

3-2016

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Recommended Citation

Jun, Alexander; Hong, Rebecca; Cline, Curtis; and Fitt, Faith, "Globalization, Values Management, and Interpretations of Integrity in Higher Education: Perspectives from the Kingdom of Cambodia" (2016). *Staff Publications*. 71.

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Globalization, Values Management, and Interpretations of Integrity in Higher Education: Perspectives from the Kingdom of Cambodia

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As globalization moves higher education worldwide toward international confluence, local imperatives are sometimes overlooked in favor of indiscriminate norms. This study explored forces that impact higher education in an emerging educational center, especially as they are identified by students within that system. The findings revealed three areas of importance to the participants: a) the deep and continuous evolution of the education system in Cambodia, b) the value of social support systems, and c) the influence of a complex ethical system. The third area showcases the opposition between global forces of confluence and local values in higher education, and offers thoughtful practitioners the opportunity both to reconsider their own preconceptions and to work together with students and others to shape future systems in emerging higher education.

Higher education is essentially a global endeavor. Altbach (1998) argued that, because the central mission of higher education concerns the production and dissemination of universal knowledge, colleges and universities are the axis of a network of information, technology, communication, and culture that transcends political boundaries. Globalization, which Marginson (2011, p. 11) defines as the “sum of all tendencies to convergence and integration across national

¹ Author Affiliations appear just before the references list.

borders,” continues to move higher education worldwide toward a confluence of systems, policies, and values (Altbach, 1998). The increasing similitude of higher education across nation-states offers a variety of benefits to all stake-holders, including increased access to higher education for historically underrepresented groups; greater racial, ethnic, cultural, and political diversity within higher education; more opportunities for multicultural exchange; better cross-border equivalence in credentials and employability; and increasing awareness of global interdependencies. However, there are also hidden costs attendant to the increasing homogenization of higher education.

Haigh (2014) observes that, although the mission of higher education may be essentially global, many important objectives of higher education are uniquely and necessarily localized. Higher education is an important contributor to national economic growth, a pathway to mobility within societies, and a means of nurturing citizens who have strongly indigenous cultural values (Foskett, 2012; Haigh, 2014). These local imperatives are sometimes threatened by the powerful movement of higher education toward international conformity, as decisions in favor of the global diminish the value of the local (Caruana, 2010). Long-held and well-loved cultural values may be disestablished in preference for the indeterminate values of international higher education (Caruana, 2010).

To offset the tendency of globalization to absorb and efface the national and cultural distinctives that define and dignify regional cultures, scholars have suggested that many features of higher education can (and should) remain culture- and context-specific (Caruana, 2010; Pyvis, 2011). Pyvis (2011) argued that the importation into developing higher education systems of standards created in established higher education systems can result in educational imperialism. The tension between the creation and implementation of international standards of quality in higher education (such as those

promoted by governing UNESCO guidelines) and the fact that those standards often “suppress . . . local educational traditions” remains unexamined (Pyvis, 2011, p. 733). Pyvis (2011) argued that educational practices and measures of evaluation and quality should be restructured to better reflect local values. However, other scholars have expressed concerns that too strong a reliance on context-dependent norms and values can compromise the international mission and universal value of higher education (Altbach, 1998; Herman & Bailey, 1991).

We conducted this study through a broad constructivist lens, under the assumption that knowledge is created socially from context and relationships. Meaning and value derived from social interaction within any given community ought to be viewed contextually within the bounds of culture. We approached this study as an opportunity to explore the delivery of higher education in the Kingdom of Cambodia as a manifestation of the tensions that suspend the local and the global in emerging educational centers. Our primary objective was to explore the forces that impact the delivery of higher education in that region, especially as they are identified and denominated by the most vulnerable (but in many ways most pivotal) stakeholders within the system: Cambodian university students. Our findings revealed three areas of profound importance to our participants: a) the deep and continuous evolution of the Cambodian education system, b) the value of social support systems, and c) the influence of a complex and shifting ethical system. The third area, the ethical tensions in higher education, showcases the opposition between global forces of confluence and local understandings and values in higher education. This finding offers thoughtful practitioners the opportunity both to reconsider their own preconceptions and values and to work together with students and others to shape future systems in emerging higher education. We begin with a brief description of the Kingdom of Cambodia, and then briefly

describe our methodology and present our findings. We then situate those findings in the context of current literature and offer a discussion of their implications.

The Kingdom of Cambodia

The Kingdom of Cambodia is a Southeast Asian nation located within the Global South that currently faces manifold challenges to its higher education system. Those challenges include high pupil/teacher ratios, low enrollment of underserved groups, and limited public resources. The country has changed considerably since the Khmer Rouge regime, during which time, under its oppressive leader Pol Pot, it experienced the genocide of roughly two million people through execution, forced labor, and starvation. During the late 1970s, most of the educational infrastructure was destroyed, and for a brief but significant four-year period, public universities were closed and university professors and other public intellectuals were summarily tried and executed. In the last few decades, with large economic growth, increasing levels of foreign investment, and regular parliamentary elections, Cambodia has experienced considerable political and economic revitalization. However, the Khmer educational system continues to lag far behind its Southeast Asian counterparts. A recent UNESCO (2007) report estimated Cambodia's adult literacy rate at 37 percent, and the primary school completion rate for both males and females remains low. Cambodia has a low participation rate in higher education, with just 1.2 percent of the population enrolled, compared to an average of 20.7 percent for countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (UNESCO, 2007). However, this rate is increasing due to the growth in private universities in Cambodia, which increases access to higher education for more of the country's college-bound youth. Cambodia's higher education system is undergoing noteworthy change and becoming increasingly global in its focus.

Methodology

To explore the forces that impact the delivery of higher education in the Kingdom of Cambodia, we employed a variety of complementary qualitative methodological approaches. Because our purpose was to understand both “how” and “why” questions, our primary methodology was case study. We aligned our methodology with case study methodologists such as Stake (1995), Merriam (1998), and Yin (2008), who contend that employing case studies for research purposes to understand both “how” and “why” questions allows researchers to form a holistic perspective of an educational phenomenon. Case studies, according to Yin (2009), are appropriate for use when control of behavioral events is not required and when a study “focuses on contemporary events” (p. 8). Case study is also a particularly appropriate methodology because of its cross-disciplinary appeal and its ability to highlight important contributions to the creation and implementation of policy. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), case study research appeals across disciplines because its results are “easily understood by a wide audience (including non-academics) as they are frequently written in everyday, non-professional language” (p. 256). In addition, case study research is grounded in multiple evidences and provides holistic perspectives that also serve as important contributions for considering, creating, and implementing policy (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Because case study allows researchers to examine symbolic interactions and to identify themes as they emerge organically from the data rather than to confirm or test hypotheses imposed upon the data (Creswell, 2007), it was a particularly appropriate framework to use in this exploratory study. To complement the case study methodology, and to weave together the independent cases we examined into a cohesive textural description of the experiences of students in higher education in Cambodia, we also employed methodologies

aligned with ethnography (to focus on cultural influences affecting the experiences of the participants), grounded theory (to construct an emergent model of student experiences in higher education in Cambodia based on their self-reported understandings), and hermeneutic phenomenology (to describe the unique interpretations of individuals who have a shared experience of Cambodian higher education). The result of our eclectic qualitative approaches was a rich, emergent description of the forces affecting higher education in Cambodia, as understood by the student population.

Site and Participant Selection

The purpose of this study was to explore the delivery of higher education in Cambodian institutions that have embraced internationalization through policies and practices such as recruiting and employing foreign faculty, offering courses in English, and striving to adopt western teaching pedagogies and curricula. The primary site selected for this study was a large, competitive, public university that employs a number of expatriate educators who teach English as a Second Language (ESL) at various undergraduate levels. The institution is highly selective, has an established history of competitive admissions, and is positioned as the heart of change in Cambodia's educational system. The institution typically admits the nation's more competitive students and employs faculty with advanced and terminal degrees.

Primary participants for this study were undergraduate students aged 18-21 whose academic disciplines were in the social sciences, including international relations, political science, and economics. In order to establish multiple data sources and to triangulate the data, secondary participants for this study included expatriate faculty and administrators.

The 25 student participants in this study were all first year undergraduates who were enrolled in requisite English language

courses. More than half of the students came from the capital city, Phnom Penh. Participants who were not born and/or raised in the urban capital attended secondary school in one of Cambodia's 20 rural provinces. A majority of the students who came from rural provinces were lower income students who received some form of scholarship or financial aid to attend the university. The four faculty and two administrator participants were all US expatriates who had earned bachelors or masters degrees from US institutions. One senior administrator had been working in Cambodia for 12 years. However, most had been working in the country for five years or less. All interviews were conducted in English, and students' willingness and ability to participate in interviews in English were part of the selection criteria.

