

## Communication Education in Malaysia: Early Days to Recent Years

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### ABSTRACT

This paper provides a historical perspective on communication studies in Malaysia since its beginning in 1970. Government policies and support in addition to institutional factors shaped the development of communication education in Malaysia. History is important for scholars of communication to understand the foundations and influences that have shaped the development of the communication field. The communication programmes in public universities were American oriented in the early years but took a Malaysian orientation later. This paper traces the first juncture when media education was first introduced, in the second juncture when it was accepted as an academic subject at the tertiary level, and the final juncture as it evolved into an internationally recognised field of study. This paper made references to newspaper and annual reports of communication influences throughout the years but highlights the opinions and comments made by early educators through a series of interviews conducted between the years 2013 to 2017. The paper then discusses the growth of the communication programmes in the universities. To conclude, a discussion of future challenges in the communication field are discussed. As communication education in Malaysia progresses, universities will face increasing pressures in terms of funding, competition and loyalty to the foundations of the field.

**Keywords:** *Communication, history, university, academic, Malaysia.*

### INTRODUCTION

Communication education has taken great strides since it was formally introduced in Malaysia some 40 years ago. Many factors have contributed toward the development of communication education in Malaysia, including government and academic support. Several scholars have discussed communication education at several forums and seminars illustrating their commitment and the challenges they faced during the early days (Ahmad Murad Merican, 1991, 2005; Asiah Sarji, 2003; Asiah Sarji & Syed Arabi, 2003; Lowe, 1982, 1984; Mohd. Hamdan Adnan, 1988).

Writing a paper on communication education over a 40-year period would pose problems in data collection, but several reliable sources proved otherwise. This paper sourced the university annual reports, newspaper archives and conducted a number of interviews with the early communication educators on the problems they faced and their comments on the present state of communication education.

Previous papers presented the development of communication education chronologically, stressing the beginning of the departments and by declaring lecturers as the first till the fourth generation (Syed Arabi, 2016). By now we are saying goodbye to the second generation and welcoming the fifth generation of communication lecturers. Previous writings had also taken a historical perspective from the colonial era down to the present time (Syed Arabi, 2000, 2008, 2014, 2016).

The present paper develops communication education in three junctures. The first juncture was communication education in the 1970s; the second juncture, the transition years, from 1980s to 2007 and the present juncture post 2008. Each juncture has its own indicators that shaped communication education in the country.

#### FIRST JUNCTURE

The first juncture were the foundation years of communication education at the professional and tertiary level in Malaysia, marking a shift from skill to academic training. Two kinds of feeling pervaded at that period of time; one was that training at the skilled level was regarded as sufficient to meet the needs of media and the second thinking was that communication was a university academic subject.

In the 1970s, the country acknowledged the role of the print and broadcasting media. The media practitioners were keen that the quality and skills of reporting be upgraded. The Malaysian Broadcasting Training Centre (a UNESCO supported project) and the Press Center (Glattbach, 1972) were offering training courses. As part of the skills training, a UNESCO supported, National Broadcasting Training Centre conducted its first course in December in 1971 by providing technical and programming training on various aspects of radio and television production (Glattbach, 1972). It was envisaged that an Asian Broadcasting Training Institute would be established as part of the development of the Training Centre. A Press Centre was at the early stage to provide training for the print media practitioners.

The beginning of the academic training posed questions and offered challenges. When STAR appeared in 1972 questions were raised whether Malaysia could afford to have three English language newspapers (besides the New Straits Times and the Straits Echo). On the other hand, the government was keen to develop the broadcasting media and in 1968 started the National News Agency, *BERNAMA*, to signal the government's commitment for greater communication programme. Such events indicated the opening up of the media industry.

The thinking was slightly different among the academics on communication or media studies. One group felt media education was a skilled programme to be taught at the technical level. Hence when offered the possibility of introducing journalism education, Universiti Malaya academic administrators rejected it and claimed it was best taught at the technical colleges. It was different in doing research on the audience and the media system where theory and methodology would be relied upon. A two-year media research pilot project was initiated at Universiti Malaya but it was short lived due to lack of support.

At the academic level, there were initiatives to formalise communication studies. The 1970s saw the establishment of five communication programmes in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) (then Universiti Pulau Pinang), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) (then Institut Teknologi MARA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, (UKM), Universiti Malaya (UM) and at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) (then Universiti Pertanian Malaysia).

