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Incentives and Initiatives Provided for the Implementation of Employability Skills in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET): The Malaysian Experience

Professor Emeritus Anuwar Ali

President/Vice-Chancellor

Open University Malaysia

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Abstract

Today's globalised and highly competitive environment calls for a workforce that is skilful, efficient and innovative. This is an imperative for any nation that seeks to build a knowledge-based economy via highly competent and well-educated human capital. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET), now commonly considered part of mainstream education, creates pathways for enhancing competencies and thus, can help to hone employability skills necessary in creating a high-income economy. In Malaysia, TVET is recognised as a vital avenue for raising the capacity for knowledge and the right value systems, as well as for enculturating a lifelong learning society. The role of open and distance learning (ODL) in TVET is still relatively recent in many countries, including Malaysia, but their integration indicate a feasible system for sustaining greater access to educational opportunities for larger sections of the society.

This paper will explore the concept of TVET, its main features in Malaysia and incentives and initiatives available that aim to carry TVET to greater heights in this country. This paper will also discuss the integration of TVET and ODL and illustrate how an ODL institution like Open University Malaysia (OUM) can leverage on its technologies, flexibility and accessibility to complement TVET-based programmes. For Malaysia, with less than a decade left to achieve Vision 2020, TVET will be crucial not only in ensuring a properly skilled workforce, but also in facing ever newer challenges in higher education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Educational challenges are closely intertwined with the economic, political, social, cultural and religious agenda of any nation. Socially and culturally, there is an expectation for improvement in living conditions offered and created by higher levels of education of the masses. As economic activities change from an agricultural mode to that of manufacturing, industrial and digital, so too are there changes in the types of employability skills and competencies required. This ignited a constant challenge on the relevance of education. Many nations have given simultaneous emphasis to adult education and to universal education for the young, both emphasising on basic literacy. As the level of education is raised and as life expectancy increases, the question of employability becomes all the more important; transforming the importance of education beyond basic literacy alone.

Of late, employability and the creation of a knowledge-based economy have become fundamental concerns in many countries, including Malaysia. Realising the need to achieve a high-income economy, the Malaysian Government through its Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011-2015) is focusing on labour market reforms that aim to develop the country's human capital, with special emphasis on lifelong learning and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) as a means to raise the overall quality of the workforce by enhancing skills that have immediate applicability in the labour market. TVET is now commonly considered a mainstream education option; and many high-income countries adopt a 'dual-pathway' model of education – a model that Malaysia plans to emulate as well. Thus, improving the availability, access and quality of lifelong learning through TVET is considered equally important to the formal academic pathway in the country.

The concept of lifelong learning, also a nascent focus for many countries, is one that has solid connections to TVET. In Malaysia, the various programmes conducted at certificate and diploma levels are widely recognised as formal lifelong learning programmes, and this is the main focus for the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) to begin acculturating lifelong learning in the Malaysian society. The Ministry is thus proposing the publication of a Blueprint on Lifelong Learning for the country; an effort that will greatly involve TVET programmes and providers.

This paper will explore the various facets of employability and TVET; describe how new technologies have influenced today's workplace, leading to the creation of a 'new type' of workforce; as well as how TVET connects to current manpower demands. This paper will also discuss incentives and initiatives for TVET in Malaysia based on the Tenth Malaysia Plan; the importance of lifelong learning and a new dimension to promoting employability skills through TVET. This paper will finally illustrate how an open and distance learning (ODL) institution like Open University Malaysia's (OUM) has been able to partake in TVET provision.

2. EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IN A CHANGING GLOBAL ECONOMIC SCENARIO

Employability skills have been defined as a group of important skills and competencies needed to produce an efficient workforce. The latter must possess positive characteristics such as being innovative, creative, productive, skilful, competitive and having a strong sense of determination in handling the challenges of the 21st century as well as those of the industry and globalisation (Overtoom, 2000). Thus, the ongoing changes at the workplace, the nature of the work itself and advances in technology would require a workforce that is equipped with high level skills and positive attitudes.

New technologies have brought about changes in workflows and this has, in itself, brought about a shift of workforce requirements from low-skilled workers to a highly-skilled (K-workers) and well-informed workforce. Invariably, the current workplace requires workers with high technical skills as well as the ability to work well with others (Overtoom, 2000). To cope with these inevitable changes, the society requires its education and training system to be moulded to meet such needs.