Data Collection

We used multiple data sources to help establish a convergence of evidence. During a two-week period in the spring semester of the students' freshman year, we conducted two rounds of 60-minute, semi-structured, individual interviews with 25 student participants at a variety of locations both on campus and near the university, including classrooms, courtyards, cafeterias and restaurants. We also conducted individual interviews with faculty and administrators at a variety of locations chosen by the participants. We conducted student focus group interviews in empty classrooms at times convenient for the participants. The senior member of our research team conducted follow-up interviews and member checking over a period of two months following the initial transcription, coding, and analysis of the data. We also observed student, teacher, and administrator engagement on campus through six classroom and campus event observations. We documented these activities with field notes and video recordings. In an effort to bracket and monitor our own expectations and biases (Merriam, 1998), we regularly

discussed our evolving understandings and observations, suspending our conclusions among the four of us.

Data Analysis

With the participants' informed consent, the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Members of the research team separately analyzed the transcripts and then compared analyses for rater reliability. First, through horizontalization, we each identified significant statements in the data. Those statements were then clustered into meaning units or themes, and were used to compose a textural description of the participants' experiences and a structural description of the contexts that influenced the participant's experiences. Data collection and analysis were done in a constant-comparative method and all emergent themes were discussed among the researchers. In the following findings, we present a harmonization of our observations and interviews with students, faculty, and administrators.

Findings

The data we collected indicated that undergraduate students in Cambodia engage their university studies within an evolving educational system and with the support (and pressure) of vital social systems, both of which impact an often complex ethical system.

An Evolving Educational System

Our findings indicated that Cambodian students prepare to enter college and engage their university studies within a dynamic, changing educational system that sometimes places enormous pressure on students to achieve. Both faculty and student participants commented on facets of change in Cambodian higher education, some of which are related to the nation's history of oppression, and others to the efforts of the central

government to improve education for the citizens. Barbara, a faculty member who had been teaching in Cambodia for 18 months, described hearing “about the Khmer Rouge, and how that destroyed education and [the Cambodians are] rebuilding.” Soung, a first year undergraduate student, explained that some education is now mandatory: “In Cambodia, the government require[s] the children to go to school at least [until] grade 9. And in the future, it may change to grade 12.” Students who complete 12th grade and seek to participate in higher education must take a national exam, the results of which determine a student’s access to higher education. Collin, an expatriate faculty member who has taught in Cambodia for over a decade, explained the process of taking the national exam:

“[A]ll of the students in high school go through the same curriculum and their senior year, they take a national exam. The national exam is very tough, very strict, at the same time . . . there are ways around it. . . . Most students who score a D or a C is very good. B is exceptional, A is rare. I’ve never seen an A, never.”

Vanny, a second year university student, listed some of the subjects included on the exam. “[Y]ou have twelve subjects like physics, chemistry, Khmer literature, English literature, [and] biology.” Socheat, also a second year student, described the exam as “a very big exam for high school.” Her plan to prepare for the national exam included the following:

I [took] just one course on the studying to get how’s to pass the exam. And then I go to study like a part-time study, like in math, bio - biology, Khmer study, and like other important subjects to improve my knowledge.

During the interviews, many students described their commitment to improving their future through education. Some students are earning degrees in two different subjects while attending a single institution; other students attend multiple universities concurrently. Students who attend classes at multiple universities typically study at one university in the morning and a different university in the afternoon. Chenda explained that he is a third year student at one institution and a second year student at another institution. He also explained his purpose for studying at two institutions:

[O]ne major is not enough. You know already one bachelor's degree [does] not [provide] that high [of a] position or good job. So that's why if we have two majors, we have a chance to get a high job and a good salary."

In contrast, Ravi described his initial decision to study at two institutions and then his decision to attend only one because he had "no time to study [and attending one institution provided] more time to read more books and focus on [his] subject."

A Vital Social Support System

In a country in which the education system was devastated by the Khmer Rouge, the families of the current generation of university students recognize the value of education as a pathway for the future. Parents have a strong influence over their children's educations, often deciding what college or university their children should attend and what they should study. Students underscored the role of their parents. Katerina claimed "it was my parent's idea. They think that [this institution] is the best . . . school." Chenda remarked that his parents encouraged him to study at that university because of its

reputation: “I think this school is called a famous one in our country.”

Building upon the idea of parental influence and its impact on Cambodian students, another expatriate instructor, Kate, learned how parents perceive their children’s education while she read students’ responses to a writing assignment. She said:

[O]ne time I had them write about what do they want to do in five years. Where do you see yourself? . . . They [wrote that they] just picked the major that their family chose for them. There’s this . . . cultural thing where their parents dictate everything and her parents pay for [attending the] university and they won’t let her pay because it’s the parent’s responsibility to pay.

