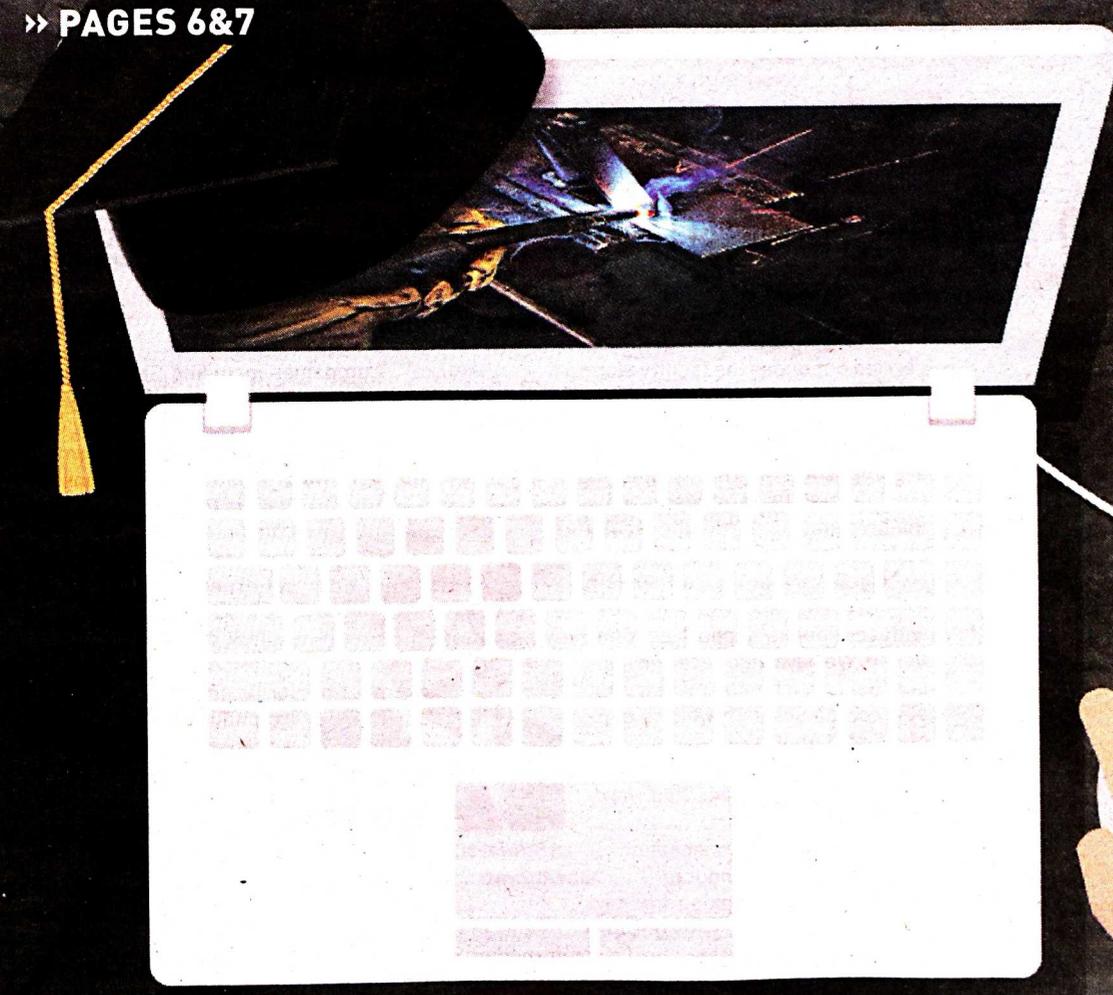
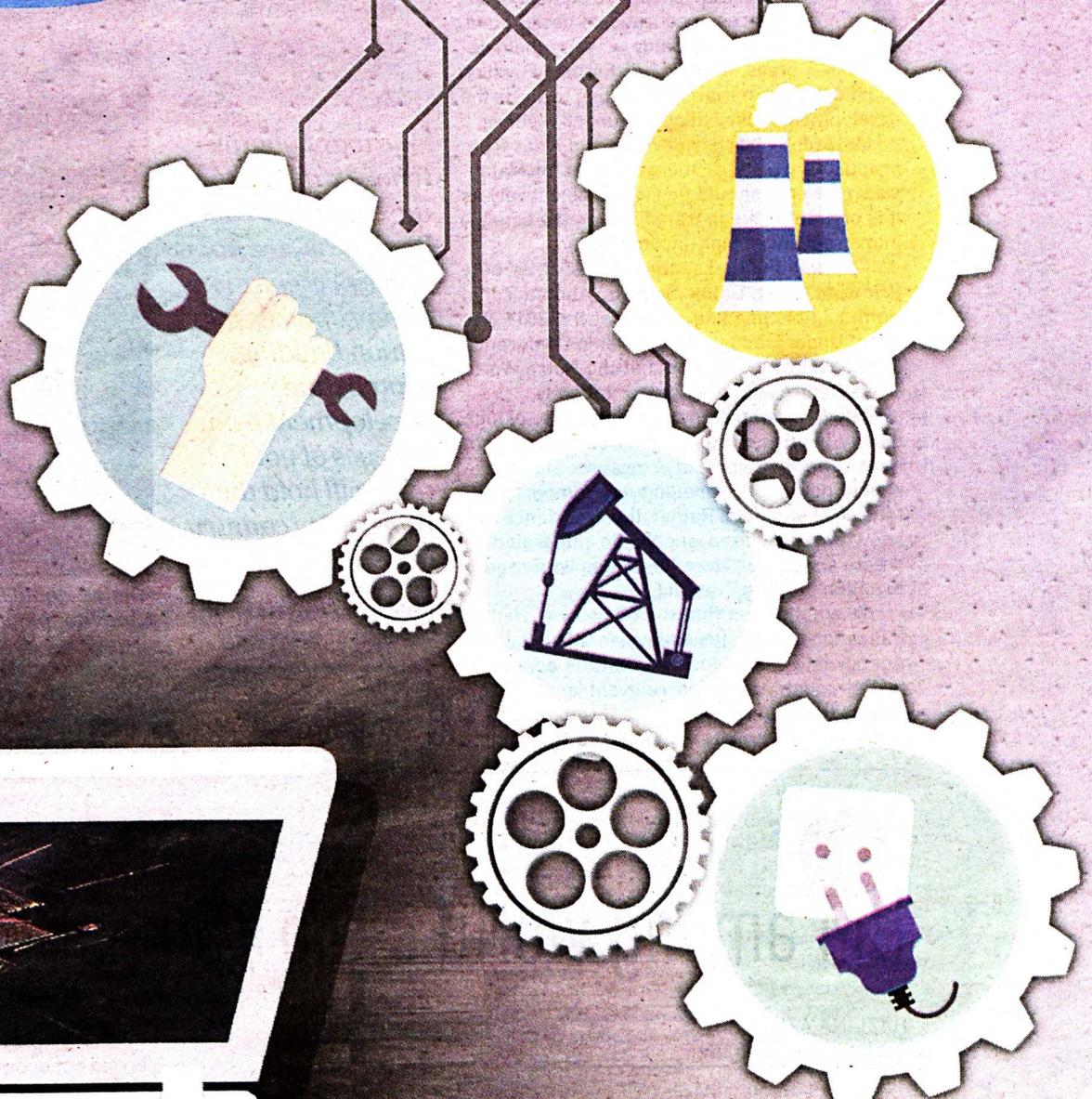