Many have expressed concerns about the mismatch between skills imparted in formal education systems and the demands of the workplace. This situation has been exacerbated in recent years with the integration of new technologies in every scope of professional human activity. Hence, narrowing the gap between education and the world of work is thus a priority for most governments because of the potential economic and social benefits to be derived from those who are engaged in productive livelihoods.

3. TRANSFORMING TVET AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Unlike the academic system, the TVET system is designed to fulfil manpower demands of industries by providing the required skills at the workplace (Ziderman, 1997). TVET is thus an integral part of national development strategies because of its potential impact on productivity and economic development. At the same time, the concept of TVET has been linked with the

contributions to skills training that are the focus of many education providers throughout the world today. There has been a drastic transformation in the world of work, changing not only the foundations of economic and social life but also the knowledge, skills and competencies that people require in almost every field of endeavour.

The driving forces behind TVET are familiar; dramatic shifts from agrarian or industrial base to a knowledge-based economy, accompanied by equally dramatic changes in employment structures; the progressive globalisation of trade and communications; technological advances that encourage rapid changes in economic and social life; and demographic changes resulting from improvements in health and social conditions.

Rapid technological advancement, together with globalisation, is likely to lead to radical changes in the world of work. Its changing nature is evident in both urban and rural communities. Naturally, it would then follow that human development of which education plays a major role must keep in step with societal changes if people are to lead productive, effective and satisfying roles. As the world moves into a technology-dominated knowledge age, learning skills, the ability to process information and the capacity to adapt rapidly to changes are fast becoming determining factors in personal, corporate and national survival and prosperity.

The constant changes in employment profiles and the world of work means that the formal, academic education system cannot sufficiently educate and train people. It is not possible to expect work activities to remain unchanged or that people will remain in one job throughout their working lives. Compensatory, remedial, enrichment education can therefore occur within the educational system. The continuing general education of the community will therefore include knowledge corpus omitted by the culture, relearning forgotten or omitted wisdoms, unlearning misconceptions acquired as correct concepts, correcting distortions and misunderstandings. Beyond the system of structured learning, there are enormous possibilities for familial and individual learning across every person's lifetime.

The recognition of these possibilities, of lifelong learning and the "treasure within" each individual creates opportunities, hitherto unavailable or unrecognised. Beyond formal schooling, in the world of work, there are philosophies recognising human resources as the critical resource for any enterprise. It is in this respect that lifelong learning has become an important strategy for meeting the challenges faced by societies.

The changing nature of society today will require a constant updating of skills and knowledge and this can only be done through a flexible system of lifelong learning. This system must be one that reflects developments in the economic and social fields. In this flexible learning system, education will thus not just take place in the classrooms but on-the-job learning which should count towards

qualifications and to be recognised as an integral part of the lifelong learning process.

