

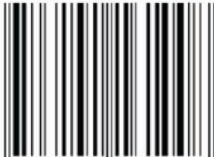


1st series

APRIL  
2026

# FSSH DIGEST

eISSN 3141-1614



9 773141 161008



Faculty Social Sciences and Humanities





“Together We Grow”

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OPEN UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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The FSSH Digest is the official bulletin of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, published triannually.



*"Together We Grow"*

# CONTENT

**1-3**

## Foreword

President/ Vice Chancellor  
& Vice President/ Deputy  
Vice Chancellor

**4**

## Dean's Reflections

Faculty leadership

**5**

## Editor's Note

Editorial leadership

**6-11**

## Faculty Insight

Highlight faculty  
academic strength

**12-15**

## Programme Highlights

Introduce  
academic programmes

---

**16-21**

## Research in Action

Showcase  
research activities

**22-23**

## Scholarly Milestones

Highlight  
Scholarly Output

**24-29**

## Life as an OUM Learner

Learner experiences

**30-33**

## Engagement Highlight

Document  
faculty engagement

**34**

## Appreciative Post

Prof. Dr. Fatimah Yusooff



## Vice-Chancellor's Insight

The launch of *FSSH Digest* marks a meaningful milestone for the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. More than a faculty bulletin, it serves as a platform for intellectual exchange, showcasing the depth of scholarship, professional reflection, and societal engagement within the Faculty. At a time when knowledge circulates rapidly across digital spaces, such initiatives help ensure that academic voices remain visible, relevant, and impactful.

At Open University Malaysia, higher education extends beyond the transmission of knowledge. Universities are expected to cultivate insight, empathy, and ethical leadership—qualities embedded within disciplines such as humanities, psychology, counselling, and religious studies. These fields contribute to a deeper understanding of the human dimensions of technological change, social transformation, and global uncertainty.

The contemporary higher education landscape is shaped by digitalisation and the growing importance of lifelong learning. As an open and distance learning institution, OUM has embraced digital technology to expand access and flexibility. At the same time, the philosophy of *Humanising Digital Education* reminds us that innovation must serve humanity by nurturing critical thinking, compassion, and responsible citizenship.

Within this context,

***“the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities plays a central role.”***

Through research, teaching, and community engagement, the Faculty contributes perspectives that illuminate the social, cultural, and ethical foundations of modern life. Publications such as *FSSH Digest* extend these insights beyond the classroom into wider academic and professional communities.

As Open University Malaysia advances towards greater prominence as a leading Open, Distance and Digital Education (ODDE) institution in Malaysia and the ASEAN region by 2026, the role of academic thought leadership continues to grow. The sharing of ideas, research, and reflective practice strengthens both the Faculty and the broader educational ecosystem.

I commend the Faculty for initiating this publication and hope that *FSSH Digest* will continue to inspire dialogue, curiosity, and collaboration. May it serve as a living repository of ideas that reflects the Faculty's commitment to knowledge, humanity, and societal progress.

**PROF. DATO' DR. AHMAD IZANEE AWANG**  
President/Vice-Chancellor





# “Many Roots, One Rhythm: Remembering the Festivals That Shaped Me”

In Malaysia, festivals are more than annual celebrations. They are living reflections of identity, memory, and shared experience. For me, they are also something deeply personal something I didn't realize I would one day miss.

Growing up, festive seasons felt endless. There was always somewhere to go, someone to visit, something to eat. I never had to think about it. Hari Raya meant waking up early, putting on new clothes, and following my family from one open house to another. I remember the smell of rendang in the air, the laughter of relatives I only saw once a year, and the quiet moments of asking for forgiveness that somehow brought everyone closer. Back then, I didn't think much about what it meant. It just felt normal.

Chinese New Year had a different energy. It was

louder, brighter, almost electric. I remember the excitement of visiting friends, watching lion dances, and collecting ang paws with more enthusiasm than I'd like to admit. The streets felt alive, and for a few days, everything seemed to slow down just enough for people to come together. Even as an outsider to the culture, I never felt like one.

Deepavali, on the other hand, felt warm and welcoming in a quieter way. Walking into a friend's home, seeing the kolam at the entrance, and being offered sweets I couldn't always name but always enjoyed it stayed with me. There was something special about being invited into a space so different from my own, yet feeling completely at ease.

And then there were the cookies the ones that seemed to only exist during festive seasons. The kuih kapit that came in fragile rolls, the buttery pineapple tarts that melted too quickly, the colourful kuih that stained your fingers slightly. Back then, they were everywhere, homemade, imperfect, and always shared generously. Now, many of those traditional treats feel harder to find, replaced by modern versions or store-bought variations that don't quite carry the same warmth. Maybe it's not just the taste I miss, but the effort behind them the time, the hands, the quiet care that went into making something meant to be shared.

I also remember hearing and sometimes experiencing the celebrations in East Malaysia, where festivals like Gawai and Kaamatan carried a different kind of spirit. They felt deeply rooted in the land, in gratitude, in community. There was music, dancing, and a strong sense of togetherness that didn't need to be explained.

Even from afar, those celebrations added another layer to what it meant to be Malaysian showing me that our diversity stretched far beyond what I saw in my own surroundings.

At the time, I didn't realize how unique all of this was. It was just

*“life in Malaysia moving from one celebration to another, crossing cultures without hesitation.”*

Festivals weren't separate events. They were shared experiences, woven naturally into everyday living.

But as I've grown older, things have changed. Life gets busier. People move away. The visits become shorter, the gatherings smaller, and sometimes, they don't happen at all. And that's when I started to notice what was missing.

It's not just the food or the decorations. It's the feeling of being part of something bigger than myself. It's the openness, the easy connections, the way differences didn't matter as much as the act of coming together. Those moments shaped how I see people, how I understand community, and how I define home.

In a fast-moving world, festivals are one of the few things that still have the power to bring us back to that feeling. They remind me of who I was, where I came from, and the kind of society I was lucky to grow up in.

Maybe that's why I miss it so much not just the celebrations, but the version of life where everything felt more connected, more present, more shared.

