporting their successful academic completion. Acknowledging these universally recognized advantages, this study adopts an established framework (Moeurn et al., 2024; Yasmin et al., 2024) and contextualizes it within the Cambodian higher education environment to explore and better understand four specific benefits.
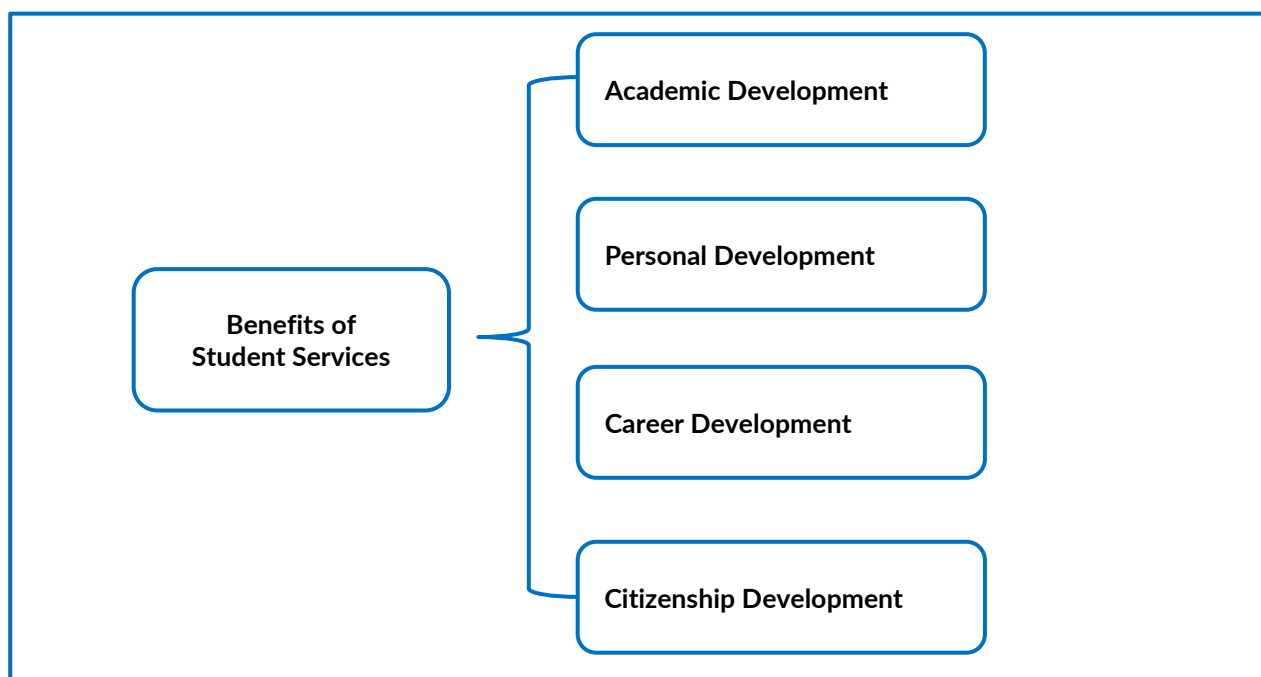
Figure 1: The benefits of SS in HE in Cambodia for student learning (Moeurn et al., 2024; Yasmin et al., 2024)

METHODS

This section encompasses six key components: Research Design, Research Setting and Participants, Research Tools, Data Collection, Data Analysis, and Ethical Considerations.

The researchers employed a qualitative research approach to align with the study's objectives and focus. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for organizing and categorizing complex data (Patton, 2002). To gather comprehensive insights, semi-structured interviews were utilized due to their effectiveness in facilitating the collection of nuanced information. Creswell (2012) emphasized that qualitative research enables researchers to derive valuable insights from participants while

exploring detailed and in-depth perspectives. Schostak (2006) further highlighted that interviews serve as a powerful tool for eliciting precise and context-specific information. Similarly, Cohen et al. (2007) noted that interviews support diverse research purposes, including data collection, evaluation, hypothesis generation, and sampling of research questions.

