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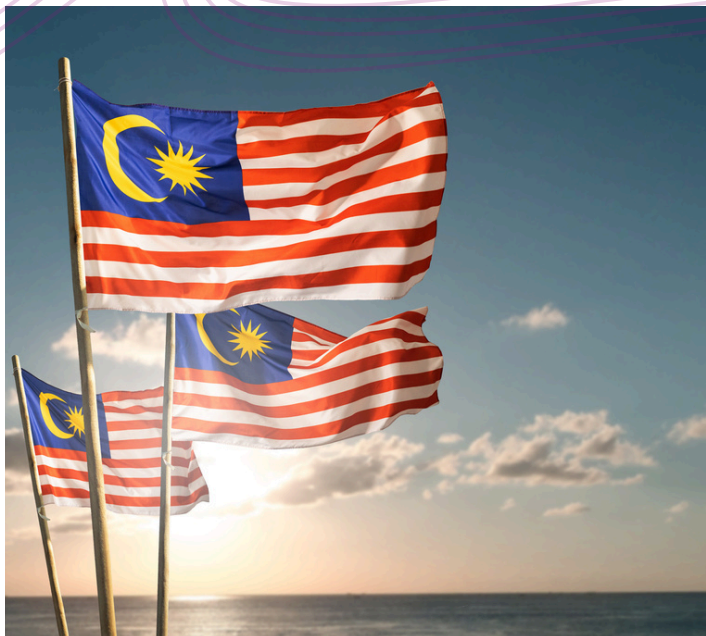




# *Lifelong Learning in Malaysia: Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint (MHEB) 2026-2035*

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## **Introduction**

Like many other countries, Malaysia faces rapid technological, economic, and social changes driven by automation, AI, digitalisation, globalisation, and climate change. These shifts demand inclusivity, equal access to education, and lifelong opportunities for personal growth. The Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint (MHEB) 2026–2035 responds by positioning lifelong learning at the core of reform. Building on earlier plans, it redefines education as a continuous process from childhood through adulthood, shared by businesses, communities, schools, and higher institutions to promote a culture of ongoing learning.

## **Why Lifelong Learning Matters**

Malaysia is experiencing significant changes driven by digitalisation, automation, and green industries, reshaping jobs and making many traditional skills obsolete. This creates an urgent need for continuous and lifelong learning to enable upskilling and reskilling in line with labour market demands. Lifelong learning also addresses social and educational disparities by providing alternative pathways, such as adult education, community centres, micro-credentials, and online platforms, that empower excluded groups to expand their knowledge and skills. It is key in promoting equity and inclusion, especially for rural communities, women re-entering the workforce, and vulnerable groups. The Blueprint further emphasises TVET as a driver of national growth, helping individuals align with industry needs while enhancing employability. Beyond jobs, lifelong learning fosters civic engagement, creativity, and resilience, ultimately building stronger communities and reinforcing national unity.

## **A Glance at the Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint (MHEB) 2026-2035**

The Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint (MHEB) 2026-2035 will comprise 10 thrusts to promote a more inclusive and equitable higher education system. These thrusts are humanity-centric education; entrepreneurial and adaptive learners; high-performance talent with purpose; advanced TVET competencies; financial sustainability; agile and resilient governance; responsible research and development; innovation, commercialisation, and economy; global prominence; flexible education and lifelong learning; planetary health and sustainability; and adaptive and dynamic delivery (Jeevita, 2024).

It aims to align higher education with global realities while maintaining local relevance. Additionally, it prepares students with future-ready skills essential for today's rapidly evolving education landscape and meets the country's digital and industrial needs (Bernama, 2024). The blueprint also recognises that graduates must be more than simply employable; they must be adaptive, ethical, and capable of lifelong learning.

In addition, the success of these strategies depends heavily on effective governance. Without proper implementation and oversight, the initiatives risk remaining aspirational rather than actionable. Financial sustainability and agile governance have long been challenges within Malaysia's higher education landscape, where bureaucracy and funding constraints often slow reform. Therefore, agile and adaptable leadership is crucial, emphasising flexibility, continuous improvement, and the ability to navigate uncertainty and rapid change in the education system.

### **Challenges in the Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint (MHEB) 2026-2035**

The Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint (MHEB) 2026–2035 presents a progressive vision; however, its success depends on overcoming several challenges. A key issue is access and equity, as students from rural and indigenous communities continue to face infrastructure gaps, digital divides, and financial barriers. The Blueprint must ensure that marginalised groups receive quality education while remaining aligned with labour market needs (Hashim et al., 2022).

Another challenge lies in quality and relevance. To meet industry needs, curricula, teaching methods, and assessments require continuous updates to develop critical thinking and creativity. For TVET, lecturer competency and sufficient infrastructure are vital (Ahmad & Rosnan, 2024). Governance and management also remain problematic, with bureaucracy, weak accountability, and financial constraints slowing reforms. Universities need more autonomy, balanced with transparent oversight and diversified funding beyond government support.

Finally, innovation and technology adoption create both opportunities and risks. Bridging the digital divide, strengthening educator training in AI and data analytics, and addressing ethical and data protection issues are essential to ensure responsible technology integration (Srivastava et al., 2025).



### **Conclusion**

The Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint (MHEB) 2026–2035 introduces a novel shift by embedding lifelong learning, digital literacy, and transferable skills into the higher education ecosystem, moving beyond traditional academic knowledge toward holistic workforce readiness. Its focus on continuous adaptability, critical thinking, and problem-solving directly addresses the long-standing gap between educational outcomes and labour market needs, while equipping graduates with the resilience required to thrive in a rapidly changing global economy. Equally novel is the Blueprint's positioning of higher education institutions as catalysts for innovation and societal change through sustained collaboration with industries and government agencies. By prioritising digital fluency, lifelong learning, and a "first-class mentality," the Blueprint not only enhances graduate employability but also redefines the role of universities as drivers of national development. This proactive approach emphasises Malaysia's strategic commitment to developing a knowledge-based economy, ensuring competitiveness and sustainability in the face of future challenges.

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