*“In Malaysia, festivals are not just days we celebrate they are moments that quietly shape who we become, long after the lights have faded.”*

**EMERITUS PROFESSOR DATUK DR. MOHD  
TAJUDIN MD NINGGAL**  
Vice President | Deputy Vice-Chancellor  
(Academic & Research)

## Festive Reflections: Diversity, Harmony and the Role of the Humanities

Malaysia is uniquely blessed with seasons of celebration that reflect the richness of our social fabric. As we welcome the renewal and hope of Chinese New Year, embrace the spiritual discipline of Ramadan, and celebrate the gratitude and unity of Eid, we are reminded that our diversity is not accidental, but it is foundational to our national identity.

These festive moments reinforce the values that sustain a plural society: family solidarity, generosity, forgiveness, perseverance, and harmony. In the Quran, Surah al-Hujurat (49:13), affirms that we were created into nations and tribes “so that you may know one another.” Diversity, therefore, is not division yet is an invitation to understanding.

Similarly, in Chinese philosophical thought, harmony (he, 和) represents balance within the self and society. Across traditions, the message is consistent: social cohesion requires moral consciousness and mutual respect. This is precisely why the Social Sciences and Humanities remain profoundly relevant today.

In an era defined by digital acceleration, artificial intelligence, and global uncertainty, societies face complex questions about identity, ethics, governance, mental well-

## DEAN'S SEGMENT



being, cultural preservation, and social justice. Technology may provide tools, but it is the Social Sciences and Humanities that provide meaning, context, and moral direction.

Our disciplines empower society by cultivating critical and ethical leadership, strengthening intercultural understanding within Malaysia's diverse landscape, enhancing psychological resilience and community well-being, guiding governance through human-centred perspectives, and preserving cultural heritage while thoughtfully engaging the challenges of modern transformation. Without the insights of the Social Sciences and Humanities, development risks becoming mechanical rather than humane. With them, progress becomes inclusive, reflective, and sustainable.

As a Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities, we remain committed to nurturing graduates who are not only skilled professionals, but responsible citizens individuals who understand society deeply and contribute to it meaningfully.

May this festive season renew our shared commitment to harmony, compassion, and collective growth.

***“Gong Xi Fa Cai.  
Ramadan Mubarak.  
Selamat Hari Raya Aidilfitri.”***

*Together we grow.*

**ASSOC. PROF. DR. HAMIDAH MAT**  
Dean Faculty of Social Sciences  
& Humanities

# Festive and Culture in Humanities

Welcome to this issue of **FSSH Digest**, centred on the theme *Festive and Culture in Humanities*.

In Malaysia, festive seasons are more than dates on a calendar. They are moments when homes open, tables are shared, and conversations flow across generations. Celebrations such as Chinese New Year, Ramadan, Hari Raya Aidilfitri, and others remind us that culture lives within everyday practices—in food, language, prayer, memory, and reunion. These occasions invite us to pause, reflect, and reconnect.

For the Social Sciences and Humanities, such moments hold particular significance.

***“Festivities reveal how identities are shaped, how traditions are sustained, and how communities navigate differences with mutual respect.”***

Values such as generosity, forgiveness, discipline, and harmony are not merely discussed; they are practised and experienced in daily life.

In this issue, **FSSH Digest** highlights the work and contributions of our Faculty. We feature academic expertise, programme developments, research initiatives, publication achievements,

and faculty engagement that reflect the realities of a diverse society. The voices and experiences of our learners are also included, illustrating how education unfolds within Malaysia’s rich cultural environment.

In a time shaped by rapid technological change and global uncertainty, understanding people, communities, and traditions remains essential. The Humanities encourage us to listen carefully, think critically, and act responsibly—reminding us that progress must remain humane.

As we celebrate this season, may we continue learning from one another, strengthening shared understanding, and contributing meaningfully to the society we call home.

**MR NUR BAKRI ABD HAMID**  
**Editor FSSH Digest**

## EDITOR'S NOTE



# FACULTY INSIGHT

Highlight Faculty  
Academic Strength

## Islamic Ethics in Contemporary Society

*“Indeed, Allah commands justice, grace, as well as generosity to close relatives. He forbids indecency, wickedness, and aggression. He instructs you so perhaps you will be mindful.”* Surah al-Nahl (16:90)

Festive seasons bring communities together in celebration, reflection, and gratitude. They offer an opportunity to revisit shared moral values. Eid, with its emphasis on charity, forgiveness, and community, illustrates how Islamic ethics continues to guide everyday life.

Islamic ethical thought, grounded in the Qur’an, the Sunnah, and the long tradition of *ijtihad*, provides a comprehensive moral framework capable of engaging contemporary social concerns. At the centre of this framework lies the principle of *maqasid al-sharia*, commonly understood as the preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. These objectives remain highly relevant when considering modern issues such as artificial intelligence, bioethics, sustainable development, and social justice. Within this perspective, human welfare (*maslahah*) and the prevention of harm (*mafsadah*) function as key ethical considerations.

Islamic ethics also introduces the concept of *khalifah*, which understands human beings as stewards entrusted with the care of creation. This idea carries important implications for environmental ethics, encouraging responsibility towards the natural

world while challenging excessive consumption. The prohibition of *fasad*—corruption and harm to the earth—resonates strongly with current global discussions on environmental sustainability.

***The principles of ‘adl (justice) and ihsan (benevolence and excellence) further contribute to contemporary discussions on economic fairness and human dignity.***

Practices such as *zakat* and the prohibition of *riba* reflect a broader commitment to social responsibility and distributive justice.

While some critics argue that Islamic ethical traditions emerged in pre-modern contexts, ongoing scholarly engagement through *ijtihad* and the recognition of *‘urf* (customary practice) demonstrate the tradition’s capacity for renewal. Contemporary Muslim scholarship continues to explore contextually grounded responses to modern challenges while remaining faithful to core principles.

Ultimately, the festive season reminds us that Islamic ethics is not merely a theoretical framework but a living practice reflected in acts of generosity, reconciliation, and social harmony.

**MR OO CHENG KEAT**



## Beyond the Lights: Navigating Mental Well- being During the Festive Season

As campuses fill with the excitement of upcoming celebrations, the festive season often brings the promise of rest and connection. For many, it is a time of joy and reunion. Yet from a psychological perspective, festive periods can also present complex emotional experiences. At the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSH), we recognise that festive cheer is not a one-size-fits-all experience.

