

Contributed by DR HO NEE YONG

I READ my Sunday newspaper one morning and saw the advertisement on AeU, which offered a 50% discount for senior citizens on tuition fees. After some mental calculations on my monthly government pension, I headed to the AeU campus in Kuala Lumpur to enrol in its PhD in Education programme.

After all, learning has no finishing line.

Students can learn from anywhere, anytime and the programmes are affordable. Gone are the days when people had good reason to lament on the lack of opportunities to continue with tertiary education.

AeU has made it possible for anyone to obtain a degree at their own pace and preferred method of learning. Open entry is available now for working adults lacking in the minimum entry requirements.

The use of English as a language of academia at AeU gives students the edge in e-learning where most interactive materials and journals are in English.

This has effectively increased flexibility in study, which part-time students cannot do without.

The AeU's Digital library, known as Asia e University Knowledge Centre, is cosy; the aesthetically designed AeU logo, a delight and the vending machine offering a variety of free drinks, a bonus.

AeU students can gain access to about 20,000 e-books, 70,000 online journals and other facilities at the AeU Digital Library on the main campus in Kuala Lumpur.

AeU's School of Graduate Studies dean Prof Dr Siow Heng Loke and School of Education & Cognitive Science dean Prof Dr John Arul Phillips were the two persons I met on that day at the Knowledge Centre.

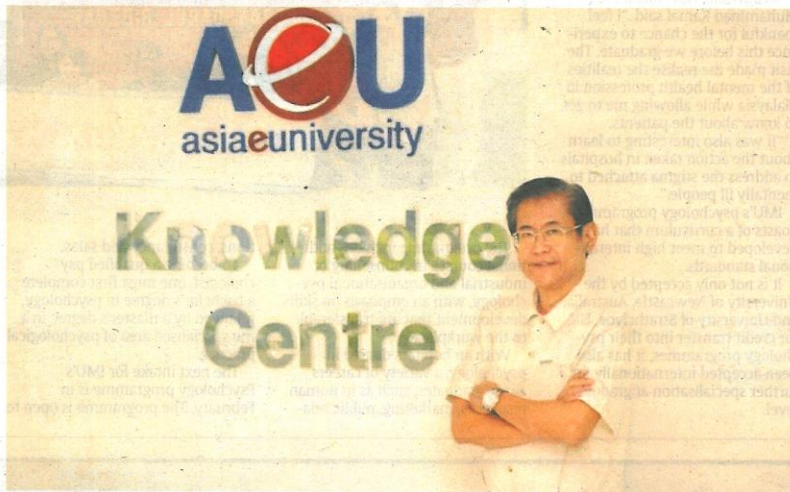
After a casual look at two lecture rooms and a few questions on e-learning, I showed my master's degree in Education from Reading University, UK to Prof Dr Siow, who then approved my application.

He was to become my supervisor later.

At the orientation, when AeU president Prof Datuk Dr Ansary Ahmad had remarked that the dropout rate for PhD students was very high, this had me pondering whether he was referring to me. I was 63 years old then.

The beauty of life after retirement lies in the freedom of choosing to do what you want without seeking anyone's permission.

Learning has no boundaries at AeU



Dr Ho says his PhD journey at AeU was refreshing, insightful and one he will cherish.

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— DR HO NEE YONG

Nevertheless, the news of my enrolment at AeU caused a little commotion among family members whose sterling support had been the catalyst for my advocacy for lifelong learning for the past 40 years.

I promised them that quality family time would always supersede my PhD journey.

At AeU, learning was made much

easier with easy access to scores of international online libraries and e-Journal databases.

As my reference research was almost exclusively done through e-Library, I had the option of not having the static queue-up counter service; and this meant a much lower time-cost.

I have the AeU librarians, who offered their assistance at my point of need in online research, much to thank for.

I attended several doctoral colloquia for research ideas; had one-on-one sessions with my supervisor, and my thesis proposal passed by the vetting committee during the first year of my study.

Over the next two years, my concerns were raised on the formulation of questionnaires, which needed modifications on the part of wordings; the selection of teacher-respondents which had to be equilibrated; and the data analysis and interviews which needed to be

simultaneously positioned.

It was a meaningful and an exciting experience.

As the doctoral journey is a shared one between supervisors and candidates, both parties need to make their expectations known to bring thesis writing to fruition.

I am glad that AeU has all it takes for this cordial relationship to be in place.

In my data collection through questionnaires, I had to make sure that the relationship between important parameters and variables could be differentiated for analysis; and that there was accessibility to potential respondents.

Indeed I am very appreciative of the cooperation rendered to me by the school heads concerned. The few trips I made to the post office to send parcels of questionnaires through express mail were really worthwhile.

Besides data collection, I also made use of the triangulation

approach to find out whether the analysis of data and interviews were mutually reinforcing.

It was during the many interviews conducted that I was able to confirm the reliability and validity of my statistics results.

The many enlightening classroom lectures, and those presented by international guest speakers, helped enlarge my body of knowledge on matters concerning research and current educational issues.

The exposure to these lectures have had a positive impact on my critical-thinking skills: What interests should schools and universities serve? What constitute good education? Or is there a justification for society to subsidise the production of doctorates?

In the course of my research, I became convinced that for a holistic education to be a worthwhile effort, and to ensure its success, the character-building aspect must take precedence over the pure quest for knowledge and wealth.

My journey at AeU was at its crucial stage when the viva voce was held in January 2013.

My external examiner from the University of Oxford, UK, had to be ready at 7am on a winter morning to be linked up through the tele-video conferencing with other examiners at the AeU meeting room in KL; at 3pm local time.

It was a defining yet exciting moment for me. I have AeU to thank for, not forgetting the confidence my supervisor Prof Dr Siow had in me for his selection of external examiners.

My PhD journey at AeU was not only refreshing and insightful; it was also one that I shall always cherish.

Since its humble beginning in April 2007, AeU has established its reputation as an acclaimed institution of higher education in the region by providing quality education programmes to almost 15,000 students from 54 countries.

AeU was declared as one of the successful projects under ACD in October 2012.

The January 2014 intake is now open. Candidates can apply for studies through a Normal Entry or via an Open or Flexible Entry admission, which considers the individual's working experience.

Dr Ho Nee Yong is an alumnus of Asia e University (AeU).

■ For more information, go to www.aeu.edu.my or call 1300 300 238.