

# **Students And Staff In Makyong Circle(Simac)- A Collaborative University- Community Programme In Reviving The Dying Arts.**

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## **Abstract**

Makyong used to be one of the most popular classical performing Arts in Kelantan in the 50's, 60's and 70's. This art genre was once a star in the 50's and 60's. However, recently, it has gone through a stalemate situation and seemed like dying. Siti Zainon Ismail(1985) observed that the dying of Makyong is due to the lack of appreciation and understanding of the local youth towards Makyong. The community project of another dying art that is the the Rebana Kercing of Kampung Laut has proven to be successful in sustaining its popularity and existence in Kelantanese community.

Based on the above opinion and the role model of a community project, Rebana Kercing of Kampung Laut, the writer has embarked on a collaborative university- community project of sustaining, preserving, conserving and commercialising Makyong as a traditional performing arts in primary and secondary schools in Kelantan. The writer named this project as "SiMaC" (Students and Staff in Makyong Circle). This project is led by UMK represented by UMK staff and students with support from the traditional Makyong activists as the main mentor and the Kelantan community. Schools in the Kota Baru district is the main target group for this project. This project abridges University Malaysia Kelantan with the art activists and the community in reviving the dying performing arts, hence churning human capital with strong selfhood as well as sustaining the traditional culture of the community. This paper will discuss the modus operandi of the programme as well as the challenges and the outcomes of the programme.

## **1.0 Introduction**

Cultural activities among students is well known in most universities in Malaysia. Most universities have a cultural group that aim to promote appreciation and understanding of culture among students. In most cases, cultural activities run by students are left to benefit only the students involved in the activities. Its multiplier effects are not propagated outside the circle of students.

Despite the extensive involvement of students in cultural activities, Malaysia is on the other hand experiencing the dying of traditional performances especially in the state of Kelantan. Most of the state arts are about to die due to some factors such as decreasing number of activists, lack of support from the state government, depleting interest among the younger generation towards traditional arts and many more.

Realising the acute problems of arts existing in Kelantan, the Department of Culture and Arts, a wing under the Ministry Of Information, Communications and Culture has been

running specific programmes with the aim of promoting arts amongs school children through the 'Tunas Budaya' programme. The programme trains school children to master the skill of traditional performing arts such as the rebana kercing, dance and many more.

As a new university, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) through its Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage is thriving to promote heritage to the younger generation so that heritage is seen as a valuable goods that can be commercialised as well as preserved for the benefit of the younger generation. This paper highlights specifically on the preservation of Makyong through students activities.

This paper will present a conceptual view on the project named Student and Staff In Makyong Circles (SiMaC) to the nation so that it can be implemented not only in UMK and Kelantan but theroughout Malaysia entirely. The researcher's experience in learning from an established programme initiated by the Department Of Culture and Arts Kota Bharu will be presented in detail in this paper apart from discussing the strategy of implementing SIMAC.

## **2.0 The need to implement SiMaC**

Some of the factor that urged the researcher to start this SiMaC project are as follows:

- i. 'Makyong' is experiencing the most crucial stage in the declining stage of its lifecycle. In Kelantan although some efforts has been taken to revive the 'Makyong', but it is still too early to judge its success story.
- ii. As a university, we are all involved in academic research and by having this project we are not just focussing on the factors that trigger the development of arts but also to practically underline strategies to revive it through real doing.
- iii. Heritage is part of our core business in UMK.
- iv. The East Coast Economic Region (ECER) is also concerned with the preservation and conservation of arts as well as making it more viable for incoming generation to the arts activists.

## **3.0 The dying of 'Makyong' in Kelantan**

The dying of 'Makyong' is referred to as a situation where 'Makyong' is no longer readily available for viewing by the audience at any time required by them. Many regarded the situation as a result of some reasons such as no activists, no viewers, no skills of performing it and less interest among the younger generation to learn the skill of performing it. It can also lead to a very serious problem on knowing one's identity that is the selfhood or '*jatidiri*'. Many scholars have expressed opinions on the dying of traditional arts in the Malay Archipelago.

Milene Salvini (1971) in her article 'Performing Arts in Indonesia', pointed out that the Kebyar dance of Southern Bali was dying of due to the lack of activists. Made Bandem

(1981) also mentioned that performing arts is an important component of Indonesian culture and life. An article by Indra Tranggono on Gairah Asmara Tobong (August, 1997) also indicated that the Kumpulan Tobong Ketoprak from the Kabupaten Klaten Jawa Tengah was dying of due to the declining response from the viewers. Rosnah Noh (1990) wrote in her thesis entitled 'Pengaruh dan Perkembangan Mak Yong Masa Kini Satu Tinjauan' that the dying of Makyong is due to lack of permanent players. Similar problem occurred in Padang Indonesia. The Randai dance of the Minang people is dying of (Thursday, 15th February 2009, 6.30 p.m, TVRI SUMBAR, Budaya programme).