Well-being is more than the absence of stress. It is a holistic state that includes physical, mental, and social dimensions. During festive periods, attention often centres on the hedonic aspect of well-being—the pursuit of pleasure and enjoyment. However, sustainable well-being also involves eudaimonic elements such as purpose, meaning, and self-acceptance. Research suggests that while external factors like gatherings and celebrations play a role, internal resources such as optimism and healthy coping strategies are important buffers against seasonal stress.

Festivities can also stretch our “social battery.” Continuous gatherings and social expectations may lead to fatigue, particularly for individuals who experience social anxiety.

*Setting personal boundaries should therefore be viewed not as rudeness but as a healthy form of self-care.*

While social connectedness supports well-being, the pressure to constantly participate or perform socially can become overwhelming.

Another common challenge occurs after celebrations end. Returning to academic routines or work commitments can bring a temporary drop in motivation or mood. Managing this transition requires patience and gradual adjustment. Short breaks, grounding techniques, and realistic expectations can help individuals regain focus. Physical well-being also plays an important role, as rest, nutrition, and routine influence emotional balance.

As members of the FSSH community, we are reminded that well-being grows within supportive environments. A simple check-in with a colleague or friend who may be finding the transition difficult can make a meaningful difference. Ultimately, the festive season invites us not only to celebrate but also to remain present, grounded, and compassionate towards ourselves and others.

**MR MOHD FAKARDIAN  
CHE RUS**



## English and the Malaysian Indian Experience: Between Legacy and Possibility

Walk into many Malaysian Indian households today and you are likely to hear a blend of languages—Tamil with grandparents, Malay in public spaces, and English in classrooms, offices, and increasingly at home. This multilingual environment reflects more than convenience; it reflects history, adaptation, and evolving identity.

The presence of English within Malaysian Indian society is closely linked to the period of British colonial rule. Introduced as the language of administration and formal education, English soon became associated with social mobility and access to opportunity. While many early Indian migrants worked in plantation sectors with limited access to English education, those employed in clerical or professional roles were able to benefit from the language as a pathway to advancement. In this way, language also reflected social differences within the community.

Following Malaysia's independence in 1957, the linguistic landscape shifted. Bahasa Melayu became the national language, yet English continued to play a major role in higher education, business, and international engagement.

*For Malaysian Indians, this produced a layered linguistic identity: Tamil as a cultural foundation, Malay as a symbol of national belonging, and English as a bridge to wider opportunities.*

Today, English holds increasing importance among younger and urban Malaysian Indians, often associated with academic achievement and career prospects. At the same time, concerns about declining use of heritage languages, particularly Tamil, have emerged. In some cases, Tamil is used less in daily communication and more in cultural or religious contexts.

Despite these changes, Malaysian Indians actively reshape the role of English within their communities. Malaysian English reflects local influences and multilingual interactions, demonstrating how language adapts within diverse cultural settings. Rather than replacing existing languages, English functions as an additional layer within a complex linguistic identity.

As Malaysian Indian communities continue to evolve, their linguistic practices will also adapt. What remains constant is the ability to navigate multiple languages while maintaining connections to culture, heritage, and opportunity.

**DR. P KANGATHEVI PONNUDORAI**



# Living in a High-Speed Society: When Faster Is No Longer Better

We live in what many scholars describe as a high-speed society. The sociologist Hartmut Rosa characterises modern capitalist life as one marked by relentless acceleration, of work, communication, technology, and even personal expectations. Paradoxically, this constant movement does not always bring us forward. Instead, Rosa describes a condition of

*“frenetic standstill”: we move faster and faster, yet feel increasingly stuck, disconnected, and alienated.*

In theory, speed was supposed to free us. Faster systems, smarter technology, and greater efficiency were meant to give us more time, time to rest, to enjoy leisure, to reconnect with what matters. Yet many of us feel the opposite. The faster life becomes, the more drained we feel.

It resembles a hamster running endlessly on a wheel: tremendous effort, increasing speed, but no real sense of arrival. Motion replaces meaning.

This accelerated way of living carries a heavy psychological cost. A fast-moving society produces not only productivity, but also pressure. It cultivates impatience, hypervigilance, and a growing intolerance of uncertainty.

***When everything must be immediate, answers, results, success, uncertainty becomes threatening rather than natural.***

Over time, this heightened sensitivity feeds anxiety, worry, and emotional exhaustion. It is no coincidence that anxiety-related difficulties, including sleep disturbances and burnout, are increasingly common in high-speed environments.

Imagine driving at very high speed. At first, it feels efficient, even empowering. But as the speed increases, so does the fear of crashing. The body tightens, the breath shortens, and the mind becomes alert to danger. At that point, safety does not come from pressing harder on the accelerator, but from slowing down, regaining control and reflecting on the direction we are heading. Life, too, requires moments of deceleration. Without slowing down, reflection becomes impossible, and without reflection, we risk losing ourselves in motion.

Both spiritual wisdom and contemporary

counselling practices remind us of this need for balance. In Islamic teachings, *sabr* (patience) and *syukur* (gratitude) are not passive traits; they are inner disciplines that regulate the heart amid uncertainty. Similarly, in counselling approaches such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, simple, compassionate messages, acknowledging distress, allowing uncertainty, and offering reassurance, can reduce hyperarousal and anxious reactivity. Sometimes, hearing

***“be patient, you are safe, you are okay”***

is not an oversimplification, but a clinically meaningful intervention.

For counsellors and helping professionals, this high-speed context carries an important implication. Many clients are not “failing to cope”; they are reacting normally to an accelerated world that rarely permits rest, reflection, or emotional processing. Therapeutic work, therefore, does not always require complex techniques. Often, it begins by creating a slow, grounded space, one where clients are allowed to pause, breathe, and reconnect with their values. In a society that rushes, therapy itself can become an act of resistance: a place where slowness is safe and patience is healing.

As we celebrate Aidilfitri, a time symbolising renewal after restraint, this message becomes especially relevant. After a month of learning patience, self-control, and gratitude, Aidilfitri invites us not to return blindly to speed, but to carry these virtues forward. It reminds us that true success is not measured by how fast we move, but by how consciously and compassionately we live.

Surah al-Asr offers a timeless reminder:

***that humanity is in loss except those who believe, do good, encourage truth, and practice patience.***

In a high-speed society, *sabr* is not merely a spiritual virtue, it is a psychological anchor. And perhaps, in this season of Aidilfitri, slowing down is not a step backward, but a return to what truly matters.

