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Approach to Teaching and Learning Visual Merchandising (VM) Courses among Teachers in Vocational Colleges

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Abstract

The Visual Merchandising (VM) course is a compulsory course for Vocational College students in the Fashion Design Diploma Program (SRF). Previous studies found problems faced by teachers in teaching and learning (PdP) in Vocational Colleges due to time constraints, lack of suitable places, limited equipment and materials in handling PdP, outdated and lack of mastery of knowledge and skills when implementing course implementation strategies VM. Therefore, this study was carried out to explore the approach and strategy carried out by teachers in KV for poor VM. This qualitative study has 3 study participants among teachers and 6 study participants among students. Participants of this study were interviewed and the results were transcribed and then analyzed using Atlas.ti software. The findings show that there are 3 main approaches used by KV teachers during the PdP process, namely the student-centered approach, the teacher-centered approach and the material-centered approach. These three approaches are carried out by KV teachers according to the creativity and appropriateness of the content and criteria of the VM course, however, the students have obtained good and enjoyable learning results.

Introduction

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is undergoing changes in terms of implementation, policy development, administration, training and allocation of teachers (UNESCO-UN EVOC, 2020). This transformation is aimed at an education system that provides specialized training for technical skills and other skills to meet the dynamic labor market demand and provide quality training for a sustainable future for the employment sector. Transformation is not only limited to course content and curriculum development but also includes the entire TVET system and technical staff members (MTS-III). MTS-III focuses on developing the capacity of TVET leaders in implementing change programs and facilitating knowledge sharing and peer learning within the UNEVOC Network. (Taib et al., 2020).

Based on the Malaysian Education Development Plan (2013-2025), two leaps related to Technical and Vocational Education are emphasized. Firstly, the emphasis on producing holistic graduates with balanced entrepreneurial characteristics and secondly graduates who have the strengthening of skilled graduate training. According to the Malaysian Ministry of

Education (2013), there has been an increase in the capacity, quality and level of skill programs in the field of TVET involving 250 thousand TVET graduates through a report presented by the Ministry of Education in 2012. This enrollment is expected to increase by 2.5 times in 2025 which is as many as 650 thousand quality TVET graduates to enter the employment field as a step to intensify the government's efforts to advance the economic and industrial fields.

Thus, the Vocational College is one of the educational institutions and technical and vocational training is responsible for producing semi-skilled and skilled workers to produce students who are knowledgeable and skilled in line with the objectives of PPPM 2013-2015. Of course, teachers play an important role in imparting the right knowledge and skills to realize the government's desire towards an industrialized country, in addition to producing successful business entrepreneurs to improve and expand the country's economy to a global level.

Problem Statement

MoE through PPPM 2013-2025 intends to expand access and improve the quality of education pathways, starting with TVET education where there is more demand than supply. Therefore, the MoE has entered into a place purchase agreement with the private sector by improving the quality of TVET through collaboration with the private sector to obtain qualifications recognized by the industry through offering more 'hands-on' practicum course opportunities and improving teacher training (MoE, 2013). Teachers are important leaders to provide knowledge and skills to students (Taiba, et al., 2020). Without a broad mastery of knowledge and skills in theoretical and practical PdP causes students to not be able to have a real intellectual understanding related to project production.

Nevertheless, the level of mastery of knowledge and skills of teachers in TVET education is still at a moderate level, especially in the VM Course in the SRF Program at Vocational Colleges (Abdul Aziz, 2021). This causes teachers to lack confidence to carry out the process of imparting knowledge and skills to students (Hamdan & Ayop, 2010). The findings of previous studies also found that the problems faced by teachers in PdP at Vocational Colleges are also due to time constraints, lack of suitable places, equipment and materials in handling PdP which are limited and not up-to-date as well as the lack of mastery of knowledge and skills in implementing VM course implementation strategies (Anuar et al., 2015; Abdullah & Ali, 2017; Jamaludin & Osman, 2014; Rahman et al., 2011). The development of the latest trend of PdP VM online (Roggeveen et al., 2021; Karim et al., 2020; Boardman & Mccormick, 2019; Mohamed et al., 2020; Hazwani & Nizar, 2016), should be highlighted by teachers to students to see the influence of different goods purchasing behavior from online store environment methods, and online promotions (Hasim et al., 2020). Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the teaching approach implemented by teachers for the Visual Merchandising (VM) course at the Vocational College.

