The Challenges and Ambiguities of Malaysian Qualifications Agency's Programme Standards for Performing Arts (Drama/ Theatre/ Film)

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Abstract

Since its establishment in 2007, the Malaysian Qualifications Agency has been developing and releasing programme standards for different disciplines and subjects. A set of programme standards document serves to benchmark the quality but it also takes away the freedom from the institutions to design their own programmes. Currently, there are programme standards for 19 different disciplines. This paper serves as the first and foremost response and feedback to the Malaysian Qualifications Agency on the programme standards for performing arts launched in late 2013. This paper presents three main outcomes. The first outcome highlights the disconnection between the programme standards and Malaysia's performing arts development. The second outcome highlights the ambiguities of MQA's efforts in including the concepts of employability within the programme standards. The final outcome focuses on the inconsistencies in the quality assurance requirements stated in the programme standards.

Keywords
- Drama and theatre in Malaysia
- Performing Arts Education
- Malaysian Qualifications Agency
- Programme Standards for Performing Arts
- Institutions of Higher Learning in Malaysia

Note

Prior to reading this paper, you are commended to go through the Malaysian Qualifications Agency's PS for performing arts by clicking on this link: goo.gl/FKvabZ

Introduction

For over two millenniums, the performing arts in Malaysia have always focused on traditional arts influenced by the country's multi-racial situation (Yousof, 2004). The Malays, for instance, are known to perform traditional works such as the shadow puppetry (Wayang Kulit) and Malay dance. It was not until the recent three decades where western forms of performing arts got its influence and foothold in Malaysia, likely due to the establishment of Five Arts Centre[1] in 1984 and The Actors' Studio[2] in 1989. In 1994, the government, under the Ministry of Cultural, Art and Tourism, established Aswara[3], the first governmental performing arts' institution. Even with these establishments, the development of the performing arts in Malaysia has never been a focus of the government, and hence, not many Institutions of Higher Learning (IHLs) provide an education in performing arts. Up till 2014, there are less than 10 IHLs offering academic qualifications (of higher education) in the performing arts[4].

In Malaysia, the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA)[5] takes on the role to accredit programmes, qualifications offered by the IHLs. The programme standards document (PS) is a set of quality assurance document that provides regulatory guidelines on how curriculum should be developed in IHLs in Malaysia. It also outlines learning outcomes at different qualification levels, assessment of students' learning, entry requirements, academic staff requirements, facilities and resources as well as the leadership and governance requirements. In Malaysia, IHLs are required to submit their new programme proposal to MQA for approval. The programme proposal, Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (COPPA)[6], is a document requiring the IHLs to provide inputs of programme, from learning outcomes, to actual curriculum, assessment strategies, individual academic staff qualifications, educational resources, academic leadership and administration as well as the programme review process. With the PS in place, it would seem as though the process for developing the COPPA is made simpler. From another perspective, with a set of PS in place, the IHLs cannot deviate away from what is required of the programme. During regulatory programme reviews and accreditation exercises[7] by the MQA, these institutions must prove that they have adhered to the guidelines stated in the PS document.

In late 2013, MQA launched the first ever PS for performing arts. The PS for performing arts highlights the requirements of qualifications from certificate level (Level 3 of the Malaysia Qualification Framework) to a PhD level (Level 8 of the Malaysia Qualification Framework). The PS are developed by a team of academicians from different public and local institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. Three main fields have been identified to be under the umbrella of performing arts. Dance and Music are each considered a field under the performing arts. Drama, Theatre and Film are put together as one single field in the PS.

According to the PS, the performing arts are part of the creative and cultural industries. It also states that the way forward for performing arts education in Malaysia is to *encourage students to experience and develop curiosity, interest and enjoyment in their own creativity and that of others*. The PS also indicates the hope that students will acquire the knowledge of the performing arts, apply the knowledge, reflect upon their application, and be aware of their artistic skills and personal engagement. The need for continual quality improvement is also reflected in the PS. It stipulates the need for IHLs offering performing arts programmes to conduct curriculum reviews once every two to three years, depending on the qualification level. IHLs are also required to forge relationships with the relevant governmental and industry players within the performing arts discipline as well as

engaging in dialogue sessions with these stakeholders once every two years. External reviewers, who are qualified in the respective fields, must also review the programmes and the related assessments. The 58-page document is the first and the only regulatory documentation on how Malaysia should position, design and execute its performing arts education. This research aims to identify the challenges, weaknesses and problems of this 58-page PS for performing arts, particularly in the field of drama/ theatre/ film at an undergraduate level.