**ASSOC. PROF. DR. MOHD AZLI MD JAILANI**

# PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Highlight Academic Programme

## The Architecture of the Soul: A Study of Al-Ghazalian Psycho-Spiritual Counselling

In contemporary discussions on mental health, there is growing recognition that strictly secular clinical models may not fully address the needs of individuals whose worldview is deeply rooted in spiritual and religious traditions. Within the Islamic intellectual heritage, the teachings of the 11th-century scholar Imam Al-Ghazali offer a psycho-spiritual framework that integrates psychological well-being with spiritual development. Rather than focusing solely on symptom management, this approach emphasises *Tazkiyah al-Nafs*—the purification of the self—while positioning the heart as the central axis of human psychology.

Al-Ghazalian thought views the human psyche as an integrated system consisting of four metaphysical elements: the *Qalb* (heart), *Ruh* (soul), *Aql* (intellect), and *Nafs* (self). Psychological distress is understood to arise when imbalance occurs among these internal dimensions. The *Nafs*, in particular, is described as evolving through different states, from *Nafs al-Ammarah* (the impulsive self) to *Nafs al-Mutma'innah* (the tranquil self). Within this framework, the counsellor functions as a guide, supporting individuals through reflection, self-awareness, and spiritual alignment.

This perspective offers a holistic approach to counselling by integrating religious values as meaningful psychological resources. It addresses ethical dilemmas, emotional struggles, and what classical scholars describe as the

*“illnesses of the heart,” including pride, envy, and excessive attachment to worldly concerns.*

Central to this process is *muhasabah*, or reflective self-accounting, which encourages individuals to recognise inner imbalance and seek guidance. In this sense, seeking support is not a sign of spiritual weakness but part of the journey towards personal growth and equilibrium.

Ultimately, Al-Ghazalian counselling presents a model that bridges psychological care and spiritual insight, offering a culturally resonant approach to mental well-being that recognises the human being as both a psychological and spiritual entity.

**DR. HAZRUL HIZAM KARIM**



## Postgraduate Diploma in Islamic Studies (PGDIS), OUM: Strengthening Understanding, Expanding Application

In today's dynamic higher education environment, Islamic studies must remain relevant, contextual, and responsive to contemporary realities. The **Postgraduate Diploma in Islamic Studies (PGDIS)** at Open University Malaysia (OUM) addresses this need by offering a structured programme that bridges the rich heritage of Islamic scholarship with present-day societal challenges.

*PGDIS is designed for graduates from diverse academic backgrounds who wish to strengthen their understanding of Islamic studies in a systematic manner.*

Participants include teachers, officers from the public and private sectors, community activists, and professionals seeking deeper grounding in Syariah principles, 'aqidah, Islamic thought, and contemporary issues. This diversity enriches classroom engagement, allowing participants to exchange experiences and perspectives.

The programme emphasises a balanced integration between **turath** (classical Islamic scholarship) and contemporary approaches. Students are introduced to disciplines such as *Ulum al-Quran*, *Ulum al-Hadith*, *Fiqh*, *Maqasid Syariah*, and Islamic thought, alongside discussions on current social issues. Learning encourages critical reflection and practical application rather than rote memorisation.

Delivered through the **Open and Distance Learning (ODL)** mode, PGDIS offers flexibility for working adults through structured modules, online tutorials, and digital learning platforms. Beyond an academic qualification, the programme often serves as a pathway to further studies while strengthening professional credibility in education, religious administration, and community development.

**DR. MUHAMAD ZULFADLI ABDUL RAHMAN**





## Integrating Social Science and Counselling: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Community Well-being in the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities

The Faculty of Social Science and Humanities (FSSH) plays an important role in advancing knowledge and practice related to human behaviour, community life, and mental health.

By integrating disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and counselling, the faculty provides a comprehensive perspective on individuals within their social environments. In contemporary society, rapid social change, urbanisation, and economic pressures have contributed to various social and mental health challenges, including stress, family conflict, and emotional distress. In Malaysia, these challenges are further shaped by cultural diversity, religious values, and social expectations, highlighting the need for integrated approaches that combine knowledge, practice, and community engagement.

Social science provides the foundation for understanding how

social structures, cultural values, and economic conditions influence behaviour and well-being. Within Malaysia's multicultural context, this understanding assists

*in designing programmes that are relevant to community needs and support sustainable development through participatory approaches.*

Counselling complements this perspective by offering practical support to individuals, families, and groups facing emotional and psychological challenges. Through counselling education, students develop essential skills such as empathy, communication, and ethical practice, while culturally sensitive approaches remain central to effective support.

Community-based counselling emphasises prevention, early intervention, and social support. Initiatives such as school counselling, workplace support, and outreach programmes help reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking behaviour while strengthening support networks within society.

At FSSH, the integration of social science, counselling, and community engagement allows students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-life contexts. This multidisciplinary approach prepares graduates to contribute meaningfully to society while addressing complex social and mental health challenges, supporting the development of stronger and more resilient communities.

**PROF. DR. FATIMAH YUSOOFT**

# RESEARCH IN ACTION

Showcase  
Research Activities

## Can Spirituality Be Measured? A Research Journey in Open and Distance Learning

This question has long occupied my mind: to what extent are our students, working adults who balance the demands of career, family, and studies simultaneously, truly able to grow spiritually? In the context of Open and Distance Learning (ODL), where face-to-face interaction between lecturer and student is greatly limited, this question becomes increasingly relevant.

This awareness prompted me to undertake research on the development of a measurement instrument for Islamic spiritual practice, grounded in the framework of Akidah, Ibadah, Syariah, Akhlak, and Rahmah (AISAR). The objective of this research is clear: to construct an instrument with high validity and reliability for measuring the level of Islamic spiritual practice among Muslim communities in a scientific and systematic manner.

The instrument was developed with 119 items encompassing a range of spiritual practices and manifestations that are measurable. Through a systematic and quantitative validation process, the instrument was refined to 87 items whose content validity was confirmed. The quantitative approach employed ensures that each item accurately and meaningfully measures its intended construct.

In face-to-face teaching, an educator is able to observe, sense, and respond to a student's spiritual development directly. That is difficult to achieve in the ODL context. This is where the contribution of this instrument becomes significant, as it provides a structured measurement mechanism grounded in empirical evidence to help educators and curriculum designers understand the spiritual dimension of their students' learning, even without physical presence.