Kate offered a reason for parental support in the students’ educational decisions. Parents provide the direction for students because “there is no counselor that they can go to [for] experience. . . . I don’t think career counselors exist either, because their parents choose their majors.” According to another teacher, Susan, who had taught in Cambodia for over a year, parents “are the ones dictating everything because they’re paying for everything, [with] what little they have.” Kate and Susan’s thoughts on education were confirmed in our focus group interview with students, which provided more evidence that parents were the primary agents in decision making for both college location and major course of study.

Participating in higher education in Cambodia can also be a significant family investment. Collin indicated, “[A] lot of [the students] are very poor. [They] come from a very poor background, poor family and so them being here is a big sacrifice for their family.” When we asked students how they were paying for their education, Sela expressed the poverty she felt by stating, “as you know that Cambodia is not the rich

country . . . [for] some people it's difficult for them to afford and pay for the children for school." Socheat commented that her "brother and . . . parents support [her] to study" at the university. Desi recognized that his "parents pay a lot of money for [him], it's not so cheap to study." Kate shared that for some families, "It's very common for all the family, [and] all the extended family to help pay for one student to go to school. . . . [I]n return, then once [the student] get[s] a job, [they] help the whole family." Vanny provided a fuller example of the financial duress many families experience when paying for higher education in Cambodia, and also the income disparities among families. He said,

"Some students they came from province, they sell the land that they had (inaudible) any property the (inaudible) they feed (inaudible) or cow, they sell and take money to support their children to study. But some students, they are rich, because their parents they are very easy to study. But for me, my parents, they work hard."

When asked if her parents paid for her education, Katerina responded, "Yes, of course. They pay for me. That's the only thing they can give me because they told me that after I graduate, they have nothing left to give me. Like a big house or jewelry, or anything like that. They can only give me education."

For the opportunity to participate in higher education, many of the students experience separation from their parents. For example, Pisal lives with his brothers in Phnom Penh while his parents live in another province. Sovanny moved to Phnom Penh because his "parents wanted [him] to continue [his] stud[ies]." However, when he arrived in Phnom Penh, he did not have a place to live. Sovanny stayed with friends for two

days until he met some students and “asked them where do you live, where are you from?” His new friends invited him to live with them. Sovanny described the experiences of other students who “have relatives in Phnom Penh, so they live with relatives.” For example, Vatey explained that she moved to Phnom Penh from one of the provinces to study and lives with a relative. Vatey is able to go home during school holidays. On the other hand, Lyda’s hometown is 291 kilometers from the institution and requires a bus ride of seven hours. Lyda only visits her family “twice a year.” Although Lyda “rented a room” in a house belonging to people she did not know, her “mother knew the apartment owner.” Lyda has “one friend who is [also] renting a room in the same house.”

Participants’ responses suggest that Cambodian undergraduate students are surrounded by a vital family support system that sometimes pressures them to excel. Whether through paying for their education, selecting their campuses, choosing their majors, or arranging for housing, Cambodian families are intimately involved in students’ academic careers.

A Complex Ethical System

As we interviewed students, we asked what they thought were challenges to their education or ways in which the educational system could be improved. In their responses, participants often described the need to address issues of academic integrity. The students’ perspectives on the pervasive ethical challenges in Cambodian higher education were reiterated in our interviews with expatriate faculty and administrators. The participants’ experiences in higher education in Cambodia are strongly influenced by what we refer to as a *complex ethical system* that is sometimes in conflict with international conceptualizations of academic integrity and quality. Before we present our findings, we briefly situate academic integrity within international perspectives on education and development, as represented by

the United Nations' Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) was established by UNESCO in 1962 to promote training, applied research, technical cooperation, knowledge sharing, networking, and educational partnerships among UNESCO's 195 member states and 9 associate member states (IIEP, 2015). The IIEP sponsored a series of reports between 2002 and 2007 in which they examined the effects of various kinds of corruption on national development. The IIEP found strong correlations between corruption and poverty, and between academic dishonesty and delayed economic growth (Eckstein, 2003). They identified acts of academic misconduct (among other forms of corruption) as student cheating on tests (including bringing unauthorized materials into an examination room, the unauthorized sharing of exam questions and answers, impersonation, bribing proctors and others, forgery, and falsification of results), plagiarism (including any form of presenting the work of another individual as one's own), misrepresenting or fabricating research, and misrepresenting or fabricating credentials (Eckstein, 2003).