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COVER STORY

Industry experts enhance learning

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UNIVERSITIES are increasingly emphasising closer ties with the industry and its professionals to keep up with the challenging role of preparing graduates for the workplace.

Guest lecturers, specifically practising industry professionals, frequently teach and share experiences with undergraduates and postgraduate students doing research.

Where subjects have close ties to the industry, seminar-style lectures by a diverse range of professionals are seen as a more desirable way to introduce tertiary students to the disciplines.

ACADEMIA-INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT

University of Malaya's Faculty of Business and Accountancy senior lecturer Dr Zarina Zakaria said academia-industry involvement has been ongoing at the institution for quite some time.

Named as Practitioners' Sharing Sessions, the initiative is significant as it brings the real-world situation faced by those in practice into the classroom.

"It exposes students to the practical aspects and, to a certain extent, the know-how so that they will be able to translate theories and concepts into practice.

"This has enhanced students' understanding of various topics," said Zarina.

She believes that teaching and learning cannot be achieved in silo as both must acknowledge the ecosystem — by recognising the significance of systems, skills and processes — and industry experts need to share real-life processes with students.

"Talks by industry professionals in various fields and of special expertise enhance the learning process," she added.



Students can't be spoon-fed in the workplace. They need to take charge. We can put academia-industry collaboration in place but, at the end of the day, it is all up to them."

ZARINA ZAKARIA
UM Faculty of Business and Accountancy senior lecturer



Zulkifli Abd Rani lecturing engineering students and the public at UTM.



Adjunct Professor lecture series with Nik Hasyudeen Yusoff at the Faculty of Business and Accountancy in UM.

The faculty has also appointed former Securities Commission Malaysia's market and corporate supervision executive director Nik Hasyudeen Yusoff as adjunct professor.

His area of expertise is in accounting; he has 23 years of industry experience and international exposure to financial reporting and auditing. He is currently Innovastra Capital Sdn Bhd director.

"Nik Hasyudeen is one good example of industry professionals who can relate their experiences for the benefit of undergraduates. His lectures are relevant to his profession, with real-life examples of the workplace," she added.

A fellow of CPA Australia and a member of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and Malaysian Institute of Accountants, he also sits on the Advisory Board at the Faculty of Business and Accountancy at UM.

"Recently, the Malaysian Institute of Corporate Governance held a forum panel on the topic, *Board Effectiveness: The Role of Audit Committees*, with students," added Zarina.

"This event enabled us to bring the boardroom to the classroom. Panel members, who are also board members, shared how directors interact with the management.

"Likewise, we invite corporations to discuss topics such as transfer pricing, auditing of specialised industries, fraud audit as well various financial and management accounting issues.

