

We must educate students, not merely certify them

THE recent discussion about what makes us truly educated deserves to continue, not because the answer is elusive, but because universities have become too comfortable measuring learning by grades, publications, and graduate employability.

We celebrate academic excellence while often overlooking intellectual courage, ethical judgement, empathy, and social responsibility.

The uncomfortable truth is that universities can produce graduates with first class honours who struggle to distinguish facts from misinformation, who avoid difficult conversations, or don't know how to make principled decisions when faced with ethical dilemmas. If this is the outcome of higher education, then we must question whether we are educating students or merely certifying them.

The responsibility does not rest solely with university leaders or policymakers. It begins in every classroom. Every lecturer shapes not only what students know but also how they think, question, and act.

Every lecture should challenge assumptions. Every assessment should reward curiosity rather than memorisation. Every classroom discussion should expose students to diverse perspectives and real-world problems that demand thoughtful solutions.

True education cannot be outsourced to artificial intelligence, online platforms, or carefully designed curricula. It is cultivated by lecturers who dare to inspire, provoke, mentor, and model integrity.

Universities must therefore empower academics to move beyond content delivery and become architects of character, critical thinking, and lifelong learning.

The future of higher education will not be determined by the number of degrees awarded but by the quality of citizens our universities send into society. The time has come for every lecturer to stop teaching subjects and start shaping human beings.

**ASSOC PROF DR
MUHAMMAD NOOR
ABDUL AZIZ**
 Senior researcher
 Institute of Excellence
 Teachers and Leaders
 in Education
 Universiti Utara Malaysia