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CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE | UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA
INSTITUT PENYELIDIKAN PENDIDIKAN TINGGI NEGARA
NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

CTEF - IPPTN Special Series on SDG4: Planning for Flexible Learning Pathways in Higher Education: Part 02

Flexible Learning Pathways in Malaysia: Looking Back to Look Forward

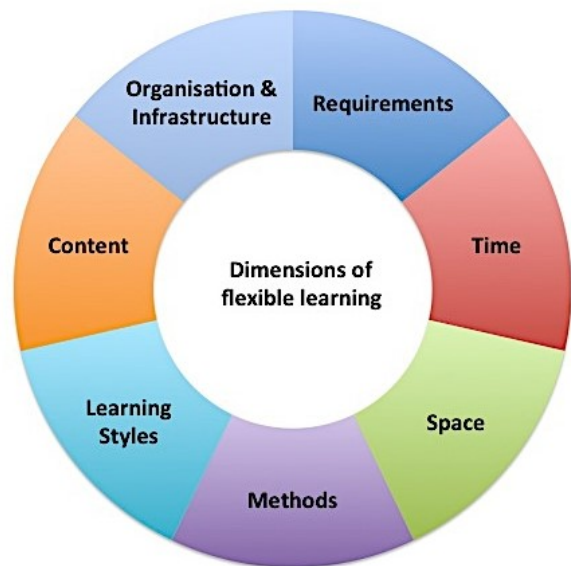### Widening of access to higher education and flexible learning environment

The Malaysian Government has introduced the Open Entry Policy in 2006, making it possible to gain entry to higher education institutions without the required academic qualifications, but based on prior learning experience. The expansion of higher education in Malaysia has primarily catered for the demands of traditional learners. Not until 2005, where there was the interest among many working adults to further their education and obtain formal recognition of their professional experiences. Moreover, the current context has forced higher education system to be more efficient and effective to deal with the pandemic COVID-19 era.

FLPs in national policy framework

The government has set out national strategic objectives that emphasise the recognition of prior learning and professional experience and enable lifelong learning opportunities for diverse types of students.

Since the data are not available, it is not possible to ascertain what proportion of this growth in enrolment related to the new alternative pathways. However, among the universities that are offering online distance learning (ODL) like the Open University Malaysia (OUM), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), the intakes based on these alternative pathways have been significant.

It is important to note that in Malaysia the demand for higher education goes in parallel with the demand for highly skilled and knowledgeable workers (see Figure 1).

Dimensions of flexible learning: Organisation & Infrastructure, Requirements, Time, Space, Methods, Learning Styles, Content

New Strategic Objectives for Higher Education

- 2015 – Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025 focuses on providing lifelong learning opportunities through reskilling and upskilling to meet the changing skill demands and recognise the potential of those outside the workforce.

- 2016 – Eleventh Malaysia Plan 2016-2020 focuses on uplifting the bottom 40% of households and other disadvantaged groups by increasing the share from 9% to 20% of these groups with a higher education degree by 2020.

- 2018 – Higher Education 4.0 initiative by MoHE focuses on producing competent and skilled workforce for the 4th Industrial Revolution.

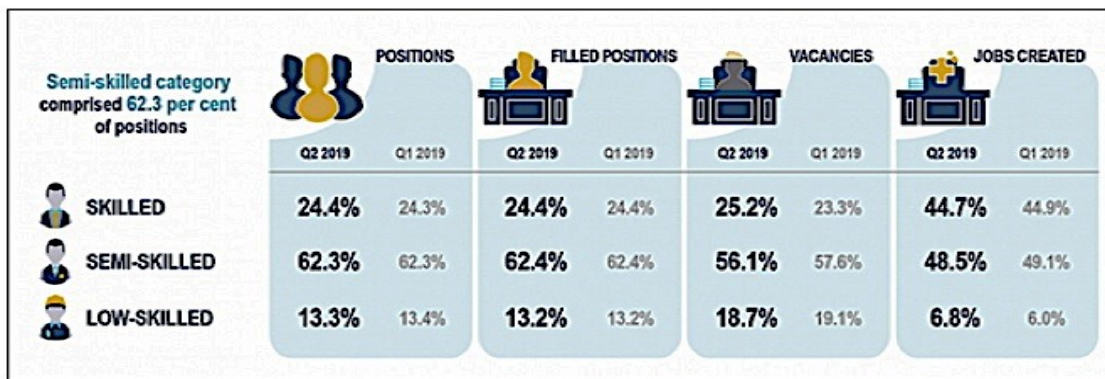- 2019 – Malaysia's Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 re-emphasises earlier policies on lifelong learning.

Figure 1: Malaysia – employment by skills (percentage share)
*Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM)(2019)*

This poses a challenge for Malaysia, particularly in terms of how the equity groups (the disadvantaged and marginalised groups) fit into the national framework for the 4IR, which is technology intensive. Also, it will be even more critical to consider the learning needs of equity groups, and those intending to return to higher education with lower than the required academic qualifications for admission into higher education institutions.

Therefore, there is a need for Malaysia to confirm the extent to which the linkages between national policies on lifelong learning, strategies, instruments, and institutional practices in terms of FLPs have benefited non-traditional learners, and equity groups.

SDG4: FLPs in Malaysia

IIEP-UNESCO's definition on FLPs: a holistic approach, comprising adequate and well-coordinated mix of well-designed policy frameworks and instruments, with targeted measures for enabling environments, including administrative capacity and coordination, and involvement of all relevant stakeholders, are required, in order to translate FLPs from national priority into institutionalised practice that reaches intended beneficiaries.

Malaysia through CTEF – IPPTN USM together with Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) were part of the IIEP-UNESCO research study on "SDG4: Planning for flexible learning pathways in higher education" that was launched in 2018. The case studies which involved eight countries from different regions aimed to produce knowledge and provide evidence-based policy advice to ministries of higher education in different development contexts that are considering building or strengthening FLPs as an area of reform especially now within the challenging context of COVID-19 pandemic era. Lessons learned should inform future policies and practices for Malaysia.
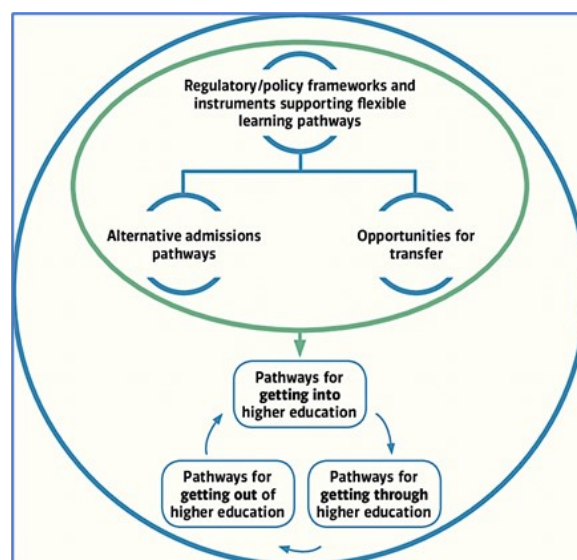
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