



Taylor's University and Universiti Putra Malaysia students share their thoughts on marriage and children

I'M finally getting a hang of achieving work-life balance. And now that I have managed to do that, I want to further my studies because the accounting field is very competitive. To be outstanding, I have to constantly upgrade my skills and knowledge. I decided to pursue a master's degree before sitting for the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) professional papers. I want to focus on completing my studies and progressing in my career before thinking about marriage as it requires a lot of commitment and you have to be financially stable, as well. So, I've decided to focus on my goals first.

Auditor and Masters in Accounting student who only wants to be known as Veron, 27

I WANT to finish my postgraduate studies. It's crucial for women to be financially independent, whether they are single or have a family. There is a Chinese proverb that says, 'knowledge changes one's life.' I believe that it's only through education that we are able to gain more knowledge to help us in our future.

Master of Science (Agribusiness) student Sophia Ang Xin Tong, 26

IT'S tough balancing the demand of my doctorate course while having to take care of my family; I have two young children. My

husband is a warehouse executive at a food and beverage company and because of the nature of his work, he works at night, which leaves me with the kids. I was working as a veterinary officer but decided to go on study leave because I just couldn't manage. And I really want to give my all to my PhD. Due to these factors, in addition to financial obligations, we decided to stop at having just two children.

PhD (Animal Production Economy) candidate Umami Noorhakimah Abdullah, 36

AS the eldest in my family, it is my responsibility to ensure that my parents and younger siblings are taken care of. After completing my studies, my focus will be on securing a job, building my career and finding ways to open a restaurant or a food stall for my parents to run so that they can earn some money. My mum loves to cook and has experience working in a restaurant. My dad is not as strong as he used to be but he can help my mum with the easier chores. My younger brother can help as he's currently unemployed. There are a lot of things that I have to take care of before I can even think about marriage, which is expensive! I'm still young and have a long way to go before making such an important decision.

Bachelor of Agriculture Science student Mohamad Ariff Fikri Ali, 25

"The report also suggested that only 7% of organisations were fully prepared to address these skills gaps.

"To circumvent this problem, the workforce must have higher cognitive skill sets," he said.

Therefore, people are constantly looking for courses such as postgraduate degree programmes or micro-credentials to upskill or reskill themselves.

Prof Pradeep said gaining these skills can future-proof their jobs or enable them to transition into sustainable careers.

"Consequently, the pandemic has seen more students enrolling in these programmes and courses," he added.

The growth in continuing education, he said, is currently fuelled by the working population's comfort and ease with online and hybrid learning.

Sunway Education Group chief executive officer Prof Dr Elizabeth Lee said most who choose to pursue postgraduate studies are those who want to enhance their career pathways.

They realise now more than ever the importance of lifelong learning, she said.

"To advance their careers, they need to expand their current portfolios of knowledge and skills, and even consider changing roles and responsibilities at the workplace or elsewhere.

"Malaysians are becoming more aware of this at a time when the job market is shrinking, and understand the need to upskill and reskill," she added.

Universiti Malaya (UM) deputy vice-chancellor (Academic and International) Prof Dr Kamila Ghazali said several factors come into play in the increase in postgraduate enrolment at the varsity.

The intake rate for UM's postgraduate programmes, she said, has shown significant and consistent increment over the years.

One of the primary reasons, she said, is the fact that the university's programmes are flexible. It allows students to attend classes remotely through any online platforms available.

"We believe this is in line with the market demand as our applicants comprise mainly working adults.

"The opportunity to study remotely could also be seen as an opportunity for them to elevate their academic qualifications as part of their preparations for a new phase in their careers and professional development.

"There is no denying that there may be a slump in the employment market because of the pandemic, so perhaps there is an increase in interest to pursue postgraduate studies as an investment to make oneself more marketable compared to other candidates who may only possess a bachelor's degree," she added.



Lee: Those seeking to advance their careers need to expand their portfolios.

Popular programmes

Traditional choices such as the MBA continue to be a favourite among those seeking postgraduate studies.

Prof Lee said this is because the MBA prepares them for more senior leadership positions.

"Students are also venturing into different and more niche areas at the higher level to diversify such as the Master of Business Analytics, Master in Health Sciences, Master of Marketing, Master of Human Resource Management and Master in Sustainable Development Management.

"There are also those who venture into professional accounting programmes such as the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW), and the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) qualifications, following the completion of their degrees.

At Taylor's University, Prof Pradeep said many students enrol in courses like social commerce and digital marketing, leadership and management of change, design thinking, and big data in the digital world.

"The popularity of these courses is consistent with the need for higher cognitive skill sets, as indicated in the 2018 McKinsey report.

"Other master's degrees that are increasingly popular are those in computer sciences, communications and medical sciences; there is also a consistent enrolment in our PhD programmes," he said.

Interest in areas such as fintech, predictive data analytics, digital marketing, sustainability, entrepreneurship, artificial intelligence (AI), healthcare, and robotics engineering is popular among PhD candidates in the varsity, he added.



Murali: Growth in postgraduate enrolment hasn't slowed down during the pandemic.

These areas offer novel research opportunities, he said, and cater to the needs of the industries that are progressing rapidly.

Similarly, Prof Murali said APU has witnessed continuous growth in enrolment in its postgraduate courses.

This hasn't slowed down during the pandemic, he said.

"The shift can be mainly seen in technology-based programmes such as data analytics, AI and cybersecurity.

"Another interesting thing we are noticing is that there are many professionals from business backgrounds who are taking up these technology-based programmes, whether it's on a short-term basis, such as micro-credential courses, or the more formal postgraduate courses," he said.

He added that some of the courses they go for include data science and business analytics.

Prof Murali said this growth and interest to constantly upskill themselves are in line with the World Economic Forum's recent report which suggests that by 2025, more than 85 million jobs will be displaced.

The pandemic and digital disruption, he said, are forcing employees to find ways to redefine themselves.

"There is a fear of being left out if they don't further their studies, especially in technology-based areas.

"The Covid-19 outbreak has intensified the digitisation of companies, for example, and so, people are well aware that the way forward is in digital technologies and innovation.

"As a result, we find that there is a demand in our university for short to medium and long-term postgraduate courses which allow people to transition into this space."