The setting up of the communication programme in USM in 1970 followed by the setting up of the School of Media Studies in Institut Teknologi MARA and at UKM and at UPM were ideas derived from "the higher ups" not from the practitioners.

The then Vice-Chancellor, Professor Hamzah Sendut, initiated the communication programme at USM after UM shelved the idea of providing journalism courses. Likewise, it was the Director of ITM, Tan Sri Arshad Ayub, who conceived the idea of having a professional course in communication besides offering other professional courses in the

Institute. He realised that journalism needed a professional training. It was a similar idea when the *Majlis* of UKM agreed to the setting up of the Department of Communication to provide professional training of journalists, broadcasters, public relations and advertising.

When the offer was first made, Universiti Malaya turned it down on the premise that journalism, as a skilled course, was not appropriate to be taught at the university level. When events proved otherwise, UM later decided to set up a programme in journalism in 1976 called the Creative and Descriptive Writing Programme under the Malay Studies Department. UM had earlier planned to introduce a two-year pilot project on media research under the English Department with the help of the Southeast Asia Press Centre and Survey Research Malaysia (Glattbach, 1972). A pilot Media Research Group was set up in the Department of English, Universiti Malaya in 1972 (Grenfell, 1979) but the idea on the setting up of a Department or a Unit of Communication was not followed through to make it a reality at the primer institution. The South East Asia Centre and Survey Research Malaysia cooperated with UM in the project.

USM accepted the opportunity and placed the communication programme in 1970 under the School of Cultural and Community Studies until it was renamed in December 1971 as the School of Humanities (Universiti Sains Malaysia Laporan Tahunan Ketiga, 1971/72). When the programme started in June 1971, the Dean of the School of Humanities, Prof Van Niel said early support came from outside. Dr. Lakshman Rao, Asian Mass Communication and Information Centre from Singapore and Mr. Lau Cam Cheng, University of Malaya, Faculty of Education lecturer were the lecturers to help. Mr. Jack Glattbach and Mr. Mike Anderson of the Southeast Asian Press Centre taught basic journalism and media writing courses.

Being a new field, the university sought the services of an expatriate. Dr. John Lent who was its first head then called Chairman of Programme. The Communication programme started off with two full-time (John Lent and Vincent Lowe) and four part-time staff members. The first postgraduate programme began in 1993 with the registration of three students. External assessors to the School included Tony Wilson, Majid Tahrarian, Herbert Schiller and James Curren.

The second public university to offer communication courses was *Kajian Sebaran Am* (Mass Communication studies) (now Faculty of Communication and Media Studies) at UiTM with an intake of 30 students in July 1972, in three sequences: journalism, public relations and advertising. It started its postgraduate programme in July 1996 with 16 Malaysians registered as students (interview with Sankaran, 2016).

Arshad Ayub who strategically thought of communication as professionally oriented tapped the expertise of Ohio University. The course was designed by Dr. Ralph Kliesch, of the School of Journalism at Ohio University after he had spent four months at ITM working on the feasibility study of the Institute having a communication school (Glattbach, 1972). Later academicians said they were also instrumental in adapting the courses to have a Malaysian orientation but the early communication educators with ITM admittedly groomed the course to be American oriented in the early years (Sankaran, 2016; Shahreen, 2016).

The program at UiTM became the Faculty of Communication and Multimedia with Marina Samad as its first dean followed by Shahreen Kamaluddin. Shahreen, as the Second Dean, remembers well the changes made in the curriculum to make it sensitive to the needs of the media industry. The Faculty was the first to introduce separate majors with a focus on its professional courses. The Faculty worked well with the professional concept with the

support given by the visionary Director, Arshad Ayob (Shahreen Kamaluddin, 2016). While students in the other universities had their courses watered with liberal arts content, UiTM communication students had lots of opportunities to do practical and professional specialisation.

UKM was the third university to have a Department of Communication in 1975 with four sequences: advertising, public relations, journalism and development communication. The first intake of a postgraduate student was in 1986.

The Department of Development Communication at the then Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM) initially offered diploma level and later the postgraduate level courses under the Centre for Education and Extension Studies. The Department of Development Communication's postgraduate courses had a concentration in communication with the farmers and matters of land and farming. Later, the new Department of Communication started offering undergraduate courses in four concentrations: broadcasting, journalism, corporate communication and human communications. Development Communication was offered as a specialisation at the masters level, but this was later to level off when there was no more enrolment of postgraduate students (interview with Prof. Dr. Abdul Muati @ Zamri Ahmad, 2014).