The IIEP observed that educational misconduct occurs at many levels and can be committed by any individual associated with the system, including teachers, students, administrators, governors, policy-makers, and even family members (Eckstein, 2003). Academic dishonesty at any level of education has a detrimental effect on educational quality, use of resources, and overall school performance, and is incompatible with the guiding purposes of education, which the IIEP identifies as "to produce good citizens, respectful of the law, human rights, and fairness" (Eckstein, 2003, p. 10). Academic dishonesty undermines the ability of education to function as a resistance against corruption (Eckstein, 2003).

Cambodia became a member state of UNESCO in July, 1951. As we interviewed students in Cambodian higher education and asked them what complicates their experiences and what changes they would make if they could, several students identified issues related to academic integrity. As we interviewed the expatriate faculty members and administrators, several of them reiterated the concerns expressed by the students. Themes that emerged included perceptions of the prevalence of academic dishonesty among students, examples of academic dishonesty, faculty responses to academic dishonesty, motivations for and implications of academic dishonesty, and desires for change.

Prevalence of student concerns related to academic integrity. All of the students who discussed academic integrity stated openly and frankly that academic dishonesty was a problem. For example, Piseth acknowledged that academic integrity at the institution was “a very big problem.” Chuong acknowledged that many students “still cheat because I think they still have their bad background (from cheating in high school) so that they cannot change it.” The faculty members that we interviewed also affirmed that there was a high incidence of academic dishonesty at that university. According to Kate, “There’s a very big issue of cheating.” Tyler stated that “cheating is rampant.” Betty suggested that instances of academic dishonesty were frequent and that students’ experiences in high school may contribute to issues of integrity at the university. She linked the incidence of academic dishonesty to broader educational and social influences of which the students were aware:

What the students say, it sounds like . . . there’s a lot of corruption, favoritism and bribing. [Students] come here under the impression that cheating . . . is okay and so we feel like we’re fighting this whole mentality that

[pervades] education. . . . I feel like they [students] didn't learn [standards of integrity] when they were growing up . . . it might be a cultural perception, or a cultural interpretation, I'm not really sure, but whatever they have, is not what they need when they come to [the] university."

Expatriate faculty responses to and examples of academic dishonesty. According to instructor Tyler, many students did not appear to understand the concept of academic dishonesty. Kate attributed the lack of understanding of academic integrity to collectivist cultural values. She said, "(Cambodia is) a collective society, so everyone does everything in a group. . . . I don't want them to cheat, so it's a very big struggle to . . . encourage individual thinking and creative thinking and to promote integrity that avoids cheating." Tyler explained how he helped students understand academic dishonesty:

"I literally had to explain, cheating is—and I would hold a piece of paper over myself and I would cough and I would lift my paper up so other people could read it. I'd say, 'this is cheating: You're showing your answers to someone else.' Or I would say, 'cheating is this,' and show someone leaning over."

Kate, who had been teaching in Cambodia for about a year, provided examples of student academic dishonesty and described faculty strategies to mitigate academic dishonesty during English exams. For example, Kate said:

I have to be like a Nazi. I have to have [the students] roll up their sleeves, check their pockets, [and] check their shoes. Some of the teachers write two different

exams so the person next to you doesn't have the same exam. Some teachers divide the class in half and make them [students] come at different times so their rooms are not so crowded, so they can see better. I had a student cheat on her midterm and I took her paper and she cried in class. She had this tiny little paper hiding under her test that had all this English stuff on it, so I saw it and took it and I took her paper. She knew because I told them before that if you are cheating, you get a zero. So she put her head down and she was crying. She wasn't crying loudly, when I saw her face, I saw a tear."

Tyler described how "[one] student sits in the back of the room [and] cheats all the time. [He] has people do his homework." Other forms of academic dishonesty described by a student focus group included "Sometimes [students] write something on their hand . . . [or] on the table," and putting information on socks or shoes so when "the teacher goes away, take it out, then copy." Students in the focus groups also described how some students use technology to cheat by using their phones to take photos of exam answers and "post [the answers] on Facebook."