The Drama and Theatre Landscape in the Post-Independence Malaysia

> "Islamic proselytizers—Muslim nongovernmental organisations, the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS, Parti Islam Se Malaysia), and the UMNO (United Malays National Organisation)-led federal government—have exerted a major influence on the public sphere over the past three decades. Their *dakwah* (proselytizing) movements and campaigns infused the public sphere and everyday life with diffuse images and expressions of piety. These diverse efforts precipitated the emergence of a "Muslim cultural sphere"—artistic and cultural discussions and expressions of "religiously inflected voices and visions"—within the broader public sphere."
>
> (Daniels, 2013)

Malaysia gained independence from British rule in 1957 and the immediate concern then was to stablise the country and to promote a sense of national identity (Ooi, 1976). Malaysia has its first set of policies on culture and the arts in 1971, initiated by then the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports, where Malay (and Islamic) forms of performing arts were strongly promoted to enlarge the aspiration of the nation. Being a multi-racial and multi-cultural society, Malaysia accepts performing arts of other culture with the condition that they must be *suitable and reasonable* (Tan, 1990). Despite that, Islam should remain as the main element in the national culture. In 1976, the National Advisory Council on culture was formed to discuss matters on cultural policies and their implementation (Aris, 1983). Public universities, such as the National University of Malaysia and University of Malaya, were the first few educational institutions to respond to the cultural policy and introduced Malay performing arts educational programmes, which included the traditional Malay folk arts (Tan, 1990). The performing arts then were also highly regulated. Before any performance, arts organisations or the artists must apply for a performance license from the police, who had the right to request for more information, such as the script, and make corrections or cuts on the artistic work. Of course, the police could also completely deny the performance a license and it would be illegal to continue to stage the performance (Kee, 2001).

To further the Malay agenda, the government, through one of its agencies, organised the yearly theatre festival in 1970s to promote the modern Malay theatre. The Ministry canceled the festival in 1984 (Tan, 1990) and since then, there is no longer a national level arts festival in Malaysia. Chinese theatre groups were established from schools, alumni associations, Chinese culture associations and political parties. The government never supported the Chinese groups but likewise all other performing arts, performances by the Chinese groups must apply for the performance license. In 1970s, the Chinese groups, especially theatre productions by the political groups, faced challenges with censorship. Not only the scripts were heavily censored, the performance permits were often only issued on the eve of the first performance (Tan 1990). In the 1980s, there was an emerging group of local Malaysian playwrights who wrote English plays, such as Kee Thuan Chye and Chin San Sooi. Although the scripts were not always given the license to perform, these

playwrights continue to produce scripts (Kee, 2011). Five Arts Centre was established in 1984 by Chin San Sooi, Marion D'cruz and the late Krishen Jit as a performing arts group to highlight Malaysia's multiculturalism and support local artists and their works. The centre staged many of the approved English plays in 1980s and is still one of the most established performing arts company in Malaysia today.

In May 2010, the 6th World Islamic Economic forum hosted the Marketplace of Creative Arts in Malaysia[8]. A plenary session *Identity in the 21st Century – Investing in the Future of Creative Arts* was held in the presence and attendance of artists from different disciplines, including the performing arts, and different countries (Lim, 2014). The Marketplace of Creative Arts, which showcased artistic works by 29 local and international artists, provided excellent networking opportunities for Muslim artists around the world to understand each other and to collaborate. Though the term *Creative Economy*[9] is not new, this forum in 2010 was one of the first few landmark events in Malaysia that relates Creative Arts (which includes the performing arts) as a contributing factor to the economy. Despite the enthusiasm, the drama and theatre scene in Malaysia remains small today. There is government funding for the performing arts but there are still no clear policies, structures and administration in terms of funding. Censorship for local performing arts is more lax today as the government pushed for self-censorship by the arts organisations and artists themselves. The permit for performances is now being managed by the respective city councils. Television shows and films continue to be the main source of entertainment for the vast majority of Malaysians.

