

# TEACHING STRATEGIES OF FASHION DESIGN TUTORS AND ITS SUSTAINABILITY IN MALAYSIA HLIS

Raja Iskandar Shazrim Shah<sup>1</sup> and Nazlina Shaari<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Communication and Creative Industries, Tunku Abdul Rahman Universiti College, Setapak, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Industrial Design, Faculty of Design and Architecture, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.

\*Corresponding author:  
nazlinashaari@upm.edu.my

## ABSTRACT

*As well as developing student design and soft skills, design tutors need to ensure that students comply with professional practice standards. Using proper teaching strategy models, students need to be taught both the technical know-how to succeed in the industry and the soft skills to assist them in being responsible members of the community. Even though the design teaching strategies in Malaysian higher learning institutions (HLIs) are generally planned by the tutors, there has been little research on fashion design tutor teaching strategy awareness. Therefore, for this reason and because there have been concerns raised that HLIs tutors in Malaysia are inexperienced and have little industrial practice, which could significantly affect the learning and the sustainability of fashion design programs in Malaysia, this paper conducted a small descriptive survey based study on design teaching strategy awareness to gather primary information on teaching strategy differences in 38 tutors teaching on fashion design courses in Malaysian HLIs. It was found that a conceptual teaching strategy model framework for design-based tutors was needed to provide guidance on the development of fashion design teaching strategies, and that future research was needed on the most appropriate fashion design education strategies for a sustainable future.*

**Keywords:** *Teaching strategies, Design tutors, Fashion design course.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Fashion design in Malaysia has traditionally been an unpopular choice for students in HLIs; however, this seems to be gradually changing as the number of fashion school has significantly grew compared to yesteryears. Each fashion school has its own distinctive methods for teaching the fundamental knowledge and skills needed for students to have a successful fashion career. As such, success is predominantly dependent on how the students receive their education, that is, the teaching strategies being used should enable the students to acquire both cognitive and soft skills knowledge domains; however, this is closely related to the pedagogical practices of their tutors (Davis, 2017). The main duties of a design tutor are to teach the students the relevant design skills to ensure they understand and apply professional practice standards and the soft skills such as critical thinking to ensure they can responsibly serve their communities (Cross, 2004). While each teaching task is generally independently planned by the tutors, there is a lack of research on the fashion design tutors' perceptions of their own applied teaching strategy models in Malaysian HLIs. Bernama (2017) also recently reported that there had been concerns raised about the employment of inexperienced tutors in Malaysia HLIs, which could affect teaching strategy development in design faculties.

This study conducted a preliminary survey involving descriptive analysis in selected design faculties to understand the design tutors' awareness and perceptions of their applied teaching strategy models, the results from which led to the development of a proposed teaching strategy conceptual framework for a holistic transformational learning process (Clark-Carter, 1993). Bone and Agombar (2010) concluded that the teaching and learning of sustainable design values are important to ensure that students fully understand their industry's environmental, social and economic commitments before entering the workforce.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Pedagogy in design studies

Pedagogy, which is a combination of both art and science, is defined as teaching methods or practices in educational contexts (Davis, 2017). Shulman, an American educational psychologist, defined signature pedagogies as characteristic forms of instruction that transform content knowledge to fully develop future practitioners or scholars within a certain field and claimed that in professional education environments such as higher learning, tutors were responsible for facilitating the learning of accomplished and responsible practices aimed at providing service to others (Shulman, 2005). Shulman argued that these pedagogies were important, were an authoritative approach to teaching, and influenced the way that the knowledge was analyzed, criticized, accepted or discarded in the field. However, the rapidly evolving student generation, shifting global economies, and the increased demands of the fashion industry have increased the need to expand the course design and ensure the development of better pedagogy skills (Faerms, 2014).

### 2.2 Sustainability in teaching strategies

Barth (2015) claimed that including sustainability and associated practices within curricula can cultivate an environmental consciousness and a sense of lifelong learning in students, which means that tutors need to be able to initiate mini projects such as environmental awareness campaigns to connect with nature and encourage out-of-the box thinking. Nieto and Medellín (2006) believed that sustainability indicators should be included in assessments on environmental issues in HEIs to determine whether students understand and are able to evaluate the impacts in their own field and develop positive responses. These ideas were also raised in Gutiérrez & Martínez (2010), claimed that as education was part of the social development dimension, appropriate instructional tools were needed, that is, the tutors charged with teaching the technical skills need to reflectively consider both the theories and the practicalities of the real-life environments (Nicol & Pilling, 2000).

### 2.3 Fashion design subject clusters

While fashion design courses vary between HLIs, there are common themes in the subject clusters being taught, the four main subject clusters are design; garment making; retail and marketing; and liberal studies. As can be seen, each cluster has several major associated fashion design courses.

