

## Changing a Major

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### Abstract

Pursuing a degree programme of one's childhood dream and blessed by one's parents could not guarantee that the person will be able to complete his studies. The case walks the readers through the experience of Hasan who completed his matriculation studies and enrolled into MBBS (medical) programme of a public university in Malaysia. Hasan realized that there was a misfit between his aptitude and the nature of medical studies when he was in his second year. The case chronicled Hasan's actions and reactions in coping with his poor academic performance, fulfilment of his parents' wish, his lack of concentration and inability to digest his courses, changing to another academic discipline with his current university, or withdrawing from his university and making a new application to other public and private universities. There are compelling lessons that students, instructors, university authorities and parents could generate and contemplate after going through Hassan academic adventure.

**Keywords:** Career counseling, tertiary education, personality, personal development.

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### Introduction

Muhammad Hasan Bin Ibrahim is 22 years old, born in 2001. He is the seventh among eight siblings. His father is a government pensioner while his mother is still working as a lecturer in engineering faculty at a well-known public university in Malaysia. university in engineering faculty. The first four children in his family are females, while the remaining four are males.

Hasan has siblings who graduated from the same university that he is studying – IIUM (International Islamic University Malaysia). The eldest sister, 37 years old, graduated with a law degree, followed by the second child with an accounting degree. The third child obtained a degree in linguistics. The fourth broke the chain by obtaining a degree with art and design degree from UiTM. The fifth sibling resumed the broken IIUM link by completing a degree in business administration. There was another break from the IIUM chain for the sixth sibling, who obtained his business administration degree from UKM. The seventh, i.e., Hasan reconnected with the IIUM chain. He is caught in the dilemma of deciding between two

different degree programmes. He was in his second or third year but must descend to first year if his plan works.

## **Matriculation**

Hasan matriculated at IIUM branch campus at Gambang, in the state of Pahang. The matriculation centre is located about 28 km or 30-minute drive from the Bandar Indera Mahkota (also referred to as Kuantan) campus. The main campus of IIUM is situated in Gombak, Selangor about 237km or 2 and ½ hr drive.

Unlike all his siblings who studied in the art field, Hasan was the only one who chose science. Since he was a kid, he was convinced that the science majors, especially medicine, provide the greatest contribution to society and have higher reputation compared to the others. Hasan grew up with such belief and never considered any other fields besides medicine. Hence, being a medical doctor became his ultimate career. Thus, after completing SPM, he matriculated in MBBS programme at IIUM Centre of Foundation Studies (CFS), Gambang in 2019. He excelled in his foundation program by earning 3.88 CGPA in 2020.

Despite his achievement in the medical foundation program, Hasan did not have a fairly good idea about the field of medicine. All he wanted to achieve was to become a medical doctor. He noticed that some of his classmates in the same programme, seemed to have a good idea about the field of medicine.

Hasan reminisced about his choice of university when he submitted his online application to enroll in the country's institutions of higher learning through the Ministry of Higher Education portal.

His first choice was IIUM because all his family members, including his parents are familiar with the University. His father graduated from UM (Universiti Malaya), whereas his mother graduated from UTM (Universiti Teknologi Malaysia) and a university in the United Kingdom. His second choice was Universiti Malaya, a reputable university in the country, where his mother teaches. He was aware of the competition with other applicants in the medical program even if he could complete UM's matriculation programme. His third choice was Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), another reputable public university.

Hasan's parents only advised him to choose MBBS because of the potential that they saw in him. In addition, they were also hoping that one of their children could be a medical doctor in the future. Parental wishes gave extra motivation to Hasan to prove to his parents and family that he could be a doctor.

## **High School**

Hasan's education at lower and upper secondary schools were related to the sciences. He attended SMK Saujana Utama, Sungai Buloh for his Form 1- Form 3 because the school was located near to Hasan's house. It was a public school that also offered. He was in the first class of the school with addition KAA (Kelas Aliran Agama, religious studies stream). He had to take Arabic and *Qiraat* besides other PT3 papers. He completed his PT3 (previously known as PMR) and with excellent results he got admission to a boarding school MRSM Taiping for his Form 4-Form 5 education. (MRSM refers to Maktab Rendah Sains MARA). He enrolled in the science stream at MRSM. He grew up focusing on sciences.

Hasan was an active member of Police Cadet from Form 1 to Form 5, but never joined any competitions. However, being a member of the Taekwondo club at MRSM, he attended regular training and participated in a few competitions among the various MRSM branches throughout Malaysia.

Hasan made a few friends within the same programme in CFS and they were successfully admitted into MBBS at the undergraduate level. During his matriculation, he used to study with them almost every day at the library and Student Centre.

### **Matric. Vs. Undergraduate**

At matric level, Hasan studied the basic science subjects like physics, biology, mathematics, statistics, and chemistry. He managed to do well in all of the subjects. score well for every subject. The study group was helpful to make him complete all his assignments, perform necessary revisions. He used to spend most of his time at the library doing his assignments.

During his last semester in CFS, Covid-19 pandemic arrived in Malaysia. Students vacated the campus and returned home to study online. The Covid-19 environment did not affect his studies that much because it was towards the end of the last semester. Hasan obtained high CGPA and managed to get into MBBS programme at IIUM Kuantan. It was still under Covid-19 pandemic, and he studied from home. He discovered that the methods to study the undergraduate subjects were different compared with the subjects that he studied at CFS. The undergraduate subjects seemed conceptual. He studied alone and did not get the opportunity to study in groups like he used to do during matriculation.