Tyler also recounted hearing "horror stories about students never show[ing] up [in other institutions], but they pay a fee and they get an A" for their grade. Corroborating Tyler's statement, Chuong claimed the problem extended beyond taking exams. "[T]he problem is the corruption. . . . [P]eople try to use money to give to [the] teacher to get good mark[s]. . . . Just pay money and you can get a good grade." Although Tyrone could not confirm that academic dishonesty occurred at his institution, Mongkol shared "honestly at [this institution], sometimes I can say that . . . some students [in certain majors], they also cheat." Tyler indicated "We know that happens in Western schools, but

for people who had a ton of money, that can happen. It's not the norm. Here that's the norm."

Motivation for academic dishonesty. We explored the issue of academic dishonesty with two student focus groups. One male student provided a rationale for why Cambodian students cheat in college. He described the peer pressure students experience "because other people look down on them. . . . [I]f we don't get a good grade in class, friends don't want to [be] near us or want to talk to us." The other students in the focus group nodded in affirmation of that statement. During his individual interview, Pisey summarized the motivation for students to cheat, indicating that "students in Cambodia seem to like school very much. They tend to prefer high score[s] no matter what way [they] get it. So this is the culture from high school."

Implications of academic dishonesty. Although the students and faculty identified academic dishonesty or corruption as the primary problem within the university, some of them also implied that the results of academic dishonesty extend beyond the high school or university classrooms. Tyrone identified the fundamental issue as "a real challenge with integrity." Betty suggested that, because of the influence of globalization and an increasingly international community in Cambodia, academic dishonesty undermines the foundation of students' future occupations. She said,

"[T]he whole cheating thing . . . affects how they [students] will interact with their future careers . . . as an example, one student was cheating and I had to take the paper away, and I explained why I took the paper away and there wasn't any kind of light bulb that went off in their head. . . . I was trying to explain that if you don't learn integrity now, employers are looking for honesty, somebody they can trust, especially if they

want to work for an NGO, which a lot of them want to do . . . somebody from the international community will not appreciate cheating in any kind of way. I think that's something they need to grasp, even if they don't choose integrity . . . they need to know the norm in [an international] community if they want to be involved, they need to [be] globally [aware]. But it's very difficult to get that across sometimes."

Some students acknowledged that studying without unethical assistance or study aids was a better preparation for their future occupations. For example, Dee wondered, "if you don't have an understanding about the study, what to do, what way to work at a job, so like if you have an interview, to apply for a job, if you don't have understanding or knowledge, so how can you pass the interview?" Similarly, Mongkol said that cheating is "not good because to me . . . we have to try hard only four year and then we get a job. But if we cheat, we also know nothing. So if we finish, we know nothing, how can we do a job?"

Desire for change. Although pervasive academic dishonesty was repeatedly acknowledged by the students and expatriate faculty during the interviews, some stated clearly that not all students participated in academic dishonesty. When asked if he ever cheated, Pisal claimed "No. Honestly, I used to cheat when I was in high school. But at [the] university, not at all." Sokha reported that "Some students, they try to study hard, so they don't cheat." Some students also expressed a desire for change in Cambodian higher education. Choung explained,

"[W]hen I was in high school, I know some people, when exam, they try to cheat. That's [a] bad habit. Most of the students cannot change it up until now. In the university, also, they try to cheat. I don't know

when [they] can change this character, and I hope it will change soon.”

Mongkol supported the idea of change and recognized that academic dishonesty weakens education; he said that “Cambodia education is still limited because you have cheating of some kind.” Sela asked for reform that would make education more equitable: “Just no corruption. I’d like no corruption because to be fair and equalize . . . that’s the way they can compete with each other. If they do the corruption like that, it is only for the rich people student, it is not fair for the others who cannot afford to pay.”

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine forces that impact the successful delivery of higher education for undergraduate students at Cambodian universities, especially as those forces are identified and discussed by the students themselves. To validate the findings, the perspectives of several expatriate faculty members and administrators were also solicited and included. Three major themes emerged from the findings: a) the concurrent evolution of the educational system, b) the importance of social support systems, and c) the complexity of the underlying ethical system. Findings from this study confirm what IIEP reports have stated about academic integrity worldwide, particularly that acts of academic dishonesty are ubiquitous and that threats to academic integrity weaken the quality of education. Of particular interest in this study, however, is the courage and honesty of the student participants who nominated academic integrity as an area in need of improvement. Eckstein (2003) notes that research related to ethics and the quality of education is often impeded by unwillingness on the part of educational stakeholders to discuss academic dishonesty and even to admit that it occurs. The

candor and honesty of our student participants prefigure a hopeful future for Cambodian higher education. However, previous research related to academic integrity suggests that the journey toward the more uniform and transparent system that these students wish to see may be complex.

