

UMS conducts workshop on inclusive open educational resources with UNESCO



UMS Chief Librarian, Zawawi Tiyunin (centre) presenting a memento to Joe (left). Also seen in the photo is Dr Fong.

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KOTA KINABALU: Malaysia has become 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 for inclusive open educational resources under the aegis of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (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 jointly organised by Professor Dr. Fong Soon Fook, Country Consultant of UNESCO, who is also the Director of the Center for E-learning at UMS; the Ministry of Education; Malaysian Centre for e-Learning (MyCEL); Malaysian e-Learning Council for Public Universities (MEIPTA); Higher Educational Institutions from across the nation; representatives from the Malaysian Association for the Blind; Department of Social Welfare; 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.

Joe Hironaka, Programme Specialist of UNESCO, 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,” he said.

According to him, 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,” he added.

Hironaka said, 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 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 educational 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.”