

Heritage Education: Turning Myth into Reality - the UMK Experience

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Abstract

Heritage has been seen as a very important element in the development of a nation. Heritage on the other hand is dying and needs to be revived. There is a push to educate younger generation on the issue of dying heritage by creating awareness and appreciation towards heritage through education. All across the globe, there is a growing concern for the need to restore heritage into our education systems simply because heritage depicts one's identity of race and culture. In light of the above dilemma, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) views heritage as an opportunity that needs to be grabbed and properly utilized. Heritage to UMK is like a precious gem that needs to be given a new touch. Hence in July 2007, UMK introduced a unique academic programme named Bachelor of Heritage Studies with Honours to the Malaysian high school leavers. This paper will introduce the programme and the academic components, discuss problems related to the running of an academic heritage programme at tertiary levels and forecast the future of this programme.

1.0 Introduction

Heritage education has been the in-thing in the Malaysian Universities Scenario. Heritage, as the government of Malaysia is promoting currently was once a 'neglected' area of study in Malaysia. Many universities have incorporated heritage studies in their arts academic programmes but it came only in bits and pieces and not as a full fledged heritage programme.

Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) is a new university established two and half years ago. Despite being new, UMK positively views heritage as one of the untapped areas in the higher education and smells the benefits of offering a full fledged academic program in Heritage Studies. Inspiring from the richness of Kelantan's heritage, the Minister of Higher Education at that time had aspired UMK to capitalize on the forgotten past. As a result, since 2007, UMK has

embarked on a new bachelor degree programme called the Bachelor of Heritage Studies clustered under the umbrella of Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage. This programme is the only one of its kind in the higher education scenes in Malaysia.

The faculty's tagline "sustaining heritage and championing creative technology" has turned heads around by utilizing heritage as a commercial commodity and applying heritage studies in creative technologies. Combining the strength of heritage and applying it in industrial design and creative technology has proven to be very fruitful. Students of Heritage and Creative Technology and vice-versa do not only appreciate heritage but also make use into application the theory related to heritage in making designs. The methods used in teaching students focus more on the understanding and appreciation of theories as well as equipping them with practical knowledge, hence the nomenclature of experiential learning and problem based learning is propagated in UMK.

The initial number of students admitted to the Heritage Studies Programme was 60 students and since the first student enrollment in 2007 the number has tripled. As of now the number of Heritage student for three intakes is 180 in total. The number will grow but to be competitive the faculty has planned to take only a minimum number of students so as to control the quality of graduates produced by the faculty.

This paper will highlight the experience of running an academic Heritage Studies programme at tertiary level. The structure of courses offered, methods of teaching, support courses and problems related to teaching and learning of heritage in a newly established university is discussed in this paper.

2.0 Universiti Malaysia Kelantan and Heritage Education

Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) is the 19th public university in Malaysia. The formation of the university was mooted during the tabling of the Ninth Malaysia Plan and subsequently approved by the cabinet of Malaysia on June 14, 2006. The inception of UMK was officially announced by the prime minister of Malaysia on 1st September 2007 under the 415 public university act. The University is located in the east coast of Malaysia that is Kelantan. It is about 400 kilometers from the capital city of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. Currently UMK operates from their temporary campus in Pengkalan Chepa, Kota Bharu Kelantan.

The vision of UMK is as quoted below:

“Championing Human Capital Development with Entrepreneurial Characteristics for Global Prosperity”

Kelantan as quoted by Tourism Malaysia is the cradle of culture and heritage. Heritage element can be found in abundance in Kelantan but sadly it is ‘abandoned’ by the state government. Many of the old traditions ranging from culture, way of living and historical building are still intact although going through the trouble water.

Exploiting on the fact that Kelantan is naturally rich in heritage, a university like UMK is in the right path to its future. UMK as a new university is always thinking of embarking on something unique and boutique of nature whereby it should be more than just mere heritage. Standing on its tagline of “Entrepreneurship is Our Thrust,” UMK dares to enter into a new entourage that is combining heritage and commercialization without forgetting the importance of preserving and conserving the ever valuable gem of heritage. It is really a challenge to have the conflicting and inflicting issues all in one bucket. Making the different forces to work hand in hand is a difficult task for UMK. Some activists condemned the effort of commercializing heritage by saying that it is destructive. Some agreed by saying that it is a new approach that the government should lead and initiate.

