

Triple Threat: The Inspiring Story Of A Student, Mother, And Entrepreneur

Author: Raja Rosnah Raja Daud, Munirah Mahshar

Prologue

It was a quiet night in July 2021. The clock on the wall showed it was past 10 PM. Syahira sat at her small desk, typing away on her laptop, trying to finish an assignment due the next morning. Her room was dimly lit, and the only sound was the soft clicking of her keyboard. From behind her, she heard small footsteps. Her four-year-old son, Aisy Akhtar, appeared at the doorway, holding his stuffed toy close.

"Mommy, I can't sleep," he mumbled, rubbing his eyes.

Syahira turned to him with a tired but loving smile. *"It's bedtime, Aisy. You need to get some rest,"* she said gently.

Aisy walked over, resting his head on her arm. *"But I want to stay with you,"* he whispered, his voice sleepy but stubborn.

Syahira stroked his hair softly. *"I know, sweetheart. But I have to finish my assignment. How about you go lie down, and I'll come tuck you in as soon as I'm done, okay?"*

Syahira found herself constantly struggling to keep up with the demands of her life. As a young mother, a full-time student, and an entrepreneur, her days often felt like a race against the clock. Time management became her biggest struggle. No matter how hard she tried to organize her day, something always seemed to spill over into the next. Her nights stretched longer as she stayed up past midnight to finish her university work. She rarely had time for herself, and the constant juggling left her feeling overwhelmed and fatigued.

Syahira knew she was doing her best, but the weight of managing everything often left her questioning if it was enough. It was a battle to find balance between being a good mother, a dedicated student, and a successful businesswoman, and some days, it seemed impossible to do it all.

THE AUTHORS

Raja Rosnah Raja Daud and Munirah Mahshar are based at the Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia.

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Disclaimer

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Starting Point

Siti Nur Syahira binti Abdullah Kasim was born in 1997 at Pasir Mas, Kelantan. During her secondary school in 2005, Syahira stood out not just for her academic achievements but for her entrepreneurial spirit. From an early age, she exhibited a remarkable drive and creativity that set her apart from her peers. Syahira's entrepreneurial journey began with a simple yet brilliant idea: selling school stuffs to her classmates. Observing the frequent need for various items among her classmates, she realized that there was an opportunity to meet this demand while indulging in her own entrepreneurial ambitions as well as start her saving. Syahira bought these stuffs at a stationary shop, using her own pocket money and re-sell them to her classmates. She offered a variety of colourful notebooks, trendy pens, and handy organizers, each item chosen to make the school experience a little more enjoyable.

Her entrepreneurial spirit continued when she pursued a degree at Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) in 2018. She opened a stall in campus, selling food such as oden, soft drinks and sweet corn. This venture allowed her to cater to the student community, gaining firsthand experience in managing a food business while further developing her skills.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 spurred a significant rise in her passion for cooking into a viable home-based business. Her first step was to invest in a bread maker—a versatile tool that promised both practical and creative possibilities. With her new equipment, Syahira began experimenting with bread dough, mastering the art of baking from the comfort of her own kitchen. This initial foray into home baking provided a sense of accomplishment and a tangible way to channel her energy and creativity. As she honed her bread-making skills, Syahira's thoughts naturally turned to other culinary pursuits. Drawing on her love for cooking and her background in traditional recipes, she decided to venture into making homemade pizza. Using her own carefully crafted recipes, she started creating pizzas that blended fresh ingredients with unique flavors, offering a taste of comfort and quality that resonated deeply with her family and friends. This initial foray into baking quickly evolved into a larger venture as Syahira used her newfound skills to create homemade pizzas from her own recipes. The pandemic's constraints catalyzed her entrepreneurial journey, allowing her to turn a personal passion into a successful business that could be managed from the safety and comfort of her home.



Figure 1: Picture of Siti Nur Syahira

Business Ups And Downs

In 2021, Syahira decided to establish Syahira Food Trading company, driven by a combination of strategic investments and a deep understanding of market demands. When she embarked on her venture to make homemade pizza, the path was far from smooth. Despite her enthusiasm and commitment, she encountered numerous obstacles, particularly in perfecting her pizza recipe. Each trial presented its own set of difficulties, from achieving the right balance of flavours to mastering the texture of the crust. It took Syahira four attempts to finally create a pizza that met her high standards. Remarkably, she achieved this milestone without the benefit of formal baking classes, relying solely on her determination and a willingness to learn from each failed attempt.