In 1978, a unit called *Penulisan Deskriptif* was created at UM with the intention of stimulating good writing and thinking in language. It was later in 1978 that *Jabatan Penulisan Kreatif dan Deskriptif* (Department of Creative and Descriptive Writing) was set up. The university was keen to set up the Media Studies Department but the Ministry of Education, the approving authority, rejected it because other universities were offering similar courses (interview with Bakar Hamid, 2016).

The Department offered three courses during the first year: language, introduction to the creative writing and media organisation. There were support from the media practitioners such as the well-known linguist, Asyraf Abdul Wahab, Salleh Daud, Editor in Chief (*BERNAMA*), columnist Adibah Amin from NSTP and Azah Aziz from *Utusan Malaysia*. Several indicators are to be noted:

1. Communication was a new academic programme introduced at the tertiary level. Malaysian universities had been offering other social sciences/humanities such as history, geography, political science, Malay, Chinese, English and Indian studies, sociology and anthropology but communication was not readily accepted. The government was also looking for new courses away from the traditional subjects like history or geography and found communication that could contribute toward the development of the country.
2. Public universities were able to teach communication because private institutions were not allowed to offer degree level courses in accordance with the University and University Colleges Act, 1971. During the 1970s, the government was setting up universities to cater for the needs of its citizens. The government, in its desire to have more Malaysians with degrees, established many universities in 1970s and also started sending many Malaysians to obtain their tertiary education overseas.
3. The government embarked on a training scheme by sending thousands of Malaysians to obtain degrees in higher education overseas and hence made them to qualify as lecturers upon their return to the country. This made possible for USM, UKM, UiTM and UPM to send their tutors, mainly to obtain degrees in the United States. UiTM had a formal arrangement to send their staff to obtain their degrees at Ohio University. Ralph

Kliesch from Ohio University and later Bernard Rubin provided direction in the design of curriculum at UiTM. Ohio University offered places for several of the academics to further their studies in the American campus (Sharifah Mariam, Hamidah Karim, and Sankaran). It was a strategy by UiTM then to link up with Ohio University to gain recognition and also to get academic help in running its programme, the credit for this initiative should be given to Tan Sri Arshad Ayub, then Director of ITM in forging a close relationship with the two institutions. Other staff later on like Mohd. Hamdan Adnan, Shahreen Kamaluddin graduated from other American universities (interview Mohd Hamdan Adnan, 2017; Shahreen, 2016).

4. Another foreign body also helped in the development of the Communication programme in USM. UNESCO helped in the establishment of the Communication programme by offering scholarships to students to further their studies. Ramli Mohamad and Karthigesu were among the two to be offered scholarships by UNESCO (interview with Dr. Ramli Mohamad, 2014). It was later that UNESCO sent Leslie Sargent, Shalton Gunaratne and Marvin Bowman to teach the programme.
5. UM utilised their own staff that were teaching in the Malay Studies Department by appointing them as lecturers to the Department of Creative and Descriptive Writing. The approach at UM was geared toward journalistic and literary writing.
6. Early lecturers did not have basic degrees in communication but, recruited as tutors, they were sent abroad thus earning them degrees in some communication field. Some had experience in broadcasting (Marina Samad, Vincent Lowe, Khartigesu, Asiah Sarji) or in journalism (Faridah Ibrahim, Farizah Jaafar, Mansoor Ahmad, Mohd. Safar Hasim), or in public relations (Syed Arabi Idid, Bebe Chooi) or were former teachers (Shahreen, Sankaran, Sharifah Mariam). Their basic degrees were in other social sciences or humanities that eventually qualified them to teach communication upon returning with their post degree qualifications. Mohd. Yusof Hussain, Mohd Fadzilah Kamsah and Saodah Wok had degrees in Agriculture before qualifying themselves by obtaining degrees in Communication at the masters and PhD levels. Knowledge in agriculture was needed as the unit of communication was placed as part of extension of the agriculture and rural development programme in UPM.
7. There were several foreign lecturers engaged to teach and be part of the administration in managing the communication programmes. In USM, the first batch of lecturers were John Lent and Vincent Lowe. It was later that UNESCO sent Leslie Sargent, Shalton Gunaratne and Marvin Bowman, in addition to Ronny Adhikarya to teach at the communication programme. Others as part time lecturers included Jack Glattbach and Mike Anderson (SEA Press Center) and Robert Bittner (Adult Education Television Singapore). John Wilhelm spent time teaching at UiTM. The foreign lecturers made possible contact with other foreign lecturers and universities among staff in USM in later years.

