

Exploring Lecturer and Student Readiness on Flexible Learning Pathways Toward SDG4

Rafidah Abd Karim

Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Ramlee Mustapha

Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter presents a study about flexible learning pathways towards SDG4 in Malaysian higher education. The purpose of the study was to explore the lecturers' perception on flexible teaching and the students' readiness for flexible learning pathways to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) in Malaysian higher education institutions (HEIs). The study employed a survey method. An online questionnaire was designed and distributed to a total of 167 students and 60 lecturers from selected higher education institutions in Malaysia. Data were analysed using the SPSS version 27, and the findings were presented using descriptive statistics. The study found that the tertiary students were ready for flexible learning pathways. In terms of teaching, the lecturers agreed that they have implemented flexible teaching modes. Based on the empirical findings, several suggestions for future research are presented.

INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) -- UNESCO has started the project "SDG4: Planning for flexible learning pathways in higher education." Flexible learning pathways (FLPs) refer to entry and re-entry points for people of all ages and educational levels. It is aimed to enhance the "educability" of an individual. Flexible learning can also be defined as pedagogical practice in which various learning modes, assessment, and certification are implemented. Flexible learning pathways could also include legislative and regulatory frameworks, credit transfer, and lifelong policies (Godonoga & Martin, 2020).

In today's complex and fast-changing world, flexible learning by youth and adults needs to be recognised (Yang, 2015). It can be part of life-long learning paradigm in which knowledge, skills and competencies gained through non-formal and informal education are all desirable goals (UNESCO, 2015). Hence, multiple entry points into learning institutions could be necessary to non-conventional students due to study-work intermittence. In the same token, flexible exit strategies from learning institutions could be crucial in assisting students with their transition to the workforce. To create these pathways, HEIs will need to organise their study programmes using innovative strategies that are based on productive collaboration with companies and the industry.

Through the flexible learning pathways, the educational profiles of students can be more effectively tailored to their learning preferences and the demands of the labour market by offering a more varied range of learning options (OECD, 2020). Therefore, higher education institutions and companies must collaborate to design higher education programmes to be more flexible. It will allow students to combine study and employment and it could increase graduates' employment opportunities and provide them more freedom to adapt to various learning styles. A fundamental input for the learning-teaching system is readiness, which is crucial in the education-instruction process (Bloom, 1995). In line with the above, it is crucial to research on the readiness on flexible teaching and flexible learning pathways among lecturers and students in the higher education. To gain an in-depth insight of the topic, the authors highlight research on related definitions and overview of the flexible learning pathways and quality education.

BACKGROUND

Flexible Teaching and Learning in Malaysian Higher Education

According to Taylor (1988) flexible teaching involves an attempt to change how we go about our teaching or how students engage in learning. Flexible learning as discussed by Cybinski & Selvanathan (2005) is an alternative to the traditional face-to-face instructional methods used in higher education. Flexible learning is a collection of educational approaches and philosophies that are concerned with by giving students more personalisation, convenience, and choice tailored to their needs (Shurville et al., 2008). Recently, several trendy flexible learning environments are being practiced in educational institutions such as e-learning, blended learning, flipped learning and mobile learning. Most students now use mobile devices for e-learning in their classrooms because they find the gadgets to be adaptable for learning (Karim et al., 2019). Flexible learning environments provide alternatives to address these issues in several ways, including altering the length of instruction, enabling imaginative learning activities, and providing useful assessments and resources (Naidu, 2017). Descriptions of learning environment characteristics include reduced traditional face-to-face time, flexibility in learning delivery mode, equivalence in learning regardless of delivery mode, design for student-centered and collaborative learning, and application of self-regulation and motivation for learning (Cybinski & Selvanathan, 2005). Lundin (1999) provided the characteristic and principles of open and flexible learning, for example external studies, distance education, distance learning, open learning, flexible delivery, flexible teaching and learning a distributed learning.

Malaysia's higher education system is going through a significant shift after years of development. To produce graduates who are prepared for the future, the curriculum and teaching strategies are being updated to include new essential components like experiential learning, an organic and adaptable cur-

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