"Most industry professionals volunteer their time and get to know the students in the process. For example, the Big 4 Public Accounting Firms have been offering students book prizes, internships and permanent job offers.

"The sessions enable the firms to get students' feedback on the reason why they regard them as their employers of choice.

"In return, students learn of their expectations at the workplace. They visit the industry to expose themselves to the real work situation and get a feel of the environment.

"The presence of industry professionals in undergraduate teaching is a good avenue to foster a better relationship between the industry, academia and students."

UM realises the importance of balancing soft and hard skills because it is one of many ways to prepare students for the workplace.

"They need to be exposed to emerging topics

in their area of studies and industry experts share with students how to deal with challenges in practice.

"Students can't be spoon-fed in the workplace. They need to take charge. We can put academia-industry collaboration in place but, at the end of the day, it is all up to them."

BRIDGING THE GAP

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) Adjunct Professor Zulkifli Abd Rani said one way for higher education institutions in the country to bridge the gap between academia and industry is to increase the involvement of industry professionals at universities.

Zulkifli believes that this prepares graduates to be market-ready and secure employment within six months after graduation.

The country's economy is expected to grow at a fast pace in the future, and the education sector will expand in tandem with rapid industrialisation.

"It will require a bigger workforce and open up job opportunities in the future.

"However, despite promising days ahead, many of our graduates are still unemployable," he said.

While there is no easy solution to the problem, there are several ideas worth pursuing.

Better idea of the real world

MOST undergraduates appreciate and acknowledge the benefits of learning from practising industry professionals.

They find lectures by industry professionals to be important, engaging and interesting. They recognise the importance of university-industry links and appreciate the chance to learn from those practising in the field that they may want to join after university.

Second-year Aswara animation students Nur Amalia Aidi and Muhammad Nor Arief Mohd Sanip agree that industry professionals in the classroom allow them to learn the know-how and work flow.

"Industry professionals give a lot of good tips for work. They have expertise and are up-to-date with the latest software and techniques," said Nur Amalia.

Muhammad Nor Arief said industry talks help them to adapt faster and prepare for the future.

"We can ask questions and seek answers to better equip ourselves before entering the industry," he added.

Raja Sofia Raja Cholan, a second-year Sunway University undergraduate in corporate communications, feels that lectures by experts in their field offer students a better idea of the real world. The talks also give her better insight into her strengths and weaknesses.

Undergraduates should know how theories apply in practice. "This is important for all fields of studies. Experienced personnel will motivate students."

Her sentiments are echoed by Universiti Putra Malaysia student Mohd Noraiman Mohd Fadzil who also believes that the practitioners' experiences, life journeys and tips will benefit undergraduates.



Nur Amalia Aidi



Mohd Noraiman Mohd Fadzil



Annis Nadirah Idris

"It is not only about learning business tips but also how to market ourselves and manage an organisation," said Mohd Noraiman, who is in the third year of the Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Environmental and Occupational Health course.

At the lectures, students have a line of communication with professionals from the industry.

"This will be beneficial upon graduation as students can network with them. Some industry professionals share their current and future focus in research and development in their companies which will help students to choose projects, theses or research that can offer mutual benefit," he added.

Final-year University of Malaya accounting students Annis Nadirah Idris and Tan Soon Yee said industry talks provide knowledge beyond the classroom.

Tan said students only get to know examples — some of which offer cases peculiar to a foreign country — from textbooks.

"However, industry talks open our eyes to the industry in our own country and how we can apply knowledge when we enter the job market."

Annis Nadirah said the talks prepare students for internships.

Based on his 27 years of experience in the oil and gas industry and having served it in three capacities as an operator, contractor and regulator, Zulkifli added there is a mismatch between the curriculum and industry needs and academia aspirations.

"For example, the oil and gas industry is moving towards the new frontier of deepwater application whereas some of our universities are still teaching the shallow water application and not updating the deepwater subject in their syllabi at the engineering faculties.

"An outdated syllabus leads to students' lack of knowledge of the current scenario.

"Sometimes they attend interviews while clueless about current issues.

"This is where the role of industry professionals comes in. They can share their experience with undergraduates in seminars rather than typical lectures in class."

Zulkifli, who is also Corporate Fellow Member of UTM-Malaysia Petroleum Resources Corporation Institute for Oil and Gas and managing director of Techno Diverge Link Sdn Bhd, a consulting firm focusing

in oil and gas, renewable energy, nano technology, information technology and education consulting services, added there should be emphasis on skills rather than traditional theoretical knowledge.

"We don't want robots. We need people with intellect and action-orientated qualities who can apply what they learnt at university.

"We want a graduate who not only looks good on paper but also someone who is willing to take risks and be proactive, not reactive."

Zulkifli lauded the recent move in appointing a former industry expert in the oil and gas industry as vice-chancellor of one of top local universities.

"We need to appoint more industrialists or technocrats to lead universities and the authorities to bring about the desired mindset change to bridge the gap."

Zulkifli has delivered many professional talks and adjunct professorship lectures on oil and gas; consulted on leadership, nationalism and patriotism; and was a guest speaker of Biro Tatanegara, the Prime Minister's Office at forums, both local and abroad.