As an educational institution, OUM is inherently committed to the holistic development of its students, encompassing intellectual, personal, and spiritual dimensions. Yet, without an instrument capable of operationalising spiritual excellence scientifically, that aspiration remains mere rhetoric.

***This research is an integrated effort to ensure that the spiritual development of students is not merely a value proclaimed, but something that can be measured, demonstrated, and systematically strengthened.***

**ASSOC. PROF. DR. KHAIRUL HAMIMAH  
MOHAMMAD JODI**



## Revisiting the ‘Lazy Malay’ Myth: Insights from Abdullah Munshi and Isabella Bird

The Malays have frequently been portrayed as a “lazy” and “backward” society since the colonial period, a stereotype that appears in a number of nineteenth-century writings. Such portrayals were produced not only by Western observers but were also echoed in certain local narratives. This raises an important question: to what extent were these claims grounded in historical reality, and to what extent were they shaped by specific colonial and social contexts?

Dr. Abdul Muqit Muhammad’s book, *Munshi dan Bird: Mitos Melayu Malas*, revisits this longstanding debate by examining two influential travelogues on the Malay Peninsula: *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah ke Kelantan (1838)* by Abdullah Munshi and *The Golden Chersonese and The Way Thither (1883)* by Isabella Bird. These texts provide valuable insights into nineteenth-century perceptions of Malay society, particularly in relation to labour, social hierarchy, and cultural attitudes.

Through comparative literary and historical analysis, the book explores the backgrounds of Abdullah Munshi, a prominent Malay intellectual of the colonial era, and Isabella Bird, a British traveller and writer. By closely analysing their travel narratives, the study demonstrates how criticisms directed at Malay society—especially those concerning alleged laziness and backwardness—

were influenced by the social conditions, economic structures, and power relations of the period.

The analysis suggests that the conditions experienced by the lower strata of Malay society contributed to social behaviours later interpreted as “laziness” by outside observers. Rather than accepting these labels uncritically, the book situates such interpretations within broader historical and structural contexts.

This publication contributes to comparative literature and historical studies by offering a critical reassessment of colonial narratives about the Malays. It also opens further discussion on the intellectual traditions of Malay society and the development of Malay Islamic civilisation as reflected in travel writing. Ultimately, the work encourages a more nuanced understanding of Malay history, society, and cultural identity.

*Munshi dan Bird: Mitos Melayu Malas* was published by Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM Press) in 2025 and is available through major Malaysian book retailers and online platforms.

**DR. ABDUL MUQIT  
MUHAMMAD**



# When Doors Open, Communication Begins

## How Malaysia's Open House Tradition Builds Understanding Across Cultures

In Malaysia, festive seasons are marked not only by religious observances and family gatherings but also by a distinctive social practice known as the **open house**. During celebrations such as Chinese New Year, Aidilfitri, Deepavali, and Christmas, homes are opened to friends, colleagues, neighbours, and sometimes even strangers. Beyond hospitality, the open house represents a meaningful form of intercultural communication in action.

At its core, the open house reflects inclusion. Inviting individuals from different backgrounds into one's home conveys acceptance, respect, and a willingness to connect across cultural differences. As the Malay proverb reminds us, "*Tak kenal maka tak cinta*," one cannot appreciate what one

does not know. Visiting another community's celebration allows people to move beyond assumptions and build familiarity through shared experiences.

Food plays an important communicative role in these gatherings. Traditional dishes such as *ketupat* and *rendang* during Aidilfitri or the exchange of mandarin oranges during Chinese New Year express generosity, cultural heritage, and goodwill. In this way, food becomes a language of hospitality that communicates without words.

Non-verbal gestures also shape these interactions. Warm greetings, respectful attire, and gestures of appreciation convey sincerity and openness. As another proverb states,

*"Bahasa menunjukkan bangsa,"*

reminding us that behaviour reflects identity and values.

In a time dominated by digital communication, Malaysia's open house tradition highlights the enduring importance of face-to-face interaction. Shared laughter, conversation, and presence strengthen relationships in ways that technology cannot replicate. Ultimately, the open house demonstrates that meaningful communication grows not only through words but through genuine encounters and shared moments across cultures.

**DR. NORFARDILAWATI MUSA**



# Why Parents and Kids Feel They Live in Different Worlds

Do you agree that today's parents and children often clash not because of attitude issues, but because they genuinely see the world differently? Modern life is changing so quickly that the beliefs, values, and behaviours of younger generations differ sharply from those of their parents. Understanding this change is essential for strengthening family relationships.

One major reason for this gap is worldview formation. Parents grew up in a society where authority was respected automatically. Teachers, elders, and leaders were rarely questioned. Stability, obedience, and endurance were seen as the keys to success. For them, maintaining order was vital.

In contrast, today's youth grow up in a world that encourages critical thinking, innovation, independence, and self-expression. Schools promote creativity, and social media gives everyone the freedom to express themselves and voice their opinions.

*Young people learn that it is normal to question, analyse, and choose their own path. Parents may see this as “rebellion,” while children see it as “being themselves.”*

Another factor is the mental health revolution. Older generations rarely discussed stress, anxiety, or emotional needs. Showing emotions was sometimes seen as a weakness. Today, mental health awareness is widespread through social media, schools, and everyday conversations. Young people are more comfortable discussing feelings and setting boundaries. This can confuse parents, who may worry that their children are becoming “too sensitive,” while children may feel invalidated when their emotions are dismissed or criticised.

The digital lifestyle also creates a deeper divide. For parents, socialising meant meeting friends physically or visiting relatives. Today’s generation forms friendships online, builds communities around shared interests, and uses digital communication as a primary form of connection. Parents may see this as addiction or isolation, but for youth, it is a natural social environment.

Economically, life is also different. Many parents entered stable jobs and followed predictable life paths. Today’s youth face uncertain job markets, higher living costs, and rapidly changing industries. Their lifestyle choices reflect a different economic reality rather than a lack of discipline.

Suggestions from Psychologists to Bridge the Gap

*1. Use emotionally safe communication. Replace blaming language with “I feel...” statements to reduce defensive reactions.*

*2. Build emotional literacy together. Learn the names of emotions, discuss stress openly, and validate each other’s experiences.*

*3. Create shared rules. Instead of top-down discipline, develop family rules collaboratively to strengthen mutual respect.*

*4. Encourage technology-balanced bonding. Limit screen time during meals or family moments to promote real connection, especially during dinner.*

*5. Validate each other’s perspectives. Agreement is not always required; understanding is more important.*

The generation gap may be wide, but it is not a wall. Families can intentionally build bridges through empathy and communication. In doing so, the younger generation can grow stronger, both despite and because of their differences.

