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'Be happy and proud of how far you've gotten even with disabilities,' says IIUM graduate with autism, Nur Aliyah

👤 Guest Submission 📅 December 10, 2023

By **Aida Mokhtar**

GOMBAK, 9 December 2023: Recent graduate with mild autism, Nur Aliyah Shahirah binti Mazalan, provided a piece of inspiring advice for students with

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disabilities, "Be happy and proud of how far you've gotten even with disabilities. Do not let people invalidate your hard work. You (alone) are enough (to validate your own efforts) so keep going."

Aliyah was conferred the Bachelor of Human Sciences in English Language and Literature (Honours) degree on 28 November 2023 in the seventh session of the 39th IIUM Convocation Ceremony, at IIUM Gombak.

Being a student with autism can have its challenges. What is autism? "Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life due to a neurological disorder that affects the functioning of the brain," according to the National Autism Society of Malaysia (NASOM).

When a student has autism, it can hamper him or her when learning, communicating and socialising thus he or she requires support from the educational institution, or in this case, the IIUM.

Aliyah's support system included that provided by the IIUM Disability Services Unit (DSU), IIUM Library and close friends. She described them as people who, "...accept me without judgement while also patiently giving me guidance to learn and become a better person."

The importance of being communicated to clearly and in detail was something that she would have cherished during her study but was sometimes not found. "As an autistic person, navigating life as a student and growing up is challenging as sometimes we deal with the situation where we are left to make decisions on our own without any proper explanation as people tend to think that we just understand and are able to assume things like our peers where we often actually need extended elaboration to understand instructions." People who communicated with Aliyah needed to ensure that she understood what was mentioned so that miscommunication did not occur that could lead to much frustration.

It was not only her understanding that had been affected at times due to the lack of explanations, Aliyah also mentioned feeling overwhelmed and facing sensory overload by the many assignment deadlines and heavy workload; feelings that would not normally be encountered as much by typical students.

In spite of having mild autism, and the challenges that come with it, Aliyah conveyed the noble intention of earning financially on her own without having to depend on her parents. She also put forth the idea of learning new skills and being an advocate for persons with disabilities (PwDs). She also articulated her plan to pursue another degree in the form of a Master's in Linguistics soon as, "learning is my passion." IIUM Today wishes Aliyah all the best in her future endeavours. May Allah bless her. Amin.***

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