

## Education for Creative Content Industry: More Collaborative Efforts Needed

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### *Abstract*

*Much has changed and challenged the creative content industry since two decades ago. Data comprehension and digital technology has done wonder in the great shift from cell drawing of animation work to digital computer-based illustration, and "film-quality" movie production shot using digital video disk or computer hardisk. To measure whether the technology development in the creative content meet the requirement of the industry practitioners, the National Film Development Corporation of Malaysia (FINAS) commissioned this faculty to conduct a two-stage qualitative and quantitative research. For the purpose of this report, the qualitative aspect of the study is presented here. The first qualitative stage was intended to be an exploratory study to gather in-depth preliminary data on the issue. Three focus group interviews that involved 26 respondents, divided into three mixed groups of producers, directors of photography, art directors and actors, a second group comprised of assistant film directors, effects coordinators and script writers, while the last group had production managers, audio mixers and actors. They were conveniently selected from the membership listings of the three national associations of Film Producers (PFM), Film Directors (FDAM), and Film Workers (PROFIMA). Highlights of the findings indicated that a significant number of the industry practitioners felt film graduates were not really interested of a career in this industry. They reasoned that this partly due to the lack of availability of mid-level positions film graduates expected to be employed in, and when they could not find one, then simply accepted jobs below their qualifications. Respondents were also concerned that the curricula in film-broadcasting studies did not reflect the true needs of the industry. They proposed that certain elements of management, finance and marketing should be incorporated in the teaching curricula. The conclusion that can be reached is that FINAS should collaborate with recognised colleges and universities to organise courses on film production management, film production scheduling and budgeting. A challenge to the institutions of higher learning would be how the teaching of the craft of filmmaking and video production can be made more effective as a means of transferring knowledge and developing skills.*

### **Introduction**

The world today values creativity and innovation. Thus, the film and electronic media industry should offer the greatest opportunity to any creative enterprise. This is the industry that hungers for creativity. The new catch word for it now is creative content industry.

Imagine, a career in this industry allows you to create a product from reality to the height of fantasy. For example, a documentary on the construction of the Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur to alien beings in a far away planet as in Avatar. And to top it all, humans fighting bad robots from other planets in the Transformers series! Obviously, a better way to enter this industry is to quickly acquire knowledge and experience because the only constant is change. In the short span of the last decade the industry has seen significant changes from the format of recording images and sound to the distribution of its products. Producers and television stations that once record movies and programmes in the analog format, are now shifting to digital recording and transmission. What get recorded are no longer on tape, but in optical disc, memory card and hard disk. Even film is now shot using digital high definition camera that stored images and sound in hard disk.

Recognising this new standard of film and television programme production, the question now is whether the institution of higher learning is able to match the current needs of the evolving industry. Besides instilling the traditional aesthetic education in the art of scriptwriting, drama, and acting; understanding and developing skills in film and video production technology, production management, and the soft skills of effective presentation and communication, teamwork, leadership, and entrepreneurship are also highly demanded.

In order to measure whether the institution of higher learning could fulfill these needs, the National Film Development Corporation (FINAS) through Universiti Teknologi MARA's Research Management Institute commissioned the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies to conduct a two-stage research titled Effectiveness of IPTA/IPTS Film Graduates in Malaysia.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Creativity is defined as the ability to generate novel or unique ideas, while innovation is production of something original and useful. To Bronson and Merryman (2010), to be creative requires divergent thinking (generating many unique ideas) and then convergent thinking (combining those ideas into the best results).

Looking at the creative content industry in Malaysia today, there are two governmental agencies that regulate its activities and development. They are FINAS (through the Perbadanan Kemajuan Nasional Malaysia Act 1981, permitting it to control the production, distribution and exhibition of films in the country) and the Film Censorship Board of the Ministry of Home Affairs (through the Film Censorship Act 2002, allowing it to determine what is permissible to go on air on any multimedia platforms).

While the general public thinks film is that celluloid strip with perforated edges, the FINAS Act has a wider definition. Accordingly, film includes "feature films, short films, short subject films, trailers, documentaries, advertising filmlets and any recording on material of any kind, including video types and video discs, of moving images, accompanied or unaccompanied by sound, for viewing by the public or any class of the public."

In the opening remark of their book, Asiah Sarji et. al. (1999) stated that the local film industry was too slow to meet changing systems and situations. The contributing factor was the lack of professionalism among its human capital. Based on their in-depth interviews of 18 film practitioners, Asiah Sarji et. al. found that 60 percent of the respondents neither had a formal education on film nor any form of training skill in film.

