

Working mum, 53, graduates as valedictorian

Head of e-learning at NUS bags master's over 2 decades after last pursuing formal education

Elisha Tushara

After spending 21 years in the media industry in roles such as multimedia producer and news editor, Madam Hafizah Osman moved to the education sector in 2017 as the head of e-learning at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

To perform better in her new job, she went back to school in 2021 – more than two decades after she last pursued formal education – embarking on a master's degree programme in learning and professional development (MLPD) conferred by Griffith University in Queensland, Australia, in partnership with the Institute for Adult Learning in Singapore.

On Monday, Madam Hafizah, 53, graduated as the valedictorian of her cohort.

Asked how she juggled work and studies, she told *The Straits Times*: “Before I took the plunge, I had some reservations, especially in terms of time commitment. Having had experience as a part-time student when I was single and had no family commitments, (I knew) it was... a challenge.”

When she was working as a multimedia producer in Singapore Press Holdings from 1996 to 1999, Madam Hafizah earned her bachelor's degree in language and linguistics from the Open University UK.

She initially doubted whether she could study again at a much older age.

What helped her make the decision to push ahead was the fact that the further studies would be directly linked to her work, in an area where she started her career. In 1991, she became a teacher after completing her A levels and getting

a teaching diploma from the National Institute of Education.

Madam Hafizah said that her family – husband Mohammad Kamarurrashid Kamaruddin and their 21-year-old daughter and 20-year-old son – gave her their fullest support, and reassured her that she was capable of doing her master's degree.

“My husband is definitely my biggest supporter, cheering me on. And my children were my inspiration as they studied through Covid-19,” she said.

Professor Sarojni Choy from the School of Education and Profes-

sional Studies at Griffith University said Madam Hafizah's maturity and articulation skills made her a top student and an effective cohort leader.

She described adult learners like Madam Hafizah as self-directed and experienced learners who make choices that are relevant and practical to their work.

“They want very clear connections between theory and practice,” said Prof Choy.

Besides having her family's support, another factor that helped Madam Hafizah decide to study for the master's degree was the fact

that 50 per cent of her MLPD programme was subsidised by SkillsFuture Singapore.

Her employer NUS covered another about 20 per cent of her tuition fees as part of its Talent Development Sponsorship programme, an initiative to help its staff embrace continual learning, adopt new and emerging skill sets, and be future-ready.

This was important to Madam Hafizah as paying for the full cost of the master's programme herself would have put a dent in the family's financial resources.

Mr Kamarurrashid, 49, a civil

servant, said he is immensely proud of his wife's achievements, and credits her success to her determination and passion for lifelong learning.

“Her thirst for knowledge is unmatched,” he told ST.

Madam Hafizah hopes to continue her learning, even if it is not through formal pathways.

“You have to continue learning because the world is changing. It's evolving every single second, and you cannot afford to be left behind,” she said.

elisha@sph.com.sg



Madam Hafizah Osman (right) with Professor Carolyn Evans from Griffith University who presented her the Master of Learning and Professional Development on Monday. Madam Hafizah said her family gave her their fullest support, reassuring her that she was capable of doing her master's degree. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE