

## MASS COMMUNICATION AND JOURNALISM EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

Mohd Hamdan Adnan

Mass communication and journalism education including training have now gained acceptability and recognition among the institutions of higher learning and professional organisations in Malaysia. Currently, out of the seven universities in the country, only the International Islamic University is not offering any kind of communication courses. Today, five universities or colleges offer degree courses in mass communication which include areas of specialization in the professional field like journalism, public relations, advertising, broadcasting and the like. Professional and training organisations relating to communication have also established their own training programmes. The big newspaper companies and established public relations and advertising agencies have also set up their own in-house training schemes. In 1987 the School of Mass Communication, MARA Institute of Technology introduced a four-year diploma programme in Journalism and Public Relations for people working in the communication industry. This is recognised by the Malaysian Government as equivalent to a general degree. Four of the universities offering communication degrees provide short courses meant for civil servants and organisations. In 1986, the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia introduced a correspondence course leading to a certificate.

A correspondence course in communication is welcome, since with the exception of the Science University of Malaysia, the rest of the institutions conducted courses' in the Kuala Lumpur area.

Communication education and training at tertiary level has a rather astonishing growth. Academicians and professional communicators believed that communication practitioners needed good training and experience. Before the 70s nearly all journalists and editors, public relations and advertising professionals, and broadcasters have come up in the traditional hard way. However, perceptions changed. Moreover, the mass communication industry has become very competitive. Malaysia, with 16 million people, is served by over 76 newspapers in more than seven languages. Magazines have also proliferated and there are now three television channels, including a private station. The public relations and advertising agencies are also becoming very competitive. All these mean that the mass communication industry requires personnel, adequately educated or trained in its field. Moreover, Malaysian readers and audiences are now better educated and, therefore, expect good quality mass media contents.

The privatisation of the electronic and telecommunication sector also create the need for managerial skills. New technologies have revolutionized newspaper operations. The New Straits Times and the Star have computerized their newsroom. Bernama the national news agency, has one of the best computerized information systems in Asia. The Utusan Group is planning on this line, too.

Professional and training organisations such as the Institute Public Relations of Malaysia has been trying to ensure that only qualified persons can practice public relations through a licensing scheme. However, this effort has yet to bear fruit.

The effort to increase the number communication educators by the institutions of

higher learning was by embarking on an extensive, government-supported programme of sending promising academic staff abroad for their master' and doctoral degrees. At the same time, they produced local journals and books on mass communication. These academic publications are *Sasaran* and *Forum Komunikasi (ITM)*, *Malaysian Journalism Review (USM)*, and *Jurnal Komunikasi (UKM)*.

These developments contributed to the popularity and recognition of mass communication education and training in Malaysia.

However, as Malaysia does not have a national communication policy to provide guidelines for communication education, institutions engaging in communication teaching and training have more or less developed according to their own needs and interests.

Mass communication education in Malaysia began in 1971 at the *Universiti Sains Malaysia* with the introduction of the Communication Programme in the School of Humanities. Soon the School of Mass Communication was started a year later in July 1972 at the *Institute Technology Mara*.

The University of Malaya had contemplated introducing such a programme in 1969, but it fell short of justifying its establishment. Three years later, however UM's English Department initiated a small media research unit generally focusing its attention on literary analysis, especially content analysis, to mass communication. Students worked on a project on the profile of the media in Malaysia.

John Lent, the former USM communication programme coordinator, revealed that the programme was initiated with very little planning. In the beginning they suffered for want of the bare essentials such as permanent staff, a building and equipment, library resources and a well-defined curriculum. The Part-time faculty members were recruited from among the professionals of SEAPC, AMIC and CEPTA-TV in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. They provided courses on "Writing for Mass Media" (I and II), "Audio Visual Media" (I and II), "Mass Communication" (I and II) and "Mass Media in Education and Development." Students were required to enroll in three years of quantitative methods, to be bi-lingual, to participate in week-long field trips to Kuala Lumpur media organisations and serve an internship.