Education and Employability

> "When trying to appreciate higher education's potential for contributing to economic wellbeing it is helpful to distinguish between the formation of subject-specific understandings and skills and the promotion of other valued skills, qualities and dispositions. Whereas the world of employment has, by and large, been satisfied with the disciplinary understanding and skills developed as a consequence of participation in higher education, it has been less happy with the development of what have been termed 'generic skills', such as communication, team-working and time-management."
>
> (Yorke, 2006)

Basically, employers want to take in graduates who are not only developed academically, but also in terms of their personality and life skills. This has always been an ongoing debate – should education engage actively with the concept of employability? From reports, it seems like a good percentage of graduates from the IHLs secure employment within months of their graduation (Cole and Tibby, 2013). In order for IHLs to fully understand the concept of employability, they have to be aware that employability is not the exactly the same as employment (Knight and Yorke, 2004). Accordingly to the Higher Education Academy (United Kingdom), employability is *a set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy* (Knight and Yorke, 2004).

For the IHLs, the concept of employability does pose some challenges. First and foremost, more people are entering higher education. It is almost impossible to make everyone employable in the sense of the word. On the other hand, based on the government and regulatory requirements, the

IHLs have the responsibility to provide an environment for good learning with a fixed set of learning hours and credits (Cole and Tibby, 2013). Under such restrictions, the IHLs have to carefully balance between imparting the knowledge for employment and teaching the generic skills that boost employability. Many IHLs assign credits to internship and work-based learning but is practical training suffice in generating employability? Internship does have its benefits and advantages. It allows a student to be in an employment situation to understand how things work and evolve around the workplace. On the other hand, a lot of these students on practical training are not given the actual responsibilities of an actual employee of the company. Many of these students undertake generic work that are way below their knowledge level and some claim that they learn nothing at all during their practical training (Low Pay Commission, 2010).

In order for IHLs to be successful in including employability into the curriculum, they must first interpret the concept of employability. What skills do they want their students to have? Next, IHLs must think of ways to fully engage students, who might not always see the importance of employability during that stage, and the academic staff, who see themselves as content knowledge experts, but not career counsellors. The success of instilling the skills for employability cannot be the sole responsibility of the career centre in the IHLs. The academic staff can better provide insights to the needs of the employment within the respective fields. Finally, IHLs must be able to follow through the process and to monitor and evaluate the development of their programmes and students (Cole and Tibby, 2013). Knight and Yorke (2004) developed the USEM model to highlight how employability is a combination of four different, but inter-related areas. 'U' stands for the understanding of the subject matter related to work and the understanding of the workplace. 'S' stands for skillful practices. These practices include academic practices, employment practices as well as life practices in general. 'E' represents efficacy beliefs. This area is about understanding self and how one can better improve and develop himself/ herself. Finally, 'M' stands for metacognition, which looks at learning and reflecting. It involves the strategies in learning, problem solving and critical thinking. This USEM model provides a framework as to how employability can be embedded into the curriculum, instead of being taught as a stand-alone subject.

While the USEM model offers some understanding of the different skills needed to enhance employability, it does not clearly identify, in layman terms for students and parents, the specific generic and life skills that employers are looking for. In 2011, the Confederation of British Industry and the National Union of Students jointly launched a document - *Working Towards Your Future: Making The Most of Your Time in Higher Education.* The document highlighted the necessary skills and attributes one should acquire to boost and enhance employability. They include communication capabilities, IT skills, numeracy, self-management abilities, teamwork, problem solving skills, and business/ commercial awareness. Nonetheless, the document stressed that it not enough to just obtain the knowledge of employability, but the importance of keeping a positive attitude in delivering these skills and attributes. Reich, in his 2002 publication of *The Future of Success*, stated that advanced economies needed two types of people. The first type is those who emphasised on discovery and the second type are people who are able to make use of the discoveries by others through their awareness of the market and interpersonal skills.

Most people who chose to enter higher education have thought about the possible subsequent employment (Robbins, 1963). When the above concepts are applied to the higher education in performing arts, some questions and insights can be deduced. First and foremost, how does IHLs interpret the concept of employability in case of the performing arts? Next, how can IHLs embed

employability into the performing arts curriculum? Finally, how does IHLs play a role in facilitating the performing arts students in achieving self-discovery or exploiting discoveries by others as Reich has suggested? These questions should be considered when developing the PS for performing arts.

The Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF)

A qualification framework is a regulatory structure for quality assurance in education. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a sharp growth of private tertiary education providers in Malaysia. The National Accreditation Board was established in 1996 to regulate and provide quality assurance of private higher education in Malaysia. It was also thereafter that the discussion on the need to establish qualification framework for private education started. The Ministry of Education officially established the MQF in 2004. It was launched as a streamlined effort not only to regulate private higher education, but also govern the public and transnational higher education in Malaysia (Mok and Yu, 2013). When MQA was established in 2007, the management of the MQF was transferred to MQA. The MQF was structured based on various researches done on different qualification frameworks around the world, from New Zealand, United Kingdom, and the European framework. There are a total eight levels on the MQF. Levels 1 to 3 are considered certificate levels and are regarded as skill based and vocational qualifications. The level 3 Certificate is often considered the foundation year for a Bachelor degree and is equivalent to the GCE 'A' level. Level 4 is the Diploma level, which requires a student at least two years to complete, unlike in the United Kingdom, where level 4 qualifications are often one year in duration. While the Diploma is still regarded as a skill based and vocational qualification, it is the first entry point to higher education in Malaysia. Most Bachelor degrees (with the exception of Medical and Engineering courses) are three years in duration. Level 4 (the Diploma level) is considered the first year of a Bachelor degree level and Level 5 (also known as the Advanced or Higher Diploma) is the second year of a Bachelor degree level. Level 6 is considered the final year of a Bachelor degree level.

There are multiple routes to enter higher education in Malaysia. Upon completing the Malaysian Certificate of Education, which is similar to GCE 'O' levels, students can choose to enter a Level 3 Certificate programme or the two-year Level 4 Diploma programme. Upon completion of the Level 3 Certificate, students can enter the first year of a Bachelor degree programme, which is at Level 4 on the MQF. In Malaysia, a Level 3 Certificate is often divided into a few streams such as the Science or Arts stream. For those who chose the Science stream, they can enter a range of Bachelor programmes related to science (such as Engineering, Computing, Applied Sciences). For those who chose the Arts stream, they can enter other Bachelor programmes such as Business, Communication, Advertising, Language, Performing Arts, Design, and Humanities. For those who enter directly into the Level 4 Diploma programme, they are able to enter directly into Level 5, which is the second year of the Bachelor degree. This is provided that the student chose to enter a course within the same or similar discipline. Either route, the minimum duration to complete a Bachelor degree in Malaysia from the time one completes the Malaysian Certificate of Education is four years.

Good Practices in Curriculum Design and Learning Outcomes Development

> "A well-structured curriculum design provides a map for all participants at a certain point but who wish to understand how that segment fits in with all that went before or comes after."

(Seel, 2004)

Neither the curriculum nor its development can stand alone as separate activities. They are closely linked in the development of educational programmes designed to meet the needs of the diverse group of stakeholders. MQA introduced COPPA and the Code of Practice for Institutional Audit (COPIA)[10] to emphasise the need for IHLs to prepare curriculums that meet the set standard. Guidelines to Good Practices: Curriculum Design and Delivery[11] is introduced to help the IHLs in the preparation of a curriculum, and is to be presented with the COPPA and COPIA to MQA for accreditation before the curriculum can to be offered to the public. Curriculum delivery is a process to achieve learning outcomes of the programme and are supported by assessments for evaluation. COPPA states that there must be a variety of learning-teaching processes, which include teaching, learning support, advice and guidance, coaching, mentoring, peer and collaborative learning, feedback and assessment, personal development planning and tutoring, skills development and practice. According to MQA, the typical effective curriculum delivery cycle involves these four key stages. First and foremost, there must be a plan on how the curriculum can be delivered. The next stage is to deliver the curriculum. Thereafter, in order to monitor and evaluate the students' learning, assessments must be carried out. Finally, proper evaluations must be provided to the students.

