

# HIGHER ED

## A case for arts and humanities

MURNIATI ABU KARIM  
murniati@nstp.com.my

**M**UHAMMAD Amirullah Zulkifli was halfway to finishing an Engineering degree at the International Islamic University of Malaysia before deciding to take on a different study path. After putting much thought into it, he changed his programme to English Literature at the same university.

His decision to dive deeper into the English Literature course was not abrupt as he had developed a passion for teaching after being involved in community service programmes that provide assistance in education for

children in the rural areas of Sabah and Sarawak.

"I had in mind that I should go into teaching or anywhere that goes along the lines of facilitating and social work," he said.

While he was doing the course, he discovered a new reality.

"It was not all about writing essays and presentations, it was also about creating versatile products. Lecturers were so creative in giving out assignments.

"I was involved in a project that required me to design a magazine using Adobe InDesign. Who would've thought that an English student would utilise this skill but did it.

"I also completed a few assignments on

creating videos and short films based on short stories.

"Although many questioned my decision to pursue Arts and Humanities, this course gave me more than enough skills to venture into business and the industry. Its versatility and perks are endless," said Muhammad Amirullah who is working as a customer operations specialist at Shell Malaysia.

Today, a degree is expected in the job market. As the world undergoes rapid technological development, students turn away from the Humanities and are inclined towards Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics courses [STEM]. This issue has raised concerns about the value of Arts

and Humanities degrees.

Arts and Humanities are academic disciplines concerning cultural and social studies with courses like languages, literature, history, philosophy, music and film studies.

Graduates in these degree are often criticised on whether they would be workforce ready.

"In the age of industrialisation, STEM courses are highly preferred by the industry. There is no doubt that our mindset is shaped by this.

"Language or other Arts and Humanities courses continue to be regarded as easy. Some even say that the only viable career for graduates in these courses is teaching," said Muhammad Amirullah.



Universiti Malaysia Kelantan Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage students making a traditional musical instrument using bamboo during a programme.

According to Universiti Malaysia Kelantan statistics, there has been a significant drop in the number of students applying to the Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage over the past three years.

Philosophy and Current Issues lecturer Dr Fairuz A'dilah Rusdi said that under the faculty, the university offers courses such as Heritage Literature, Heritage Conservation, Cultural Heritage and Performing Arts.

Fairuz agreed that some may have neglected the importance of these degrees while continuing to have misconceptions about them.

"Often, we hear that students who go into this stream of studies are not smart enough or do not do well compared to those in the other fields of studies.

"Arts and Humanities majors are also often labelled second-best and less hard-working who will end up not securing a comfortable job. Even worse, these students are often misjudged as wanting to have it easy or escape the harsher realities of life.

"This, however, is very different from the perceptions that come with being in the Science stream.

"Perhaps, lack of awareness and appreciation of Arts and Humanities have created misconceptions about such courses.

"In some countries, arts and culture are placed on par with the sciences due to higher appreciation of the societies, backed by government support to uplift these courses," she said.

Fairuz added that society ought to alter their perceptions by realising that both streams have their pros and cons.

"A student inclined towards the Arts or Humanities will excel better in these studies if they have the passion for them. The same goes for students with inclination towards STEM fields: they will fall behind without genuine interest in the courses.

"Parents too play a big role. They should not expect their children to follow their wishes in choosing a course or what society approves or commends. Let children have a say in what they want to pursue and engage in, and not expect them to fulfil societal expectations."

Muhammad Aminullah pointed out that the prejudice and misconception of the Arts and Humanities courses are the result of ignorance or knowledge gap.

"To correct misconceptions, we need explanation. It is important to enlighten society on Arts and Humanities courses and proactively discuss the importance of the courses to the industry. In fact, the courses serve as a strong support system to STEM," he added.

#### MORE THAN WORDS

Arts and Humanities subjects deal with the study of man and society, as well as everything that has to do with life and experiences, Fairuz said.

"They concern individuals as an entity, individuals within a collective structure, people in the past and present, and how to improve the well-being of man in regards to language, culture, religion, philosophy and others.

"Arts and Humanities students have many underrated advantages. They are known for their critical mind and are well-read.

"The students have a strong grasp of current issues. They are trained to be inquisi-

**The students have a strong grasp of current issues. They are trained to be inquisitive, analytical, interpretative and ready to come up with solutions."**

#### DR FAIRUZ A'DILAH RUSDI

University Malaysia Kelantan Philosophy and Current Issues lecturer

tive, analytical, interpretative and ready to come up with solutions."

Fairuz added that these degrees are important and are of value to society.

"They are crucial in promoting thinking such as why we were created, how we have evolved and see the potentialities of a person in society.

"Students with a high cognitive intelligence may lack emotional quotient (EQ) to deal with issues.

"This EQ spectrum is embedded in humanities courses and deal with effective communication, building quality relationships and empathy. These are the critical factors that shape the value of our society today," she said.

Third-year Universiti Malaya student Nur Sabrina Md Amin opted for a degree in Arts and Humanities as she is keen on being involved in discussions that challenge her thinking.

TURN TO PAGE 30



Dr Fairuz A'dilah Rusdi



Nur Sabrina Md Amin



Universiti Malaysia Kelantan "teniat" is a cultural centre which exhibits different types of weaving, batik designs and handicrafts. It also serves as a student lab for the Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage.

According to Universiti Malaysia Kelantan statistics, there has been a significant drop in the number of students applying to the Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage over the past three years.

Philosophy and Current Issues lecturer Dr Fairuz A'dilah Rusdi said that under the faculty, the university offers courses such as Heritage Literature, Heritage Conservation, Cultural Heritage and Performing Arts.

Fairuz agreed that some may have neglected the importance of these degrees while continuing to have misconceptions about them.

"Often, we hear that students who go into this stream of studies are not smart enough or do not do well compared to those in the other fields of studies.

"Arts and Humanities majors are also often labelled second-best and less hard-working who will end up not securing a comfortable job. Even worse, these students are often misjudged as wanting to have it easy or escape the harsher realities of life.

"This, however, is very different from the perceptions that come with being in the Science stream.

"Perhaps, lack of awareness and appreciation of Arts and Humanities have created misconceptions about such courses.

"In some countries, arts and culture are placed on par with the sciences due to higher appreciation of the societies, backed by government support to uplift these courses," she said.

Fairuz added that society ought to alter their perceptions by realising that both streams have their pros and cons.

"A student inclined towards these fields will excel better in these areas if they have a passion for them. The same goes for those with an inclination towards STEM fields without genuine interest in them.

"Parents too play a big role in this. They often expect their children to choose a field that is approved or commended by society. They don't have a say in what their children should do and engage in, and they don't want their children to fulfil societal expectations.

Muhammad A'rif said that the prejudice against the Arts and Humanities is the result of ignorance.

"To correct this, we need a better explanation. It is the responsibility of society on Arts and Humanities and to proactively do

of the courses to the industry to serve as a strong support system. More should be added.

### MORE THAN WORDS

Arts and Humanities subjects are a reflection of man and society that has to do with the human condition, Fairuz said.

"They concern the nature of individuals within society, how to improve the human condition, and how to improve the world in regards to language, literature, philosophy and culture.

"Arts and Humanities are many underrated subjects known for the intellectual and well-read.

"The students should be aware of current issues. They should be able to



**Dr Fairuz A'dilah Rusdi**



**Nur Sabrina Md Amin**