CHAPTER SIX

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

Empirical evidence from the study has revealed that the higher education sector in Cambodia has remained underdeveloped in terms of stakeholder collaboration and has encountered an impediment to development, influenced by the process of commercialization and politicization. This chapter is intended to present an overall conclusion to the dissertation by providing a summary of the key findings from the preceding theoretical and empirical chapters. The summary is followed by an integrated discussion on the overall research question. It then elaborates on the contributions of the research to academic literature and development implication for the higher education domain in Cambodia. It concludes with limitations and directions for future research.

6.2 Summary of key findings

The overarching aim of this research is to examine how stakeholder involvement in the Cambodian higher education sector influences the governance of HEIs, upon the transition toward privatization, in shaping educational quality for the labour market in Cambodia. Specifically, the dissertation aims to answer the following research questions.

1. How has the higher education sector developed, whether toward entrepreneurialism or commercialization, to respond to the labour market in Cambodia?
2. Who are the stakeholders in the Cambodian higher education sector?
3. To what extent and with what result do the stakeholders succeed in collaborating?
4. How do higher education providers in Cambodia converge and/or diverge in their governance?
5. What challenges are involved in the governing process toward quality education during the transition from state to market in Cambodia?

In order to address the above research questions, the study starts with a review of the concept of the entrepreneurial university from the perspective of higher education models to provide theoretical grounding for the empirical study.
The section is structured in the following manner. It proceeds with a summary of the state-of-the-art concept of the entrepreneurial university as provided in Chapter Two. It then presents the main findings on the development of the higher education sector in Cambodia vis-à-vis some countries in the region from the perspective of the entrepreneurial university concept (Chapter Three) with an aim to answer the first research question (Question One). It is followed by the key findings on the stakeholder involvement in the Cambodian higher education sector with the triple helix model as a guiding tool for analysis (Chapter Four) to answer research questions Two and Three. This section finally provides the main findings on institutional governance in Cambodia with an institutional governing body used as a basis for analysis (Chapter Five) in order to answer the two last research questions (Questions Four and Five).

6.2.1 State-of-the-art concept of the entrepreneurial university

The state-of-the-art concept of the entrepreneurial university provided in Chapter Two employs a “systematic” literature review, shedding light on the higher education models in conjunction with most recent development: the entrepreneurial university. The review covers issues of higher education models, twentieth and twenty-first century developments of universities, and the concept of the entrepreneurial university. The knowledge from this review serves as a theoretical foundation to inform the other empirical chapters.

Based on the review, higher education is generally classified into three models of European origin, namely Humboldtian, Napoleonic, and Anglo-Saxon models, which have exerted their influence on the current higher education despite the fact that the American model has later become widely adopted in higher education in Europe and even worldwide. Notably, there appears to be no specific model to which the government of a particular country adheres for its higher education system as the functions of universities keep evolving to respond to the ever-changing demands of the society in the era of globalization. Clearly, none of the models really took the new development into its model, but they shaped the new tasks as well as possible into the Anglo-American model.

The review establishes that each model has embraced developments imposed by the ever-changing environment of higher education. Three of the developments, connected with the basic missions of a university, are as follows: (1) education: lifelong learning and entrepreneurship education, (2) research: from mode 1 to mode 2, and (3) role of the
university in the knowledge society. These developments incline toward the third mission, the one related to entrepreneurship for economic development, which corresponds with the idea of entrepreneurial university. Although it has become apparent that most universities carry out entrepreneurial activities, they all are not necessarily entrepreneurial universities. The review affirms that in order to create an entrepreneurial university, commercial activities need to create added value for the core functions of teaching and research to maintain its academic identity and vice versa. Moreover, entrepreneurial universities are expected to assume multiple roles in society and fill gaps in an innovation system. That is, they are expected to collaborate with government and industry to produce new knowledge and technology to enhance their role in the knowledge society and to diversify their income sources. Overall, not only is the entrepreneurial university a university executing the third mission in promoting entrepreneurship, but it also incorporates the mission into teaching and research to maintain its academic identity.