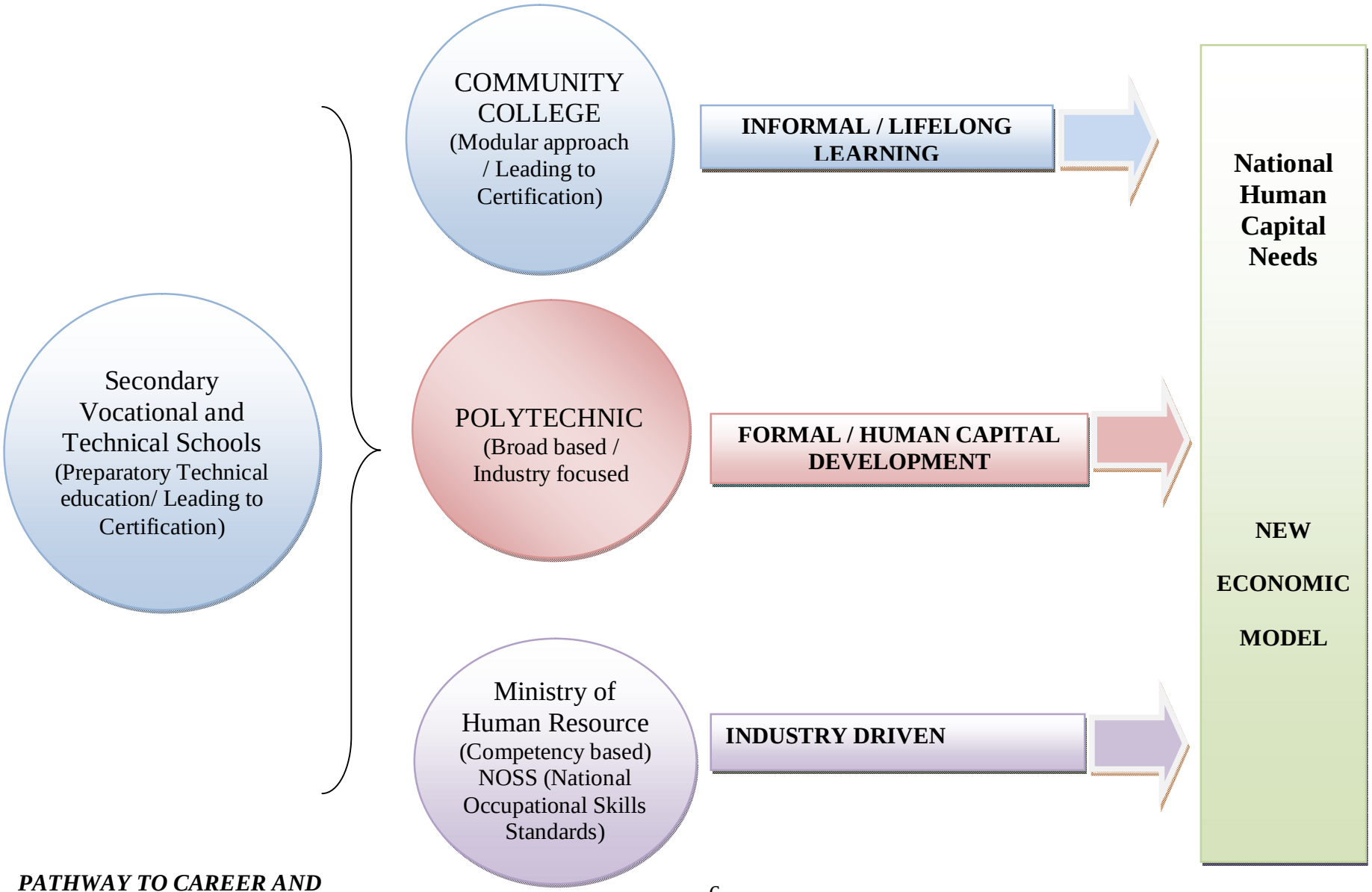
In a developing nation, it is pertinent that every citizen is aware of the importance of lifelong learning; and more importantly to have access to it. The public sector, private sector institutions and non-governmental agencies will need to work together to make available a system for lifelong learning and enable the citizenry to participate in its process. Thus, lifelong learning should become everyone's prerogative – as an extension of what has been established in the Karachi Plan (1960); i.e. that basic education is a fundamental right for all. In this context, special attention also needs to be given to certain sections of the population that are at risk. This particularly refers to those who have not completed their basic education, females who have not had access to basic education because of cultural norms as well as the handicapped. All will benefit from a lifelong learning agenda that does not exclude or discriminate against them.

4. INCENTIVES AND INITIATIVES FOR TVET IN MALAYSIA

Education and training was given the largest allocation (23%) of the total development budget in the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011-2015). To a large degree, this reflects the Malaysian Government's commitment in enhancing the quality of the country's human capital. One of the key thrusts in this Plan is to raise the country's capacity for knowledge, creativity and innovation. Education and training, including skills training, will play a central role in raising the capacity for knowledge and skills and the right value systems.

To provide greater access to education, training and lifelong learning, more classes and schools from pre-school to primary and secondary levels will be provided; including the upgrading of existing facilities. At the tertiary level, the Government has renewed its commitment to increase TVET facilities by establishing more polytechnics, community colleges, skills training institutions and centres of advanced technology, besides additional universities and university colleges. The Government thus gives high priority to the development of a TVET system to enhance the skills of its workforce in line with the demands and requirements of the work environment and industry (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET) IN MALAYSIA



PATHWAY TO CAREER AND EMPLOYMENT

4.1 Polytechnics and Community Colleges

Polytechnics have been set up by MOHE to upgrade students' technological and entrepreneurial skills. Certificate and diploma programmes are conducted in several technical fields such as engineering, commerce, hospitality and food technology. Entrants into these programmes are typically school leavers with O-level qualifications. Certificate programmes take about four semesters (or two years) to complete while diploma programmes can be completed within six semesters (or three years). Polytechnics are managed by a designated department within MOHE and at present there are 27 polytechnics throughout the country with an enrolment of 86,430 students in 2009.