The initial stage of promoting her pizza in early was equally challenging. Syahira took a hands-on approach by setting up a small stall at Pantai Kemayang, Bachok on weekends. With limited resources and no established brand presence, she personally reached out to passersby, introducing her product one person at a time. Her efforts resulted in selling 8 out of 30 boxes, a modest success that highlighted both the potential of her product and the hurdles of a competitive market. Each sale was a hard-earned victory, demonstrating the demand for her homemade pizza while also underscoring the need for strategic marketing and outreach.

Fortunately, at the end of 2021, she received a substantial boost from government support, securing a grant of RM15,000, complemented by RM8,000 from RISDA. These funds played a crucial role in setting up the operations and expanding the business capabilities. The business then achieving an impressive sales volume of 150 boxes of pizza per day. The menu's appeal is further amplified by offering 13 distinct pizza flavors, catering to diverse customer preferences and contributing to high customer satisfaction.



Figure 2: Variety of Mami Sya's Pizza



Figure 3: Syahira received a grant from RISDA

A Race Against The Clock

Syahira found herself caught in a relentless cycle of juggling multiple roles, each demanding her full attention and energy. As a young mother, student, and entrepreneur, she struggled to manage her time effectively amidst the growing pressures of her responsibilities. Each day, her schedule was packed with lectures, assignments, and business tasks, all while ensuring she could be there for her four-year-old son, Aisy Akhtar.

Her mornings began early, often before the sun was up, as she prepared for a full day ahead. Mornings were dedicated to attending classes and tackling academic assignments. Syahira would then shift her focus to her business, Syahira Food Trading at 10 A.M, where she had to handle everything from order preparation to inventory management. This required not only time but also a significant amount of creative energy and organizational skill. Despite her best efforts, she frequently found herself working late into the night, trying to complete assignments and manage business orders simultaneously.

Balancing these responsibilities left Syahira with little personal time or rest. Evenings were often a whirlwind of trying to meet deadlines, while Aisy's needs for attention, playtime, and bedtime routines added another layer of complexity. The stress of trying to maintain high standards in her academic work and business operations while fulfilling her role as a mother led to many sleepless nights and feelings of burnout. Syahira's struggle was not just about finding enough hours in the day, but also about managing her energy and focus across her numerous roles. The constant balancing act often left her feeling stretched thin, struggling to maintain a semblance of balance in her demanding life.

Women Entrepreneurs Problems In Malaysia

Women entrepreneurs in Malaysia often face significant challenges with time management due to the multifaceted roles they juggle. Balancing the demands of running a business while fulfilling family responsibilities can be particularly taxing. Many Malaysian women entrepreneurs find themselves struggling to allocate sufficient time for their business activities, domestic chores, and family care. This often leads to long working hours and high levels of stress as they attempt to meet the needs of their business, maintain their household, and spend quality time with their loved ones.

Another major issue is the lack of support systems that can help manage these competing responsibilities. While some women entrepreneurs might have access to family support or domestic help, this is not universally available. The absence of affordable childcare or reliable domestic help can further exacerbate the difficulty of managing a business and family life simultaneously. This gap in support resources means that many women entrepreneurs are left to handle multiple roles on their own, increasing the pressure on their time management skills.

Moreover, societal expectations can add to the challenge. In Malaysia, traditional roles often expect women to take on the majority of household and caregiving responsibilities. These expectations can lead to an uneven distribution of household chores and parenting duties, placing an additional burden on women entrepreneurs. As they strive to break through these traditional barriers and succeed in their business ventures, they must also navigate these entrenched societal norms, which can complicate their ability to effectively manage their time.

Lastly, the pressure to maintain a work-life balance can lead to burnout. With the constant need to juggle business tasks, family commitments, and personal time, women entrepreneurs may find themselves overwhelmed. This burnout can affect their productivity, decision-making, and overall well-being. Addressing these time management challenges requires a combination of better support systems, flexible work arrangements, and societal shifts in recognizing and valuing the dual roles that many women entrepreneurs play.

Epilogue

As Syahira faced the culmination of her relentless struggle with time management, she stood at a crossroads. The demands of her business, academic responsibilities, and her role as a mother had reached a tipping point, leaving her feeling exhausted and overwhelmed. In her moment of reflection, she realized that she needed to make a change. One option was to delegate more responsibilities within her business, such as hiring a part-time assistant or outsourcing certain tasks, which would free up valuable time for her studies and family life. Alternatively, she could consider restructuring her academic commitments, perhaps by opting for part-time study or night classes, to better align with her business schedule and parenting duties. Both paths offered potential relief, but each required careful consideration of her long-term goals and immediate needs.