Heritage studies in UMK is a generic programme that encompasses all areas of heritage ranging from tangible to intangible heritage. It is under the guardian of the Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage. The programme covers almost all aspects of heritage that are cultural, built and natural heritage as well as incorporating preservation, conservation, management, entrepreneurships and commercialization of heritage.

Besides heritage, the parent that is the Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage also offers a degree programmed in Creative Technology. Although the Degree of Creative Technology is more specialized in technology, students are also exposed to some knowledge in heritage so that they can make to good use the elements of heritage in their creative designs.

Both Creative Technology and Heritage Studies are a four-year-honours-degree programme which aimed at producing heritage activists, artists, arts educators, arts entrepreneurs, preservers, conservers and managers.

The vision of the Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage is as follows:

“Championing creative technology and heritage studies, integrating entrepreneurial competencies for global sustainable development”

Whereas its mission is to provide:

- Global standard creative technology and heritage academic programmes that fulfill universal needs
- Research and consultancy with commercial and sustainable values
- Relevant and informative publications for the development of creative industry

Other faculties in UMK are the Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business, Agro Industry and Natural Resources and the ever prestigious Veterinary Medicine faculty making up a total of 4 faculties as of March 2010 with a total enrolment of 1223 students from all over Malaysia. Supporting the students are the 400 staff both academic and administrative.

As of now, UMK operates at a temporary campus, Taman Bendahara in Pengkalan Chepa and will be moving to two permanent campuses namely the Bachok and Jeli campuses. Both campuses are now under construction and will be expected to partially complete in the year 2011. Bachok campus will initially house the main administrative building and the Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage whereas the Jeli campus will accommodate the Faculty of Agro Industry and Natural Resources as well as the Veterinary Medicine Faculty.

UMK promises to always grow whereby in the year 2020, it will undoubtedly become a handsome adult by having 15000 students (20% postgraduates and 10% foreign students) in both campuses under the guardian of 54 programmes.

3.0 Classification of Arts and Heritage in Malaysia

In Malaysia, Rahmah and Wan Abdul Kadir (1997) classify arts by its category of work specification and product produced. Their classifications are as listed below:

a. Malay Traditional Performing Arts

- Music- traditional music
- Dances- court and folk dances
- Folk games- such as kite flying
- Folk songs- lullaby, poetry reciting and others
- Malay Theatre
- Malay Martial arts

b. Malay Handicraft- includes silvercraft, batik, songket weaving, and wood carving.

c. Malay Literature- includes pantun, sajak, puisi and other forms of old manuscripts.

However, Wikipedia.com (retrieved 16th October 2007) classifies heritage as follows:

- a. Cultural heritage
- b. Natural heritage

c. Physical heritage

National Heritage Act defines heritage item as any National Heritage, heritage site, heritage object or underwater cultural heritage as listed in the register.

All the heritage products mentioned above are viable for commercialization and have high tendency to be traded as valuable items. Understanding that it is open for commercialization, the university feels that it needs to be managed appropriately so as not to destruct the state of well being of these heritage products.

4.0 Review of opinions on the dying arts

Milene Salvini (1971) in her article "Performing Arts in Indonesia," pointed out that the Kebyar dance of Southern Bali was dying off 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 Kabupten Klaten Jawa Tengah was dying off due to the declining response from the viewers. Similar problem occurred in Padang Indonesia. The Randai dance of the Minang people is dying off (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 obtained independence.

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 situation happened in Malaysia whereby Mohamed Ghouse Nasuruddin (1994) relates the 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’.

No specific quotation on the dying of Rebana Kerching was cited by scholars of traditional performing arts since it has become alien and very much less known to most Kelantanese in the 80’s and 90’s. In fact its popularity is only confined to a specific area that is Kampung Laut and its neighbourhood.