The design cluster covers fundamental design guidelines and several important technical subjects; concept development, design development, design illustration, computer added design or CAD, and textile design; all of which give students the knowledge to create aesthetically pleasing garments by manipulating design elements based on design principles (Davis, 1996). The garment making cluster involves the multiple activities associated with garment production, with students being given the basics of pattern construction, garment production and the workflow rules and regulations (Mithlesh, 2019). The retail and marketing cluster exposes students to the management of fashion production from the initial selection of designs for retail customers to maximizing company sales and profitability (Major & Steele, 2017).

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to gather the empirical data on tutor perceptions of their fashion design course teaching strategies. Descriptive surveys have been found to be an efficient approach to gathering descriptive data about perceptions because the researchers do not have direct control over the independent variables, which makes the gathered data more genuine (McCombes, 2020). The survey was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire that was distributed to a random sample of fashion design tutors (N = 38) from various HLIs in the Klang Valley and Johor Bahru, Malaysia. The reliability of the research instrument was computed for multi-items opinion questions using SPSS computer software. All variables or items were tested on Cronbach's alpha and gave a good internal consistency of  $\alpha = 0.837$ , which is above the recommended reliability of 0.7 (Kaplan & Saccuzz, 2017). Prior to the conduct of the survey, consent for the on-site observations and sampling frame calculations were obtained to confirm respondent availability for the interviews and to seek consent for the collection of sensitive teaching delivery data on the cognitive, affective and psychomotor teaching/learning domains. Random sampling of the HLI fashion design tutors was used to ensure that the specific subgroup within the population was highlighted and was equally and proportionately represented (Clark-Carter, 2010), which meant that the final respondents had a range of teaching and industrial practice experience.

## 4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Thirty-eight participants ( $N = 38$ ) from five Malaysia HLIs offering design-based courses were selected as the sample; 35 tutors from public HLIs and three tutors from selected private HLIs. The site observations revealed that 27 (71.1%) respondents had developed their own teaching strategy models, seven (18.4%) had not developed their own, and the other four respondents (10.5%) did not answer the question (Table 1).

*Table 1: Tutors who developed their own teaching strategy models*

|              | Frequency | %     |
|--------------|-----------|-------|
| <b>Valid</b> | 4         | 10.5  |
| Yes          | 27        | 71.1  |
| No           | 7         | 18.4  |
| Total        | 38        | 100.0 |

As most respondents claimed that they had had to develop their own teaching strategies models while on-the-job, it was surmised that this trial and error approach may have led to them becoming expert tutors; however, this did not necessarily guarantee that they were good design studies tutors (Curry, 2014). Although 34 respondents (89.5%) (Table 2) claimed that they had had specific training on teaching strategies and 33 respondents (86.8%) (Table 3) claimed that they had employed recognized methods, most failed to provide concrete answers during the interview on the particular teaching models they were using to teach fashion design.

*Table 2: Tutor claiming to have received teaching strategy training*

|              | Frequency | %     |
|--------------|-----------|-------|
| <b>Valid</b> | 34        | 89.5  |
| Yes          | 34        | 89.5  |
| No           | 4         | 10.5  |
| Total        | 38        | 100.0 |

*Table 3: Tutors claiming to have used recognized teaching strategy methods*

|              | Frequency | %     |
|--------------|-----------|-------|
| <b>Valid</b> | 33        | 86.8  |
| Yes          | 33        | 86.8  |
| No           | 5         | 13.2  |
| Total        | 38        | 100.0 |

It was found that a majority of 22 respondents (57.9%) had five to nine years of teaching experience, 14 respondents (36.8%) had 10 to 19 years, and the other two respondents (5.3%) had less than five years (Table 4).

*Table 4: Teaching experience of respondents in years*

|              | Frequency | %     |
|--------------|-----------|-------|
| <b>Valid</b> | 14        | 36.8  |
| 10-19        | 14        | 36.8  |
| 5-9          | 22        | 57.9  |
| 1-4          | 2         | 5.3   |
| Total        | 38        | 100.0 |

*Table 5: Tutor industry experience in years*

|              | Frequency | %     |
|--------------|-----------|-------|
| <b>Valid</b> | 5         | 13.1  |
| 20-29        | 5         | 13.1  |
| 10-19        | 4         | 10.5  |
| 5-9          | 7         | 18.4  |
| 1-4          | 13        | 34.2  |
| 1<           | 9         | 23.7  |
| Total        | 38        | 100.0 |

*Table 6: Tutor references when developing their teaching strategies*

|                        | Frequency | %     |
|------------------------|-----------|-------|
| <b>Valid</b>           | 15        | 39.5  |
| Experience in industry | 15        | 39.5  |
| Self-experience        | 23        | 60.5  |
| Total                  | 38        | 100.0 |

Table 5 shows that most respondents (22) had had less than five years of industry experience; however, the remaining 16 respondents had had more experience, with four (10.5%) having had more than 30 years, five (13.1%) having had 20 to 29 years, four (10.5%) having had 10 to 19 years and seven respondents (18.4%) having had five to nine years.