6.2.2 Higher education development in Cambodia: An entrepreneurial university perspective

The study has offered a clear picture about the trend of the higher education landscape in Cambodia in comparison with that of some Southeast Asian countries. Although some universities in developed economies in the region have shared the global trend of the entrepreneurial university, the concept, a driver of the stakeholder collaboration for innovation and development, has become a new phenomenon in the higher education sector in Cambodia due to the non-existent stakeholder collaboration involving the government, university and industry. The absence of such collaboration could lock the potentials of HEIs in Cambodia to diversify their income sources and reach out for more activities for quality improvement and economic development. A lack of the government’s interventions, limited interaction between HEIs and industry, capability and credibility gaps of Cambodian HEIs and industry, along with the legacy of the traditional French model featuring an institutional divide between HEI and industry, constitute the risk factors which hamper the development process of the stakeholder collaboration for quality education in the sector. In addition, the Cambodia’s integration into the 2015 ASEAN Economic Community is viewed to pose more challenges than opportunities as most, if not all, HEIs in Cambodia do not appear ready enough to produce qualified graduates for the competitive participation in the ASEAN common market.
6.2.3 Stakeholder involvement in the higher education sector in Cambodia

The study has found that the stakeholders in the higher education sector in Cambodia comprise four major groups: the government, development partners, HEIs and industry. These stakeholder groups have contributed to the sector albeit at different levels. Their collaboration has remained very limited, thereby failing to push the sector forward for quality education. The government and development partners have become close partners, forming a synergy to push the wheel of the sector forward despite the conflicting views. However, clear mechanisms have yet to be put in place to promote stakeholder collaboration. Notably, NGOs, through funding from either bilateral or multilateral development agencies, have become executive agents to assist the government for development although their involvement in the higher education sector is deemed limited, mainly in the form of employers, private donors and trainers. The industry is considered rather weak and passive in collaborating with the other stakeholder groups due to their limited resources, capacity and credibility. Moreover, HEIs are not resourceful and proactive to take the lead in the stakeholder collaboration. Therefore, the study has affirmed that stakeholder collaboration has remained a big challenge, prevailing at both national and institutional levels. This challenge has appeared to be a major hindrance to the advancement of the higher education sector in Cambodia to prepare graduates for the national competitiveness in the knowledge-based economy.

6.2.4 Institutional governance in the higher education sector in Cambodia

The study has provided further insights into the higher education development in Cambodia from an institutional governance perspective considering different forms of higher education providers. Clearly, the overall governance arrangement of public HEIs in Cambodia is intended to involve stakeholders for institutional development through their representatives. However, the study has shown that the governing bodies or so-called executive boards of public HEIs have failed either to function properly or even to exist at some HEIs as all the important decisions have to be made by the parent ministry. Only until the PAI status is granted to some public HEIs do the new governing bodies become empowered in the decision-making process in terms of financial and academic matters. However, the increased autonomy has yet to bring about satisfactory improvements in educational quality and services. At private HEIs, governing bodies are oriented toward shareholders instead of stakeholders. The decision-making power lies with the shareholders or owners of HEIs. The
study has revealed that the market and political forces in the sector have increasingly blurred the distinction among the three forms of higher education providers, posing an implied threat to higher education quality in preparing qualified graduates for the competitive labour market. All in all, the study argues that commercialization and politicization are underway in Cambodian institutional governance, thereby slowing down the development process of higher education in Cambodia.

6.3 Discussions and theoretical contributions

6.3.1 Overall discussions

The integrated analysis of the findings from the entire study presented in the dissertation provides sound insights into the development and challenges in the higher education sector in Cambodia. While the research findings appear consistent with the existing academic literature in the field, some new findings divert from conventional knowledge. The insights into the topic of the dissertation can be viewed at two levels: meso (sector) and micro (institution).

