

Moving forward with changing times

AeU's new campus in Subang Jaya is expected to serve more than 5,000 full-time students.

OPEN and distance learning (ODL) has been a boon for many people, from working professionals to people with physical disabilities. With advancing technology, it has become easier to pursue education through ODL.

Emeritus Prof Datuk Dr Hassan Said, vice-chancellor of Asia e University (AeU) explains, "At the very beginning, distance learning meant sending course materials via post. With the Internet, study materials can be sent over email.

"However, these techniques did not offer the 360° flexibility that is possible now with education materials available in the form of video and audio files, interaction with teachers and fellow coursemates made possible through Skype and extensive research materials available online."

He shares that technology has greatly changed the education landscape, just as it has across other sectors. Among the biggest changes is how more and more people are looking at flexible study options and 24/7 learning, which are now possible at AeU thanks to technology.

AeU is a premier ODL education provider in Malaysia. It was established in 2007 and has flourished over the years by embracing advancements in technology and using it to offer quality education to everyone.

"By everyone, we literally mean everyone, because we have retirees above 60 years old to students in their early 20s pursuing their studies at AeU," says Prof Hassan.

Education for all

According to Prof Hassan, the majority of students enrolled in AeU's part-time online courses are working professionals aged between 30 and 40 years old.

"Many working professionals are pursuing further study for various reasons, from wanting to upgrade their skills to changing their profession or industries. Regardless of the reason, the biggest challenge faced by these people is time management, because they have primary commitments. AeU, as a flexible ODL university, offers students the opportunity to study at their own pace.

"There is no such thing as a two- or three-year course. You can take your own time completing your course because what matters is the quality of the outcome."

AeU recognises that delivering quality education also means educating those who may not have the financial means for tertiary study.

Prof Hassan elaborates, "We understand that a 40-year-old working professional who has decided to go back to school won't have an easy time; she may face financial constraints because of other responsibilities. We urge such students to discuss their problem with us so we can work out a solution."

To ensure everyone has equal opportunity to access quality education, AeU also offers financial assistance in the form of a 50% discount on tuition fees for

> SEE NEXT PAGE

ODL as a way to further education opportunities

> FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

people above the age of 55 and 75% for people with disabilities.

However, the biggest achievement for AeU in making education accessible to everyone lies in the fact that after Selangor, the greatest number of students to enrol are from Sabah and Sarawak. As pointed out by Prof Hassan, this goes to prove that students who cannot relocate to cities such as Kuala Lumpur for various reasons can pursue education through ODL at AeU.

Full-time versus part-time

There is a common notion that full-time education is valued more in the job market than part-time education. Prof Hassan dismisses this as a misconception, saying, "If you look at full-time and part-time courses now, there is not much difference, since what has changed is only the delivery method and medium.

"Contrary to what some believe, companies are keen on having their employees pursuing part-time education to enhance their skills because they cannot afford to let go of those employees for three years – the approximate length of time required to pursue a full-time course.

"Even younger students prefer part-time courses over full-time ones. They don't like being stuck in a classroom for an hour when they have the option to pursue other interests while learning."

Besides championing part-time, fully online ODL programmes, AeU also offers blended learning and full-time programmes that are carried out at its main campus in Subang Jaya and learning centres across Malaysia.

According to Prof Hassan, blended courses offer the best of both worlds because students have the flexibility of ODL and opportunities to receive input from teachers.

"We have learning centres all over Malaysia, where students can meet teachers to discuss course material. It is not like traditional teaching; it is more like receiving guidance from a mentor and academic facilitator."

Among the most popular programmes at AeU are the Master of Business Administration, Master of Education, Master of Communication Technology Management, Bachelor of ICT, Graduate Diploma in Early Childhood Education, Graduate Diploma in Business

Management, Graduate Diploma in Accounting, Doctor of Business Administration and research programmes such as Doctor of Philosophy and Master of Science (Management).

The future

AeU would not be where it is today without some distinguishing factors. From offering massive open online courses to using a learning management system to facilitate teaching and learning online, AeU is constantly striving to enhance the student experience with advancing technology.

AeU is part of Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) – an intergovernmental organisation created to promote cooperation between Asian countries.

"We aim to stay ahead of technological advancements and use technology to its fullest potential in delivering education. Thanks to ACD, AeU has the privilege to be visible to students from 34 countries, which gives it an edge in its status as a quality ODL provider in the region," mentions Prof Hassan.

Another distinguishing factor of AeU is its provision of support in terms of accommodation and visa processing for foreign students wishing to pursue full-time further education in Malaysia.

At present, full-time programmes are offered for only a few courses, but plans for the near future include increasing this number, and the establishment of AeU's new campus at Subang Jaya is a step in that direction. More than double the size of the older AeU campus, the new one is spacious enough to house up to 5,000 students.

Subang Jaya's strong position as one of Malaysia's higher education hubs and its easy accessibility via major highways and public transportation makes it the ideal location for this new campus. The university is also considering adding more accounting courses to its list of qualifications as it recognises a huge demand for accounting professionals in the market.

The long-term goal is for AeU to be among the world's top ODL universities. Prof Hassan says, "In education, the vision is not only for the university, but also for the community. I want AeU to have an impactful presence and support inclusiveness in the society by ensuring quality education is accessible to everyone."

■ For more information, call 03-5022 3456/1300 300 238, email enquiries@aeu.edu.my or visit aeu.edu.my



AeU's Knowledge Centre exemplifies its drive to stay ahead of technological advancements.



Prof Hassan says AeU plans to use technology to its fullest potential in the university's teaching and learning processes.