**ASSOC. PROF. DR. WONG HUEY SIEW**

# SCHOLARLY MILESTONES

Highlight  
Scholarly Output

## From the Research Desk to the National Stage: Recent Publication Milestones

Meaningful research does not end with publication in a journal; it must make an impact on communities, education, and national policy. Last year (2025) stands as a testament to this conviction.

Among the most significant contributions in 2025 were four publications in internationally indexed journals. The development of a Religious Literacy Scale for prospective teachers, published in *Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia* (Scopus), addresses a long-standing gap in measuring the capacity of future educators to understand religious diversity. In the same year, a study on developing a measurement instrument for experiential-based Islamic learning was published in *Tadris* (Scopus). On the pedagogical front, a study on creative learning using the Nearpod application in teaching Islamic education history appeared in *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* (Scopus Q1; WOS ESCI Q3). The challenge of artificial intelligence in academia was examined through an ethical lens in a paper published in *MANU*, raising important questions about integrity and responsibility in higher education.

In 2026, the publishing momentum continues. The *Cybergogi-Talaqqi Model*,

which integrates digital technology with the etiquette of Islamic learning, has been published in *Jurnal Pemikir Pendidikan*, offering a new framework for online learning consistent with Islamic values. Research on the ritual practices of the Bugis community in Tawau, Sabah, examining the tension between cultural heritage and matters of akidah, has been presented at three international conferences, enriching the discourse on Islamic thought and ethnicity in Malaysia.

However, academic writing alone is insufficient if knowledge does not reach the general public. Throughout 2025 and 2026,

*a series of articles has been published on platforms such as Portal IKRAM and the Tinta Minda column of Bernama,*

covering contemporary issues including gadget addiction, LGBT concerns, spiritual distress, the health of the qalb, spiritual preparation for Ramadan, and more. Such writing serves as a bridge between the academic world and everyday community life, conveying knowledge in accessible language without compromising its integrity.

Expertise was also contributed to the development of the Guidelines on Values-Based Education (VBE) by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) in 2026, a national policy document that will shape how values are taught and assessed across higher education institutions throughout the country.

This is where academic work finds its most enduring impact, not merely cited, but enacted.

**ASSOC. PROF. DR. KHAIRUL HAMIMAH MOHAMMAD JODI**



# ENGAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Document  
Faculty Engagement

## Unplug to Reconnect: A Festive Case for JOMO

In Malaysia, festive seasons such as Raya, Chinese New Year, Deepavali, Christmas, Kaamatan, and Hari Gawai are synonymous with *makan* sessions and lively family reunions. Yet in recent years, the smartphone has quietly become a permanent guest at the table. Instead of speaking to the auntie beside us, we often find ourselves filming the food or adjusting the perfect filter for an outfit.

Many of us recognise the feeling of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). As we scroll through Instagram, we see friends attending more aesthetic open houses, grander celebrations, or overseas holidays. Gradually, our own gatherings may feel less impressive, less worthy, and less “postable.” Festive moments slowly shift from being experienced to being curated. Celebration becomes content, and joy becomes presentation. The question is no longer “How was the reunion?” but “Did you post it?”

### *Perhaps it is time to consider JOMO — the Joy of Missing Out.*

JOMO is the quiet relief of not checking what everyone else is doing. It is choosing conversation over comparison and being fully present without worrying about how a moment will appear online.

Research shows that even short breaks from social media can improve life satisfaction and emotional well-being.

### *Constant exposure to other people’s highlight reels can influence how we evaluate our own experiences.*

When we compare our behind-the-scenes moments with someone else’s edited version, disengagement often grows quietly.

This does not mean digital platforms are the enemy. They allow us to reconnect with relatives overseas, participate across distances, and preserve memories. Yet genuine connection is not measured by likes. It is built through eye contact, attentive listening, and shared time.

A simple festive reset may help. During *makan* time, keep phones away. Take photos if needed, but post them later. Ask elders how festivals were celebrated before smartphones existed. Let children share their stories while we listen fully—not half-listening while scrolling.

Let this festive season include a small pledge: try a “**phone-free makan**” at least once. Festivals were never meant to fill our feeds; they were meant to strengthen our relationships. In a digitally connected world, the most

meaningful festive upgrade may not be better content, but better connection.

**MADAM CHRISTINA MARY RICHARD**





# Rise and Reflect (RNR) 2025: Learning Beyond Boundaries

In conjunction with the 25th Anniversary of Open University Malaysia (OUM), the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSH) introduced Rise and Reflect (RNR) 2025, an intellectual engagement initiative designed to encourage dialogue, reflection, and knowledge sharing across disciplines. Organised under the theme “Learning Beyond Boundaries,” the programme provided a platform for scholars, practitioners, and public figures to explore contemporary issues affecting society today.

Implemented from April to October 2025, RNR 2025 was structured as a series of online sessions delivered through livestream platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. The open-access format allowed participation not only from OUM students and academic staff but also from alumni, professionals, and members of the wider community. This approach reflects OUM's longstanding commitment to flexible, inclusive, and lifelong learning.

## 25 Topics for 25 Years

A distinctive feature of the programme was the concept “25 Topics for 25 Years,” which symbolised OUM's quarter-century milestone. Across six months, a total of 25 sessions were organised, highlighting the diverse academic fields represented within the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, including psychology, counselling, communication, Islamic studies, political science, English literature, and liberal studies.

The programme was officially launched on 29 April 2025 by YB Tuan Dr Mohammad Fahmi bin Ngah, Selangor State Executive Council Member and Assemblyman for Seri Setia. The launch marked the beginning of a sustained intellectual series aimed at expanding academic discussions beyond traditional classroom settings.

## Conversations on Contemporary Issues

Throughout the series, participants engaged in discussions on a range of contemporary issues, including mental health awareness, ethical leadership, governance, media responsibility, cultural understanding, and community resilience. These discussions provided participants with opportunities to reflect on current societal challenges through perspectives drawn from the social sciences and humanities.