The curriculum at USM emphasized mass media skills, international and comparative communication, and cultural approaches to communication and development communication. A third of all courses dealt with writing, editing, broadcast production and directing skills. Second year students were to be generalists in communications, taking four such courses, while those in the third year were to be specialists in one of four core areas - print, broadcast, research or general.

In 1982 the communication curriculum was integrated into a Master Plan as the communication programme was already able to provide professional training. In order to expand, a degree programme in communication was proposed to be established for the 1984/85 academic session.

As for ITM's School of Mass Communication, formed in July 1972, a report by Ralph Kiesch of Ohio University found that there was an urgent need to initiate a Mass Communication programme and the setting-up of a school. It started off with three areas of specialization - journalism, public relations and advertising. Then in the following year broadcasting was introduced.

The ITM's School of Mass Communication has been based on the American model. Its semester system with a credit-hour rating for courses, requires students to complete 134

semester hours over a minimum of six semesters. Continuous assessment is based on Grade Point Average (G.P.A.) evaluation.

The ITM's School of Mass Communication was initially composed of three cores - language, liberal and professional specialization. Its student population has increased from forty-two to nearly 700, excluding the evening classes students, the number of teaching staff from five to more than thirty-five. The number of graduates has increased from 26 in 1975 to a cumulative total of 724 in 1987. Since 1980, student intake was twice a year, in January and in July.

The third institution offering a mass communication programme is the National University of Malaysia. Its Department of Communication was born out of the UKM sponsoring committee report in 1969. It mentioned on the need of UKM to offer courses in journalism.

The Department follows a major and a minor system. Students take mass communication as part of their general or honours degree in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. The award of honours degree is determined by the 3-2-2-1 system. Students enrol in three departments in the first year and continues in two departments in the second and third year and majoring in one department in the final year.

In 1979, the fourth institution, the Agriculture University of Malaysia, established the Department of Development Communication under the Centre for Extension Education and Continuing Education. It was realized that the field of development communication is a vital and growing academic discipline, with practical applications, particularly in developing countries.

At UPM, a credit-hour system is also used. More than twenty courses are offered, ranging from diploma to degree and postgraduate levels. At diploma and undergraduate levels, the Department services other disciplines but does not award its own degree. It only offers a Master of Science programme and a Doctor of Philosophy programme to qualified individuals with Bachelor's or Master's degrees from universities and colleges approved by UPM. The Department has had students from Nepal, Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia. Courses are conducted in English, except when enrolment in a particular course is all Malaysians, in which case the course is conducted in the national language.

The University of Malaya initially offered communication courses at the Department of Malay Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The programme aims at upgrading the quality of writing whether it is in the descriptive or creative forms. In 1988 this was upgraded into the Department of Writing and courses in publishing master's at level were planned to be offered.

UM was the first university in Malaysia, established along British traditions and, therefore, followed British patterns of formal education. However, since vast majority of lecturers in the other institutions being American-trained, courses, textbooks and resource materials are largely American based. For instance, "I.T.M., which has a school of mass communication in the country is a blend between British and American influence. Although it was initially set up along the lines of a British polytechnic, it has adopted many features of the American educational system, such as continuous assessment and the semester system," (Lent, 1988: 110).

Further, while the national language is the main medium of instruction, in all institutions the importance of mastering the English language is stressed as the key to improve international and cross-cultural communication.

The five institutions offering communication education expand in line with government policy. Table 1 indicates the projected enrolment in mass communication education and training programmes.

