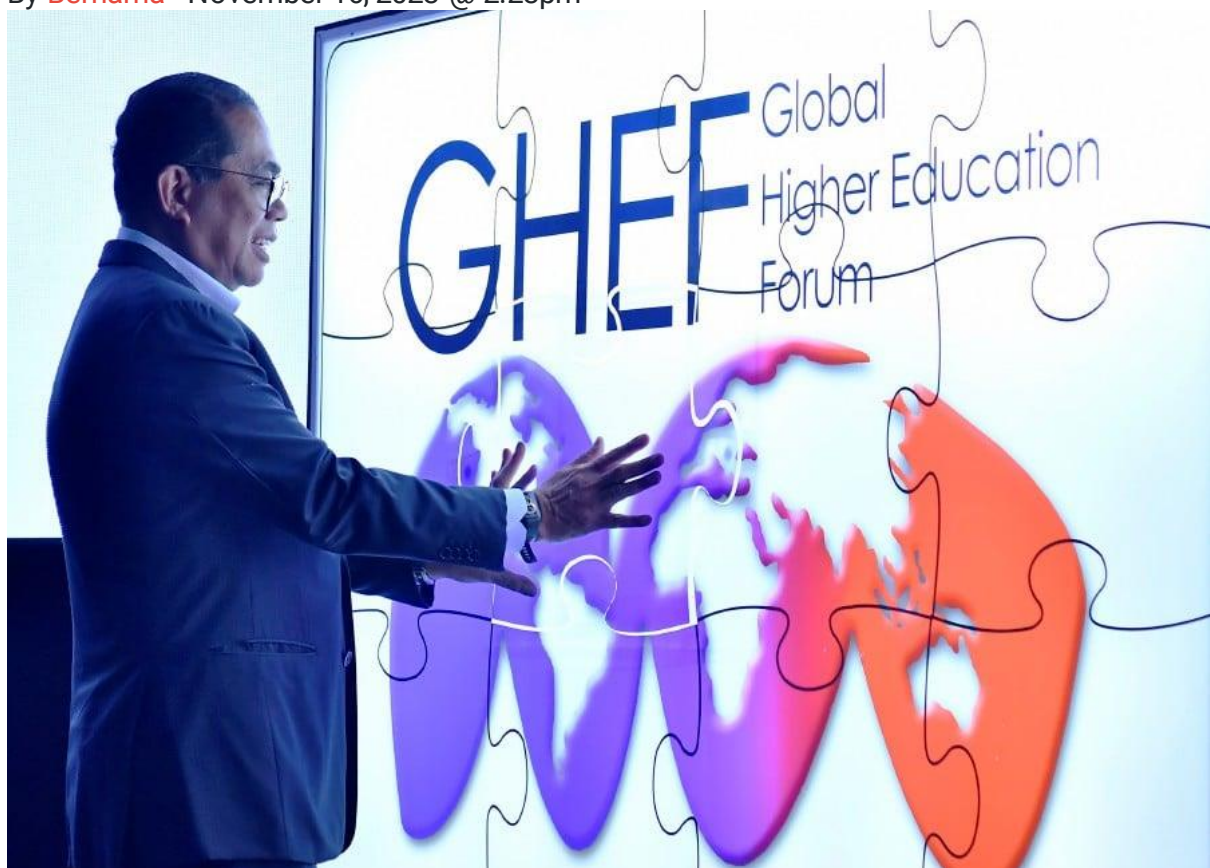


GHEF a platform to discuss post-pandemic challenges within higher education sector

By **Bernama** - November 16, 2023 @ 2:23pm



Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin at the 8th Global Higher Education Forum 2023 (GHEF2023). -BERNAMA PIC

SEPANG: Almost 1,000 delegates including secretariat and volunteers from various stakeholders, local and international, in the higher education sector, came together at the 8th Global Higher Education Forum 2023 (GHEF2023) here to meet and discuss the dynamics and challenges of post-pandemic within the higher education ecosystem, with a particular focus on advancing equitable recovery efforts.

The three-day forum that began yesterday (November 16), raised the theme 'Equity Recovery - Higher Education in the Post-Pandemic Era', which focuses on advancing and preserving equality in the higher education sector, especially in the post-Covid-19 pandemic era.

On the third day of GHEE 2023, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Symposium themed "Post-Pandemic: Inclusion of People with Disabilities and Equitable Quality Education in the TVET Ecosystem" is also scheduled to be held.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin, in his opening speech, said the theme was selected because the global pandemic has significantly impacted all segments of society including the higher education sector.

He said as observed in many studies and reports, the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in the unavoidable closure of many higher education institutions in numerous countries worldwide, disrupting the education of millions of students in 2020 and 2021.