The programme also included several Islamic-themed webinars that explored topics such as Quranic guidance in everyday life, the role of Islamic finance in society, and spiritual approaches to well-being. These sessions highlighted how religious perspectives can contribute meaningfully to discussions on ethics, personal development, and social responsibility in contemporary society.

## International Spotlight: RNR Paris

One of the most notable highlights of RNR 2025 was the Special RNR Paris segment, held in conjunction with UNESCO's Digital Learning Week at La Maison de l'Indonésie in Paris. During the session titled "Humanising Digital Education: Celebrating 25 Years of OUM," Prof Dato' Dr Ahmad Izanee Awang, President and Vice-Chancellor of OUM, reflected on the university's growth from 753 learners in 2000 to more than 130,000 students today. He emphasised that OUM's strength lies in providing education that is flexible, accessible, and responsive to the realities of working adults. According to him, digital learning must remain human-centred, ensuring meaningful engagement between learners, tutors, and the wider academic community.

The RnR 2025 Paris programme also featured a presentation by Dr Maszlee Malik, former Minister of Education Malaysia, who discussed the role of OUM in shaping digital higher education within the ASEAN region. In his address, he highlighted OUM's open, distance, and digital education (ODDE) model as an example of how technology and inclusive policies can expand access to higher

learning. He also emphasised the importance of initiatives such as Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and flexible micro-credentials in supporting lifelong learning and professional development.

Together, these sessions underscored OUM's growing international presence and demonstrated how Malaysian higher education institutions contribute to global discussions on digital transformation and lifelong learning.

## Promoting Mental Health Awareness

In conjunction with World Mental Health Day, the RnR 2025 programme also featured a special series focusing on mental health awareness. These sessions brought together experts from psychology, psychiatry, counselling, and Islamic scholarship to discuss topics related to emotional well-being, trauma, and stress management.

By combining academic insights with practical perspectives, the discussions encouraged greater awareness and understanding of mental health issues among participants while highlighting the role of interdisciplinary approaches in promoting psychological well-being.

## Strengthening Interdisciplinary Engagement

Beyond public engagement, RNR 2025 also strengthened collaboration within the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. By bringing together different disciplines within a single programme, the series demonstrated how various academic fields contribute complementary perspectives to shared societal concerns.

Topics related to ethics, governance, well-being, identity, and social responsibility were examined from multiple viewpoints, including psychology, counselling practice, communication studies, religious scholarship, political thought, and literary interpretation. This interdisciplinary engagement reflects the collective strength of the social sciences and humanities in addressing complex societal challenges.

## Looking Ahead

Over the course of six months and across 25 sessions, Rise and Reflect 2025 demonstrated the Faculty's capacity to organise a sustained intellectual engagement initiative that connects academic scholarship with broader societal conversations. As OUM celebrates its 25th anniversary, the programme stands as a meaningful reflection of the Faculty's commitment to promoting thoughtful dialogue, encouraging interdisciplinary learning, and extending knowledge beyond institutional boundaries.

**DR. AMIRAA ALI MANSOR**



# Faculty Engagement in Delivering a Programme with the Visually Impaired Community

The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSH), Open University Malaysia (OUM), continues its commitment to community empowerment through a collaborative initiative with the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB). More than a conventional Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activity, the programme reflects the faculty's values of compassion, inclusivity, and social accountability.

As Programme Director, together with PM Dr Wong as Deputy Director—who is closely associated with MAB—several engagement sessions were conducted with MAB's senior management to plan the “Day with the Visually Impaired” programme. These discussions involved Dato' George Thomas, Chief Executive Officer of MAB, and Puan Mazlifah, General Manager of the Gurney Training Centre (GTC), focusing on aligning objectives, structuring activities, and identifying the long-term impact of the collaboration.

Faculty engagement began during the planning stage through the establishment of an organising committee covering publicity, finance, technical coordination, documentation, welfare, and programme activities. Preparations included empathy-based modules, facilitation sessions, motivational sharing, and contributions such as white canes and audiobooks.

*During the programme, faculty members participated actively in activities such as “Walk in Their Shoes,” where participants experienced temporary visual deprivation to better understand the challenges faced by individuals without sight.*

The initiative fostered reflection, awareness, and inclusive engagement.

Following the programme, a comprehensive report was prepared, and FSSH is now moving towards formalising a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with MAB to strengthen future collaboration in education, research, and accessible learning initiatives.

**DR. WAN MOHAMMAD UBaidILLAH WAN ABAS**

# FLEXIBILITY IS OUR PRIORITY

Sharing Our Staff Experiences

## Balancing Briefcases and Bibliographies: Doing a PhD While Working Full-Time

Pursuing a PhD while working full-time requires sustained curiosity and disciplined resilience. It is not only about managing time, but also about managing identity. By day, you are a professional attending meetings, responding to emails, and making decisions. By night, and often early morning, you become a researcher—reading journal articles, refining arguments, and engaging with theory.

One of the key challenges lies in balancing urgency and importance. Professional responsibilities are immediate and externally driven, whereas doctoral research demands slower, deeper engagement with ideas, literature, and methodology.

