CRITICAL THINKING

'MAKE ONLINE CLASSES FUN, INTERESTING'

Lectures should not be one-way session, but should be thought-provoking, says educationist

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HIGHER education institutions' online classes should be made more palatable to their students, said educationist Professor Datuk Noraini Idris yesterday.

Since most universities and colleges could provide online learning for their students, the institutions must try making the lessons more interesting, she said.

"While the Higher Education Ministry's decision (that all teaching and learning programmes in universities should be conducted online until Dec 31, with the exception for five categories of students) is to ensure everyone's safety during the Covid-19 pandemic, it should not deter lecturers from making their lessons more engaging.

"The online lectures and lessons should not be a one-way session but should be thought-provoking for everyone involved.

"For instance, how can astronomy relate to agriculture or how can climate change influence agriculture?"

Noraini said universities and colleges could emulate their counterparts in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States on what could be done to make online learning and teaching better.

She said these countries had fully adopted online systems integration not only for student registration, but also in creating profiles for lecturers and having highly-accessible online classes, as well as students being able to submit their assignments online.

Professor Datuk Noraini Idris

"In Malaysia, the system is there, but there are things that can be done to make it better.

"We should make learning fun, using approaches and materials that encourage critical thinking and problem-solving, instead of using PowerPoint (slides), like in the past.

"There should be more teacher-and-student interaction using virtual platforms," she said, adding that lecturers should be creative in assessing students fairly, while parents and students must embrace online learning.

For those staying in areas with unstable Internet connectivity, students and universities should look at other options, including making video recordings of assignments that could be shared with lecturers via online systems or other online platforms such as YouTube.

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Deputy Vice-Chancellor (academic and international) Professor Dr M. Iqbal Saripan said certain courses or classes could benefit from an online learning system.

Iqbal said the teaching and learning (PdP) programmes conducted on online platforms could be placed in two categories: real time, where students must attend an online session at a selected date and time, and asynchronous learning (forms of education, when instructions and learning did not occur in the same place or at the same time).

He said asynchronous learning, which UPM and most universities had adopted during the Movement Control Order, had benefited students.

Iqbal said UPM lecturers had recorded their classes and uploaded, or shared videos among students either through the university's online system or YouTube.

"This allows students who are unable to attend or have limited access to the Internet to undergo their synchronous learning or online classes, which are held live at a certain date and time, to revisit the lessons offline."

He said UPM had no problem

Online learning should promote problem-solving skills. PIC BY NIK ABDULLAH NIK OMAR

continuing online learning until the end of the year and might consider making it permanent for some courses after the pandemic ends.

Iqbal said UPM was thinking of ways to allow practical classes to be held for the five categories of students exempted from online PdP.

The university, he said, was preparing laboratories, studios and sites according to the Health Ministry's Covid-19 standard operating procedures for this year's post-graduate students to come back to campuses.

Universiti Teknologi Mara Vice-Chancellor Emeritus Professor Datuk Ir Dr Mohd Azraai Kassim said the university had no issue conducting online PdP using its UFUTURE (Massive Open Online Courses) mode to facilitate teaching and learning.

"UiTM has been using the open and distance learning mode for part-time students since 1998.

"When the decision was made for PDP to be held online, it seems that UiTM had been on the right path by embracing technology as outlined in the UiTM 2025 Strategic Plan."