

Call for more translational research in STI



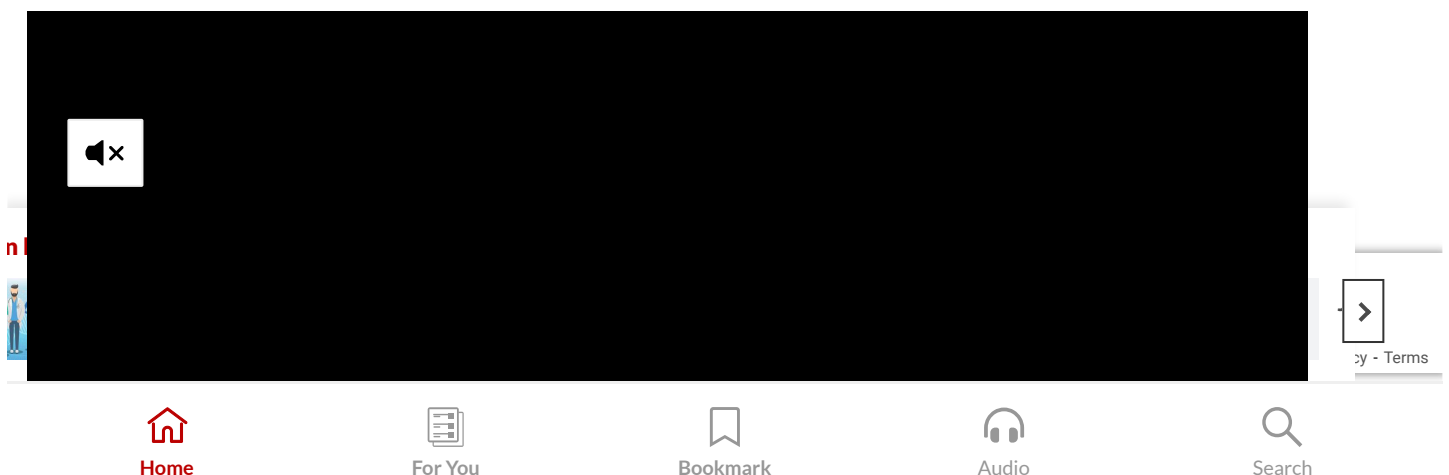
By REBECCA RAJAENDRAM

EDUCATION

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THE science, technology and innovation (STI) scene in Malaysia needs to connect with society if it is to solve problems facing the country.





UCSI University School of Architecture Prof Dr Mohd Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi said STI in the country is “missing the social element” and that research is not being translated to solve real-world problems.

He said this is the result of our education system that has placed too much emphasis on STI as just knowledge to the detriment of the vision of producing a wholesome individual.

“This leads to individuals wondering what to do with all their STI knowledge,” he said at a virtual forum held on Aug 17 to launch the university’s Tan Sri Omar Abdul Rahman Centre for STI Policy Studies.

Prof Mohd Tajuddin said academics are also facing the same predicament and are unable to translate their research to help society.

“If this is not in the teachers, professors or lecturers, what else can you expect from the students?” he asked.

Based on his conversations with students with a cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of 4.0 or are class valedictorians, Prof Mohd Tajuddin said they failed to demonstrate an understanding of humanity.

To solve this problem, he advocates introducing a 60-20-20 split in credits for higher education courses.

This would mean 60% of credits would come from a student’s core subject matter, 20% from a different discipline and another 20% from “global spirituality”.

Global spirituality, he explained, is the education of different religions, and moral and values, so that students have a better understanding of others.

“We have to structure our knowledge teaching within the framework of humanity and consciousness of society. Then, I think we will move in a positive direction,” he said.

Concurring with Prof Mohd Tajuddin is science newspaper The Petri Dish founding editor-in-chief Dr Mahaletchumy Arujanan.

She said science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) graduates and researchers should look closer at where their chosen fields of study infringe into other disciplines.

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She also said that a science communication module should be included in all STEM programmes in universities so that these graduates would be able to communicate clearly with all stakeholders in the future.

At the forum, UCSI University Council member Prof Emeritus Tan Sri Omar Abdul Rahman said policies are the starting point of any endeavour and are the “simple part” of the process.

“The big challenge is in the action (implementation).

“Translating intention into action and its successful completion require optimum capacity and a whole host of dedicated players and competent enablers – the government, scientific community, private sector and civil society,” he said.

He also said there are four critical technologies needed for a harmonious, prosperous, progressive and sustainable society: technologies for satisfying basic needs; technologies for improving quality of life; technologies for economic growth and industrial competitiveness; and technologies for good governance.

Omar said that in order to secure support from the major stakeholders for STI policies, the country must have a government that is committed to providing comprehensive STI infrastructures and resources; an ethical and competent scientific and technological community; and a private sector that is capable of utilising technology and innovation to generate wealth.

It also needs a society that is “at ease with science” and an efficient governance system that enables effective policy-making, planning and implementation, and is open to public debate and international collaborations.

With the launch, it is hoped that the centre will strengthen the national agenda for science, technology and social innovation towards establishing a harmonious, prosperous, progressive and sustainable Malaysia.

Prof Omar said the centre would also be tasked with advocating the establishment of a National STI Action Council.

UCSI University vice-chancellor and founder Datuk Peter Ng lauded the establishment of the centre, calling it timely and “much needed” especially at a time where the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted various parts of daily living.

Other panellists at the forum include Malaysian Green Technology and Climate Change Centre chairman Prof Datuk Dr Abu Bakar Jaafar and 27 Advisory executive director Girish M. Ramachandran.

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