In this study, one-on-one interviews with experienced individuals provided rich, detailed insights and practical expertise. This method allowed participants to confidently and thoroughly articulate their perspectives, thereby enhancing the depth and reliability of the data. To ensure specificity and clarity in the findings, the researchers incorporated direct quotations as a means of substantiating key points (Patton, 2002). Focus group interviews were conducted with students to gather their experiences with student services and their time studying at higher education institutions from the start of their studies. Group interviews offer a supportive environment for less confident students or those who struggle to recall their experiences, allowing them to share their responses with peers. Patton (2002) noted that group interviews facilitate more interactive sharing of experiences. In addition, Cohen et al. (2007) highlighted that such interviews encourage participants to provide more detailed and complementary insights.

This study involved thirty-eight participants selected from a range of higher education institutions. The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport oversaw the selection process, encompassing both public and private higher education institutions. Out of the 90 institutions nationwide, three were chosen for inclusion in the study. These institutions were selected based on their high student enrollment during the 2022–2023 academic year. Higher education institutions that attract the highest number of students typically do so due to strong student support and widespread recognition of their educational quality. These institutions are appropriately selected as representative models for other higher education institutions in Cambodia. While they may not demonstrate exceptional high-level outcomes, they have achieved satisfactory results, making them well-suited to serve as representative institutions with optimal conditions. The key informants represented four distinct groups: officials from the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport; development partners; and rectors and students from the three targeted higher education institutions.

Table 1: Participant Geography

Code	Institution	Position	Interview
R1	MoEYS	Management Team	One-on-one
R2	MoEYS	Management Team	One-on-one
R3	Development Parter	World Bank	One-on-one
R4	Public Higher Education	Rector of HEI	One-on-one
R5	Public Higher Education	Rector of HEI	One-on-one
R6	Public Higher Education	Rector of HEI	One-on-one
R7	Public Higher Education	Student	Focus Group
R8	Public Higher Education	Student	Focus Group
R9	Public Higher Education	Student	Focus Group

The research methodology for this study employed a semi-structured interview approach to collect qualitative data. Fraenkel et al. (2012) emphasize that semi-structured interviews are a widely recognized and effective method in qualitative research, enabling researchers to obtain detailed and specific insights from participants. The interview questions were designed to explore stakeholders' perspectives on support for student services in higher education. These questions were adapted from prior studies (Ciobanu, 2013; John, 2024; Johnson et al., 2022; Samarita et al., 2024). Consistency was maintained using the same questions across the four target groups. The sub-research questions addressed three primary areas: stakeholder participation, the modes of their involvement, and the benefits derived from their participation.

The researcher initiated the interview process by obtaining an administrative approval letter from the university. Three days after submitting the request, the researcher followed up with the two organizations to confirm management's response. Upon receiving permission and the list of participants, the researcher collected contact details to introduce the research purpose and

coordinate the time and location for the interviews, allowing participants to decide on these aspects. Before beginning the interviews, the researcher adhered to ethical protocols, introducing the study, reading the interview guide, and obtaining signed consent from participants. During the interviews, participants shared their experiences regarding the role of student services in supporting students. The researcher recorded responses using a phone while simultaneously taking notes and monitoring the recording process to ensure accuracy and prevent technical issues. Prepared research questions guided the discussion, and clarification was sought when necessary.

The researcher utilized thematic analysis to organize data into themes based on the research questions. This method allowed for the systematic identification, analysis, and interpretation of key concepts and patterns within the data, as emphasized by Sharan (2002), Patton (2002), Braun and Clarke (2006), and David (2017). Thematic analysis simplifies complex data, highlights recurring themes, and facilitates meaningful conclusions. The researcher grouped responses from various sources under relevant themes and cross-verified them with the research tool to ensure alignment with the research questions. The final data were reviewed, compared with other research findings, and discussed in detail. This analysis was conducted by the researcher under the guidance of an experienced professor specializing in education and qualitative research.

To ensure compliance with ethical standards and institutional protocols, the researcher submitted a formal request, including the research questionnaire, to six higher education institutions and relevant stakeholders for interview approval. Upon obtaining consent, interviews were scheduled based on participants' availability, with arrangements made through phone calls or social media platforms. Interviews were conducted at locations convenient for the participants. Before each session, the researcher outlined the concept of student services and emphasized confidentiality. As Schostak (2006) highlighted, interviews provided participants the freedom to express their views and the option to withdraw or skip questions without consequences. Each face-to-face interview lasted at least 45 minutes, ensuring in-depth exploration and comprehensive data collection, while focus group discussions took more than 60 minutes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Academic Development

The provision of student services in higher education institutions plays a critical role in fostering students' confidence and motivation, enabling them to fulfill their responsibilities with enthusiasm and dedication. Specifically, these services support skill enhancement, broaden general and technological knowledge, and offer additional academic support through initiatives such as remedial teaching for underperforming students, internships, and specialized training programs.