**TABLE 1:**  
ENROLMENT OF STUDENTS OF MASS COMMUNICATION IN MALAYSIAN

YEAR	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	TOTAL
INSTITUTIONS								
USM	115	185	270	305	370	385	385	1,980
ITM	220	240	300	310	310	310	310	2,000
UKM	160	160	180	180	180	190	190	1,240
UPM	30	30	30	30	30	30	210	
UM	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	210
TOTAL	555	645	810	855	900	940	955	5,660

## PROFILE

### Philosophy

The philosophy of the of the mass communication education in USM more-or-less sums up the philosophy of communication education in Malaysian universities. It clearly stated that it was established to provide a broad-based education that will meet the manpower needs of Malaysia. To meet this philosophy, a multi-prong approach was adopted. They are:

**Multidisciplinary Approach:** This is adopted in the course packages prepared for the students whereby it is recognized that communication education integrates other disciplines as well;

**Liberal Approach:** Although students major in communication, they are encouraged to enroll in courses that are offered by other programme of studies in the university; and

**Integrated Approach:** Courses offered by the communication Programme incorporate theoretical and practical components in order to provide real situation learning for the students.

### Objectives

In term of objectives there are some variations among the various institutions offering communication education. This is inevitable because the Ministry of Education is very sensitive to duplication of courses among the institutions of higher learning because it could lead to dilution of manpower and financial resources. Any application for courses must be submitted to the Ministry for approval. Some of the common objectives include:

1. To prepare students for employment in communication-related professions.
2. To inculcate skills in handling and organising the mass media.
3. To increase public awareness on the potential of mass media and the importance of effective communication.
4. To assist the development of national communication system through research and consultancy.
5. To provide communication support to all development efforts of the government.

As for UPM, Department of Development Communication emphasises on extension and continuing education. Its objectives are:

1. To conduct communication courses for UPM's students.
2. To support the extension activities of the university by producing publications for extension personnel of development agencies and farmers.
3. To conduct extension courses for trainees of in-service trainings organised by UPM or development agencies.
4. To produce audio visual aids in development communication and extension for students, lecturers, personnel as well as trainees of development agencies, and
5. To conduct consultancies in the field of development communication for development agencies.

### Status And Location Of Unit

Of the five, only ITM's School of Mass Communication is an independent unit within its own organisation. The Head of School reports directly to the Director of ITM or to the Deputy Director of Academic and Students Affairs.

The Schools or Department of Communication in the four universities are located under a bigger unit. USM's communication programme, for example, is located under the School of Humanities. The coordinator of the programme is the Deputy Dean of the School of Humanities. For each of the four area of specialization there is a programme chairman whose duties are to ensure that the courses are being conducted well.

UM's Head of Department of Writing reports to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and not directly to the Vice Chancellor of the university.

The Head of the Department of Communication in UKM also reports to the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. For each of its course majors it has a coordinator.

UPM's the Department of Development Communication head is directly responsible to the Director of the Centre For Extension and Continuing Education.

### Degrees

Of the five institutions of higher learning offering mass communication degrees, four offer a first degree programme while the remaining one (UPM) offers undergraduate courses in communication though not awarding a first degree. UPM, however, has requested the Ministry of Education to have the authority to award an undergraduate degree in communication. USM now awards the Bachelor of Communication specializing in one of its four major disciplines: a. Mass Communication, b. Film and Television, c. Development Communication and d. Management Communication. Both UKM and UM award the Bachelor of Art degree in its respective field. ITM's School of Mass Communication degree is equivalent to a general degree. In a way it is more of a professional award. It had submitted proposals to the Education Ministry to begin an advance diploma equivalent to an honours degree as well as a master of communication twinning with an American university. All of the universities, except for USM, offer graduate programme in communication. UM began its post-graduate programme in 1977 with six MA and two doctoral students. UPM introduced its Master of Science (Development Communication) in 1979 with only one student. In 1984 it began its Doctor of Philosophy (Development Communication) with two students. Now it has further introduced Master of Science in Public Relations, Organizational Communication and Development Journalism. At the doctoral level it has added Organizational Communication and Development Journalism.

UKM began both its Master of Art and Doctor of Philosophy programme in 1986 with six students. Communication undergraduates specialize in their chosen field only at the fourth year. However, students must start planning for the area of their choice beginning at the end of their first year itself as pre requisites must be met by the students concerned. The areas of specialization are journalism, broadcasting, film, public relations, advertising and development communication.