### **Undergraduate Performance**

In the first year of his undergraduate studies, he passed his papers because the examination formats during covid-19 outbreak were relatively easier to score. Moving to his second year (session 2021/2022), the exams reverted to the normal format. He had to struggle to study and face the exams. When he attended the physical classes, he could not comprehend much. He did not make adequate preparations for his tests and exams.

Hasan became very demotivated. He thought that his poor performance was not due so much to lack of motivation than his declining interest in becoming a medical doctor. Although he endured his classes and activities in the programme, but he kept saying to himself that he really couldn't see himself in the whitecoat treating patients. With all the predicament, he lost all motivations to even study, and consequently failed his repeated papers. He was worried about his future and the disappointments that he inflicted on his parents.

Hasan's concern was to fulfill the wish of his parents that one of the family members would become a medical doctor.

#### *1st Year performance*

It was during Covid-19 era. The formats of assignment and examinations were relatively easy because they used multiple-choice format. As a result, he managed to score all his 4 blocks in his 1<sup>st</sup> Year in MBBS. Hasan studied to pass his examinations, not so much to achieve the zeal of becoming a doctor. He realized that studying the subjects had been a burden, not a

source of enjoyment. He suppressed all his emotions and eagerness of becoming a doctor at that time.

The MBBS uses blocks system instead of semesters system. But the results for 4 blocks will impact the total result for that current year of study. Each year of the study level has 4 blocks that are approximately equivalent to 2 semesters. Usually, 2 semesters are equal to 1 year (assuming a student does not take a short semester or 3<sup>rd</sup> semester in that year). Failing more than 1 block in one particular year required the failed student to repeat the whole year of study. For example, in Year 2, Hasan passed Block 2 only and failed Block 1, Block 3 and Block 4, Hence, he was required to repeat his Year 2 studies.

### *2nd Year performance*

Year 2 resumed the typical face-to-face semester. Lectures, assignments, and exams were administered the usual way. Returning to normal mode of studies gave Hasan a shock since it was his first time studying the MBBS subjects under that mode. He tried to study with his friends, but he was out of focus. Each class bombarded him with information overload; he could not digest his lessons well.

And that time, he could not answer the examination papers like what he could in his previous Year 1. Exam questions comprised essays, subjective questions and multiple-choice. He failed 3 out of 4 blocks in Year 2. Hence, he needed to repeat the whole Year 2 while his friends were all going into Year 3.

He felt pressured. He discussed his situation with his family and some lecturers. At first, he considered to change from MBBS to another programme, like dentistry. Due to quota and other factors, Hasan decided to repeat his 2<sup>nd</sup> year. He was confident that if he really focused on the lectures, he could pass his exams. He repeated his Year 2 with a new spirit.

### *3rd Year (Repeating 2<sup>nd</sup> Year) performance*

He wrote notes of lectures and submitted his homework. However, this spirit did not last long. He really could not comprehend the lectures. Hasan could endure his first hour lecture of the day, but lost focus when he attended the second class. Upon finishing 2 blocks of the year, the results showed that he failed those blocks.

## **Identifying Alternatives**

By this time, Hasan concluded that medicine is not for him. He was not fit to be in MBBS.

He decided to change his programme within university but after reading the rules and regulations of CoP (Change of Programme) in IIUM, he found out that he was not eligible to apply for it anymore since he had already exceeded the credit hours. None of the officers from his faculty could give him definite answers that he could succeed if he applied to change to another academic programme. Hasan was very worried that if he stayed in the faculty, he would be dismissed and give him a bad record.

He was considering applying through UPU, but to do this, he would have to withdraw from his current university to be eligible to apply. He already put away all of his thoughts of MBBS and wanted to proceed with the withdrawal. He was also concerned about increasing

MARA educational loan burdens if he stayed on the programme any longer. Withdrawing from the programme soon will allow him to stop increasing the amount of the loan.

With all the issues in mind, Hasan decided to withdraw from the university as soon as possible, around March 2023. He needed time and space to plan his next move – choosing courses and universities. New student intake in all public universities takes place in October.

Initially, he wanted to stay in the fields of science and biology field due to his secondary school education. But, after obtaining advice from some relatives he wanted to try something new related to economics. Hasan's good scores in SPM and CFS IIUM make him eligible to apply for the field. He did some reading and concluded that he liked it. The field is marketability of the field and not as harsh as medicine.

He surveyed some public universities like UiTM, UM and UKM but learned that they could not take students with IIUM CFS certificate because the certificate was only valid for IIUM or private universities, like UNITEN.

Hasan obtained some advice from one of the faculty's administrators who said that he could make a direct application as a new student of IIUM. It is the prerogative of the admissions office to process his application with strong supporting documents.

Hasan drafted his appeal letter and requested his father's friend who is lecturer of his target faculty to review and give feedback on the letter.

He submitted his application and appeal letter to the admissions office on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2023. Upon his telephone inquiry, the admissions officer said that she would invite Hasan to come to campus for an interview if she is satisfied with his application and appeal letter. Hassan will be notified of the interview in 2 days. The admissions office notified Hassan on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2023 to attend the interview on 10<sup>th</sup> August.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1 Hasn't Hasan wasted his time both at matriculation and in the MBBS programme? Take a position and justify.

2 What positive benefit has Hasan obtained after going through the two academic programmes? Discuss only one point.

3 How do you reconcile Hassan's original choice and his parents' wish to have a medical doctor in the family? In what way might the decision affect Hasan's future careers? In what way does the predicament become a blessing in disguise for Hassan and his parents?

4 Do you think that the secondary schools and the matriculation centres have provided adequate career guidance to students so that the students become better informed of their choice of degree programmes, career choices, and their inclinations? Take a position and justify by offering only one argument.

5 If you were the Dean of matriculation centre, explain what would you do to provide career guidance to your students? Please discuss four (4) initiatives.