It is important to have an understanding of the strengths and opportunities of good assessments. For every curriculum development, the process is crafted according to the programme objectives or a good picture of an ideal graduate (Wolf, Hill and Evers, 2006). Educators are the ones who determine the kind of content, processes, learning experiences, resources, and student assessment strategies that work best to meet their teaching and learning objectives. It is important that curriculum assessment takes place in all stages of curriculum development. According to this article from ETFO Voice (Goode et al, 2010) *Assessment for Learning*, assessment is an ongoing process of everyday learning and good assessments take into consideration learning styles, strengths and needs. Assessment is the process that informs students about their learning. Only when students understand that assessment is part of their learning that they will play an active role as learners, using assessment information to regulate and monitor their own learning progress and promote the goals of lifelong learning, including higher levels of student achievements, improved learning to learn skills and greater equity of student outcomes (OECD/ CERI International Conference, 2008).

> "Firstly, instructors give task, what must the learner do in the syllabus. Instructions given must be achievable tasks, such as 'describe', 'analyze' or 'evaluate'. Secondly, the learner must understand the condition to achieve the learning goals. They can achieve within the study period and there are sufficient resources available. Lastly the learner will aim to achieve good results by understanding the standard of measurement. They must know all task are assessed and quality of achievement can be observed."
>
> (Chapman, 2007)

The purpose of designing a set of LOs is to help educators identify the goal; guide them in the planning of instructions, delivery of instructions and evaluation of students' achievements. LOs guide the learner to focus and set priorities. Clear learning outcomes (LOs) will also provide a link between expectations, teaching and assessment. In general, LOs should respond to the programme's aims and objectives (Agochiya, 2009). Good LOs can be displayed at various levels of thinking (Bloom et al., 1956). Assessments which require a lower order of thinking skills need students to

demonstrate only their levels of memory and understanding, while more demanding thinking tasks require students to demonstrate application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. According to a publication, *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*, they key to quality LOs is that students are absolutely clear about what they are expected to be able to do at the end of the study (Ramsden, 2003). While crafting the learning outcomes, one must ensure that the outcomes listed are intellectually challenging but achievable. Apart from that, it is important to make sure the assessment tasks are realistic, and reflective of the LOs set for the programme.

Findings One: Disconnection with the Malaysia's Drama and Theatre Development

To be a relevant aspect of the Creative Industries (hence, the creative economy), an education in the performing arts should respond accordingly to the industry practices and development. What is viable in the case of Malaysia's drama and theatre development? The PS states that the aim for an education in performing arts is *to encourage students to experience and develop curiosity, interest and enjoyment in their own creativity and that of others*. This aim is a total disconnect from the concept of Creative Industries and viability, and relates performing arts to hobbies. A visit to the current website of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture[12] suggests two realities. First and foremost, culture is inter-related to tourism. Although it is not stated in any form of white paper or government policies, it is surmise to conclude that by putting culture and tourism together in one ministry, the Malaysian government is seeing culture (which includes the performing arts) as a possible contribution to the economy through its collaboration with tourism.

This argument can be supported by the recent launch of the musical, MUDKL[13], a story about the development of Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia. As compared to other musicals, MUDKL's performance duration is relatively short – 45 minutes. Despite that, it will possibly be the longest running musical in Malaysia as there are plans to run the show for three years, starting from June 2014, at the City Hall, in the city centre of Kuala Lumpur[14]. With two (highly priced) ticketed shows per day, seven days a week for the next three years in the same venue of 320 seats, this musical is, no doubt, catering to tourists. The performers involved in this production are given a contract and are paid a monthly salary. In any case, MUDKL is an exception as majority of other drama companies and productions do not provide stable employment to the performers. The second reality suggests that there are currently no proper cultural policies in Malaysia. The list of programmes and funding incentives on the website is only relevant to tourism and not to culture. The set of PS has failed to reflect and connect with the actual development of the performing arts in Malaysia.