If one thought close to a decade later the situation in the local film industry would have improved, how mistaken he or she could be. In 2007, in a forum conducted for film practitioners, film director and then President of the Film Workers' Association of Malaysia, Syed Mohamad Syed Hassan Ben Yahya, bluntly said that the quality of film production in this country was low because industry practitioners lacked expertise, they only had experience. This was further echoed by identity in the same forum when he said: "Film practitioners also lack discipline. They often do not come to location on time. Moreover, there is no proper scope of work for the film production personnel; anybody can delegate authority and responsibility to somebody else."

If the practitioners had experience but lacked expertise, obviously, a university or college education can make them more rounded and builds good work habits. After all the local film industry has been in existence for more than 70 years (according to Malek and Jarr, 2005, the first Malay film *Laila Majnun* was produced in 1934,) and that film schools were introduced in local universities in the 1970s. Thus, one can deduce that the graduates of these film schools could have laid the groundwork for greater professionalism in filmmaking.

However, this assumption has proven to be far from reality. The problems on human capital the film industry faces now, and in the future, simply demand a rethink (if not a revamp) in the universities curricula and a new learning approach.

Realising the importance of creativity, many countries are making creativity development a national priority, (Bronson and Merryman, 2010). In 2008, British secondary school curricula from science to foreign language was revamped to emphasise idea generation, and pilot programs have begun using Torrance's test to assess their progress. In Europe and China, more and more schools are instituting problem-based learning programs - curricula driven by real-world inquiry for both children and adults.

In many instances, these countries' assessment of creativity is through the use of Torrance test. The test was developed by Professor E. Paul Torrance in which children were given a series of creativity tasks. It involved a 90-minute series of discrete tasks, administered by a psychologist. Those who came up with more good ideas on Torrance's tasks (having very high creativity index) grew up to achieve greater creative accomplishments as adults. Longitudinal tracking studies into their adulthood indicated that they were entrepreneurs, inventors, college presidents, authors, doctors, diplomats, and software developers.

To understand exactly what should be done to increase creativity and innovation among the new breed of creative content workers first requires understanding of the expectations of the film industry practitioners on the film graduates of the local universities and colleges. This was what this study set out to do.

### **Research Methodology**

The first stage was intended to be an exploratory study to gather in-depth preliminary data on the issue. Therefore, a qualitative study involving three focus group interviews was recommended to and accepted by FINAS. Twenty six respondents were interviewed and they were divided into three mixed groups of producers, directors of photography, art directors and actors, a second group comprised of assistant film directors, effects coordinators and script writers, while the last group had production managers, audio mixers and actors.

They were conveniently selected from the membership listings of the three national associations of Film Producers (PFM), Film Directors (FDAM), and Film Workers (PROFIMA). Two groups were interviewed in a function room of a hotel, while the last group interview was in a meeting room at a resort and convention centre in Shah Alam.

- A lecturer, with experience in moderating focus group interviews, conducted the interview sessions, assisted by a FINAS-approved discussion guide. Findings from the qualitative study were then used to guide the construction of the questionnaire in the follow-up to the second stage of quantitative research. However, this paper will only present the findings of the first stage of the qualitative study.

### **Research Findings**

This research highlights several important findings on attitudes of graduates, facilities available and curricula offered at Institut Pengajian Tinggi Awam/ Institut Pengajian Tinggi Swasta.

#### ***a. Attitudes and Interest***

A significant number of the industry practitioners felt film graduates were not really interested in a career in this industry. Film study or broadcasting was the last choice when they applied to go into college or university since they did not have good grades in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (a middle secondary school examination).

*As a part-time lecturer to broadcasting students, I often asked them whether they had deep interest in the broadcasting industry. The answer I got was very disappointing.*

*(Ms Zohara Ghany Mohd. Batusha, managing director of a production company)*

*Most graduates preferred to be in front of a camera (the glamorous part). And the reason they were not interested in this industry was that they were not exposed to the reality of the work requirements.*

*(Noor Fiha, director)*

Respondents also questioned the lack of constructive attitude among graduates of this field of study. They reasoned that due to the lack of mid-level positions the graduates expected to be employed in, they then simply accepted jobs below their qualifications such as production assistants and crew, contributing to poor work attitude.

*Graduates' attitudes and behaviours today have changed, they are hedonistic and are lazy to improve.*

*(Raja Aznil Raja Hisham, advertisement film director)*

*The majority of graduates did not actually know and understand what they were taught in the IPTA/IPTS. I have to take time and teach them because I want the best from them.*

*(Shahriman Sharie, executive producer)*

*Graduates today do not read much and do research work that can assist them to excel in this industry.*

*(Wan Ahmad Ngah, freelance director)*

#### ***b. Curricula in film-broadcasting studies***

Most of the respondents agree that there should be collaborative effort between the IPTA/IPTS and the film-broadcasting industry to expose students at an early stage to the technology and the world of filmmaking, as a morale booster to their interest in this area of study.