"While higher educational systems are trying their level best to adapt to this unprecedented challenge in varying degrees, the pandemic has indeed exposed the vulnerability of the current systems to external factors.

"As we are gradually transitioning beyond the crisis, it is crucial to address emerging challenges and opportunities faced by higher education in the post-pandemic era. This means, we must not only identify possible solutions and avenues for growth, but more importantly, we must critically explore fresh ideas and new approaches," the minister said.

Mohamed Khaled also said it is important to establish educational systems that can withstand unforeseen challenges and ensure equitable outcomes for students during challenging times.

"While many higher education institutions globally managed to face the challenges during the pandemic, they must now prepare themselves for a higher education landscape which is highly volatile and unpredictable," he said adding that the preparation must include, among others, prioritising equity as the main agenda.

Mohamed Khaled said more strategic and stronger collaborations among institutions, jurisdictional authorities, educators, and other stakeholders should be established in order to be better prepared for future crises.

"In many occasions and forums that I have appeared before this year, I have shared my view that collaborative and strategic engagements between governments, higher education institutions and industry players must be intensified.

"The Higher Education Education (MoHE) believes that through multiperspective discussions at the national, regional, and international levels, we can develop new approaches to teaching and learning that will contribute to a more effective and equitable education system," he said.

Meanwhile, the Director-General of Higher Education, Professor Dr Azlinda Azman, said the objective of GHEF 2023 is for Malaysia to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of Covid-19 on the equity recovery in the country's education and to learn

from the experiences of other countries in managing higher education in their respective nations in the post-pandemic era.

She said that among the topics discussed in the forum are related to the digital divide, teaching and learning, innovation in teaching and learning, employability, financial sustainability, financial impact, and the sharing of best practices in the world of higher education.

Azlinda said the findings from the forum, aside from being published in journal form, will also serve as the foundation for MoHE to formulate or enhance national higher education policies.

"We see that we need more feedback from external parties to enhance our policies because we cannot just sit and remain silent.

"So certainly, most of the findings we come across will be put into practice; otherwise, it would be a waste.

"We need to improve our methods, our delivery, to identify our constraints and the solutions.

So, this forum helps us find those solutions, and at the MoHE level, we want a lot of input because we want to revamp, restructure, move forward, and be relevant to current needs," she said, adding that MoHE also aims to learn from the experiences of other countries regarding the concept of lifelong learning.

One of the speakers, Professor Dr Hannele Niemi from the University of Helsinki, Finland, said besides adapting digitalisation in the post-pandemic higher education ecosystem, the government or the authority should also emphasise the importance of human connection among students.

"I think that is something that we have to keep in mind, that even though we have good tools (in teaching and learning), still we need human beings and that kind of social interactions in learning.

"I think that the most important lesson we learn in the highly technological country as what we are and what we also learn is that to give support and give opportunity for students to network because that is also a very important part of higher education," she said.

As for Professor Dr Miki Sugimura from the Education Department of Sophia University, Japan, although Covid-19 has made students and lecturers adapt to remote learning, it also gives them the opportunity to learn in a new environment.

"At the beginning when Covid-19 started in 2020, we had a lot of issues. For example, in my university, we were struggling with how we could manage these IT solutions. So as the students. But now, the students, as well as researchers and teachers, finally tried to adjust to this unusual situation.

"Online virtual education is more popular. Students from Japan are now connected with African students to talk about environmental issues. Sometimes, our university

branch office in Bangkok also arranges new programmes among Asean universities, including Malaysian universities. So it is more easier for us to get together and cooperate," she said.

Sugimura said through this forum, she also hoped to learn from Malaysia in terms of internationalisation.

"I first came to Malaysia 40 years ago and since then I always looked at the development of the country's education, especially higher education. There has been great progress over the last 20 years on how you always seek for the better things to work.

"Japanese universities always envy Malaysian universities because we are still struggling to figure out how can we increase the numbers of our English-track programmes but you guys, you have already done a good job," she said.

GHEF 2023 is intended to be a platform for various stakeholders to discuss the issues facing the higher education ecosystem, promote discourse on higher education, address relevant challenges, and develop potential solutions and policy proposals.

The forum provides a space to discuss concepts, experiences, practices, exchange of knowledge and research findings on various topics of higher education from different countries, contexts and perspectives.

The delegates comprised academics, researchers, undergraduate and postgraduate students, government officials, policymakers, non-governmental organisations and industry representatives from local and international institutions from countries such as Australia, Chile, China, Finland, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, Palestine, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Sub-Saharan Africa, Oman, Uzbekistan, South Korea and Malaysia. –BERNAMA