Rahmah Bujang (1998) in her article on classical dance of Khmer mentioned that the dance was about to die during the reign of Khmer Rouge regime (in the 70's) but was revived after the country obtain independence. Similar situation happened in Malaysia whereby Mohamed Ghouse Nasuruddin (1994) relates dying of Malay performing arts to the small number of activists as well as political intervention by the state administration. In 1990, the PAS led administration of Kelantan pronounced that any forms of performing arts which are not in line with the Islamic teaching were banned from performing in public (Berita Harian, Februari 1997). On the other hand, Siti Zainon Ismail (1985) mentioned in her book 'Getaran Jalur dan Warna' that many of the Kelantanese themselves do not appreciate the Makyong, hence making it less frequently performed. She says:

“ many graduates from Kelantan itself cannot appreciate ‘Makyong’ because of the fact that it is less frequently performed and starting to die-off from the public”

Mohamed Ghouse Nasuruddin (Berita Harian, 25 Julai 1998) agreed that the banning of Dikir Barat in Kelantan was due to the usage of obscene words used in the scripts.

However Zaiton Nasir in her article entitled 'Mempertahankan Tradisi Mak Yong' (Dewan Budaya: Mac 1991) observed that Makyong has its future to be disseminated to the masses.

Ghulam Sarwar (1986) supported the prediction made on the dying of Makyong by pointing out that the main reason for the worsening situation is the inexistence of the players. The players are aging, leaving only 12 players who really know 'Makyong'.

Based on the literature presented above, the researcher has decided to embark on the SiMac project.

### **3.0 Objectives of SiMaC**

The objectives of this project are as follows:

- To inculcate awareness among primary school pupils on the dying arts
- To enhance arts appreciation among primary school pupils
- To inculcate the knowledge and skills of performing 'Makyong'
- To revive 'Makyong' in the community

It is hope that by the end of this programme, the group will be able to perform at the national level event that is the CITRAWARNA which is normally held in Kuala

Lumpur (normally in September every year)- with at least 200 school pupils dancing on the street of Kuala Lumpur at the Merdeka Square by the year 2011.

The ultimate mission in embarking on this programme is to preserve and conserve this precious heritage gem of Kelantan- the Makyong.

#### 4.0 The Modus Operandi of Students and Staff In Makyong Circles (SiMaC)

The implementation of SiMaC is implemented through student cultural activities. Students are trained by UMK staff and lecturers to acquire the 'Makyong' performance skill and later on teach others especially school children to acquire at least the same skill which later on propagated it to other schools. The pyramid concept used in the multilevel marketing is adopted to turn students to teach others to propagate Makyong performances. It can be illustrated in figure 1.0.

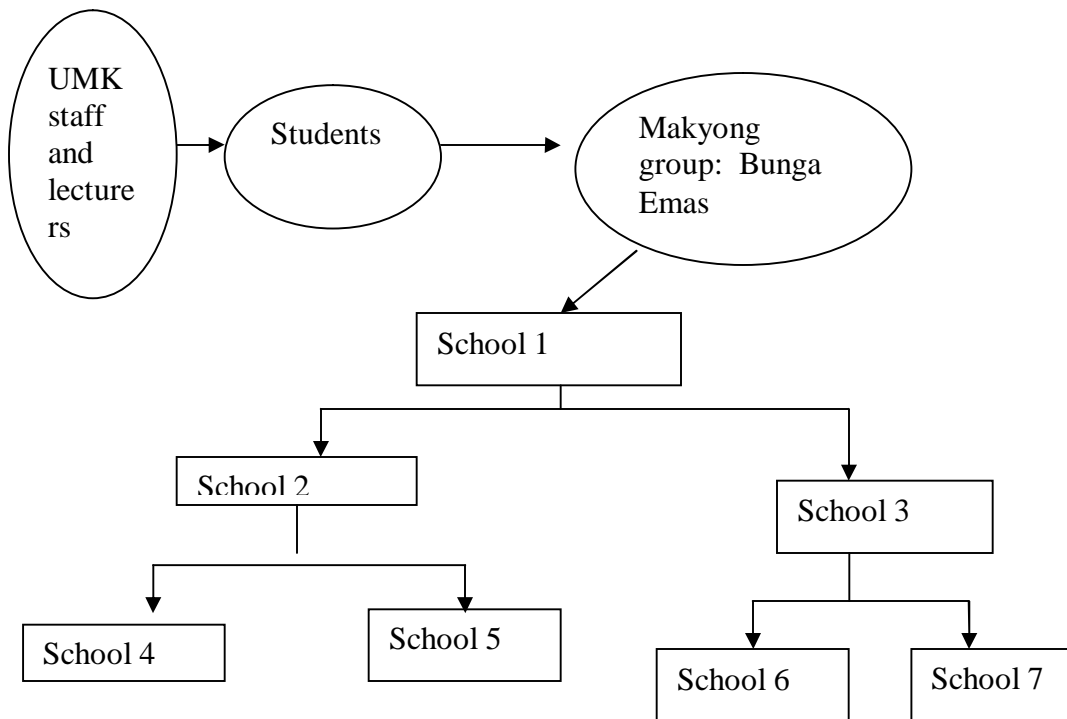


Figure 1.0: The SiMaC Pyramid Propagation Concept In Reviving Makyong

#### 5.0 Needs and values

This SIMAC project is to be undertaken by students who are actively involved in cultural activities in UMK. It is headed by a lecturer teaching malay Performing arts and a makyong activist. The activists and the lecturer put their concerted effort to teach UMK