Literature Review

The MoE has outlined access to quality education, early childhood education for all, a structured financial support system for students and industry-academic collaboration arrangements in TVET in the 12th Malaysia Plan (RMK-12, 2021-2025). TVET is Technical and Vocational Education and Training that aims to produce a competent workforce in certain fields. The scope of TVET should be based on recognized occupational standards with emphasis on practical components, psychomotor skills and exposure to training and industry.

The purpose of TVET was introduced to meet industry demand and contribute to economic growth, in line with globalization, knowledge-based economy, technological advancement and global workforce mobility. Therefore, the formation of part of the TVET curriculum in collaboration with the industry has been established. TVET is responsible for supplying skilled and semi-skilled workers who can be marketed to fill career vacancies in Malaysia and can produce successful entrepreneurs to increase the development of the high-income economy. Various economic fields have been identified as having a high potential to produce skilled workers, one of which is through the field of Fashion Design. The field of fashion is one of the economic and socio-economic activities that are innovative and useful to various levels such as individuals, communities, corporates and nationals. According to Mehdipour (2021), the fashion industry is increasingly influenced by its environmental and social effects. This situation is due to the global fashion industry has experienced rapid changes driven by the development of globalization and technology. The result is a shift towards fast fashion or the latest trends that allow consumers to wear the latest trends at low cost. Various world fashion brands try to meet the demand by producing the latest fashion products that can be quickly marketed all over the world.

Various marketing strategies used by clothing fashion retailers to attract buyers, one of which is the store design and visual strategy for the fashion products offered at the outlet, which is called Visual Merchandising (VM). According to Gopal et al. (2019) Visual Merchandising is a discipline related to the relationship between objects, the context in which they are placed and relevant images. It forms a product image that causes customers to be attracted when they see it. According to Fernando, Gunarathne and Deyshappriya (2019) there is a relationship between visual merchandising and fashion-oriented impulse buying behavior. VM has a positive effect on the behavior of fashion-oriented shoppers where they are attracted to various visual merchandising techniques such as window displays, interior design, floor merchandising and promotional signage.

The importance of VM in the field of fashion design prompted BPLTV to make it one of the courses in the field of Fashion Design at the Vocational College. This course is designed and must be taken by Fashion Design students while in semester 3, the VM course is introduced because they are aware of the importance of this VM in the fashion industry so students can build knowledge and create creativity to compete in the industry market later. VM learning in the context of education offered at KV includes an explanation of visual elements in terms of importance, function, types of fashion promotion, the display of visual merchandise elements on window or shop displays, and an explanation of the language and art of merchandise visuals used (Vocational College Standard Curriculum (KSKV) 2016, HFD Fashion Design Diploma: Academic Management, Vakasional Unit.BPLTV.KPM). The VM course taught to KV students is to meet the knowledge and expertise needs of students when they go out into the industry as industrial workers or have their own businesses as traders or entrepreneurs. Focus on theoretical and practical learning by producing a 'Store Design' model or Store Design (RBS) according to a theme chosen as a group. This situation illustrates that the emphasis of VM learning in Vocational Colleges is more on practical or practical training than on theory.

Study Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach as the basis of the study. According to Nabilah et al (2010) qualitative research is a process of inquiry towards understanding based on data collection methods commonly used when surveying a social problem. Qualitative research is

conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of a matter to be studied. It is also conducted to obtain detailed information related to a subject being studied. This means that in order to obtain detailed and in-depth information, a qualitative study must be carried out.

The respondents of this study were three teachers and six students from two vocational colleges in Selangor. The selection of respondents is through purposive sampling. The teacher respondents involved are teachers who teach the course with at least two years of experience to confirm the use of the PdP strategy approach implemented while the student respondents are among KV students who have completed the VM course while pursuing the Diploma in Fashion Design, KV.

This study uses interviews as a data collection method. The data obtained through interviews were then transcribed and using the analysis software that is Atlas ti to do the process of coding and categorizing according to specific themes. Coding and categorizing are core processes in qualitative analysis. Coding is a process of handling data to a form of data reduction leading to the identification of categories and the formation of themes. According to Van Manen (1990), theme is a process formed as a result of the understanding obtained through interviews from the text. Therefore, it is data that can give meaning to the phenomenon and if the phenomenon does not exist, then the theme will not exist.

Study Findings and Discussion

This study was conducted to answer the main question which is the implementation strategy carried out by teachers who teach VM Courses at Vocational Colleges. Through the results of interviews and data analysis through the Atlas ti software, there are three main approaches used by teachers, namely the student-centered approach, the teacher-centered approach and the material-centered approach. The approach implemented by the teacher in the PdP process for the VM Course is consistent and parallel with previous literature studies.

