



UMS Chief Librarian Zawai Tiyunin (centre) presenting a memento to Joe (left) as Fong looks on.

## Draft policy on inclusive edu

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KOTA KINABALU: Malaysia became one of the first countries in the world to advocate the development of inclusive open educational resources with the launching of a workshop for the development of a policy under the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco).

Ensuring quality education is one of the key aims of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for 2030. SDG4 highlights the need for the development of inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong opportunities for all.

The workshop was organised by Unesco Country Consultant, Professor Dr Fong Soon Fook, who is also Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Centre for E-learning Director, in association with Unesco, the Education Ministry, Malaysian Centre for e-Learning (MyCEL), Malaysian e-Learning Council for Public Universities (MEIPTA), higher education institutions from across the nation, representatives from the Malaysian Association for the Blind, Social Welfare Services Department, "Wacana Austisme" and the Malaysian Federation for the Deaf.

The workshop on the development of the draft policy was organised with the generous support of the William and Flora Hewlett foundation.

Unesco Programme Specialist, Joe Hironaka, highlighted the fact that Malaysia was one of the first countries to develop a draft policy on inclusive open educational resources.

Almost half a million individuals in Malaysia are currently registered as disabled. Disabled or differently-abled individuals may be challenged with visual,

auditory, speech, physical or cognitive limitations which in turn hinder their ability to lead a productive life in society.

Inclusive education aims to overcome this limitation by ensuring the higher educational institutions work in collaboration with the department of social welfare, and NGOs to ensure that all educational material is freely available to differently-abled individual in a format which is adapted for their use.

For instance, visually challenged individuals may require text to be converted into audio files and braille, alternatively, individuals with a hearing loss may require that video lectures be close captioned with subtitles as text in order to read content online.

The redevelopment of educational content in a format which is accessible to all is a challenge to educators as well as the formats are distinct and the method for assessment of learning is unique to the specific challenge.

The workshop was also attended by Dr Ferdinand Pitagan of Unesco and Philippines who provided an insight into the development of open educational resources in his country.

The policy on inclusive open educational resources will have a significant impact on the availability of educational resources to learners with disabilities, given the fact that it will enable higher education institutions to extend the scope of their teaching and learning material to a new community of learners, it will serve as an avenue to reiterate the need for the inclusion of all kinds of learners into Malaysian society by addressing their own unique capabilities to develop a truly inclusive society.