> *Consultation with academics is crucial. Students can seek guidance from professors, family issues, and student counseling when they are unclear. They will be able to continue their education when we can offer them guidance. R2*

Particularly, students from rural and remote areas need the supporting services from higher education due to their challenges and diverse backgrounds. Since students come to learn to improve their feelings as well as their knowledge, they must give acceptable services. A small act of service might pique their curiosity about learning and studying. It motivates them to learn.

> *Students come from a variety of cultural backgrounds; student services assist them in reaching their academic objectives. Student services must thus be customized to fit the demands of the students. R1*
>
> *Allowing students to teach students is good because they can understand that teaching is difficult; they understand that research, learning, and students helping students. R3*

Student services in higher education institutions are essential for fostering students' confidence, motivation, and commitment to learning. These services not only enhance skills and broaden knowledge through academic support, internships, and training but also address the unique

challenges faced by students from rural and diverse backgrounds. Providing adequate and tailored support can inspire students' curiosity, improve their learning experiences, and encourage their academic success.

Personal Development

Student services play a pivotal role in enhancing students' comfort and adaptability in higher education, empowering them to develop independence and resilience. These services address critical aspects such as mental health support, health education, and financial assistance, fostering motivation and perseverance among students to overcome challenges and continue their academic journey. Moreover, student services significantly contribute to improving communication skills, enabling students to build social connections with ease and mitigating feelings of homesickness, thereby promoting a more fulfilling and balanced educational experience.

> *Student services contribute to lower dropout rates and increased student engagement. Because they are in desperate need of therapy, dropout students are unsure of where to turn for help. R3*

Financial aid helps reduce the burden of tuition fees, living expenses, and study materials, making education more accessible. Academic support, such as tutoring and mentoring, helps students improve their learning outcomes, boosting their confidence and motivation.

> *Help reduce expenses for poor students and encourage them to study hard. R7*
> *Good student services make students feel happy and satisfied when they enter school, and they want to study rather than join a club. Student life depends on the university to develop their life. R2*

Student services play a vital role not only in enhancing students' academic performance and engagement but also in supporting their daily lives and fostering overall well-being and success in higher education.

> *When we can help him with counseling, we can help him further his studies. Student services are not only related to students' studies but also to their daily lives. R2*

Student services are essential in fostering students' adaptability and independence in higher education by providing comprehensive support in various aspects of student life. These services include mental health counseling, health education programs, financial assistance, and career development, all of which contribute to students' overall well-being and academic success. By addressing mental health challenges, student services help students manage stress, anxiety, and other emotional difficulties, ensuring a healthier and more productive learning environment. Health education initiatives promote well-being through awareness programs on nutrition, physical fitness, and preventive healthcare. Financial aid, scholarships, and emergency funds assist economically disadvantaged students, reducing financial stress and enabling them to focus on their studies.

Furthermore, student services enhance communication skills, promote social integration, and mitigate feelings of homesickness by offering mentorship programs, student organizations, and peer support networks. These services not only help students build strong interpersonal relationships but also create a more inclusive and supportive campus community. Ultimately, student services play a crucial role in breaking down barriers to education, empowering students to stay motivated, and equipping them with the skills necessary for both academic and professional success.

Career Development

Students can learn how to plan their future professions through career counseling, internships, shared work settings, and job market preparation. By filling in the gaps and enhancing their professional skills to a higher degree, students may specifically equip themselves to meet the

demands of the labor market while also fostering soft skills. Additionally, this service lessens underemployment, the incapacity to fulfill job criteria, and working for a respectable wage.

> *Career counseling helps students plan their careers properly. It shows students how to write a CV and cover Letter and prepare for job interviews. My generation didn't know how to write a cover letter yet. R1*

A lack of understanding of job descriptions prevents students from adequately preparing to meet market demands, hindering their ability to secure employment and sustain long-term success in their roles.

> *I went for 7 interviews, but they all said I didn't meet their job requirements. R9*

Engaging in internships, volunteering, and part-time work during higher education enables students to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and its practical application in the workplace. These experiences not only deepen their understanding of job roles but also enhance both hard and soft skills, fostering personal and professional growth. Notably, such opportunities build confidence, equipping students to pursue their desired career paths with greater assurance and competence.