Table 6 indicates the references the tutors consulted when designing their teaching course delivery strategies, with 23 respondents (60.5%) claiming to have developed their courses from their self-experience, which included the benchmarking of other published teaching strategy research and the teaching manuals provided by their respective HLIs. Only 15 respondents (39.5%) claimed to have developed their teaching strategies based on their industry experience, which tended to confirm concerns that Malaysian HLI tutors lacked industry experience prior to becoming HLI teachers. (Bernama, 2017)

Table 7: Course clusters taught by respondents

|                               | Courses                | Frequency | %    |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|-----------|------|
| <b>Design</b>                 | Concept development    | 3         | 7.5  |
|                               | Design development     | 20        | 50.0 |
|                               | Design illustration    | 6         | 15.0 |
|                               | Computer aided design  | 5         | 12.5 |
|                               | Textile design         | 7         | 17.5 |
| <b>Garment Making</b>         | Pattern construction   | 26        | 65.0 |
|                               | Garment production     | 22        | 55.0 |
| <b>Retail &amp; Marketing</b> | Retail & merchandising | 4         | 10.0 |
|                               | Fashion marketing      | 3         | 7.5  |
|                               | Entrepreneurship       | 4         | 10.0 |
| <b>Liberal studies</b>        | Theoretical-based      | 8         | 20.0 |

Table 7 shows the courses taught by the respondents each semester. As can be seen most taught multiple clusters, with (50%) teaching design development as part of their main course, with the other courses being taught as course options by less than 18% on average. In the garment making cluster, most respondents (65%) were teaching pattern construction and garment production (55%).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The majority of the fashion design tutors were found to resist and often abandon the the specific teaching strategy models from design studios. Therefore, recommendations from environmental and economic sustainability perspectives are needed to improve the teaching experience elements in the current design school teaching strategies. Further, a conceptual teaching strategy model framework for design tutors is needed to provide empirical guidance on sustainable teaching strategy models for HLI fashion design courses. The use of recycled materials and sustainable fibers or even adopting design concepts from nature and outdoor learning could be some of the initiatives that could be included to enhance the design students' learning experiences.

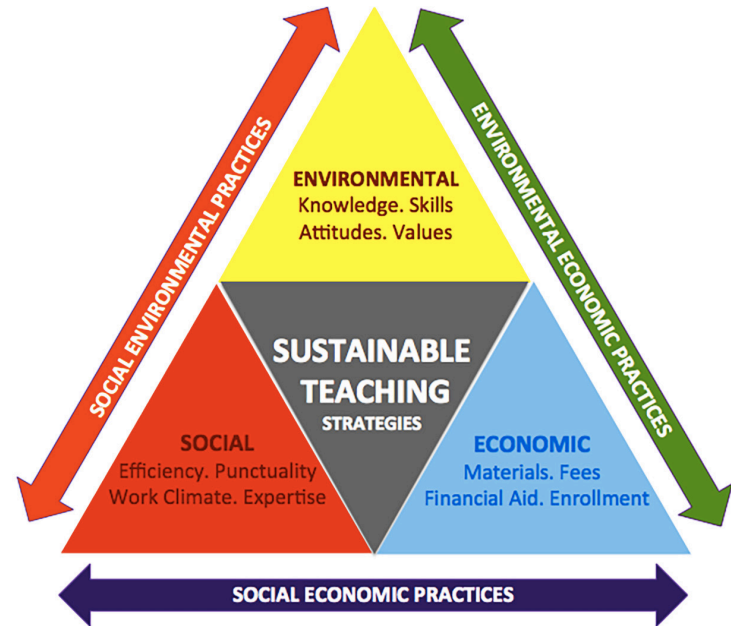


Figure 1: Conceptual sustainable teaching strategy model framework

Figure 1 addresses teaching design sustainability within teaching strategy models that integrate social engagement, the environment and the economy. To focus on what really matters and based on local demands decided on through community collaboration and a quality assurance system, local communities could benefit from HLI sustainability approaches, which could also include industry engagement. Overall, rather than just focusing on the design inputs and processes, it is necessary to also focus on the design outcomes related to local issues that benefit livability and prepare students for work in the fashion industry. Further research could compare case studies in other Malaysia HLIs by examining student and tutor expectations and motivations, assessing the challenges faced when moving to the new online teaching and learning environments, and identifying the various HLI teaching development opportunities for sustainability in post-pandemic design-based courses.

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