Findings Two: Ambiguities in the Inclusion of Employability

The reality is that the performing arts scene in Malaysia is small. Malaysia has a population of about 30 million, which is about half of United Kingdom's population. Currently, there are about 20 active drama and theatre companies in Malaysia, with less than 10 purpose-built performing arts venues[15]. Mr. Richard Chua, Programme Leader of the Entertainment Arts programme in KDU University College, also stressed that the current supply of performing arts students exceed the demand of the industry. It is therefore more important to focus on employability. According to Ms. Suhaili Micheline, an established Malaysian dancer, and Mr. Lawrence Wong, a well-known Malaysian film, television and stage actor, networking and communication are important skills for performing arts graduates to get performing jobs in the Malaysian context. In the case of drama/

theatre/ film, what is MQA's definition on its employability? What kind of graduate attributes do they want to generate through an education in the performing arts? Where do they expect the graduates to seek employment? Are they expecting the graduates to seek full-time employment or be self-employed as freelance performing artists/ performing arts practitioner?

Although the aim for performing arts seems to gear towards leisure and hobby, there are mentions on 'industry practices', 'career management', and 'internship' as required knowledge to be included in the drama/ theatre/ film curriculum in the 'Body of Knowledge' section[16] within the PS. Key skills and attributes such as leadership, teamwork, interpersonal, social, management and entrepreneurial skills, are also listed in the prescribed learning outcomes stated in the PS[17]. Perhaps this suggests the flexibility of the PS to allow the IHLs to decide how they want to incorporate employability in their curriculum design. This is not without further challenges. For the part on internship, it is stated in the PS that for every one credit issued to industrial training, a total of two full weeks of work attachment must be carried. This is not realistic for the case of performing arts in Malaysia. How does one ensure that there would always be a two full weeks of drama-related attachment available for students? The internship scheme for performing arts students should differ from, say, business students, where they can easily find a continuous internship in a company. The PS has to relook into how internship is carried out. Furthermore, with the regulated curriculum design and delivery process, which includes the subject components and the credit value, it is challenging for IHLs to be innovative on the course design to include employability adequately.

Findings Three: Inconsistencies in Quality Assurance

> "An effective Quality Assurance programme will be one that is expressed in a straightforward way. The programme should be clear, concise and uncomplicated, not tedious or unduly long and cluttered with unnecessary details or trivia."
>
> (FAO Staff, 1993)

The LOs for drama/ theatre/ film in the PS fit the qualities of good learning outcomes. They are clear, concise and free of jargon. Furthermore, these outcomes are achievable and assessable within the learning duration. While this highly commended, I have noticed some inconsistencies, which may cause misinterpretations or confusions that will undermine the intended students' learning process and the need for consistency from a quality assurance perspective. The LOs stress the importance of generic skills and attributes to enhance employability, yet there is no mention on the importance of employability in the programme's aims and intentions. A programme should have clear and concise aims and objectives, before the learning outcomes can be effectively crafted. In this case, there is no clear connection between the aims and the learning outcomes.

As stipulated in the PS, candidates with diploma qualifications with two to three years of relevant industry experience can teach at certificate/ diploma levels drama/ theatre/ film programmes. The PS does not indicate if a diploma qualification in a relevant field is required. If a candidate possess a diploma qualification in business but has worked in the field of drama/ theatre/ film for three years, is he/ she eligible to teach this level? The same goes for bachelor level programmes. Diploma level academics are eligible to teach at bachelor level if they have at least five years of relevant industry experience. Again, the PS does not indicate if the diploma qualification should be in a relevant area.

While there is a 30% cap on the number of academic staff with diploma qualifications to teach certificate/ diploma levels, there is no cap on the number of academic staff with certificate qualification, which is a lower qualification than the diploma. For bachelor level teaching, there is no cap of academic staff with any qualifications, be it bachelor, diploma or certificate. Also, professional qualifications in a relevant area are accepted for teaching at a bachelor level. What about certificate/ diploma levels? There is no mention on the acceptance of professional qualifications at this level. To add on the confusion, the PS states that IHLs can decide to bring in subject specialists and experts, who do not fall into the any of the above qualifications, to teach at all levels. The definition of subject specialists and experts is ambiguous as IHLs will interpret and define them differently. This flexibility may be abused by the IHLs and completely undermines the need for a set of requirements for academic staff in the first place. Being a set of quality assurance document, the PS should be more concise in its requirements to avoid misinterpretation and abuse.