> *Knowledge is not only learned from teachers in the classroom, but students also need to learn from the environment. Especially knowledge when they apply it in the workplace to connect theory to practice. At the same time, it will encourage students to be creative and better at solving problems. R4*
>
> *Without career counseling, students may struggle to secure employment after graduation. Many bachelor's degree holders remain unemployed due to inadequate guidance and preparation during their studies. Early exposure to industry, such as accounting programs that connect students with companies, study tours, and university-led job initiatives, is crucial. Support services, skill development, and private sector connections ensure students are workforce-ready by their third or fourth year. R2*

Career counseling, internships, and practical experiences are crucial for helping students prepare for the labor market by addressing skill gaps and enhancing both hard and soft skills. Opportunities such as volunteering and part-time jobs bridge theoretical knowledge with real-world application, fostering confidence and equipping students for long-term career success.

Citizenship Development

The primary objective of higher education institutions is to cultivate socially responsible individuals who can actively contribute to the development and progress of the national society. By offering services such as community engagement, social work opportunities, and participation in societal events, these institutions connect students with meaningful social activities, fostering involvement and encouraging contributions to community problem-solving. Aligned with governmental strategies, education plays a pivotal role in nurturing social responsibility and shaping students into well-rounded, active citizens.

> *The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport wants to encourage more extracurricular activities to benefit students, in line with the 7th term's Royal Government, as the goal of education is to prepare pupils to be fully fledged citizens. By taking part in different social events and social activities. Students may work together and improve their conduct. Then they get along well with society. R1*

Engaging in diverse social activities and events enables students to enhance their communication skills, foster a sense of unity, and strengthen their ability to support one another. These experiences play a crucial role in the development of soft skills, which are often cultivated through such interactions. Students become more inclined to participate, gaining a deeper

understanding of the principles of teamwork. Furthermore, these activities nurture mutual respect and camaraderie, motivating students to work diligently in promoting national values.

> *Participating in many social activities makes us get to know each other better and feel that the school cares about us and helps us. Especially when we organize big events together, it makes us proud of our nation and our sense of community. R8*

The primary goal of higher education institutions is to cultivate socially responsible individuals who contribute to national development. Through community engagement, social work, and participation in societal events, students are encouraged to develop communication skills, teamwork, and mutual respect. These activities foster soft skills and a sense of unity, promoting involvement in community problem-solving and the advancement of national values.

Discussion

The research findings indicate that student services at higher education institutions play a pivotal role in enhancing the learning environment and promoting academic performance. These services contribute significantly to the development of human capital, thereby supporting the progress of society.

The result found that student services in higher education are crucial for boosting students' confidence, motivation, and commitment. These services enhance skills, broaden knowledge, and address the challenges faced by students from diverse backgrounds, ultimately improving their learning experiences and academic success. The result is similar to those (Abiola and Paul, 2019; Chao et al., 2018; Ciobanu, 2013; Grillo & Leist, 2013; Jacobs, 2009; Rafal et al., 2018; Reeves & Hare, 2009; Roberts & Styron, 2009; Rovai & Downey, 2010; Shaheen et al. (2020).

The next result found that student services help foster adaptability and independence in higher education by offering support in mental health, health education, and financial assistance. They enhance communication, ease social connections, reduce homesickness, and help economically disadvantaged students stay motivated in their studies. The result is consistent with those observed in Azfredrick, 2015; Duniway, 2012; Fisher, 1989; Goosen, 2009; Hull, 2009; Shaheen et al., 2020; Steward et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2021).

Career development is also found in the research. Career counseling, internships, and practical experiences are essential for preparing students for the labor market by addressing skill gaps and enhancing both hard and soft skills. Volunteering and part-time jobs help bridge theory with practice, boosting confidence and supporting long-term career success. The result aligns with those noted in CDRI, 2015; Leao et al., 2011; Lenz-Rashid, 2018; NEA, 2020; MLVT, 2024; Ribchester & Mitchell, 2004; Shaheen et al., 2020; Tinto, 1987; Wallace & Rachinger, 2009).

The last result found that student services help develop citizenship for HEI students. HIEs aim to cultivate socially responsible individuals who contribute to national development. Through community engagement and societal participation, students develop communication, teamwork, and soft skills, fostering unity and promoting national values. The outcome is consistent with those (Bateson & Taylor, 2004; Feldman, 1969; Husseiny, 2009; Parker et al., 2017; RGC, 2002, 2023; Tinto, 1983; MoEYS, 2024; UNESCO, 2002).

