

# Creating immersive environment for learning English

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**A**S first-year students of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) arrived at the Brave-Hearts site in UKM's Pusanika, they were greeted with sights, sounds and smells that sent their senses reeling.

An air of excitement surrounded the booths offering information and activities by 14 faculties involved in the programme under Citra UKM centre.

Brave-Hearts, which stands for "Bringing Real Activities Via English Hands-on Experience and Rewarding Tasks", is an out-of-class English enhancement programme for UKM students.

Now in its fourth year, the programme is aimed at creating interest among students with lower English proficiency levels to learn the language, and boost their confidence to converse in the language.

At one of the booths, Aishah Mutmainnah Khairul Anuar, 21, is seen encouraging visitors to try out costumes from different English eras. The Liberal Studies student herself was clad in a dark velvet Victorian-era gown, complete with a beaded headpiece that she had sewn all night.

Aishah said introducing clothes worn by people in England, such as tunics, gowns, ruffled collars, lace veils and corsets, could help to spark interest among undergraduates to learn words related to clothes.

"Personally, I am excited to be wearing this Victorian-era dress. Through the pieces of clothing we have, students like me can learn new words associated with clothing," said Aishah.

Similarly, other booths offered activities that focused on awareness of language functions and vocabulary building, such as Readers' Theatre, a Snake-and-Ladder game and a mock Moot Court, where all of the activities were conducted in English.

At the mock "court" booth, students take

up roles as judge, defendant, public prosecutor, accused, bailiff and so on, to act out a scene in the courtroom using a script prepared. The booth was a hit as group after group of students signed up to give it a try.

To make this year's programme even better, Citra UKM's deputy director (Communication), Professor Madya Dr Zarina Othman said all 14 faculties under the centre were roped in to participate and set up booths.

"Brave-Hearts 2018 features the involvement of faculties to showcase their disciplines through communicative activities in English," she said.

"This will be an opportunity for students from different disciplines to realise the role of English and communication in their respective fields.

"This initiative creates the ambience needed to boost students' mastery of English and their motivation and confidence to use English."

Zarina said every learner was unique and successful language learning depended on how students felt about a language.

"Less positive feelings, like lack of motivation, low self-confidence and anxiety, are contributing factors that could hamper success in language learning," she said.

"The affective factor is one aspect that needs to be addressed and enhanced outside formal learning environment where language practitioners are more able to work on providing students with a conducive environment in line with the concept of immersion."

UKM deputy vice-chancellor [Academic and International Affairs] Professor Datuk Dr Mohd Marzuki Mustafa, who graced the event, said: "The best way to learn English is to go to an English-speaking country. But, because

that is impossible for our students, we decided to bring everything that is English to them instead."

"Even though this is just a one-day event, it is hoped that the interest generated can be sustained for a long time. The momentum



Professor Datuk Dr Mohd Marzuki Mustafa



Associate Professor Dr Adi Irfan Che Ani



Students visiting the Brave-Hearts programme at Pusanika, UKM, can try on and walk around in various costumes from different eras in England. PIC BY SADDAM YUSOFF



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PROFESSOR MADYA DR ZARINA OTHMAN, Citra UKM's deputy director [Communication]

can be kept through the classes held by lecturers, too."

Since its inception in 2013, UKM's Citra Education has sought to produce knowledgeable and flexible graduates, who are experts in their disciplines and, at the same time, having excellent soft skills. New students who enrol are required to take up either 30 or 40 credit units of Citra education courses depending on whether they are in professional, or non-professional/ standard programmes.

The Citra Education course is made up of compulsory courses and Citra courses. The compulsory courses encompass those such as Basic Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Islamic and Asian Civilisations, Ethnic Relations and Soft Skills.

Citra University Centre deputy director (Competency), Associate Professor Dr Adi Irfan Che Ani said first-year students were required to choose courses from six domains offered. They are Ethnicity, Citizenship and Civilisation, Language, Communication and Literacy, Quantitative and Qualitative, Leadership, Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Science, Technology and Sustainability, and Family, Health and Lifestyle.

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The art and craft booth was a big hit with students as they get to bring back their handiwork. Before that they follow a tutorial conducted in English.



The mock Moot Court at the Brave-Hearts programme.