Judging from the objectives of the communication education and the first degrees

offered, it can be concluded that the programmes at USM, and especially at ITM, are of the specialist types, while at UKM and UM slightly more generalist.

The graduate programme at UPM can be considered as the specialist type since the doctoral and master programme do have an area of specialisation unlike UKM where it is a general programme with concentration of study in the field of communication.

### Non-formal Training

All the five institutions offering communication programmes are involved in non-formal training in one way or the other. However, the most active is UPM in line with its stated objectives, and the by virtue of fact that it is located in the Centre for Extension and Continuing Education. It conducts in-service training twice per month, organises seminar/workshop on development communication five to seven times a year. The topics covered include technical writing, public speaking, small media production, production of audio visual aids, basic photography, agricultural photography, interpersonal communication, public relations, meetings and chairmanship, media and methods, video production, script writing, development communication and report writing.

ITM's School of Communication organises annual seminar on current issues in mass communication, periodical workshop in journalism, public relations, advertising, photojournalism, law for journalist, public speaking and report writing.

UKM conducted about five to six workshops, seminars and conferences per year. UM's Department of Writing organises two or three seminars and conferences a year plus some writing workshop.

The USM also occasionally conducted in-service training for organisations from nearby areas.

### Entrance Requirements

Entrance requirements for entering USM, UKM and UM units for communication education are the same. Generally, universities in Malaysia require a minimum of two principal passes in the Higher School Certificates. Once admitted to the university students are usually interviewed by the relevant departments to determine their suitability to the communication programme.

Applicants to ITM's School of Mass Communication must possess the minimum qualification of a Higher School Certificate, and preferably a four-year relevant experience in the mass media.

Students enrolling for the UPM's is master's programme must have a first degree from a recognise univeristy. For its doctoral programme one needs a Master's degree.

### Research

UKM, UPM and ITM conducted research both at faculty and departmental level, while UM and USM only at faculty level. UPM listed six completed research during the year 1984 to 1986. The title includes "Factors effecting the flow of technical information between

the source and RISDA's extension agents" 1984", "Advertisement suitability and effectiveness in local women's magazines" (1984), "Media Utilization of Development Agencies" (1985). "Communication Audit: Analysis of communication behavior development agencies in Malaysia", and "Analysis of Extension information system in selected agencies." These research reflect the need of clients which are basically development oriented agencies.

As for ITM, the type of research reflects its professional approach. Some of the research completed include "Usage of BERNAMA Wire Copy by Major News Organization in Peninsular Malaysia," "A Survey of TV Viewing Habit and Preferences Among Klang Valley Residents," "A Survey of Communication Patterns and Flow Between Politicians and Civil Servants in Sabah," and "Readership Survey of Magazines published by Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka."

### Extension Services

All the five institutions conducting communication education offer extension services which include research and consultancies. UPM's extension projects include "Information Dissemination in Adopted Villages," "In-service trainings," and Extension publications."

ITM has its "Public Relations Consultancies Project" course. Its participants include town and district councils, banks and consumers associations.

The mass communication subjects, common to all sequences, are a mixture of theory-oriented subjects such as Communication Research, Interpersonal and Cross-cultural Communication and Mass Media and Society. Practical oriented courses include News Writing, Editing, Copy Writing, Advertising Campaign, Broadcast Production and Public Relations Consultancy.

As for UPM Master of Science in Communication, requirement is 30 credits, i.e. 24 for communication and 6 general education; the doctoral programme, 48 credits, 39 for communication and the rest general studies. UKM follow more or less the same system.

A full-time doctoral candidate is expected to enroll consecutively for not less than four-semester, but not more than ten semesters, He must fulfill a residential requirement of not less than four semesters.

A part-time Ph. D. candidate is normally enrolled for a minimum period of six semesters but not exceeding twelve semesters, and must fulfill a minimum equivalent of 24 credits in residence.

Each students selects an area of concentration theory and general courses specific to his field of study. This is in addition to methodology and statistics courses. Master's students must complete a thesis, and doctoral students, a dissertation.