The research found that student services in higher education are essential for boosting students' confidence, motivation, and academic success by enhancing skills, addressing challenges, and supporting diverse backgrounds. These services also promote adaptability and independence through mental health, health education, and financial assistance while fostering social connections and reducing homesickness. Career development services, including counseling, internships, and practical experiences, prepare students for the labor market by bridging theory with practice. Finally, student services contribute to developing socially responsible individuals who engage in community activities, fostering unity and national values.

In conclusion, student services play a crucial role in higher education by offering numerous benefits, including the development of academic aptitude, essential skills, and positive attitudes. They contribute to competency building, goal setting, career planning, cultural and social integration, dropout prevention, and the cultivation of responsible citizenship. These outcomes highlight the

significant value of student services in supporting students, improving educational quality, and advancing the government's broader vision for higher education.

CONCLUSION

Student services in higher education are crucial for building students' confidence, motivation, and dedication to their studies. These services not only help improve skills and expand knowledge through academic assistance, internships, and training but also support students from rural and diverse backgrounds in overcoming specific challenges. Providing personalized and comprehensive support sparks students' curiosity, enhances their learning experiences, and boosts academic performance. Moreover, student services are vital for promoting adaptability and independence by offering essential support in mental health, health education, and financial aid. They help improve communication, facilitate social interactions, and reduce feelings of homesickness, creating a more well-rounded academic environment.

Additionally, these services are instrumental in assisting economically disadvantaged students in overcoming obstacles and remaining motivated to continue their studies. Career counseling, internships, and hands-on experiences are essential for preparing students for the workforce by addressing skill gaps and developing both technical and interpersonal abilities. Activities like volunteering and part-time jobs connect academic learning with practical application, building confidence and setting students up for future career success. Ultimately, higher education institutions aim to nurture socially responsible individuals who contribute to national progress. Through community involvement, social work, and participation in social events, students develop communication, teamwork, and mutual respect, enhancing soft skills and promoting unity while contributing to societal problem-solving and advancing national values.

Higher education institutions should prioritize enhancing student services and addressing student needs to boost student confidence and encourage their involvement in key institutional activities. Investing in student services is a long-term strategy, as an institution's revenue is not solely dependent on tuition fees but also on the future engagement of alumni, which will support the institution's ongoing growth and development.

The lack of improvement in student services within higher education institutions has created significant barriers for students. This issue particularly affects students with disabilities, those from low-income backgrounds, students facing personal difficulties, ethnic minority students, and those without clear academic or career goals. Despite their prestige and long-standing history, some renowned institutions have been reluctant to invest in enhancing student services.

However, given the increasing competition and the continuous establishment of new higher education institutions under the Ministry of Technology, institutions that fail to modernize and adapt risk financial instability, declining enrollment, and a loss of trust from stakeholders. As key stakeholders, students have the right to demand high-quality services and to choose institutions that best meet their needs. Higher education is not solely about teaching and learning—it also involves comprehensive student support services. In a competitive landscape, institutions that resist modernization may face the same fate as once-prominent companies that have disappeared due to their failure to evolve and meet customer expectations.

Implication Of The Research

Although this study is limited by the selection of higher education institutions with the largest number of students under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, it reflects and recommends the following:

Societal Contribution

This study emphasizes the vital role of student services in higher education in Cambodia in enhancing student learning outcomes. The findings offer valuable insights to inform national policies, ensuring student services are more responsive and aligned with regional and international standards. The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) should establish clear policies, enforce quality evaluations, and incentivize higher education institutions (HEIs) to meet these standards. HEIs must prioritize student services through strategic planning and collaboration with stakeholders to improve

education quality. Failure to do so risks losing students and financial stability, as students increasingly seek institutions that support their learning goals effectively.

Scientific Contribution

This research offers valuable insights into student services in higher education and their benefits, providing a foundation for further studies on this topic in Cambodia. While the findings contribute to advancing knowledge in this field, the study's limited number of key informants restricts its generalizability across all higher education institutions in the country. To achieve a more comprehensive understanding, future research should expand the selection of key informants, include stakeholders from various ministries, and adopt quantitative or mixed method approaches to gather more detailed data.

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