Cambodian Higher Education: Intrinsic And Extrinsic Motivations

Background of study

The history of Cambodia has undergone a lot of wars, revolutions, invasions, a well-known genocide and exile over the past half century (TIME cite). In addition, there was a rapid improvement in Cambodian education after the independence from French Colony (Cambodia Cultural Profile). It is also known that Japan used to occupy, France used to rule and China and Vietnam additionally greatly influenced and controlled the communist group in Cambodia, particularly the Khmer Rouge from 1975 to 1979, a four-year period of severe suffering (Chandler, 1983), when the Vietnamese occupied the country with schools being destroyed and 90% of 20, 000 teachers being killed (Ross, 1987). Thereafter the revolution coming to an end, there has been existence of many national and international organizations helping to rebuild Cambodian educational institutions and training thousands of educators in the country (Tan, 2007).

To obtain standardized education, particularly in higher education, obviously is never an easy task. Therefore, motivation can be a dominant element, encouraging students either extrinsically or intrinsically to keep going (Saira, Madiha, Sumiara, & Anam, 2014). Simply defined, extrinsic motivation refers to the behavior of individuals to perform tasks and learn new skills because of external rewards or avoidance of punishment (Tranquillo & Stecker, 2016). To illustrate further, external factors can be due to financial incentives, status, promotional opportunities, public recognition, etc. In other words, extrinsic rewards may motivate learners to take on a task that they are not internally intrigued about; for instance, some students simply study majors that only seem to offer high salaries once they graduate (Muhammad & Azhar, 2013).

Whereas intrinsic motivation refers to the desire to seek, if one’s own will, tasks and challenges, to expand and train one’s abilities, to explore and learn without the needs of external reward (Ryan, 2000, p.54-67). Intrinsic motivations are internal factors such as fulfilling personal satisfaction, setting personal goals, having an innate curiosity, etc (Incentive Theory of Motivation and Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation). Personally speaking, I believe that if students are intrinsically motivated, they tend to yield better academic endeavors because they are passionate about what they are learning. According to a study conducted by Stefano I. Di Domenico and Richard M. Ryan in 2016, it is proven that inner motivation possesses several genuine advantages, for example, the enhancement in learning and performance, the increase of creativity and general well-being of students. Having the right attitudes and motivations greatly assists higher education undergraduates and graduates in their academic endeavors, including their everyday routines in spite of academic burdens and better settles long-term goals, especially in the long run (Ryan & Di Domenico, 2016, p.349-369).

Statement of problem

The problem addressed in this study mentions both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations behind the undertaking of higher education, including a bachelor’s degree, master’s degree and doctoral

degree. The purpose of this study is to inquire into the motivating elements which encourage Cambodian undergraduates and graduates in higher education, particularly universities and institutes in Phnom Penh, despite tremendous struggles and academic fatigue.

Research objectives and Research questions

Research Objectives

The purpose of this research is to discover the central phenomenon being studied regarding the extrinsic and intrinsic motivations of students who did or are now doing higher education in Cambodia coming from distinguished fields, particularly in the 3 aforementioned universities. The study additionally seeks the explanation as to find out which one is a more effective factor, either extrinsic or intrinsic, to retain higher education students regardless of severe academic burdens.

Research Questions

1. What are the extrinsic factors that motivate students to pursue higher education?
2. What are the intrinsic factors that motivate students to pursue higher education?
3. Between these two key factors, which one is more effective to retain higher education students regardless of severe academic burdens?

Significance

The research and ultimate findings of this study will yield understanding regarding the motivations accelerating Cambodian students to pursue higher education. The findings of this study strive to better inform Cambodian higher education institutes the wants and needs of higher education students to more effectively developing degree programs, designing and developing classroom strategies and creating marketing tools to attract and retain students (Knutsen, 2011). Lastly, these well-aware motivations will greatly aid prospective, current and retrospective students to remain resilient in carrying out higher education degrees.