

HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH MONOGRAPH

# **The Effectiveness of Academic Programmes**

AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS  
TOWARDS LIFELONG LEARNING

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## Forward

The Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP), and the implementation of the *National Higher Education Strategic Plan and National Higher Education Action Plan 2007- 2010* launched by the Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi has set forth the vision for the transformation of higher education in Malaysia from now to 2020 and beyond. The transformation framework consists of the philosophy, the concepts, the five pillars and the seven thrust areas that will be adopted in higher education institutions (HEIs). The core pillars of HEIs are governance, leadership, academia, teaching and learning, and research and development. In tandem with this, there are seven thrusts which are certainly broad based which covers widening access and enhancing quality, improving the quality of teaching and learning, enhancing research and innovation, strengthening institutions of higher education, intensifying internationalisation, the enculturation of lifelong learning; and reinforcing the ministry's delivery system.

Lifelong learning is seen to be one of the critical agendas designed to effect change within the higher education system. It is a significant development that will be emphasised to support the nation's human capital development needs. In keeping abreast with the pace of rapid development surrounding us, learning, unlearning and relearning has to be a lifetime commitment. The English proverb, "one is never too old to learn" is similar to the Chinese proverb "*Huo dao Lao, xue dao lao*". With competition between nations intensifying, many countries are promoting the concept of lifelong learning in the effort to outperform their opponents and maintain their advantages. The lifelong learning system now forms a major thrust in national policies to propel Malaysian into the global arena.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to assess current programmes offered at the HEIs in Malaysia and the extent to which these programmes facilitate lifelong learning. In particular, the study seeks to understand the perception of students towards course content, learning materials, the teaching and learning environment, the role of instructors, and the support extended. This will provide useful insights for the relevant parties to strategise appropriate initiatives to improve the current programmes offered by the HEIs.

## **Executive Summary**

Every culture and religion in this world encourages learning. Lifelong learning is a social phenomenon rather than a planned activity. It requires individuals to continuously expand their knowledge domain through formal, informal and non-formal learning methods. Formal learning is learning that is prepared by educational institutions or structure training for the purpose of certification. Informal learning is learning that is gained through everyday activities which are related to the workplace, family and social surroundings. This form of learning is not structured and neither is it done for the purpose of certification. On the other hand, non-formal learning is not conducted by any institution or training sector or for any forms of certification but are structured according to individual planning.

In Malaysia, the importance of lifelong learning has become an acceptable fact in the contemporary era of the late 1990s and early 2000s, as the world faces the revolution in Information Technology and the globalisation of markets towards technological changes and the need to continuously acquire knowledge and skills to develop individual capacities to compete and to become more prevalent. Therefore, lifelong learning programmes are extremely relevant in the context of k-economy in Malaysia. To cater to these needs, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) is responsible for all Public Higher Education Institutions, Private Higher Education Institutions, Polytechnics, and Community Colleges which offer various programmes that can facilitate lifelong learning. The main concept of lifelong learning as promoted by MoHE is based on four main objectives: (1) to fulfil individual needs, (2) to fulfil manpower needs, (3) to promote active citizenship and (4) to promote evenness in social status.

The primary objective of the research reported here is to explore students' perception towards the effectiveness of programmes offered at higher education institutions in Malaysia in facilitating lifelong learning. To realise this objective, lifelong learning programmes at higher education institutions were assessed in terms of course content, learning materials, teaching and learning strategies, the role of instructors, and the support system. This study also examined how these factors influence the students' attitude towards learning and their motivation to learn.

The research reported here utilised both the qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods were used to capture the perceptions and assessments among silver-haired people (adult learners) towards lifelong learning. The quantitative methods, on the other hand, were used to establish the differences in the perception of students from public and private institutions, polytechnics and community colleges who major in Management programmes. This study focused only on management students because of the soft-skills components in the courses and also because the field of management is the main source of semi-professional workforce in the country.

The study recommended a common reference framework on key competencies for policy makers, education and training providers and learners themselves, to facilitate national reforms and exchange of information among the higher education institutions and the community. Furthermore, the recommendations will help to support other related policies such as employment and social policies and other policies affecting youths.