Student Centered Approach

The student-centered approach is the approach used by teachers in implementing PdP sessions for VM courses. This approach is implemented in PdP sessions involving theoretical teaching in class as well as practical teaching during the implementation of LSB and RBS. A student-centered approach requires the involvement of students as active participants in PdP sessions that provide opportunities for students to explore, try, analyze, interact, give opinions, work in teams collaboratively and encourage students to act and think critically and creatively in PdP sessions. Through the results of interviews conducted, teachers at KV have used a student-centered approach during the teaching and learning process that involves several main strategies, namely Learning Through Discovery Inquiry, Discussion (Cooperative Learning), Problem-Based Learning (PBM) and Project-Based Learning (PBP). Here are some statements from the study participants that support the findings:

G2: "...usually I will give a task...task instructions to the students...what the students need to do...sometimes I will tell the students to look for reference sources in the library...look for VM books...Students look first... what is the result of the findings that he makes a reference, he makes a presentation." (Discovery Inquiry)

P3; "...the teacher asked to discuss...in groups...a maximum of three people...then...report to each other...then...print a picture...put it in the mounting board...then present it to the teacher...(Cooperative Learning)

G3: "...students do store design... store display...we ask them to do...based on what they come out with...I ask them to create a screen popup...design the store..." ...the correct arrangement of materials and tools is important for current students to master field trip… (Problem Based Learning)

G2: ”..they go on a field trip..look at the VM examples that are in the boutiques..take pictures...then come back and make a report on the field trip according to the title of their choice..which is categorized as practical for the field trip...". (Project Based Learning)

This student-centered approach is constructive learning that takes into account the cognitive structure of students to help them build new concepts or knowledge. It is a learning process that explains how knowledge is organized in the student's mind. In addition, the knowledge acquired will be actively developed by the student himself and not passively accepted by the environment and clearly show that learning is the result of the student's own efforts and not fully accepted from the teacher alone (Akmar et al., 2023). A student-centered approach is more suitable for smart students because it is easier for them to learn constructively (Abdullah et al., 2013) consistent with the results of this study which shows that VM courses that taken by Diploma students requires forward-thinking, mature and creative thinking to assess the business premises environment that practices the preparation of materials and tools which is one of the main features of the content of the VM course.

Teacher-Centered Approach

The teacher-centered PdP approach is an approach commonly implemented by teachers in the delivery of theoretical information in class or through practical activities. The teacher is the main medium in explaining and empowering students' thinking through content arguments in VM courses. The teacher's job is to master and control all PdP activities so that students clearly understand, evaluate, reason, and synthesize all the information obtained through the teacher. For the VM course, this approach is implemented at the beginning of the title or the introduction of what VM means, the function and purpose of VM is done in the course. Through assignment instructions to students, students are given an explanation of what they need to do for theoretical and practical learning. Student teacher question and answer session takes place during the theoretical and practical learning process. After a certain period is given, students will send the results of their assignments to be checked and evaluated.

There are three main strategies for teachers through this approach, which are lectures in class, demonstrations, and online learning. The statements below are some quotes obtained through interview sessions with study participants.

P3: "...the theory is in class...the teacher explains what visual merchandising is...examples...why do we have to learn...if it's practical...how do we do it...what materials do we use...create a real visual merchandising project...the theory...do assignment...after the teacher explains..." (lecture in class)

G3: "... a demonstration given to the students after the students return from the field trip. ... usually I will help the students ... when they don't know how to arrange the equipment ... their materials follow the group's theme ... for example ideas and this student ... he produces directly on the spot real... because we... there is a special place for students to do... I'll show them... lay it out how they want to arrange it... after that... just leave it to them to follow or choose according to their own choice..." (Demonstration)

G2: "...since this covid...I run an online class...I explain everything online...make a video or copy a video from Youtube...for the students..." (Online learning)

A teacher-centered approach is a PdP approach that fully empowers the teacher to control the classroom. All information, knowledge, examples and topic development are completely dependent on the teacher. This approach is found to tend to be used by lecturers at the higher education level, which is to use lecture or lecture method strategies as the main teaching technique (Azizah 2015). For teachers at Vocational Colleges, this approach is also used in the classroom, especially for theoretical teaching sessions. According to Abdullah et al. (2011), the main characteristic of the teacher-centered strategy is that the teacher/instructor plays the main role in determining and controlling all teaching and learning activities that take place in the classroom.