At the sector level, the study has offered crucial insights into stakeholder involvement in the higher education sector in Cambodia. The study has shown that the stakeholder collaboration involving only government, university and industry as postulated in the triple helix nexus model (Etzkowitz, 2002, 2003a, 2008; Etzkowitz et al., 2007; Leydesdorff & Etzkowitz, 1996; Leydesdorff & Meyer, 2003), often applied to examine the stakeholder involvement in developed countries, bears minimal relations to the context of developing countries, particularly a heavily aid-dependent country like Cambodia. This finding is consistent with that of Eun et al. (2006) who have also claimed that the triple helix model is rather inapplicable in the context of developing countries. The World Bank (2000) has established that the role of international donors, both multilateral and bilateral, is considered essential for higher education development in developing countries. Moreover, as the donor funding is channelled through NGOs for the country development, the role of NGOs is undoubtedly present in the developing countries. Evidently, the study has found that higher education stakeholders in Cambodia are basically composed of four major groups: the government, development partners (donor agencies and NGOs), HEIs, and industry.

A closer examination into the stakeholder involvement in the higher education sector in Cambodia has revealed that although each stakeholder group has contributed to the sector, they have failed to actively interact with each other to push the sector forward for economic
development. While industry is supposed to play an active role to collaborate with HEIs for innovation and development in the knowledge-based economy (Etzkowitz, 2002, 2003a, 2008; Etzkowitz et al., 2007; Leydesdorff & Etzkowitz, 1998), this stakeholder group in Cambodia has failed to cooperate with HEIs for such purposes due to the lack of capacity, resources and trust. This has relegated the role of industry to that of NGOs which have played limited roles – employers, private donors and trainers – to contribute to the sector development. Unlike the governments in developed economies, such as Singapore and Malaysia, which provide the financial and policy supports to promote the stakeholder collaboration to advance the sector (e.g. Chanthes, 2012; Koh & Wong, 2005; Malairaja & Zawdie, 2008; Mok, 2003; Mok & Lee, 2003; Razak & Saad, 2007; Sidhu & Kaur, 2011), the Cambodian government does not have such sufficient capacity and resources but to rely largely on foreign donors’ technical and financial support in order to boost the sector. HEIs, expected to take the lead in the stakeholder collaboration (e.g. Etzkowitz, 2003a, 2008; Etzkowitz et al., 2007; Etzkowitz et al., 2000; Marques et al., 2006), are deemed not resourceful and proactive enough as leading institutions to promote stakeholder collaboration due to inadequate facilities, limited funding, and a lack of a critical mass to better education quality and services. The absence of the stakeholder collaboration constitutes a risk factor, locking the potentials of HEIs to perform entrepreneurially for their quality improvement.

At the institutional level, the findings have revealed that HEIs in Cambodia have shared the global trends in their expansion in scope and scale. A decrease in the public funding and an increase in the demand for higher education have caused most HEIs, if not all in Cambodia, to fall into the trap of profit orientation. Their profit-seeking activities have moved away from the entrepreneurial university concept (Bercovitz & Feldman, 2006; Clark, 1998a; Etzkowitz, 2003a, 2008; Fayolle & Redford, 2014; Mok, 2005; Redford & Fayolle, 2014; C. Sam & van der Sijde, 2014), academic capitalism (Rhoades & Slaughter, 2004; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997, 2001; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), and commercialization (Bok, 2003), practiced in other developed and emerging economies. HEIs have relied almost entirely on tuition fees as the main source of income. The profit orientation of Cambodian HEIs mainly through one income source is deemed a big challenge to the quality and efficiency of the higher education sector.