I came to USM in the summer of 1972. Prof Van Niel was the Dean, School of Humanities at the time, and I was invited to come to help about the communication programme, and when I came there, they already had courses, develop with a very general type of topic. So there is no specific structure to the courses. And so Van Niel tells me that he wanted me to restructure all these in Malaysian context and I said how can I do that, I

don't know anything about Malaysia. And he told me to read the Rukun Negara. Then I read very quickly and still didn't know what exactly I should be doing (John Lent, 2015).

8. Several local practitioners were active in helping the programmes. A. Samad Ismail (Straits Times) and R. Balakrishnan (Head of Radio Malaya's Indian Section; AIBD) were active in USM, as much as Bakar Ismail and Pak Sako (*Berita Harian, Utusan Melayu*), Othman Said from Department of Information or Jaafar Kamin from Department of Broadcasting were helping UKM.
9. The course outlines were drawn based on some American models, but the input was also Malaysian. John Lent was told to devise the curriculum at USM on the *Rukun Negara* but set out to have a communication programme which he deemed to be suitable for Malaysians. Ronny Adhikarya introduced the concept of Development Communication because it was the in thing then (interview with Ronny Adhikarya, 2017). UiTM's course outline was initially prepared by Dr. Ralph Kliesch of the School of Journalism at Ohio University (Glattbach, 1972). Yet early lecturers made clear that the curriculum they constructed were not wholly adopted from the universities in the West but were instead adapted and reconstructed to meet the needs of Malaysians.

To be honest with you, we followed some of the leading American universities syllabus. We have the Ohio influence, we have the influence from Boston, we have the influence from Washington. But we took (ideas) from top universities that our graduates went to (Sankaran, 2016).

Designing the course outlines with the Malaysian input was also seen in USM.

We are the first batch and when the expatriates left, we just handle the whole school (Shawaluddin Anis, 2016).

Meaning that the Malaysian staff took a second look at the courses and made them locally relevant.

10. UPM extension studies were oriented toward Development Communication. Staff were familiar with the development and extension programmes at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. The Communication Programmes in UKM and UPM were developed by locals but with the programmes orientation affected by the pioneers' early training. Syed Arabi Idid, Mohd. Yusof Hussain and Mohd. Fadzilah Kamsah were graduates of the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Later academic developments in UiTM were shaped by Shahreen Kamaluddin and Sharifah Mariam (interviews with Shahreen, Sharifah Mariam and Sankaran, 2016).
11. There was a very good support and co-operation between and among news organisations and practitioners. It was UiTM that started the practical training with the newspaper and radio/TV organisations (interview with Sharifah Mariam, 2016). Every public university were soon to follow, as practical training was found to be beneficial to the academic programme and also was an early introduction to the students in getting jobs.

12. Several textbooks used were by American scholars. The American Embassy used to donate books on communication to the libraries for the use of lecturers and students. John Lent remembered that there were donated books from, maybe USA.

We had to use the western text books because there were no text books from Malaysia. It was all very new (John Lent, 2015).

13. Universities were active in organising seminars and conferences. Ministries were cooperative in sending their personnel and in many cases were willing to sponsor some items, like lunches or dinners.
14. Early research by communication scholars, historians, sociologists, and anthropologists on communication media, public relations, broadcasting film and advertising started in the universities and were made known during seminars and conferences. There were early writings on journalism and communication in Malaysia. But they were mainly historical or were related to the relationship between media, politics and journalists. Writings were the results of historians and political scientists (Cheah Boon Kheng, 1987). The first journal on media and communication was that started by UKM, *Jurnal Komunikasi*, that came into being in 1982 and is still in existence till today (now in the name of *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*). There were also scholars from sociology and anthropology who wrote on subjects related to communication (see H. M. Dahlan & Wan Hashim, 1979).
15. There was also research conducted by foreign communication academics (John Lent, 1974; Leslie Sargent, 1975, 1976) that formed the baseline for future research on media use. The foreign lecturers brought in their contact from overseas to make communication studies known in Malaysia. Leslie Sargent, teaching at the Communication Section, USM, came out with a research report on "Communication Structure in Malaysia" in October 1976 with the help of UNESCO.
16. *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* was active with public universities to coin new terminologies in communication related fields to enable academics to teach and write papers in Malay. It was a time when the public call was high for lectures and research to be conducted in Malay. Being a new field, communication required an understanding and the introduction of new terms in Bahasa Malaysia. *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* also depended on its counterpart from Indonesia and Brunei to help develop the terminologies in communication.

#### THE SECOND JUNCTURE (1980S TILL 2004)

The second juncture saw several breaks from the past with several steps taken in moving forward. Some of the departments that were established in the early 1970s were elevated to a faculty status and the new departments of communication found a different orientation in their programmes.

Matters became more settled for communication education in Malaysia in the 1980s. Universities were willing to accept communication as an academic subject relevant at the tertiary level rather than to regard it as a skilled subject. The industry was accepting graduates in communication. The development of communication education during this second juncture must be seen within the context of the socio-political situation of the country. The policy in the 1980s was the liberalisation of tertiary education enabling the

setting up of private universities and in the expansion of tertiary education, either by establishing more universities or adding departments and faculties in existing universities. The government policy during the first Mahathir administration was one of opening up education for the masses, either to be provided by the government or for the business sector. The amendments of the University and University Colleges Act, 1971 made it possible for the setting up of private universities thus allowing the setting up of departments of communication in both public and private universities.

On the other hand, the postgraduate degree programmes were taking shape. The postgraduate programme in UPM were getting a warm reception from the corporate sector. UKM itself graduated two PhDs, Mohd. Safar Hasim and Asiah Sarji.

New public universities were set up, such as the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM, 1983); Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM, 1984); Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS, 1992); Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS, 1994); and Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UNIMAP, 2001). A new different approach was seen in UNIMAS when Sharifah Mariam was recruited from UiTM to head the communication unit. The Department of Communication of IIUM established in 1990 offered programmes with an underlying Islamic orientation while that in Sabah embedded culture as part of their communication value system. The Department of Communication at UUM found it necessary to incorporate management and multimedia in line with the philosophy of the university. The new departments made the attempt to be different from the departments established in the 1970s by indicating to the approving authorities that they were offering different courses.

#### *Several Indicators are to be Noted*

More communication departments and programmes were set up in existing public universities in the 1980s or with the setting up of more universities. The country liberalised its intake of students for the universities in the country but many students went abroad for education in areas where local universities were unable to provide the relevant courses.

1. The Ministry of Education gave approval to the setting up of the degree of Communication at the Bachelors level beginning 1984/85 session. In 1997 when UiTM was upgraded to be a university, the Department of Communication was likewise elevated to a Faculty known as the Faculty of Mass Communication. In 2001, the name was changed to the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies (21st AMIC-UiTM International Conference, 11-14 July 2012).
2. UUM established a Department of Communication with an emphasis on management supposedly to be different from the other universities that were offering professional and academic courses. It was established in 1994 under the School of Social Development with the honours programme endorsed in 1999 (Bachelor of Communication) (UUM Annual Report, 1999). The School of Social Development offered the Bachelor of Communication (with Honours) until it was housed under the School of Communication and Technology in 2002/2003. Now it is known as the School of Multimedia Technology and Communication (Che Su Mustafa, 2016).
3. In 1995 the status of the Communication programme at USM was upgraded to the School of Communication, with an intake of 200 students. Ramli Mohamad was appointed the first Dean. Courses offered covered Persuasive Communication, Radio/TV/Film, and Journalism. It is to be noted that Persuasive Communication took



over from Development Communication and included Public Relations and Advertising. The Degree offered was the Bachelor of Communication in the respective four areas.

4. When the Extension Faculty was closed down, the Department of Communication at UPM operated as a department in the Faculty of Ecology from 1997 to 1999 when it finally merged with the Faculty of Modern Languages as the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication in 1999 with Dr. Md. Salleh Hassan as its first head of the Department of Communication.
5. More communication entities were established in public universities after being gauged by their respective Boards of Studies to evaluate the relevance and demand of these courses.
6. But unlike departments of communication established in the 1970s, the departments established had a different orientation. In 1990, the Department of Communication at IIUM had an Islamic Orientation while the Department of Communication in UMS blended communication with culture.
7. When Sharifah Mariam was in UNIMAS, she was asked to take a social science approach. The technical or professional approach that was evident in UiTM was asked to be ended with an emphasis given to a social science approach (interview with Sharifah Mariam, 2016). The Communication programme was placed under the social sciences.