On the other hand, Community Colleges were first established in 2001 as a means of providing an alternative avenue for secondary school leavers to further their education. As a group, they are considered the lifelong learning hubs of the country, vital in the provision of skills training. This role has been further reinforced through a rebranding process in 2007, whereby they were encouraged to collaborate with government-linked companies (GLCs) to offer more industry-relevant formal programmes at certificate and diploma levels. Currently there are 64 Community Colleges throughout the country offering certificate and diploma programmes in technical and vocational fields on a modular approach. Almost 18,000 students were enrolled in 2009.

4.2 Relevant Government Agencies

The Ministry of Human Resources (MOHR) through the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) manages the Human Resource Development Fund (HRDF). The HRDF monitors the collection of levies, disburses training grants as well as approved financial assistance and training places. Once the employers are registered with HRDC, employees at various levels of employment are given the opportunity to further their professional skills. It also manages training schemes for retrenched workers and conducts unique training schemes in IT and software development.

The Department of Skills Development (DSD), under MOHR, has been entrusted to formulate, promote and coordinate strategies and skill training programmes in line with the nation's technology and economic development needs. Under the National Skills Development Act, 2006 (Act 652) the National Skills Development Council (NSDC) was established with the aim of certifying the National Occupational Skills Standards (NOSS) and to advise MOHR in terms of skills development. As of May 2010, DSD has accredited 877 training centres including 534 private training institutions to conduct 5,031 training programmes involving 45,068 participants at the Malaysian Skills Certificate Levels 1 to 5 (DSD, 2010).

To further improve the coordination efforts in skilled manpower resources, DSD has enhanced its function through the gazetting of the Centre for Instructors and

Advanced Skill Training (CIAST) under its management effective from 16 June 2007. The core activities of DSD as the coordinator for national development skills include the development of NOSS, implementation of the Malaysian Skill Certification, implementation of the National Dual Training System (NDTS) and development of industrial expertise in the training, research and evaluation of programmes.

The NDTS operates based on the concept of smart partnership between the industry and the Government and is expected to solve the issue of skills mismatch which has been frequently raised by the industry. This industry-driven training is open to school-leavers and current members of the workforce. Each apprentice is paid an allowance between MYR350 to MYR500 (equivalent to USD115 to USD165) a month to undergo the Level 3 Malaysian Skills Certificate while employers who sponsor apprentices for the programme will be eligible for a single tax exemption incentive or refund of levy from the HRDF.

4.3 Government-Linked Companies

Through the involvement of relevant ministries and agencies, there are also several GLCs that provide training and professional courses similar to certificate programmes offered by the institutions mentioned above. These represent the Government's efforts to promote lifelong learning, employability skills training and enhancement to boost the nation's human capital. The ministries and agencies involved are MOHR, Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry and the Ministry of Health.

The emphasis is to expand the supply of highly skilled human capital, particularly at the diploma and advanced diploma levels that are in line with the changing domestic environment that calls for economic resilience, growth and the transformation to a knowledge-based economy. Skills training infrastructures will also be expanded and upgraded to promote e-learning and distance education so as to provide greater opportunities for individuals to improve and upgrade themselves. It has also been established that TVET would be an integral component of lifelong learning (UNESCO, 1999).

In the last few decades, TVET was given the main task of reducing economic inequalities via poverty eradication by providing employment opportunities to the rural youth as well as the marginalised urban population. The rapid developments in information and communication technologies (ICT), increasing globalisation, liberalisation and the shift towards a knowledge-based economy has impinged on the need for a more specialised human capital.

5. PROMOTING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS: A NEW DIMENSION

5.1 Polytechnics

An important dimension that has been emphasised of late is strengthening of linkages between formal and non-formal training programmes and to build links between the training systems and the private sector. For example, the Department of Polytechnic Education (DPE), MOHE, which has taken initiatives to align TVET to industry needs through the Time Sector Privatisation (TSP) programme. This collaborative programme, which began in 1996, has enabled the private and public sectors to utilise and optimise training facilities in the areas of technical and computer-related skills, apprentice programmes, quality and productivity related skills, management and administrative skills and communication skills.

The active and continuous industry involvement is crucial to ensure a market-driven curriculum that incorporates technical, social and learning competencies, including entrepreneurial skills as well as soft skills. Smart partnerships have been formalised through agreements between industries and related agencies in order to secure industrial placements for students. Initiatives like these are taken to minimise the mismatch between demand and supply, whereby students are given exposure to the workplace through structured industrial attachment programmes.

The much anticipated 2010 Polytechnic Transformation Plan was launched to ensure that priorities of the labour market are identified. This initiative is part of the DPE's strategic plan to rebrand polytechnics as the preferred institution for post-secondary school leavers. This practically means that the DPE has to work even more closely with industries to ensure that its graduates are groomed to face the real world of rapid change, technological advancement and globalisation. Thus, the inclusion of relevant professional and industrial certifications in polytechnic programmes has become a very important alternative pathway for diploma- and certificate-level students to progress to a higher level.

The need for regular curriculum review, the acquisition of soft skills and inculcation of traditional values such as integrity and transparency has also led to the establishment of the Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) and the Employability Advisory Committee (EAC); comprising strategic players from various industries. These strategic alliances are seen as being able to provide polytechnic graduates a competitive edge as jobseekers. The involvement of these two committees has also resulted in industries' greater support to work collaboratively with the DPE to ensure the relevancy of existing and future programmes. The industry organisations who are partners in this model provide work experience placements and relevant industry input to teaching resources and practices and employment preparatory activities such as job résumés and practice interviews.

5.2 Community Colleges

Community Colleges, the lifelong learning hubs of the country, have an equally important role to play in the upskilling of the Malaysian workforce. Under the purview of a designated department under MOHE, Community Colleges focus on lifelong learning opportunities particularly for those studying under the technical and vocational stream. Under the Tenth Malaysia Plan, Community Colleges will roll out modular programmes via multiple short modules that can be combined to obtain the Malaysian Skills Certificate. By 2015, 135 courses are expected to be on offer, an increase from just 52 in 2010. Targeted total enrolment is also expected to increase to 120,000 students by 2014.

Programmes that are specific to lifelong learning are made available in the form of short courses in 15 different clusters (e.g. automotive, hospitality and tourism, languages, self-development and et cetera). These programmes, targeted at school leavers, can also be tailor-made to the needs of local communities. The Community College Implementation Plan focus on the following objectives:

- offer various programmes which are relevant to the needs of the community;
- maintain a database of senior citizens, pensioners and other information related to local communities;
- enhance communication and computer application skills of the community;
- conduct tracer studies on the effectiveness of lifelong learning and implement future action plans; and
- involve the community in the development of the Community College

5.3 Other Pathways

The formal education system also caters relatively well as entry points of TVET. However, outreach programmes need to create alternative pathways, particularly for marginalised groups. Currently there are non-governmental organisations, private sector institutions and other non-formal organisations responding to the growing demand for livelihood and enterprise training. Much as these responses are innovative, non-formal in nature and cater to the new labour market, they are disconnected from social obligations and do not make a clear distinction between poverty alleviation and broader economic development goals.

There are different dimensions in the quest for a livelihood, and demands that compel employment changes resulting in combinations of entrepreneurship, employment, self-employment and enterprise. Therefore, the support programmes may need to include employment strategies as well as self-employment and enterprise which cater not for a homogeneous clientele, but also those that help people to cope with pressures such as loss of work and create opportunities such as self-employment.

6. FUTURE DIRECTIONS: THE ROLE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Despite the various national efforts already underway, the standard approaches to skills training need to be revisited. Having access to skills training may not be sufficient; neither would an array of vocational centres in urban areas serve the right people. There is the need to look at new, open learning practices that can offer various flexible learning pathways that will enable the working population and marginalised people to acquire knowledge and skills as they work. The shift to new, open, interactive learning environments that respond to the learners' diverse needs can be considered as it is able to cater more effectively and efficiently.

The dynamics of globalisation with the introduction of ICT have resulted in radical changes in the educational needs of individuals and the society. Educational institutions are required to imbue learners with functional lifelong learning skills so that they can survive and meet the challenges and changes brought about by emerging technologies. Education as it is understood today is not the same as it was decades ago due to one profound factor – technology.