students to acquire the skills of performing Makyong hence indirectly forming the official UMK Makyong group- The Bunga Emas Makyong Troupe. After a year of training and performing, students with the help of their lecturers and trainers collaborate with a UMK cluster school within the Pengkalan Chepa vicinity to teach Makyong to primary school pupils. Once a school is trained, then the trained group can spread its wing to other school hence propagating it to ther schools in Kota Bharu. Considering the fact that this activiyy is a concerted group work, therefore each group member must succumbed to some values which will escalate the undertaking of the project. Values set which need to be internalised by each group members are as follows:

- Teamwork
- Discipline
- Commitment
- Professionalism
- Resilience
- Innovation
- Excellence
- Adaptability
- Accommodative
- Flexible
- Entreprising

These values must be commonly understood, shared and practiced by each group in order to obtain the momentum in making SiMaC a premier project of UMK. All the above attributes are in line with the attributes of a successful art activist. Being a professional artist bears a meaning that an individual is acknowledged for his professional work, discipline, innovative and enterprising.

## **6.0 The Rebana Kercing Group of Kampung Laut**

The idea of setting SiMaC popped up after the writer visited The Rebana Kercing activities in Kampung Laut, Kelantan. Apart from the daily practice of Rebana Kercing by the activists, Encik Harun Hassan, the main ‘guru’ of Rebana Kercing (of the Kampung Laut Rebana Kercing Association, 16040 Palek bang, Kelantan) was asked to start a class to teach the nearby Sekolah Rendah Kebangsaan Kampung Laut pupils on Rebana Kercing performances. Rebana Kercing is one form of traditional performances which combines dancing, singing and music. It was once popular in Kelantan as a form of entertainment but nowadays it is one of the dying arts that is threatening the arts landscape of Kelantan. Only a few groups were left from hundreds of groups existed in the sixties. Encik Harun with all his heart and soul has tributes and surrender his life towards Rebana Kercing. He has weathered all the nasty comments posed to him and spent his entire life in propagating the teaching of playing Rebana Kercing. Rebana kercing was taught to school pupil from the age of 7 to 12 years old. After the pupils have reached puberty, they are not allowed to perform it anymore due to some religious teaching and prohibitions. His undying love and efforts has ensured that Rebana Kercing lives continually in its place of origin, Kampung Laut. Training is done 5 times a week, starting Sunday and ends on Thursday from 5 p.m till 6.30 p.m. Up to

the time of this research he has trained hundreds of students to learn Rebana Kercing. The legacy of Rebana Kercing remain intact until today in its humble birth place, Kampung laut.

## **7.0 Strategies to revive and propagate dying arts**

Below are some suggestions and strategies in reviving and propagating the dying arts in Malaysia.

- a. The state must identify those Arts which are considered as dying.
- b. Develop revival programmes such as training, adoption project, documentation, publication and so on.
- c. Build the pool of expertise which can later on re-train others.
- d. Identify schools and organizations that can be the target multiplier agents.
- e. Planned activities must be implemented accordingly.
- f. Allocation of fund for all the planned activities.
- g. Serial reviewing of the project.

The state government must be serious in preserving the dying arts. Programs such as adopted arts, adopted schools, training of trainers, activist recognitions, and many more can be planned. Budget must also be allocated to ensure the running of the projects. University can also play its role through not only research activities, but also through consultancy work, training and also voluntary activities. Students will have to be trained not only to be excellent in academic matters but also in peripheral activities such as voluntarism, culture, and sports.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

Reviving the dying arts is not only the jurisdiction of the government and the Ministry Of Information, Communications and Culture. It encompasses all entities that exist hand in hand in this country. There is no sole agent that is responsible to develop arts and culture. Ministry of Higher Learning which always aims at producing impeccable graduates in various fields must not forget that graduates must also be equipped with cultural and arts inputs. Encouraging students to get involved in cultural activities does not merely shape the quality of graduates but also turn them into being more responsive towards their own society and culture.

While in the university, students' soft skills can be sharpened through their active involvement in cultural activities. Their cultural activities can be extended to the society through the Student/ Staff in Makyong Circles programme. Live examples have proven (the case of Rebana Kercing, Kampung Laut) that students can appreciate arts more when they are exposed to them since young.

Apart from performing for the university and public, they can also train school pupils to be like them and hence building selfhood or 'Jatidiri' among young children. This

propagation process will benefit all Malaysians and can be easily implemented by all universities in Malaysia. Let us train others to appreciate and love our culture.

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