Situating the Findings in Current Literature

Research studies suggest that academic integrity is a pervasive problem in higher education (Babu, Joseph, & Sharmila, 2011; Diekhoff, LaBeff, Shinohara, & Yasukawa, 1999; Grimes, 2004; Hsiao & Yang, 2011; Lim & See, 2001; Lin & Wen, 2007; Yang, 2012). Comparative studies indicate that features of educational systems that may increase the likelihood of acts of academic dishonesty include large class sizes, a low emphasis on class attendance and on multiple assessment types, and a heavy emphasis on high-stakes exams (Diekhoff, LaBeff, Shinohara, & Yasukawa, 1999; Hayes & Introna, 2005). Several researchers found that students who believed that their peers engaged in cheating were more likely to cheat themselves (Hsiao & Yang, 2011; Jordan, 2001; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2001). Jordan (2001) found that two types of motivation (mastery and extrinsic), perceived social norms, attitudes about cheating, and knowledge of institutional policies regarding cheating were significant predictors of cheating. He found that students who were high in extrinsic motivation tended to cheat more than students who were high in mastery motivation. He also found that students who had strongly negative attitudes about cheating, more complete knowledge of institutional policies regarding cheating, and who did not perceive cheating to be an acceptable social norm were less likely to cheat.

Researchers who have explored students' perspectives of what constitutes academic dishonesty, how relatively dishonest students consider certain acts to be, and how likely students

believe their peers are to commit dishonest acts have indicated that students do not generally hold the same ethical standards that university policy-makers do. Brimble and Stevenson-Clark (2005) found a strong discrepancy between the ethical beliefs of students and staff regarding the prevalence and seriousness of academic dishonesty. Grimes (2004) found that 40 percent of participants from Eastern European and Central Asian countries did not believe that academic cheating was wrong and 57 percent thought that it was socially acceptable. Lim and See (2001) found that students held a continuum of values related to the seriousness of certain types of cheating; students believed that cheating on exams was a serious offence whereas plagiarism and manipulation of data were not morally wrong.

Previous studies regarding methods of deterring academic dishonesty have produced mixed results. McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (2001) and McCabe (2005) argued that academic cultures of honesty were often more effective than university policies at deterring cheating. However, Deikoff, Emily, LaBeff, and Hajime (1999), in their survey of student perspectives across Japan and the United States, found that students of both cultures believed that social stigma was the least effective means of deterring cheating, and that fear of punishment was the most effective. This finding supports a cost/benefit theory of student cheating, which argues that students are more likely to cheat when they believe the benefit to be great and the risk to be low (McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Tibbits, 1999).

Deikoff, Emily, LaBeff, and Hajime (1999) suggested that stronger punitive responses to student cheating may decrease its incidence. Gross (2011), however, argued that the decrease in student concern over cheating and the ethical ambivalence that students feel toward cheating is a natural result of a social values-shift over the past decades. She suggested that universities should create more lenient policies and move away

from punitive responses to actions that have traditionally been thought dishonest. Hsiao and Yang (2011) argued that university responses to academic dishonesty should be firmer and more effective, since academic dishonesty was a predictor of post-graduation acts of professional dishonesty. Grimes (2004) and Babu, Joseph, and Sharmila (2011), on the other hand, found that students believed dishonesty in the professional arena (business and medicine, respectively) was a more serious offense than dishonesty in education, and that students believed themselves unlikely to transfer dishonest habits from college to the workplace. Again, as U.S. based scholars and researchers we approached this study via a social constructivist lens, and made every effort to maintain an open posture to interpretations of findings—what some phenomenologists refer to as *epoché*, or bracketing, a methodological process by which researcher suspend their own biases and assumptions in order to understand a particular phenomenon within its own contextualized system of meaning.

In their analysis of the elements of cultural variation, Trompenaar and Hampden-Turner (2012) offer a framework for interpreting cross-cultural encounters that includes variation along a continuum from universalism to particularism. Universalist cultures tend to value simple and concrete approaches to ethics and consistent application of ethical rules in all contexts. Particularist cultures tend to value relationships and bonds, and interpret ethical rules flexibly and in context. In particularist cultures, obligations to family and friends often supersede other ethical considerations (Trompenaar & Hampden-Turner, 2012). Participants in this study commented on the tension between local and international ethical norms and between maintaining academic integrity and honoring the familial support systems without which they could not access higher education. A conceptual framework for academic integrity for tertiary education in Cambodia should nuance

understandings of ethical values, and respond both to local, particularist values for family and relationships, and to international expectations for academic work.

