



04 JUN, 2024

Success stories for school-leavers

The Star, Malaysia

Overlooked pathway to bright future

It's concerning that fewer students are sitting for the SPM exam, and more of those who pass it are heading off to look for work instead of furthering their education. However, TVET graduates say that gaining relevant and marketable skills is always valuable and not a waste of time. > **See stories on page 5 by SHERIDAN MAHAVERA and FAZLEENA AZIZ**



04 JUN, 2024

Success stories for school-leavers

The Star, Malaysia

Success stories for school-leavers

Youth, industry players share testimonies about the effectiveness of TVET

By SHERIDAN MAHAVERA
mahavera@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: When he first started out three years ago, Muhammad Asyraf Muhammad Amin crafted small wall racks for vegetables at the back of his house in Kelantan that he sold in his hometown of Kok Lanas.

Now he is the proud owner of a furniture company that makes cabinets, tables and chairs, with an annual revenue of more than RM300,000 and 12 staff members under him.

And he is only 24.
His success would not have been possible if he had just left school after sitting for his Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) and started the business on his own at the age of 18, which is the trend now among many secondary school leavers.

Success stories such as Asyraf's are something that officials and experts in the field of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) are banking on to reverse a trend of SPM graduates declining to further their studies due to the high cost of tertiary education.

A report in *The Star* on May 26 revealed that the trend has persisted since the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns. Data from the Higher Education Ministry showed that 1.25 million individuals pursued tertiary education in 2023, far lower than the 1.39 million in 2019, just before the pandemic began in 2020.

Some SPM graduates told *The Star* in past interviews that they would rather opt for gig work such as food and parcel delivery than take on the financial burden of a tertiary education programme.

Asyraf credits his success to the TVET diploma he earned at a



In demand: According to Zainah, the marketability of TVET graduates from her polytechnic was above 96% in 2023.

government-run polytechnic in Shah Alam.

"They taught me everything about working with wood, from how to identify different trees to how to design, cut, carve and craft," said the young man, who graduated with a diploma in wood-based technology.

"They had courses on entrepreneurship to give students a foundation in how to start and sustain a business."

The three-year diploma course of six semesters cost him and his family RM1,200 in tuition fees; he worked part-time at several nearby factories to earn pocket money.

"Thinking that you are wasting your time learning new skills is not a positive attitude," said Asyraf when we asked him what he thought about the perception that continuing to study after SPM is not worth the time and investment.

"You won't waste your time because you will develop skills in a field that is in demand, and the demand will only increase."

Zainah Rujihan, who heads a polytechnic in Selangor, echoed



Hard work pays off: Asyraf (right) has turned his one-man show into an enterprise employing 12 people.

this view, saying that the marketability of TVET graduates from her institution was more than 96% in 2023, with 58.6% of them having found work within six months of completing their studies.

The rest are either pursuing more advanced qualifications or undergoing upskilling. Only 3.9% have not found work yet, said Zainah, who is director of Politeknik Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah (PSA).

About 80% of PSA's degree holders are able to find work in the fields that they studied in, and among engineering diploma holders, the rate is 50%, said Zainah.

"This is because of our work-based learning method, where we link studying in the polytechnic with studying in the industry to fuse theory and practice," she told *The Star*.

Another TVET graduate, Muhammad Hanif Selamat, 36, attests to how the close links between industries and polytechnics substantially increase the chances that their graduates get employed.

"Polytechnic students do 50% practical learning and 50% theory. They are trained to work with the latest machines and equipment," said Hanif, who holds a diploma in mechanical engineer-

ing specialising in packaging.

"Those who graduate in this field get work as technicians in factories, as almost all manufacturers need packaging. The starting salaries can be between RM2,100 and RM2,500 a month."

Hanif started working almost as soon as he graduated in 2010 as a technician; he later upskilled to become an engineer. In 2015, he became a lecturer in the field he had studied.

"It's okay to do gig work but don't let it be your only future. Improve yourself by studying and picking up higher skills so that you can earn a better salary in the future."



04 JUN, 2024

Success stories for school-leavers

The Star, Malaysia

SUMMARIES

Overlooked pathway to bright future It's concerning that fewer students are sitting for the SPM exam, and more of those who pass it are heading off to look for work instead of furthering their education.