IIEP-UNESCO research on flexible learning pathways in higher education: research overview

National Webinar on
Flexible learning pathways in Finnish higher education

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Background

• Higher education expansion
  • Growth in the demand for higher education
  • Growth in numbers of HEIs

• Higher education diversification
  • Diverse types of HEIs and programmes
  • Diverse modes of delivery
  • A diverse student population
Research rationale (1)

The expansion and diversification of HE is creating challenges:

- HE systems are becoming more fragmented and less integrated
- More students are getting into HE but representation of disadvantaged groups remains low
- Expansion calls for a HE provision adapted to lifelong learning, which is not always reflected in practice
Research rationale (2)

SDG4 and Education 2030 Agenda call for more flexible learning pathways in HE that can support equity and lifelong learning

- **Flexible learning pathways** refer to entry points and re-entry points at all ages and all educational levels, strengthened links between formal and non-formal structures, and recognition, validation and accreditation of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education (Education 2030 Agenda, 2015)
Dimensions of flexible learning pathways

- Regulatory and policy frameworks
- Alternative admissions pathways
- Opportunities for transfer
- Instruments supporting flexible learning pathways

Pathways for getting into higher education (access)
Pathways for getting through higher education (progression and transfer)
Pathways for getting out of higher education (completion)
Focus of the research project (1)

Overarching objective:
To produce knowledge and provide evidence-based policy advice to higher education authorities located in different development contexts who are considering building or strengthening flexible learning pathways as an area of future reform.
Focus of the research project: questions (2)

1. What are the policies, regulatory frameworks, instruments and practices that support flexible learning pathways in higher education?

2. How effective are these policies, regulatory frameworks, instruments and practices in establishing flexible learning pathways and building closer linkages between and within higher education levels and institutions?

3. How does the establishment of flexible learning pathways influence the access, progression, transfer and completion of those identified as disadvantaged groups in the case countries?

4. What lessons can be learned from the experience of case countries regarding the key enablers and factors lacking in the implementation of flexible learning pathways in higher education?
Mixed methodology

**Stocktaking**
International survey

Carried out by IIEP

Ministries of (higher) education of UNESCO countries

Baseline information on policies, regulatory frameworks, instruments and practices for flexible learning pathways

**Case studies**

8 countries from different UNESCO regions

Carried out by research teams

In-depth analysis of eight countries that have developed policies, regulatory frameworks, instruments and practices for flexible learning pathways

Three stages in the research methodology
Eight in-depth national case studies

Europe: Finland, United Kingdom
Asia: India, Malaysia
Caribbean: Jamaica
Latin America: Chile
Arab region: Morocco
Africa: South Africa
International stocktaking exercise

National case study
Why the choice of Finland?

• Choice of countries: representing diverse regions with different stages of implementation and focus of FLPs
• A country with a strong track record of policies favouring lifelong learning
• A country with a strong focus on equality and equity policies
• Interesting set of holistic FLP policies on:
  • Flexibility in access (open studies, RPL)
  • Flexibility during studies (cross-study, specialisations)
  • Flexibility towards graduation (studification of work)
• FLPs are widely implemented across HEIs, interesting lessons to share internationally
References


Thank you for the attention!