Based on the literature presented above, it is very obvious that most of the traditional performances in Kelantan are dying off and in view of these situations the researchers have

started a journey to revive the dying heritage. At this point, the writers can conclude that factors contributing to the dying of most traditional performances are as follows:

- a. Aging activists
- b. Declining number of performances
- c. Less number of viewers
- d. Younger generations are not interested in viewing traditional performances and not willing to pay to watch traditional arts performances.
- e. Legal enforcement by the State Government
- f. Unattractive performances and costumes
- g. Less support from the government authorities and corporate companies in giving subsidies and sponsorship.

Other forms of heritage such as built heritage are facing the same problem. A Talk by Datin Waveney Jenkins, SK, MBE., Chairman of Kandis Resource Centre at Universiti Malaysia Kelantan on the 23rd January 2010 expressed her concern over some built heritage issues in Malaysia.

“The Heritage Trust was set up to convince Malaysians of the truth of this statement. I was one of a group of architects, artists and worried business people who formed Heritage Trust of Malaysia in 1983 as they saw Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia embracing the modern developing world with reckless speed. From very small beginnings we now have our headquarters in this rare relic of colonial housing which uses many Asian features to combat the heat and humidity of the Malaysian weather.”

Gregory Acciaioli (2008), an anthropologist in University of Western Australia and also a natural heritage activist living in Indonesia mentioned that one of his concern is the dying traditional way of living (close to nature) among the Lindu people of Sulawesi . In his preservation and conservation project of the Lindus, he helped restore confidence among the villagers to keep preserving natural heritage matters by creating awareness on the importance of heritage and then allowing them to initiate local projects by themselves.

The factors contributing to the dying of other heritage products are almost similar to the traditional performing arts which include:

- a. Declining awareness among younger generation about heritage
- b. Declining number of heritage activists
- c. Modern cultural influences
- d. Heritage is regarded as a free commodity which is not susceptible to commercialization
- e. Poor innovation and creativity in developing heritage products
- f. Loose support from the relevant authority
- g. Lack of modern and sophisticated technology
- h. Professional management of heritage is not practiced
- i. Products are less attractive and less functional
- j. The exploitation natural heritage through illegal logging for industrial developments
- k. Lack of personnel in teaching heritage at all levels
- l. Younger generation are not interested in specializing in heritage studies
- m. Poor enforcement in rules and regulation to preserve and conserve heritage
- n. Heritage is not part of curriculum in the education system
- o. Lack of determination and seriousness among administrators in implementing heritage plans and strategies.

One most important agenda related to the above factors are the commercialization of heritage to ensure its legacy as a superior commodity. Being a superstar product, heritage should be viewed not only as a form of guardian of culture but also as a commercial product that can bring in the cash flow and profits to the owner of heritage.

On the other side of the coin, Farok (2003) mentions that in educating students to appreciate Malay traditional performing arts, it has to be implemented step by step. The 4-step process can be categorized into awareness, educating, doing and activating.

5.0 Commercialization Of Arts and Heritage

Arts have always been regarded as a free commodity in Malaysia. However, recently the influx of commercialization theory has inevitably influenced arts commodity. The waves of commercialization have made arts products more valuable and respectable. But in doing so, arts products have lost their aesthetical values as well as their authenticity to the eyes of arts lovers.

Yoety (1985) refers to commercialization as the process of attaching monetary values to arts commodities and changing their form as needed by the consumers. Kotler (2003) also defines arts as a commodity that need to be prized accordingly based on the affordability of consumers as well as their needs. Bernstein (2007) also agrees to the opinion pointed out by Kotler (2003). Heilbrun and Gray (1993) extend the discussion on commercialization of arts by saying that arts especially performing arts have economic values which need to be handled gracefully so as to bring in income to the companies that manage the performances.

Hatta Azad Khan (2006) on the other hand, points out that the primary activity in commercializing arts is to manage and market arts efficiently. Abi Sofian (2007) and Farok (2007) agree to Azad's opinion by arguing that arts commodity has to be managed and marketed efficiently in line with the needs of consumers as well as not forgetting to maintain its aesthetical values. Manikan (1999) a Filipino researcher found out that financial management is one of the crucial aspects in ensuring the continuity of an arts establishment. This is true to some arts companies in North America that had lost their market shares due to their inability to manage their ever expanding funds.