Material-Centered Approach

Material-centered approach refers to the use of various materials such as books, scientific equipment, computers, etc. in PdP sessions. Teachers emphasize the use of materials to improve student understanding. The results of the study show that there are two sub-themes used by teachers in the material-based approach, namely theoretical and practical PdP materials.

i. Theoretical PdP Material

The implementation of material centralization for PdP is theoretically through the reference source of books related to the VM course from the college library or from any source of reference books through a search on google. Explanations related to topics and student assignments through the use of IT tools and materials such as LCDs and laptops or computers. Some quotes that support the use of teaching aids are as follows:

G2: "...in terms of materials...I like to use power point, reference books about foreign VMs...there's that...install a laptop, LCD in class...show videos from Youtube...(G2)

P2: "...use power point...present to make a model...explain about window display and store design...teacher uses computer and LCD...reference books are there for reference...group discussion..."

From the informant's narration above, it is very clear that the use of theoretical PdP materials such as reference books related to VM courses, information searches on the internet such as google searches related to titles, the use of tools, and ICT materials are fully used by the teacher informant to convey information to students. For students, the use of PdP material is used for the presentation of assignments to the teacher.

ii. Practical PdP Materials

The practical teaching and learning process involves focusing on the production of the RBS model. In producing RBS, the use of tools and materials is used referring to group assignments. Various tools and materials used by the teacher such as existing materials and multimedia in the implementation of RBS for the VM so that students can successfully produce RBS that stands out and shows creativity. The following is an explanation from the study participants.

G3: "... how is he a designer, he has a store... not only drawing but having to produce it in the form of a box screen popup... that thing appears in 3D form..."

The findings of the study show that teachers use several tools and materials in PdP, including the use of reference books, the use of technology and ICT as well as existing or concrete materials such as examples of the previous RBS model. Learning using concrete materials will reveal to students a more meaningful learning experience. This statement is also supported by Sulaiman & Rahim (2010) who stated that the learning process involving the use of concrete materials, equipment and resources is more effective. From the teaching materials provided to students, they will analyze and obtain more complete information through the use of various senses. This situation will certainly allow students to remember concepts and facts related to the material more effectively.

In order to produce teaching materials that can have the best effect on PdP, it is necessary to determine some characteristics that are suitable for the environment and conditions. Among them are explaining vague ideas, explaining parts that are difficult to understand, large and clear, attractive colors and the right size, durable, most impactful, and cheap (Jasmi & Tamuri, 2007). These characteristics are the basis in the selection of teaching materials that will be used by teachers in all PdP in schools. The features mentioned above are also among the factors that influence the use of materials in PdP. In addition there are also several reasons among which are factors; management and administration, equipment and place, importance of use, as well as preparation and use.

The VM course requires support materials so that students can better master PdP. For the teachers at the Vocational College, the use of a material-centered approach because they feel that the VM course really needs a lot of materials and tools, for example technology, real materials and reference books to improve students' understanding towards a meaningful educational experience. This finding is in line with the study of Daud et al (2020) who found that teaching TVET requires the use of technology to grow in the world of education. Technology that is enriched in the teaching and learning process has great potential in education, especially in the context of technical and vocational education (TVET).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides meaningful and important findings in VM Education in vocational colleges. There are three approaches used by teachers in implementing the VM Course, which are student-centered, teacher-centered and material-centered. Each of these approaches is carried out directly and indirectly in the classroom according to the suitability of the content and criteria of the VM course studied by KV students. The KV teachers who teach this course are free to use an approach according to their own creativity while the students enjoy learning meaningfully.

To the parties involved, this study also offers contributions from the theoretical and practical perspectives. The results of the study unequivocally demonstrate that Bandura's Theory (1977), which places an emphasis on learning through imitation and observation in the context of KV students' participation in LSB activities, may be used to give students the experience they need to create genuine models or RBS. This is consistent with Kolb's Theory (1984), which suggests that experience can help people execute RBS tasks more effectively and efficiently. In order to develop a clearer guideline in the priority of the teaching and learning process and to give teachers an understanding of the Visual Merchandising course in the production model store design project, the information and data obtained through this study can be used by the curriculum development of the Visual Merchandising course in the Fashion Design Art Programme. Both add to the body of knowledge that is relevant to

Visual Merchandising educational courses and helpful to future academics who seek to go deeper and conduct more study in this area.

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