Implications for Practice

As the educational system of Cambodia evolves in response to historical challenges, changing local values, and increasingly global expectations, student and faculty perceptions and values related to academic honesty also change. Findings from this study suggest that parents and other influential stakeholders in Cambodian education shape student futures and could therefore be agents of change in behaviors and values related to academic integrity. Studies have linked positive and negative peer pressure to higher and lower incidences of academic dishonesty (Hsiao & Yang, 2011; Jordan, 2001; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2001). As students themselves recognize cultural patterns and pressures that perpetuate academic dishonesty, and as students desire change, perceptions and practices of academic integrity are likely to evolve.

Faculty members can also contribute to an emerging culture of greater accountability and transparency. In Cambodia, large class sizes, a low emphasis on class attendance, lack of reliance on multiple assessment types, and a heavy emphasis on high-stakes exams may increase the likelihood of academic dishonesty (Diekhoff, LaBeff, Shinohara, & Yasukawa, 1999; Hayes & Introna, 2005). Faculty members can work together with students to offset the effects of these predictors of academic dishonesty by diversifying their assessment types, encouraging course-long participation, managing in-class rewards and competition, and increasing the risks related to academic malpractice.

The Cambodian government has recently undertaken policies to increase the relevance of tertiary education to ensure that future leaders will be equipped to serve the public sector at

all levels of society and to provide citizens greater opportunities to live productive and satisfying lives. More thorough implementation of these priorities, especially as they result in reforms that decrease corruption in the educational system, may begin to equalize access and improve education for more students. However, institutional policies alone have proven ineffective at restructuring cultures of cheating (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2001 and McCabe, 2005). To address issues of integrity as a response to competition and pressures of performance at the secondary and postsecondary levels will require internal, proletariat changes as well as imposed, institutional changes. A convergence of systems has produced the perception among Cambodian students and some expatriate faculty and administrators that academic dishonesty occurs frequently in Cambodian higher education, and it is likely that pervasive, system-wide changes will be required to address the challenges of understanding and addressing academic integrity. Educational reform through thoughtful change and complex restructuring of systems will present a challenge for Cambodian higher education in the coming decade.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the forces that impact the delivery of higher education at Cambodian universities. Many higher education institutions across Cambodia have embraced globalization through policies and practices such as recruiting and employing foreign faculty, offering courses in English, and striving to adopt western teaching pedagogies and curricula. Globalization offers a variety of benefits to educational systems but also challenges and scrutinizes local values and norms. As preference is given to internationalization, local needs and priorities can be marginalized. We acknowledge that, to some, the findings presented in this article may affirm the present challenges to academic integrity for other Southeast

Asian nations and throughout the Pacific Rim. To others, these findings may simply reinforce concerns related to western hegemony and the tendency of some scholars to perceive actions as dishonest that are not considered problematic within a local context. We recognize the tensions that these findings present, and suggest that, in light of international research studies that have found strong, negative correlations between academic integrity and delayed national development, the burden of cultivating and crafting cultures of honesty in Southeast Asia may be shared, not only by faculty and students, but also by local social and authority structures (both of which may more fully account for the current concerns related to academic integrity as expressed by our student participants).

As Cambodian higher education begins to restructure itself and to attract more attention in the global educational landscape, social support networks, perceptions, and practices related to academic integrity are affected. A nuanced, contextualized framework of academic integrity should reference the cultural, social, and ethical systems that influence the choices of students, faculty, and administrators. As Cambodia rebuilds and revitalizes itself in the wake of its recent history, governmental policies and priorities may also contribute to a system of access and equity that discourages academic dishonesty.

We conclude with some recommendations for future research. Findings from this study support the notion that academic cultures are influenced by forces much larger than the academy, including power structures present in society and government. Findings from this study also suggest that, although some students and faculty agreed with each other that certain actions were not academically honest, cultural constructions of honesty may vary across nations. Future research might further explore local constructions of academic integrity, and also more closely examine the social and

authority structures that shape attitudes and behaviors in the classroom.

We further suggest that North American and Southeast Asian scholars collaborate in an effort to reconceptualize issues of academic integrity, which have long been conceived as mainly pedagogical issues, rather than as symptoms of a broader systemic concern. We acknowledge the need for and call upon scholars to offer alternative perspectives and interpretations, in which expatriate faculty do not merely problematize Cambodian students or faculty by claiming that they are solely responsible and need to change, but instead shift their gaze to consider broader systemic concerns, which may have greater impact on lasting change.

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