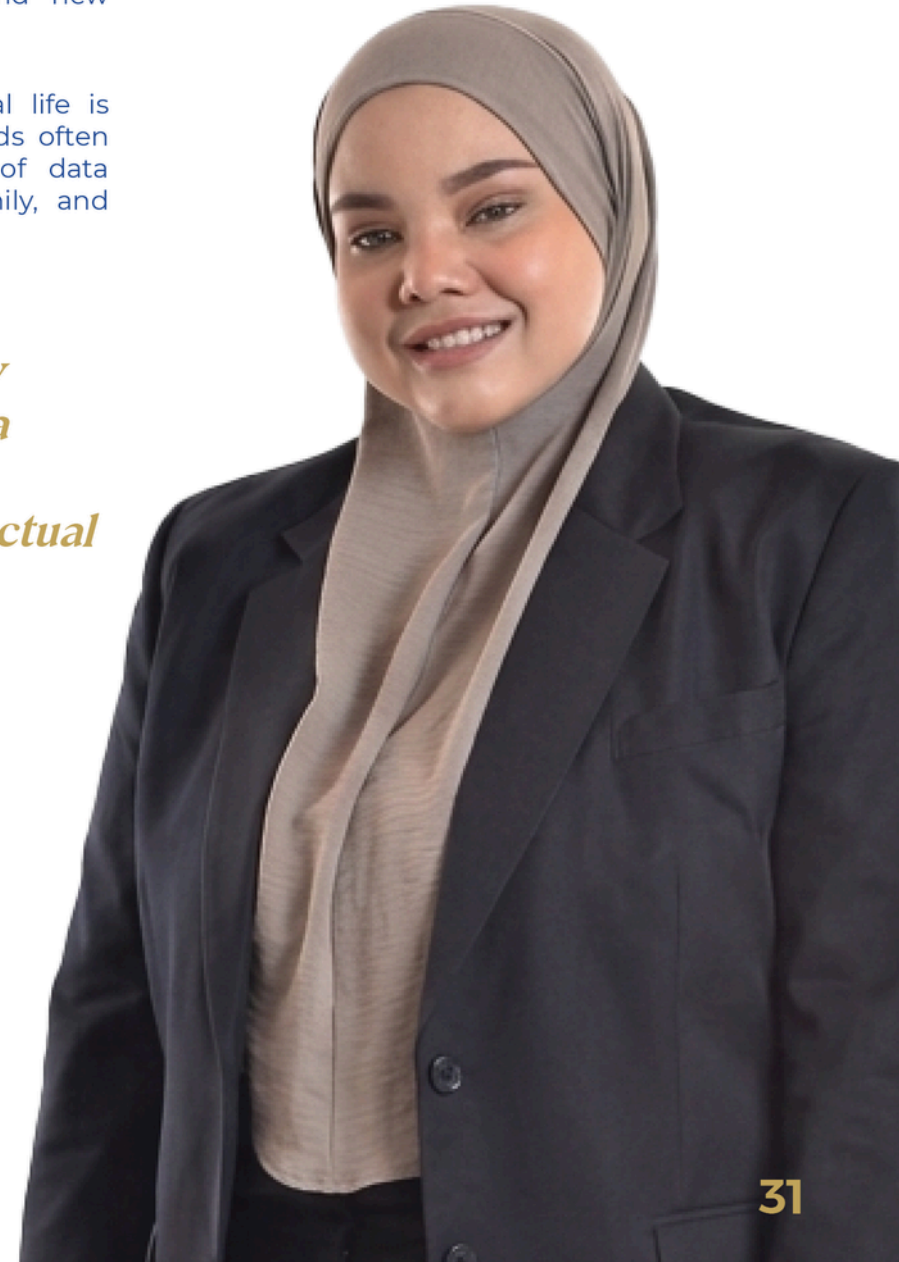
*The journey often reveals that a PhD is less about finding answers and more about learning how to ask better questions.*

The experience can also be intellectually transformative. Engaging with scholars such as Lev Vygotsky and Albert Bandura encourages deeper critical thinking and a more analytical approach to reading and writing. Over time, doctoral students begin to recognise gaps, tensions, and new possibilities within existing scholarship.

Balancing work, research, and personal life is not always easy. Evenings and weekends often become writing sessions or periods of data analysis. Support from colleagues, family, and supervisors becomes crucial.

*Ultimately, pursuing a PhD while working is not merely an academic pursuit—it is a meaningful commitment to lifelong learning and intellectual growth.*

**MADAM ADIBAH AZMAN**



## A Festive Return: Learning with Renewed Purpose

Festive seasons often invite reflection and gratitude. They also mark moments of renewal. For many learners at Open University Malaysia (OUM), returning to study carries a similar meaning. It reflects hope, responsibility, and a determination to improve one's future despite existing commitments.

As a lecturer, I observe this journey through the experiences shared by adult learners, particularly during festive periods. In 2025, one learner informed me that she would be travelling back to her hometown for a major celebration while preparing for an assignment due in the same week. Despite limited time and a demanding family schedule, she remained active in the online forum and submitted her work on time. After submission, she described the experience as a personal victory, having fulfilled both family responsibilities and academic commitments.

For working adults, parents, and professionals, continuing education is rarely a simple decision.

*Balancing assignments, online learning, and assessments alongside work and family obligations requires discipline and careful planning.*

Festive seasons can intensify these demands, as learners strive to remain present with their families while meeting academic expectations.

These moments reveal the resilience of OUM learners. Each completed module becomes a milestone, and each semester reflects persistence rather than convenience. The flexibility of OUM's learning system enables learners to organise their study time according to personal and professional responsibilities.

Ultimately, returning to study represents more than the pursuit of a qualification.

*It reflects personal transformation and a sustained commitment to lifelong learning.*

Just as festive seasons symbolise renewal and hope, the experiences of OUM learners demonstrate that determination, supported by institutional flexibility and family encouragement, allows meaningful progress to continue even during life's busiest moments.

**MR MUZAIMIR MOKHTAR**



## The Art of the ‘Slot-In’: Navigating Learning While Working

Pursuing a Master’s or PhD is challenging on its own. Balancing postgraduate study with a full-time career adds another level of complexity that requires more than intelligence—it requires strategy. As an OUM learner within the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSH), this journey is shaped by three key elements: discipline, the “slot-in” approach, and a supportive circle.

Discipline becomes the foundation. Moving from professional responsibilities during the day to academic work in the evening is rarely effortless. Over time, it becomes clear that time for study is not simply found; it must be deliberately created. Setting clear boundaries and maintaining consistent study habits helps ensure that academic goals remain achievable despite the demands of daily work.

Another helpful strategy is the “slot-in” concept. For working learners, long and uninterrupted study hours are rare. Instead, progress often happens during small pockets of time throughout the day.

*Reviewing an article during a lunch break or refining a paragraph early in the morning may seem minor,*

*yet these moments gradually accumulate.*

In this way, research becomes a series of manageable steps rather than an overwhelming task.

Equally important is the presence of a supportive circle. Friends and peers who understand the pressures of balancing work and study provide encouragement and accountability. In the end, the journey of a working learner is not only about earning a qualification, but also about developing resilience, discipline, and meaningful connections along the way.

**DR. AHMAD SALAHUDDIN M AZIZAN**



# Congratulations!

to

**Prof. Dr. Fatimah Yusooff  
(Professor, Faculty Social  
Sciences and Humanities)**

on the inaugural Professorship lecture on

**“Kaunseling Keluarga  
dalam Era Kecerdasan  
Buatan: Memperkukuhkan  
Kesejahteraan Keluarga.”**



