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

National Webinar on FLPs in Jamaican higher education
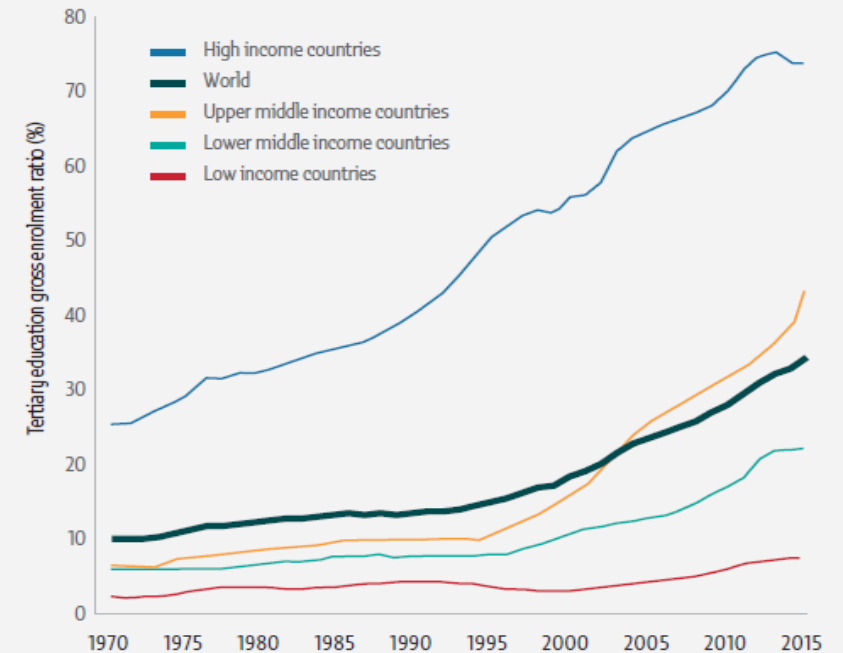
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Background

- 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

Enrolment in upper-middle income countries has grown by 7% per year in the past 20 years
Tertiary education gross enrolment ratio, by country income group, 1970-2014 (%)

Legend:
- High income countries
- World
- Upper middle income countries
- Lower middle income countries
- Low income countries

Y-axis: Tertiary education gross enrolment ratio (%)
X-axis: 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015

Source: UIS database.

Research rationale (1)

The expansion and diversification of HE is creating challenges:

- o HE systems are becoming more fragmented and less integrated
- o More students are getting into HE but representation of disadvantaged groups remains low
- o 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

Barriers to developing flexible pathways

System-wide factors

- A weak policy environment for flexible learning pathways
- Administrative fragmentation leading to uncoordinated HE systems
- Institutional autonomy limits the capacity of the state to steer change
- Competition between HEIs discourages collaboration

Institutional factors

- Differences between institutions and types of provision, curriculum, pedagogies and assessment
- Institutional culture, hierarchies of prestige and lack of trust between institutions
- Information and guidance missing or ineffective

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.
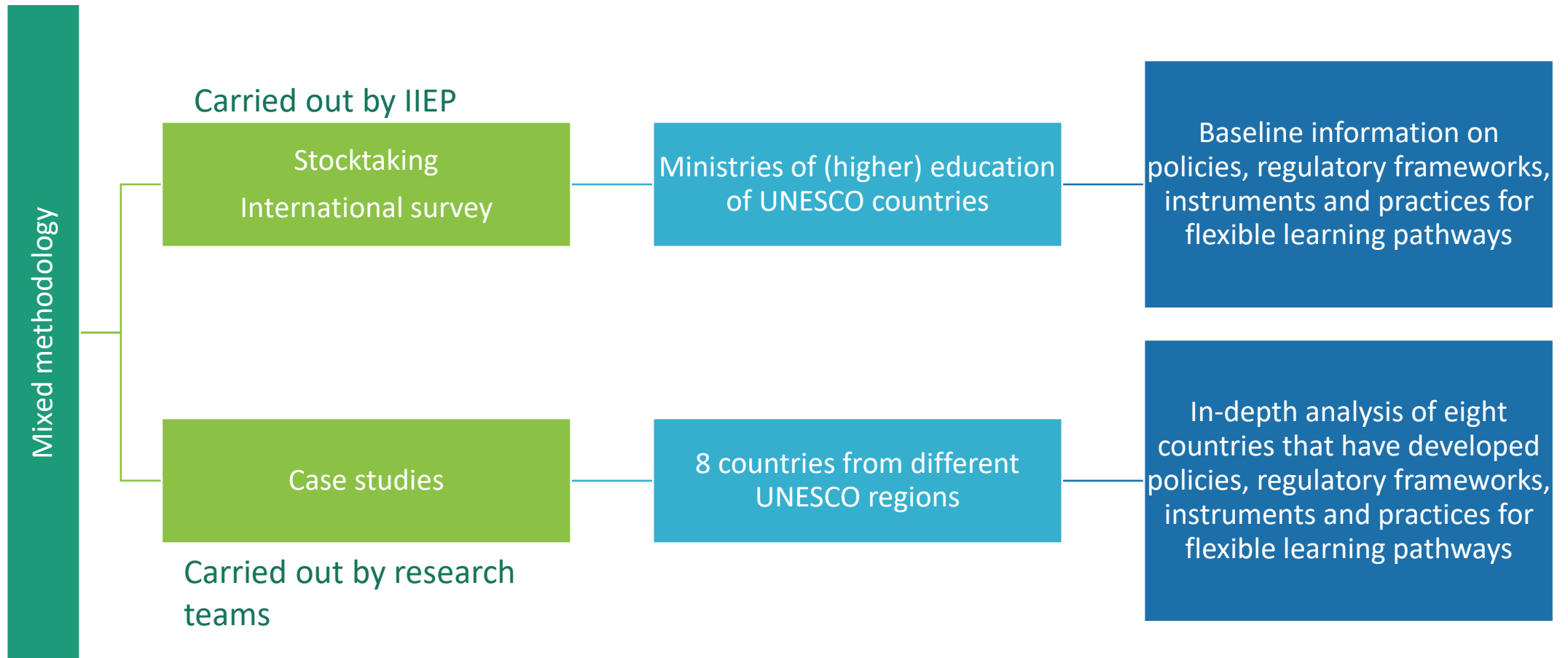
Focus of the research project: questions (2)

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?

Three stages in the research methodology

Mixed methodology

Carried out by IIEP

Stocktaking
International survey

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

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

Carried out by research teams

Eight in-depth national case studies

International stocktaking exercise

National case study

Why the choice of Jamaica?

- Choice of countries: representing diverse regions with different stages of implementation and focus of FLPs

- A country with a focus on equality and equity policies

- Interesting set of holistic FLP policies on:
  - Flexibility in access (as part of the K13 strategy: CAP, RPL, PATH)
  - Flexibility during studies (OAD, '2+2 model')

- FLPs are widely implemented across HEIs, interesting lessons to share internationally

References

- IIEP-UNESCO website: http://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/our-expertise/flexible-learning-pathways-higher-education

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Thank you for the attention!