Wong Chi Keong (1994) mentions that a performance, like any other commodity must be marketed accordingly, by strategizing the marketing mix namely product, pricing, promotion and distribution. He did a thorough research on the marketing of theatre premise in Singapore.

Abu Hassan Abdullah (2010) mentions that the creative industry is so wide that every individual that has the creativity should grab the business opportunities available. He highlighted his strategy of promoting creative products to Europe through the e-commerce providers.

Najib Dawa (2010) mentions that the amount of value created in the creative industry is so huge that from the year 2000 to 2005, international trade of creative goods and services in United Kingdom have amounted to \$424.4 billion which is 3.4% of the total world trade, offering new jobs at creative cities in Europe and North America. In Malaysia, the output for creative industries that include culture, recreation, audio visual and personal services have increased from RM266 million in 2000 to RM 694.4 million in 2005. In 2009, the craft industry has contributed about RM800 million worth of output. According to him, the areas of concern in creative industries include visual arts, music and performing arts, cultural performance facilities, industrial arts, movies, film, broadcasting and television, publishing, advertising, design, branding and fashion design, architectural design, digital entertainment, creative living, handicraft and other industries.

Norliza Rofli (2010) pointed out that in the performing arts industry alone, graduates of heritage and creative technology is needed in 26 areas of performing arts which include lighting, make-up, stage setting, promotions, costume and many more.

In lieu of the above dying factors and the potential of commercializing arts and heritage, the introduction of an academic degree by UMK is timely and proper. UMK observed heritage in many lucrative ways- that is as a field of professional studies as well as an untapped area which is open for commercialization.

6.0 Structure of Heritage Studies at UMK

In UMK, Heritage studies is a generic first degree programme which is conducted within a duration of 4 years. Generic degree in this context connotes that the study for this degree has no specialization in any Heritage areas such as cultural, building or other specific area.

This programme is offered to all students in Malaysia who have completed Higher School Certificate Examination (equivalent to A- Level) with an achievement of at least a principal "C" in arts and craft or visual arts and another 2 principals in other subjects. English is not needed as an entry requirement but an applicant has to at least obtain a pass in English subject at the Malaysian certificate of examination ("O" level). The offering of this degree in UMK is posted on the Malaysian University Admission Unit Website and students can choose which ever programme that they want to get admitted to.

In general, the structure of this programme is divided into four main clusters namely the Faculty Courses, Thrust or Core Courses, Industrial attachment, Entrepreneurship elective courses and Programme elective courses. The schematic representation of the curriculum structure is illustrated in diagram 1.0