Technology now plays an increasingly critical role in facilitating the transmission of knowledge. Given that the learning environment in traditional universities will change, the academic community is always challenged to innovate and be inventive so that the learners, and even those in the school system, will have a more rewarding experience. As an ODL university, the strength lies in using technology in various ways to provide learner-centred education. In fact, technological innovation has enabled ODL institutions like OUM to grow rapidly in terms of student numbers. OUM started with 753 learners in 2001 and on its 10th anniversary, it has more than 90,000.

6.1 Integrating ODL and TVET

ODL aims to include greater dimensions of openness, flexibility, quality and affordability in terms of access, curricula and infrastructure. The ODL mode offers structured learning in which members of the learning community are separated by time and space; makes use of instructional materials, audio and video cassettes, CD-ROMs, television and radio broadcasts as well as multimedia components such as computer and satellite transmissions. TVET encompasses programmes that provide participants with skills, knowledge and aptitudes that enable them to engage in productive work, adapt to the changing labour market and economies and participate as responsible citizens.

Such programmes may include skill levels ranging from functional, workplace literacy to more advanced technical and vocational skills at formal institutions and workplace environments for both the employed and unemployed. It is the combination of flexible access and skills and competency training that serves as the rationale for TVET and ODL integration; where there is a need to widen the

opportunities for learning, regardless of geographic, socio-economic or other constraints. As its name suggests, another asset is the openness with regards to a person's age, previous level of academic achievement and other such factors that can create artificial barriers to education as a lifelong pursuit in a democratic environment. ODL is also cost-effective, provides the independence of time, location, space and pace.

At the UNESCO Conference on Higher Education in 2008, distance learning, e-learning and the growth of open universities have been recognised as a critical enabler that has made higher education more accessible, especially for working adults. In tandem with this, there are now many more campuses around the world that have made technology an important component in their systems. For instance, they have technical infrastructures in terms of networks, internet connections and learning management systems (LMSs). In the future, it can be expected that technology would be opening up even more exciting possibilities for enhancing the delivery and outreach of education.

A common theme is the role of e-learning in supporting self-directed learning that encourages learners to take responsibility for their own learning and so develop the capability and attitudes to continue learning and maintain skills and employability throughout their working lives. This shift in the learning process encourages independence and plays an important role in a learner-centred approach that places greater emphasis on the learners rather than the organisation or faculty members.

7. THE EXPERIENCE OF OPEN UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

7.1 E-Learning Language Programme

OUM has played a leading role in enhancing industry players with employability skills. One such case study is an e-learning programme prepared for a leading bank in Malaysia. The globalised nature of today's businesses has a definite impact on the need for employees to have an excellent proficiency in the English language. There has undoubtedly been a rising need to improve on English language proficiency as it has become the *de facto* global language of trade and communication, which has also become the prerequisite to climb the corporate ladder, achieve higher income and better job positions.

However, for this particular bank, its corporate trainers and managers realised that one of the greatest challenges was in setting up and implementing a traditional face-to-face or instructor-led English language training nationwide to a large number of employees who required training. Not only were they faced with a large number of employees and the considerable amount of time and cost that would be involved in their training.

Despite OUM's blended-learning approach that was initially referred to as "the effective learning process created by combining digitally developed learning content with other learning support and services", the best way to develop an e-learning approach for this kind of training was to develop learning content that very closely resemble the way face-to-face training courses are run. Basically, the blended learning approach developed for this programme was acquired via self-managed learning (self-study) mode and the training modules were presented in CD-based and Web-based courseware. Self-managed learning was introduced as the best way to handle training for the large number of employees due to the geographical spread of its employees, time-learning and cost-effective factors.

To enrich the blended-learning approach, OUM developed a LMS through which learners could easily access information regarding the University, its programmes and services in an intelligent way. A system that is internally developed as myVLE, or "my Virtual Learning Environment", is an e-learning platform which enables faculty members, tutors and learners to interact in a virtual classroom environment. Learners could use myVLE to hold online discussions and to seek services and support to enrich their learning experience. So far OUM's myVLE has been emulated and adopted by other educational institutions as well, both locally and abroad.

Heeding the above needs, a customised E-Learning English language programme called English E-Learning Language Programme (EELP) was developed to improve the bank employees' proficiency in the English language. The programme rests on a five-level scale, of which Level 1 refers to the lowest competence and Level 5 to the highest competence. The descriptors of the levels were based on the Workplace English Language Benchmark (WELB), which was aligned to the business English tests administered by several internationally-recognised examination bodies, thus offering employers and employees a reference for recruitment and staff development.