Since the provision of higher education was opened up to the private sector in 1997, HEIs in Cambodia have provided mainly teaching services and taken advantage of the service
for their commercial purposes. This practice has shown that Cambodian HEIs have not incorporated research into their academic core missions before embedding themselves in profit-seeking activities. Only recently have HEIs started to consider research for development due to the available research grant from the HEQCIP. The study argues that such a commercial practice has been perverted, moving away from the global trend of which universities have incorporated the core missions of teaching and research and further performed entrepreneurially for innovation and development in the knowledge-based economy. In this regard, unlike Singapore (e.g. Koh & Wong, 2005; J. Lee & Win, 2004; Leong et al., 2008; Mok & Lee, 2003; Wong, 2007), Malaysia (e.g. Chandran et al., 2013; Malairaja & Zawdie, 2008; Rasiah & Govindaraju, 2009; Razak & Saad, 2007; Sidhu & Kaur, 2011) and Thailand (e.g. Chanthes, 2012; Schiller & Brimble, 2009; Schiller & Liefner, 2007; Worasinchai et al., 2009), Cambodia has shown to clearly lag behind in injecting the concept of stakeholder collaboration and entrepreneurial university into the development of the higher education sector.

Notably, the reforms at the national level have brought about some institutional changes at HEIs. One important institutional change manifests itself in an institutional governance reform. That is, each HEI is required to have a governing body as the supreme body at the institutional level. While the governing bodies are aimed to involve stakeholders through their representatives for institutional development, the actual implementation has yet to achieve the desired aim. It has appeared that market and political forces have claimed the sovereignty of higher education. The three forms of HEIs - public, PAI and private – have shared a convergent trend toward commercialization and politicization, thereby weakening the quality and efficiency of their higher education provision services. The increased autonomy at HEIs tends to induce decision-making power concentrated at leadership levels of the institutions, yet it has not resulted in significant improvements for institutional development to achieve quality education and services. Varghese and Martin (2013) have noted that in some countries, the institutional autonomy becomes a means of a ruling political party control from the national to the institutional level at which the power is concentrated at the top level of the universities. Implicitly, Cambodia has yet to enjoy its real democracy as officially claimed, thereby restricting HEIs’ independence and academic freedom. Conversely, Mok and Lee (2003) have pointed to Singapore in which autonomy has been granted to universities to promote innovation and creativity through a decentralization policy.
6.3.2 Contributions to literature and research

Based on the empirical evidence in Cambodia, the study has contributed to the higher education scholarship and research in the Cambodian context (and the developing world at large). First, it contributes to the literature and research efforts in the field of higher education by developing “a quadruple helix model”, adapted from the triple helix model (Etzkowitz, 2002, 2003a, 2008; Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2002; Leydesdorff & Etzkowitz, 1996; Leydesdorff & Meyer, 2003), to reflect the actual situation of the stakeholder involvement in the higher education sector in donor-dependent Cambodia. The quadruple helix model can be extensively applied to other developing countries which are largely dependent or driven by international donor agencies. In this sense, the study significantly contributes to the theory building on stakeholder involvement and interaction in the higher education domain in donor-dependent countries with Cambodia as a case study. Meanwhile, the contribution of the study is particularly relevant to theoretical debates on the prevalent use of the triple helix model in the developed countries to examine the stakeholder collaboration in the higher education sector. The study has argued that although the model is a good reminder of how higher education can be developed, it requires contextual adjustments because different countries have different conditions, resulting in new stakeholder groups. Therefore, the study opens an academic debate on this issue to be explored within the context of the developing world.

Second, the study also contributes to the body of knowledge in the field of higher education by providing a fresh insight into the development of the higher education sector in the region, Cambodia in particular, from the perspective of the entrepreneurial university concept (Bercovitz & Feldman, 2006; Clark, 1998a; Etzkowitz, 2003a, 2008; Fayolle & Redford, 2014; Mok, 2005; Redford & Fayolle, 2014; C. Sam & van der Sijde, 2014). While the concept has been widely discussed and adopted in the Western world, it has become an emerging and even a new phenomenon in the region, particularly the less-developed economies. With the regional comparative approach, the study has brought in an academic debate over the applicability of the modern university concept within the context of the developing world. As the concept has yet to be explored within the Cambodian context of higher education, this study has filled in the critical knowledge gap to the existing literature on higher education in Cambodia. The study also paves the way for researchers and scholars to consider for their future research as higher education needs to be pushed forward to respond to the ever-changing demands of the knowledge-based economy within the globalized and regionalized context.
Finally, the study has addressed the under-researched issue of institutional governance in Cambodia and critically examines the assumptions that devolution and privatization of higher education in Cambodia will help improve the sector for economic development. The study contributes to the academic literature by providing deep insights into the institutional governance of higher education providers (public, PAI and private) with a comparative discussion on an institutional basis and the challenges involved in the governing process while the sector is in transition toward the market model. Scholars engaged in the domain can benefit from the findings of this study to consider for their future research in developing countries in particular, which are either experiencing financial constraints or struggling to seek their own income for survival in the marketplace, which can have wider impacts. It also contributes to the ongoing academic debate on institutional governance while HEIs have been granted greater autonomy and moving toward profit-seeking activities. Overall, the research project has significantly contributed to research literature and on-going academic debate in the field of higher education with Cambodia as a case study.