At first it was a little bit unsettling for me because having worked with ITM for so many years with those kind of Ralph Kliesch's programme. Now you need to think like an academician. Before this I didn't think myself as an academic you know. Before this I was more like training people to become journalists, to become public relations practitioners and all that now I had to think more in terms of a what society needs. So the approach was more academic and research oriented (Sharifah Mariam, 2016).

8. Communication departments and programmes set up in private universities were market driven. They were not subject to the instructions of the Ministry of Education to introduce courses required by the government.
9. Foreign text books were mainly used but books written by Malaysians were still limited.
10. Research continued to be encouraged and developed in the public universities. Research spread in more areas than in the first juncture such as in politics, health campaigns, on youths, or on audience research.
11. Public universities continued to send their staff for postgraduate qualifications, mainly to the United States. Universities began sending their staff to United Kingdom and to Australia and New Zealand as part of their staff training scheme. The sending of staff abroad brought in new dynamism to the communication education in Malaysia as these new scholars brought in a new perspective in communication education. In the early 1970s, many of the tutors and assistant lecturers were sent to the United States to obtain their postgraduate degrees but in the second period, the American monopolistic influence in teaching ended. There were now a different set of influence as graduates came from universities in Australia and United Kingdom to teach in the Malaysian universities. They brought with them a different theoretical perspective from that of

the American graduates who were oriented in quantitative and empirical methodological approach.

12. Post-graduate programmes started in USM, UKM, UM and in UPM, were mainly through research. UPM started its postgraduate degree communication courses by course work and research in 1984. The focus of its masters programme was in public relations and in communication development. It started its programme in Corporate Communication in 1997. It started its Bachelors programme in 1998. Its PhD programme was geared toward Communication Development but UPM later created two programmes in Mass Media and Human Communication and abandoned the programme in Communication Development in 2004.

### THIRD JUNCTURE (POST 2004)

Two main factors affected the development of communication education in this period: one on the setting up of the Ministry of Higher Education and the other were the effects of the September 11, 2001. The setting up of the Ministry of Higher Education in 2004 immediately after the General Elections saw greater attention given toward making public universities more accountable and meeting the demands of society. The Minister was answerable to Parliament and questions were asked on the quality of university education in Malaysia. Ranking of universities was seen by Parliament as a mark of quality.

A new government policy was made to turn Malaysia into an educational hub with an enrolment of 200,000 foreign students. There was therefore an aggressive programme for the intake of foreign students in all subjects, except in medicine and dentistry. It also allowed the setting up of more private universities to meet demands for university education and to meet the policy of the government to obtain more foreign students to study in Malaysia.

The new policy made the Malaysian universities more competitive by ranking them by the various international agencies (Quest, Reuters). Four research universities were declared namely UM, USM, UPM and UKM, by endowing extra grants to encourage them in research and publications thus enabling them to be ranked accordingly. Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) was elevated as a research university in 2012.

With the overall scenario in place, Malaysia was also affected by the events of September 11, 2001. The policies introduced by the American government in response to the terrorist attack caused Muslims to be apprehensive in enrolling in American or even in Western universities. This, in an unplanned way, caused many students from the Middle East and Africa to come to Malaysia for their university education.

### *UUCA and the Setting Up of Private Higher Educational Institutions*

The educational landscape changed with the setting up of private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. Under a change in government policy, the University and University Colleges Act, 1971 (UUCA) was amended and the coming into being of the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act, 1996 allowing for the setting up of private higher educational institutions. The medium of instruction of private universities being English, attracted students to enrol in the courses. The indicators for communication education post 2004 were:

1. The setting up of the Ministry of Higher Education in 2004 had a big impact on the status and direction of higher education in Malaysia. The Ministry instituted several changes, among which are the setting up of research universities, Global Ranking status for Malaysian universities and opening up the Malaysian education system to foreign students by the intake of foreign students. Research university status meant more intake of postgraduate students than undergraduate students. Research university status also meant a greater intake of foreign students and inducing lecturers to teach in English (interview with Prof. Dr. Abdul Muati @ Zamri Ahmad, 2014).
2. There was greater consolidation in university education away from the liberal expansion of programmes during the second juncture. Resources were getting scarcer and less Malaysians who could not afford “expensive” tertiary education abroad enrolled themselves locally. The quality of the Malaysian education (and its cheaper fees) attracted the foreigners to come to Malaysia instead of going to the United States and United Kingdom.
3. There was an expansion and a raise in the level of departments. The three early departments or programmes in the 1970s emerged as Faculties. The Department of Communication in UKM stayed its size when others have moved on. UPM called it the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, UiTM’s Faculty of Communication and Media Studies had earlier shifted its orientation to be more professional (interviews with Sharifah Mariam, Shahreen and Sankaran, 2016). In 1995, USM established the School of Communication, with an intake of 200 students with Ramli Mohamad appointed as the first Dean.
4. There were also faculties, in UMS’ under the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Heritage and in UNIMAS known as Faculty of Language and Communication and in UUM as the School of Multimedia Technology and Communication. There were also schools set up in private universities. So measured in social science development, communication education had advanced the most in Malaysia.
5. Departments continue to rely on text books written by foreigners but more references written by Malaysians and non-Westerners were made available. Research on the history of journalism, broadcasting, advertisements, public relations were conducted by academics to be used as references by students at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
6. More cooperation and MoUs were made among non-Western universities, more so among Universities in Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines.
7. Malaysian academics continued to present papers overseas and, in turn, organised conferences in Malaysia by inviting foreign academics. More seminars containing research findings and interests of academics were organised by public and private universities.
8. Postgraduate courses were offered at the masters and doctorate levels in UKM, USM, UNIMAS, UPM, UM, UNIMAS, UMS, IIUM, UUM and UiTM. It looks as if more emphasis would be given to postgraduate degree programmes in the coming years.

#### CHALLENGES AHEAD

Early scholars can take pride at the tremendous development that had taken place as seen in the number and quality of students graduated, the course programmes, the research undertaken and the involvement in society. Early scholars were proud of the work they had

contributed. Sankaran, Sharifah Mariam and Shahreen were one in saying that they contributed to the quality of UiTM graduates.

We were innovative in producing quality graduates (Ramli Mohamad, 2014).

Some scholars were happy with research while others lamented that more research should have been done. Abu Bakar Hamid (2016) was happy that more research is being conducted in Universiti Malaya.

... For a while I was disappointed, maybe not enough research was coming out from there. You know it (USM) is now one of leading institutions in Malaysia. And also perhaps in South East Asia (John Lent, 2015).

While quality has improved, others expressed sadness at the many number of communication programmes in the country.

How do you reconcile with the mushrooming of private universities and again I look at the quality. The quantity without ensuring the quality remains. The quality seems to go down with the mushrooming of courses, programmes of communication offered by private universities (Sankaran, 2016).

Other communication entities are affected by the lack of proper planning and placement. Sharifah Mariam mentioned of the early communication unit in UNIMAS, that was shifted from being under the Faculty of Social Science to Humanities and then to the Faculty of Language. Likewise, with the unit in Universiti Utara Malaysia until being placed as part of the Faculty of Multimedia and Communication.

Universities will be facing greater challenges in the immediate future as resources become more scarce or limited. Public universities will see greater scrutiny of courses offered. There will be competition to obtain research grants (Abu Bakar Hamid, 2016).

The concept of Return on Investment will be invoked if programmes are not meeting the demands as called for by the Ministry. The university is seen as part of an educational hub to attract 200,000 foreign students. Universities are busy marketing and promoting foreign students to study in Malaysia.

1. Universities will compete worldwide as the pressure mounts for ranking. So academics will be pushed to do publications, research, consultancy, postgraduate supervision, and teaching. The picture is that the higher the ranking attained, the better is the university performance. The pursuit for ranking of universities has affected the development of communication faculties and departments as they give emphasis to research, publications and post-graduate supervision.
2. As places of teaching become more limited and lecturing is quite a glamorous and secured job, there would be competition to find employment in public universities. Even now we see a new breed of lecturers possessing their PhDs or even sponsoring their own PhD programmes to enter the university. Having conference papers and books written are additional points in considering the new lecturers. On the other hand,

the government will be less keen to sponsor students to do their postgraduate training in communication abroad as very good programmes are available at home.