*Students must be encouraged to often meet and be involved in the activities of the industry. They can then better prepare themselves and be professional.*

*(Zulkiflee Abu Bakar, freelance producer and part-time lecturer)*

The respondents were concerned that the curricula in film-broadcasting studies did not reflect the true needs of the industry.

*Courses taught at the university were only 20 percent useful to the industry. Theories alone are inadequate to what is required of them later at the workplace. Thus, industry experienced lecturers should be part of the teaching staff.*

*(Fadzli Ramli, producer)*



Another concern among the respondents was the inadequate facilities in the IPTA/IPTS. They found the production equipment - cameras and accessories, and editing machines - were outdated and no longer meeting industry standards.

*Besides inadequate production equipment, the use of new (production) technology in IPTA/IPTS is so far behind and is not following current trend.*

*(Rabiatul Adawiyah, financial and administrative executive of a production company)*

Production equipment is always inadequate (in the IPTA/IPTS). Moreover, students are not taught well on how to use them. Often, after a recording session, during playback, the sound goes missing. They missed recording it.  
(Nora Hendon Faezal, producer and director)

All the respondents agreed that certain elements of management, finance and marketing should be incorporated in the teaching curricula. They believed filmmaking and television programme production should be treated as serious business. Although creative freedom is given the widest latitude in the industry, still, its success is measured in Ringgit terms, not aesthetic value.

*Besides financial management, knowledge in marketing is also lacking in these students.*

*(Azimi Kassim, production consultant)*

*Financial management, sales, and advertising are important in this industry. Such courses that are specific to the film industry should be introduced.*

*(Fauziyah Md. Aris, production consultant)*

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The conclusion that can be reached is that FINAS should collaborate with recognised colleges and universities to organise courses on film production management, film production scheduling and budgeting. FINAS knows better of the industry technology direction and standards, and this knowledge can be passed on to the IPTA/IPTS, thereby, avoiding unnecessary delays and purchase of unmatched equipment standards.

After all, the future of the entertainment industry, of which film and video are an integral part of it, rests on creativity and content. The format of the content will be digital as such form is compatible to the telephony, television and computer platforms. Therefore, FINAS and other relevant authorities need to prepare this creative content industry to this eventual convergence and how film and video can play a major role as a provider of content in all three platforms.

A challenge to the IPTA/IPTS would be how the teaching of the craft of filmmaking and video production can be made more effective as a means of transferring knowledge and developing skills. Peter and Homer (1996) found that with any complex craft, the selection process for new generation of practitioners is inhabited by the lack of dedicated professional teachers willing or able to act as coaches and mentors. They also proposed that the challenge is in the design and incorporation of course materials that are steeped in experiential model-building simulations and a means of transferring knowledge and developing skills.

On the other hand, Pitts (1990) further suggested that project managers (of which future producers, production directors and production managers could be defined as such) can gain greater respect and influence from team members when they possess expert power, that is, the possession of expertise, skill and knowledge that one can assume to have acquired during attendance at the university. To this effect, perhaps the film industry and the institutions of higher learning that offer film studies and broadcasting, could identify primary job characteristics for those who aspire to be film/video producers, directors, production managers, animators and video designers.

Such identification can then be employed to ascertain traits that should be inherent among students who wish to enter this field of study. Therefore, the institution of higher learning that offers film and broadcasting studies could incorporate simulation methodology in their teaching exercises, tailored to specific course goals. The courses worth considering are team formation and team building, effective planning, production management that involves work breakdown structure, scheduling, estimating work scope and incorporating film production controls systems.

Additionally, as stated by Bronson and Merryman (2010), research by creativity theorist Donald Treffinger pointed to the use of Creative Problem-Solving method of education as a way to increase students' creativity. In another study, students who do better in both problem-finding and problem-solving have better relationships. They are more able to handle stress and overcome hardships as they grow up. A similar study among 1,500 middle schoolers found that those high in creative self-efficacy had more confidence about their future and ability to succeed. They were sure that their ability to come up with alternatives would aid them, no matter what problems would arise.

As a concluding remark, the recommendations that were initiated in this study are by no means exhaustive. Without doubt, further study and deliberations with all the stakeholders of the creative content industry are needed before the transition to full implementation.

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