6.4 Development and policy implications

The research has important policy implications to boost the higher education sector in Cambodia to develop human capital in order to help realize the Cambodia development vision to become an upper-income country and a developed country by 2030 and 2050 respectively. Higher education is considered a crucial engine for economic development and national competitiveness in the ASEAN common market.

Due to the rise of the knowledge-based economy and the local and global competitiveness, people’s knowledge, skills and resourcefulness have become increasingly important. This situation has posed great challenges to Cambodia and other developing nations to overcome in order to make their higher education responsive to the competitive labour market during the limited public funding and increasing demand for higher education. Clark (1998a) suggests that all universities adapt and become more entrepreneurial. In other words, universities should be able to be more financially independent of the public funding by seeking funds from the external sources through their knowledge commercialization. To address the shortage of resources, sustain HEIs financially, and improve the quality of the educational programs and services, the study, therefore, suggests some features which HEIs in Cambodia in particular may consider in transforming themselves into entrepreneurial
universities despite the fact that the entrepreneurial university model has been adopted mainly in developed countries and it is a new phenomenon in developing countries.

First, stakeholder collaboration involving the government, development partners, HEIs and industry would improve the quality of HEIs and help address the education and skill mismatches in the current graduate labour market by improving the relevance of university curricula. For collaborations to succeed, it is important that the government provide policy intervention and financial support rather than leaving HEIs solely responsible for organizing mutually beneficial engagement. Moreover, a moderator might be needed to coordinate collaborations, as pulling all the stakeholder groups together is a big challenge in the local context. In addition, research could be used a mechanism to bring external stakeholders and HEIs together in a single forum for common goals.

Second, university curricula should be revised to incorporate entrepreneurship education in order to promote an entrepreneurial spirit among Cambodian students and graduates. HEIs will have to be more focused on producing graduates with an entrepreneurial mind-set and employability skills to meet the needs of the competitive ASEAN labour market as any steady jobs or careers may no longer be guaranteed.

Third, due to limited public funding, Cambodian HEIs will have to diversify their sources of income by becoming entrepreneurial. They should go beyond their traditional academic role of teaching and engage in corporate-sponsored research, consultation services and patenting. Local HEIs are at risk of collapse if their only income is tuition fees, particularly if there is competition with regional university branches in the ASEAN Economic Community. The government, development partners and industry could be sources of funding through, for example, HEIs’ conducting contract research. This requires that HEIs develop the capacity to produce high quality research.

Fourth, it is necessary to promote innovative research and development (R&D) as the Cambodia’s economy is moving towards a knowledge-based future. This will require a major investment from the government. Meanwhile, Cambodia and its development partners need to work cooperatively as a synergy to push R&D forward for the country’s development.

All in all, the above four features should be considered to push the higher education sector in Cambodia (and some other developing countries at large) forward to be responsive
to the ever-increasing needs of the competitive labour market in the global knowledge-based economy.