Diagram 1.0: Structure of Heritage Studies Programme at UMK

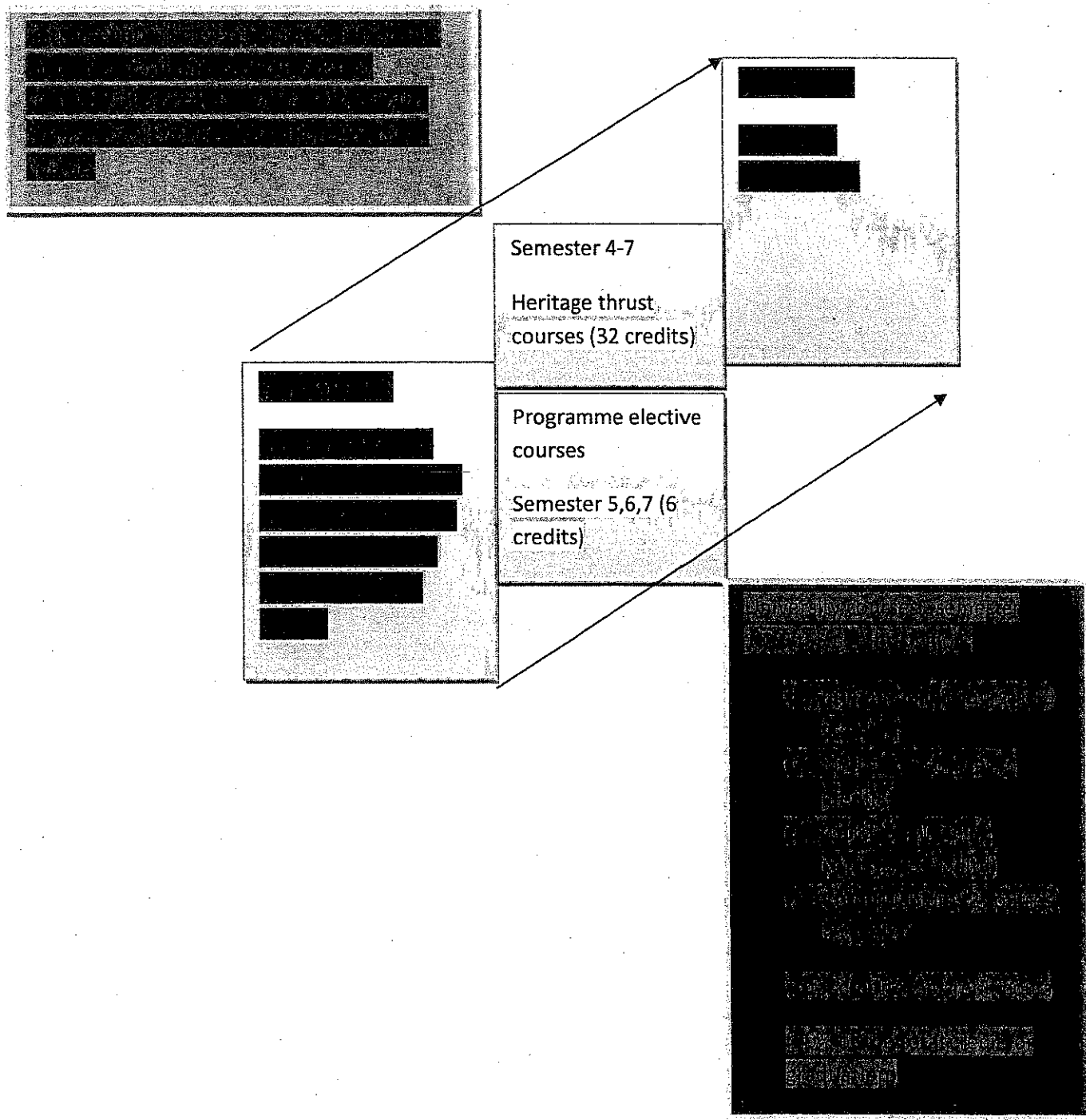


Diagram 1.0 describes the curriculum structure of Heritage Studies programme in UMK. The structure is divided into four main clusters namely:

a. Faculty courses and industrial attachment.

The faculty courses are those basic arts subject that is compulsory for the students to complete before advancing into the Heritage thrust subjects. Courses taken include Drawing, Fundamentals of Studio, Visual Presentation Techniques, Traditional Arts Design, Malay Culture and Civilization, Multimedia and Web Technology, Introduction to Sociology and Anthropology and Arts and Computer. Industrial attachment course is compulsory for all students before graduating.

b. Heritage thrust and programme elective courses

Heritage thrust and programme elective courses refer to subjects related to the specialization of heritage. Example of courses taken are Conservation, Malay Performing Arts, Oral Traditions, Aesthetic Appreciation, Indigenous Arts Objects, Archeology, Biodiversity, Museum And Gallery and others.

c. University courses

University courses are compulsory subjects that must be registered by all students of UMK. The subjects offered are English Language, Third Language, Co-Curriculum, Ethnic Relations, Critical and Creative Thinking and Islamic and Asia Civilization.

d. Entrepreneurship elective courses

Entrepreneurship elective courses refer to entrepreneurship and business subjects offered by the Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business. Students should complete four subjects such as Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship, Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurial Behavior. These courses are aimed at providing and inculcating students with the entrepreneurial behaviour that they must possess upon graduation.