To place the staff in the appropriate levels, EELP incorporated an online Placement Test. The Placement Test was designed to group the bank employees according to appropriate starting levels in the programme. The course structure and content for each level were distinct in that participants were exposed to a variety of language competencies and skills. Upon completing each module, a Mastery Test was administered to assess the students'/employees' understanding and comprehension at their respective levels. As a whole, the EELP helped employees to have a sufficiently clear understanding of employer's expectation of their English standard and to work out a self-improvement target for career development.

7.2 Nestlé-OUM Executive Diploma in Manufacturing Management

A special example of a partnership developed between OUM and industry is the Nestlé-OUM Executive Diploma in Manufacturing Management (EDMM) programme, which was launched in June 2006. Delivered in a conventional manner, trainees have to attended formal classes at specific locations and schedules. The first batch of 49 First Line Managers (FLMs) graduated in May 2008 while the second batch of 31 FLMs graduated in June 2009.

Building upon the success of this programme, Nestlé-OUM introduced the internet-based ODL mode of delivery from its 2009 intake onwards, where the EDMM programme began to be delivered in a blended ODL mode. This consisted of self-managed learning via various print and online resources where students could avail themselves of the EDMM programme while still remaining at work; online support via forums, chat, mobile, e-mail and et cetera with subject-matter experts (SMEs) and peers; as well as face-to-face classroom for tutorials and delivery of topics that require SME/tutor-learner interaction and/or participation (e.g. sensory evaluation and other skills training). Interaction with shop floor/site SMEs and facilitators (e.g. during projects and coaching) was also included.

It must be noted that e-learning is important in each of these approaches. A common theme is the role of e-learning in supporting self-directed learning that encourages learners to take responsibility for their own learning and so have the capability and attitudes to continue learning and maintain skills and employability throughout their working lives.

Based on the success of this programme in Malaysia, we are optimistic that it can be similarly adopted in other Nestlé factories worldwide when the e-learning component has been fully developed and tested. If this project materialises, this will be a significant milestone for OUM in embarking on an international training programme which leverages on e-learning to suit the needs of a dynamic multinational organisation which requires new competencies within its workforce.

7.3 Human Capital Development Project for Northern Corridor Implementation Agency

In order to boost the tourism and hospitality sector in the four northern states of Malaysia, i.e. Kedah, Penang, Perak and Perlis, OUM was identified to manage and deliver manpower requirements for the tourism and hospitality sector in the fourth quarter of 2010. The Northern Corridor Implementation Agency (NCIA) was established as a corporate body under the purview of the Prime Minister's Office, whose responsibilities are to spearhead, manage and implement socio-economic development in the abovementioned states.

The long-term objective of this programme is to encourage lifelong learning and to deliver community tourism development and its human capital supply. The programme focuses in the following areas of professional and certification:

- Hospitality Management;
- Travel and Tourism;
- Culinary Art;
- Events Management; and
- Retail Management.

All of these different focus areas lead to corresponding Professional Diploma qualifications with an international perspective. Some 500 participants from diverse backgrounds such as tourist guides, hotel and resort management and staff were trained for 11 months and job placement for the graduates was also duly executed. A convocation ceremony for these graduates was held in mid-February 2011.

7.4 OUM-PERHEBAT: Educating Malaysia's Armed Forces

This collaboration brought OUM together with *Perbadanan Hal Ehwal Bekas Angkatan Tentera* (PERHEBAT), an organisation that manages various training and education needs for former members of the country's army, naval and air forces to ensure that they receive sufficient assistance for their own socio-economic well-being as Malaysian citizens. Recognising the importance of continued education and development of Malaysia's armed forces, this partnership focuses on providing these individuals with the relevant academic and semi-technical qualifications that can help them keep abreast with current technologies, be academically proficient and attain the right knowledge and work skills that will be essential when they are eventually discharged from duty. These qualifications are also meant to help them develop entrepreneurship skills that will be vital for their continued growth outside their service in the armed forces.