The study also has some implications to strengthen the institutional governance of different higher education providers in order to ensure that the above suggested features can be implemented. That is, instead of the MoEYS or parent ministry making all important decisions for public HEIs, the public HEI boards need to be empowered to lead their HEIs. The MoEYS or parent ministry needs to ensure that the boards of public HEIs have practical functions to exert their influence on HEIs in the decision-making process for institutional development based on the inputs from the stakeholder representatives. Meanwhile, board members need to be carefully selected based on their relevant qualifications and independently of political party favouritism. This also applies to PAIs where increased autonomy has yet to bring about any significant changes to the improvement of the education quality and services. In addition, the MoEYS needs to regulate the operation of private HEIs through regular monitoring and evaluations to make sure that their income-generating activities have created values added to the core missions of HEIs.

In addition, collective decisions and commitments within the governing bodies need to be promoted for institutional development as a quality culture of governance cannot be developed based only on the enforcement of set of regulations but also through the discursive practices. Moreover, the governing boards should set out policies for their HEIs to perform entrepreneurially to diversify their income sources by collaborating with external stakeholders rather than depending mainly on tuition fees. In this sense, institutional capacity development needs to be considered for knowledge commercialization.

6.5 Limitations and future research directions

Like other research, this PhD research has some limitations which can be addressed in future research. Although this research has provided crucial insights into the higher education sector in Cambodia in relation to the stakeholder involvement and institutional governance from different stakeholder perspectives, there has remained some room for further investigation in future research. The future research will help shed light on these issues in greater detail.

As Cambodia is a donor-dependent country with NGOs as executive agents, this study extends the number of stakeholder categories in the current triple helix model (government-
university-industry interaction) – expanding the triple helix to a quadruple helix, embracing government, development partners (international donors and NGOs), HEIs, and industry. Although the extension enhances the explanatory power of this model in the Cambodian context, limitations apply to this study. That is, the findings are limited in providing much detail about stakeholder collaboration within an individual HEI in Cambodia as the study particularly examines the stakeholder involvement across institutions at the sector level. Future study, therefore, may apply the model to conduct an in-depth case study in a particular HEI in order to further examine the stakeholder involvement. This will help shed light on the stakeholder issue in further detail.

In this research, only HEIs under the direct supervision of the MoEYS have been selected for the study as they account for 57 percent of all HEIs in Cambodia and the MoEYS plays a leading role in making policies for the development of higher education in the country. In this sense, future research may consider selecting HEIs under the supervision of other parent ministries for the study in order to provide a clearer picture of the stakeholder involvement in the sector. Moreover, problems and challenges about stakeholder collaboration in the sector can be detected even more clearly to help advance the sector.

To examine the governance issue of HEIs, the current research focuses mainly on the perspectives from internal and external stakeholders at the leadership and management levels. However, it has not looked into this issue from the perspectives of other internal stakeholders such as faculty members and students. This, therefore, leaves room for future research to further investigate the same issue to provide deeper insights into the on-the-ground implementation of the institutional governance at HEIs. The findings of the future research may serve as a basis of verification with the findings of the current study and shed light on the issue in greater detail.

Although the current research has given a broad picture on how institutional governance is structured and practiced at HEIs, it has not provided much detail about a particular HEI in Cambodia. Future research is thus needed to provide more empirical evidence on the institutional governance as research on this aspect has remained very limited. In this regard, one particular HEI can be selected for an in-depth case study to seek further insights into the practice of the institutional governance. Moreover, the current study has suggested the topics for future research. As the current study has found that the institutional governance is oriented toward business and politicization, and increased autonomy has not
brought about satisfactory results to the quality and services of education at HEIs, future research may consider examining in greater detail the impacts of politicization, commercialization in higher education and institutional autonomy in Cambodia. In addition, the MoEYS issued the new Prakas 410 dated 27 February 2015 on the conditions and criteria for public HEI board composition to require the board to comprise from 5 to 11 members. They shall be proposed by the concerned HEI and approved by the education minister. As the examination of the implementation of this Prakas is not covered in the current study, this gap suggests that future study examine the implementation of this regulation to deepen a sound understanding about the current practice of public HEI governance.