3. New academic areas are being introduced, to the neglect of traditional areas like development communication, international communication. Scanning through the recent seminars held, several focus areas seem to be highlighted, namely studies related to Elections/Politics; Youth; Identity, Communication Networking, Framing, New Media (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube), Government Slogans/Nation building and Islam. This is a big development from 1980s when the focus was then on Advertising, Journalism, Development Communication, Politics/Election. "Communication scholars need to go more by asking fundamental "why" questions and constructing and evaluating theories at the heart of studying communication as a social science." (Berger, Roloff & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2010, p.17). Scholars also need to conduct longitudinal studies to gain an insight into the societal changes in the country.
4. In the use of methodologies, Md. Salleh Hassan (1991) mentioned that there was more qualitative research than before (1991) but the bulk was still quantitative. Scholars using surveys and content analysis methodologies are using face to face, online, and focus groups. Scholars prefer quantitative research over qualitative research but there is an appreciation of the value in both approaches. In the coming years more mixed or multiple methods would be needed, requiring scholars to be well versed in more than one research method when conducting research.
5. Scholars like Ahmad Murad Merican and John Lent have also expressed concern at the lack of theory building among communication scholars although they see the need for communication studies to take a wider social science perspective. Worldwide, the communication field has become prolific (Bryant & Pribanic-Smith, 2010) boasting at least 44 journals compared to only 13 journals in 1987. If other journals published in countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Nigeria are added, then the number of journals in communication would be much more. Communication is a vibrant study of interest. Likewise, Malaysians have journals like *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, *Forum Komunikasi*, *SEARCH*, *Jurnal Pengajian Media Malaysia* and *Asian Journal of Applied Communication*.
6. A new approach is only being undertaken by universities like IIUM, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), where the approach is Islamic based. The courses offered are part of the Islamisation of Knowledge. The new approach appears to be attractive such that some courses in USM, UiTM, UPM, and UKM have also added an Islamic dimension to the teaching and research in communication.
7. Another concern is the impact of technology on communication research and education. We have seen scholars studying events and effects relating to the new / social media (blogging, YouTubes, Twitters) and this was akin to what was done when the older scholars did their research on the new media then (radio, films, TV). But the difference is that the Information Technology Schools and scholars in engineering, business and sociology are also including these new media as part of their academic interest. In the 1970s and 1980s, communication departments were related to the Ministry of Information, but they have to relate to the Ministry of Multimedia and Communication, an expansion of the Ministry's functions that is now inclusive of the new media. The inclusion of the social media in the curriculum and also in our research

has brought a new perspective to be taken. The concepts of audience, the sender and receiver of messages, the space of communication, time, and effects of media have been changed with the new media.

8. Research on the new media will heavily challenge the research on communication and media as new concepts are introduced and new conceptualisation and measurements are required. There is, therefore, a ferment in the field.
9. Malaysian communication scholars need to do more theoretical and conceptual research, to reach the international arena and to engage the international fraternity. Academics are slowly being engaged by international associations like the International Communication Association (ICA), Pacific Asian Communication Association (PACA), Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) and Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC). Scholars will also witness an engaging debate on “Ferment in the Field” as communication field being affected by the online media continue to meet the challenges in shaping the methodologies and theories with new concepts or new theoretical perspectives. The whole exercise is to bring meaning to a greater understanding of communication in society. The communication programmes established in the 1970s will have to face up to the new challenges posed by government requirements and societal demands. The young academics will have to brace the new technology amidst a global surrounding that would make Malaysian communication programmes to be more viable and resilient in their research and theory building.

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2. John Lent told me in Jogjakarta (2013) that he had to start from scratch, like devising the curriculum, getting the facilities and assembling everything. But he said that the first batch of students had quality.
3. The Department of Communication, UPM was heavily influenced by their American training. The early lecturers Mohd Yusof Hussain, Saodah Wok, Mohd. Fadzilah Kamsah, Md. Salleh, Ezhar Tamam, and Sulaiman Yassin were all American trained. About 80 percent have received their PhDs from universities in the United States and 20 percent from universities in United Kingdom or from Australia (interview with Prof. Dr. Abdul Muati @ Zamri Ahmad, 2014).

#### BIODATA

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