In general, this partnership caters to all levels of study, from diploma to postgraduate, and also includes short courses and executive diplomas. Some of the immediate forthcoming plans under this partnership include promotion exercises at 157 schools for the armed forces nationwide and the offering of at least two short courses each month. The first batch should see at least 60 learners enrolling in the Diploma in Information and Technology, 80 in the Diploma of Management and another 70 in the Professional Diploma in Safety and Security programmes, respectively. Within the next several years, OUM expects to have an annual enrolment of 3,000 PERHEBAT members (those who are about to leave the service) and 2,000 in-service personnel as well.

OUM also provides advisory services for PERHEBAT to establish a university college of its own in the near future.

7.5 MOHR-OUM Certificate in Legal Practice

Borne of a partnership with the Ministry of Human Resources (MOHR), this unique programme was designed as a training scheme for unemployed graduates from various backgrounds. The increasing unemployment rate amongst graduates in Malaysia has been a worrying trend for some time and this particular project is one such contribution by OUM to help alleviate the problem at the national level.

Learners underwent 10 months of training before receiving certification in legal practice and given job placements as legal assistants in legal firms throughout Malaysia. In total, 170 learners successfully completed this programme in 2010.

8. CONCLUSION

The role of TVET in national development, including that of Malaysia, is receiving greater recognition – a very positive development indeed. Cultivating a knowledgeable workforce that can participate in a global environment for the creation of a high-income economy is an effort that invariably involves an investment in skills and competency training. It is only when a nation is able to ensure a properly skilled workforce, can it claim to be truly developed. For Malaysia, aiming to achieve that very end by 2020, it is clear that TVET will be a vital avenue.

The success of achieving Vision 2020 for the country will substantially depend upon the country's capacity to face new challenges. An important issue is the mismatch in the type of graduates from TVET institutions contributing to unfilled employment vacancies in industry. Greater collaborative measures between industry and education and training providers must to be undertaken to minimise this mismatch. In Malaysia, this is evident through measures initiated by polytechnics and the industry to work together to ensure that their TVET graduates are truly employable. However, in general, there is still a pressing need for better participation from the private sector to provide industrial training/internships for TVET students. There is also the issue of attracting financial support and students into private institutions.

However, Malaysia has tried to create a favourable policy environment as well as introduced new initiatives such as the NDTS, HRDF and the enforcement of the National Skills Development Act 2006 that initiated the establishment of the NSDC and the NOSS. These initiatives have resulted in various partnerships and

implementation measures that promise an optimistic future for TVET development.

For OUM, its role in TVET is perhaps not as distinctive as that in formal academic programmes, but the partnerships with some key industrial players illustrate that an ODL outfit can provide solutions to some fundamental feasibility, academic and logistic issues in the delivery of TVET to relevant individuals. The flexibility, quality, accessibility and affordability in ODL, combined with the industry-driven needs of TVET, can prove to be a successful and lucrative strategy for national development.

From a national standpoint, good practices will not flourish without a surrounding framework of policy, funding and assessment that empowers and encourages practitioners to make optimum use of what is at hand. Education providers must recognise that in a competitive and globalised labour market, their duty to students has to extend beyond teaching specific knowledge and vocational skills. Despite resource constraints, they need to put time and effort into building relationships with employers, structure teaching activities around real world needs and create an institutional culture of employability.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIAST	:	Centre for Instructors and Advanced Skills Training
DPE	:	Department of Polytechnic Education
DSD	:	Department of Skills Development
EAC	:	Employability Advisory Committee
EDMM	:	Executive Diploma in Manufacturing Management
EELP	:	E-Learning English Language Programme
GLC	:	Government-linked company
HRDC	:	Human Resource Development Council
HRDF	:	Human Resource Development Fund
IAC	:	Industry Advisory Committee
ICT	:	Information and communication technology
LMS	:	Learning management system
MOHE	:	Ministry of Higher Education
MOHR	:	Ministry of Human Resources
myVLE	:	My Virtual Learning Environment
NCIA	:	Northern Corridor Implementation Agency
NDTS	:	National Dual Training System
NOSS	:	National Occupational Skills Standards
NSDC	:	National Skills Development Council
ODL	:	Open and distance learning
OUM	:	Open University Malaysia
PERHEBAT	:	*Perbadanan Hal Ehwal Bekas Angkatan Tentera*
SME	:	Subject-matter expert
TSP	:	Time Sector Privatisation
TVET	:	Technical and vocational education and training
WELB	:	Workplace English Language Benchmark