



Master twice over

Keep learning or become obsolete, says Ms Chua Gek Huay, who is pursuing her second master's degree.

■ *By* CINDY TONG

If there were an award for Super Mum, Ms Chua Gek Huay (left) would probably win it hands down.

The mother of two juggles family life with her studies so well that she can afford to pursue a second master's degree. And her quest for knowledge ranks so high on her list of priorities that she insisted on sitting for her end-of-semester examinations just four days after delivering her second child.

The scholarship recipient of the Bioinformatics

Institute, a research institute under the Agency for Science Technology and Research (A*star), has an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. As she put it, "keep learning or become obsolete".

She attributed this to her family background. "My father has only had primary school education, but knows so much. He can even explain physics theories to me. I feel it would be a shame if I didn't make use of all the opportunities I've had to learn even more."

She has already put that belief into practice, choosing to enter a mas-

ter's programme in bioinformatics despite a solid background in engineering.

Bioinformatics is a subject under the life sciences that combines biology, computing, mathematics and statistics. It involves the use of information technology to seek out similarities in gene sequences. This information facilitates the creation of customised drugs to treat individual illnesses.

Said Ms Chua: "I already have a master's and bachelor's degree in engineering. But what I was really interested in was

biology. Besides, there's been this sudden shift and everybody's talking about the life sciences."

The course has been challenging for the petite 29-year-old as she had no prior knowledge of biology. She said: "My training in engineering equipped me with an analytical mind, and that helps."

This gutsy lady is determined she will ride out the storm. She said: "I have had to do a lot of reading on my own, but there are plenty of resources available."

"Besides, there are seminars, study sessions with lecturers and journal

clubs, where we discuss articles on the latest technology.

"In such an environment, I've been able to learn very quickly. You are immersed in the subject and you tend to pick up new terms and concepts more easily. Besides, everybody wants to share and learn."

Her willingness to learn has definitely contributed to her progress. She believes it is also one of the reasons she was accepted into the scholarship programme.

She explained: "During the selection process, I was already halfway into

my pregnancy. Who would want to invest time and money in someone who might not even complete the course? I'm just grateful that I wasn't discriminated against."

Given her enthusiasm, it seems almost certain that Ms Chua will go far. In fact, she already has big dreams for her future.

"My ambition is to be a lecturer or a researcher. But I'm open to all kinds of possibilities, such as contributing in any way I can to finding a cure for diseases. If not, it's up to me to pass down my knowledge for the good of future generations."