The PS challenges the common definition of performing arts, which involves works created for a live audience, by including film alongside drama and theatre. Thinking realistically, the inclusion of film might be MQA's way in responding to employability and the reality of the theatre and drama scene in Malaysia. After all, the film industry is more established and developed in Malaysia. In the interview, Chua mentioned that video production and filmmaking provide work opportunities for drama and theatre practitioners. Hence, it is logical to place the training of skills in these areas under performing arts. However, film and video production is also included in the PS of other disciplines. For instance, within the PS for creative multimedia[18], which is launched in 2011, video and film is also considered as one major field. In the PS of creative multimedia, there are specific subject requirements for video and film that are not reflected in the PS for drama/ theatre/ film under the umbrella of performing arts. To add on to this inconsistency, MQA has also launched the PS for media and communication studies months before performing arts[19]. In the PS for media and communication studies, there is also a provision for film studies, which includes film production. Therefore, it is now possible to offer video and film under the pretext of drama/ theatre/ film (within performing arts) or under media and communication studies to escape from the stringent subject requirements listed in the PS for creative multimedia. As a quality assurance body, MQA should not have allowed this situation to arise.

Conclusion

I will recommend MQA to consider retracting the PS for performing arts at this stage. Clearly, it is not the best and right time to launch the PS for performing arts. There are several vital issues highlighted in this paper, which MQA needs to readily address. Moreover, it is difficult to have a one size fits all standards for different fields within the performing arts, especially when there are currently no strategic and intended development by the government or any other relevant agencies and stakeholders. In the interview with Dr. Khong, the Vice-Chancellor (Academic) of HELP University in Malaysia, he stressed that he would only consider offering performing arts if there are substantial efforts by the government to develop the performing arts industry and when there is steady stream of potential students in the long terms. At this stage, it is more appropriate to leave it to the IHLs to carry out their own feasibility studies to decide if they want to launch programmes in the performing arts and to have the autonomy to also decide on the mechanisms and content that goes into the programmes.

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Notes

[1] Five Arts Centre website: http://www.fiveartscentre.org/

[2] The Actors Studio website: http://www.theactorsstudio.com.my/

[3] Aswara website: http://www.aswara.edu.my/

[4] Note that there over 500 public and private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. Less than 2% of the institutions offer programmes in performing arts.

[5] MQA website: http://www.mqa.gov.my/

[6] The Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (COPPA) is intended to be a useful guide for providers of higher education, quality assurance assessors, officers of the MQA, policy makers, professional bodies and other stakeholders engaged in higher education. This Code contains an overview of the Malaysian quality assurance system for higher education.

[7] Whenever a COPPA is submitted to MQA, the eventually accreditation given will be provisional. The programme can only submit for full accreditation upon the completion of one full cycle of students.

[8] The 6th World Islamic Economic conference was held in KL Convention Centre between 18 and 20 May 2010. The event was chaired by Tun Musa Hitam.

[9] In 2010, UNCTAD published the Creative Economy Report and in its introduction, the report highlighted how the developed and the developing economies are reacting to the Creative Industries. It states 'The emerging creative economy has become a leading component of economic growth, employment, trade and innovation, and social cohesion in most advanced economies. Unfortunately, however, the large majority of developing countries are not yet able to harness their creative capacity for development.'

[10] The Code of Practice for Institutional Audit (COPIA) is intended to be a useful guide for providers of higher education, quality assurance auditors, officers of the MQA, policy makers, professional bodies and other stakeholders engaged in higher education. This Code contains an overview of the Malaysian quality assurance system for higher education. It guides the reader on the nine evaluation areas for quality assurance as well as the two levels of standards – benchmarked and enhanced standards – that underline them.

[11] Refer to the document at: goo.gl/L3WjAe

[12] Ministry of Tourism and Culture's website: http://www.motac.gov.my/en/

[13] MUDKL website: http://mudkl.com/

[14] A recent news article on MUDKL: http://www.nst.com.my/node/6933

[15] This information is based on my 3 years of residence in Malaysia between 2010 and 2013. There is no formal website archiving the details of performing arts companies in Malaysia.

[16] Refer to page 47 of the Programme Standards for Performing Arts.

[17] Refer to page 9 of the Programme Standards for Performing Arts.

[18] Programme Standards for Creative Multimedia: goo.gl/yQ5HB9

[19] Programme Standards for Media and Communication Studies: goo.gl/7vXE6P