### Internship

All the undergraduate communication programmes include six to 18 weeks practical training which earns credits. ITM makes it compulsory for students to be attached to news agencies, newspaper companies, advertising consultancies, public relations agencies, government information departments, and radio and television stations.



The main objectives is for students to apply knowledge to practical situations and to get the right exposure and experience.

UKM mass communication students must undergo eight weeks of internship with the various media organisations.

### **Evaluation**

The system of evaluation on courses, degrees and programmes varies. The University of Malaya appoints external examiners a duration of two years and evaluations are made yearly. Among USM's past advisors were Professors Herbert I. Schiller, and B.Becker, UKM evaluate its programme periodically.

At ITM's School of Mass Communication, visiting professors are requested to carefully study its curriculum, and suggest how it could be further improved. They also run courses, discuss with faculty members, review examination scripts, etc. Its Academic Advisory Committee, comprising of communication professionals and academics advises the School to ensure curriculum effectiveness.

### **Faculty**

The School of Mass Communication, ITM has the largest number of academic staff. Its 37 lecturers serve about 700 students. All of the communication qualifications of the lecturers were from the United States of America. However, there are lecturers undergoing further studies locally.

UKM and UPM have 16 communication lecturers each, three have doctorate degrees, 10 masters and the rest bachelors. One is a full professor, one associate professor, 10 lecturers and the rest tutors.

UKM's Communication Department has 13 lecturers, Department of Writing, UM, has 10 academic staff that include one professor.

The communication units in Malaysia now depend very minimally on part-timers.

### **Staff**

In term of technical support staff UPM has the most, 14 in all. These are the editor, three AVA technicians, artists, photographer, three printing technicians and extension officer. This large number reflects the service orientation of the Centre.

### **Graduates**

USM turned out its first communication graduates in 1974, but its total number for 1988 has risen to about 450. ITM produced its first 25 graduates in 1975. The number for 1988 is 881.

Department of Writing, UM, turned out its first graduates in 1980. The number has

increased from 26 to 170 in 1988.

The first batch of UKM Communication graduates turned out in the 1979-1980 session. From 13 it has increased to 291 students who graduated in 1988.

UPM turned out its first communication graduate in Master of Science in 1981 till now it had graduated four students.

### Problems and Prospects

Three of the communication units offering communication education pointed to the lack of facilities and equipments as their most pressing problems. ITM's School of Communication feels it needs more electronic facilities and equipments to service its 900 day and evening students.

UKM feels it is imperative to up-grade its video equipments as well and as UM, for acquiring publishing facilities. In terms of the number of academic staff, except for UPM, all feel they have adequate number of lecturers. Nevertheless, they need to up-grade their qualifications. The prospects of communication education in Malaysia is good as reflected by the increase in enrollment of communication students.

Communication educators in Malaysia have formed their own Association of Communication Educators which hopes to get its members together to discuss the communication curriculum in the country as well as to find ways to improve it.

### References

- Lent, John *Communication Education in Malaysia: A Retropective, Prospective and Introspective View*; *Forum Komunikasi*, published by the School of Mass Communication, Institut Teknologi Mara, Vol. 1, No. 2 Jan. 1 1988, p. 110.
- Mohd Hamdan Adnan and Sankaran Ramanathan; "Media Education and Computerisation in Malaysia," Paper at the XVth Bienial Conference of the International Association for Mass Communication Research (IAMCR), New Delhi, India, Aug. 1986.
- Curriculum Structure Bachelor of Communication Programme School of Humanities University Sains Malaysia, August 1986.
- Forum Komunikasi*: A Communication Journal; A bi-annual Journal of The School of Mass Communication, Institut Teknologi MARA.
- Information For Prospective Graduate Students: 1986/87 - 1988/1989*; Department of Development Communication, Centre for Extension and Continuing Education, UPM.
- School of Mass Communication: *The Second Decade: 1982-92*, Institut Teknologi Mara.