

DRESSING FOR SUCCESS IN THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

“A picture paints a thousand words” is a very famous quote by Frederick R. Barnard which has sparked a great level of curiosity in the researchers (Robbins, 2004). When a teacher figure braces the classroom from the first day and henceforth, he or she has etched a thought process in the minds of the students which will leave a lasting mark on them. Many researchers have been primarily focused on teaching methodology and teaching content which are regarded as the heavy weights of the teaching profession and in the process have brushed aside the minute factors, namely the attire of teachers, which are also as equally impactful, though they contribute in a more subtle manner (Gorham, Cohen, & Morris, 1999). This is the crux of the researchers’ study in which the focus will be directed at investigating whether or not the overall attire of the teacher figure has a significant impact on the students capacity of assimilating knowledge. The study will also encompass the clothing items deemed acceptable in the classroom which will be validated by the students’ acceptance level. Therefore, the research questions for this study will be (a) Does the attire of the teacher have an impact on learning effectiveness? (b) Attire has the greatest impact on students from which of the three pre-university programmes? (c) Attire has a greater impact on which gender? (d) Which attire articles are deemed acceptable by the students to be used by the teacher figure? From the preliminary study it showed that the students were affected by the attire of their teacher figure in which the mean of the three elements all were 3.5 and above. The level it affected the student population showed variations across the three pre-university programmes and gender. However, the students were very open in terms of attire worn by teachers in that they accepted various forms of attire which included denim and leather and also bold prints and shiny accessories. This acceptance also showed demographic variations.

Keywords: Attire, Classroom, Learning

1.0 INTRODUCTION

How a teacher should be dressed is not just a written set of rules that has been given by the human resource of the school, but it is subject to the process of social control (Workman & Freeburg, 2000). This is even more impactful on teachers in an Asian school setting where apart from rules and regulations, culture and acceptance is of high importance (Pratt-Johnson, 2006). Many researchers have given their insight on the ideal teacher attire in which the role as a professional educator can be played out to perfection. However, there are various limitations to this aspect as the attire of a teacher is subject to various environmental

factors which include demography, culture, society expectations, school setting, grade level and so on. Atkinson (2008) mentioned in his work that a professional look can be summarised as modest, conservative and nondescript. (Molloy, 1975;1988) on the other hand did a study on the impact clothing has on a professional's success and credibility. In this study, which was restricted to Connecticut schools, many variables which include teacher success, student learning, discipline, work habits and attitudes had shown relations to the attire of the respective educators. This further catalysed this research which was intended in finding relationships between teaching effectiveness and the attire of the teaching professionals.

According to Taute *et al.* (2011), dressing cue forms impressions on others and codes multiple messages for others to interpret. This can be further translated into the classroom setting in which the attire of the teacher will bring about cues in the students which will be further interpreted by the students who act as the decoder (Schramm, 1997). Dressing is a significant section of nonverbal communication in the classroom besides other factors like environment, gestures, tone and so on. The researchers will be focusing mainly on the aspect of attire as a form of non-verbal communication to the students and how they respond to it as a cue. Studies by Morris and his team (1996) showed that there were different levels of approachability of students towards a guest lecturer when his attire was varied. A study by Julie Lukavsky, Sara Butler, and Amy J. Harden (1995) showed that students' perceptions on female school instructors varied in accordance with their attire. In this study, teachers who dressed informally were rated as the most approachable and flexible however their ratings of respect was the least.

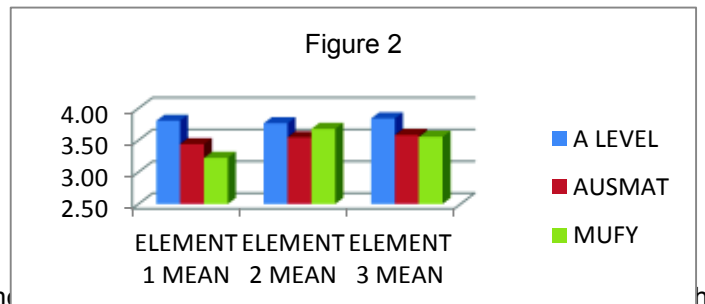
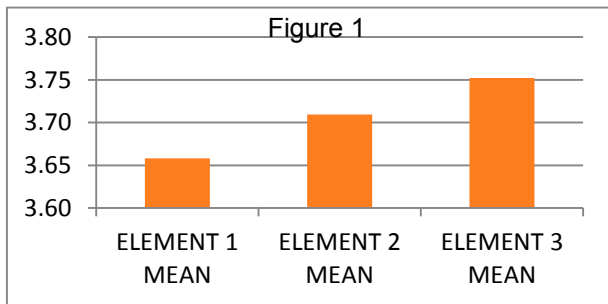
There is a thin line between clothe articles that are acceptable and those that are not, the boundary being the perimeter set by the students itself, and extending outward. The dress code of teachers were analysed in general by Freeburg and Workman (2010) in which they targeted their study at the validity of the dress code in 103 U.S. K-12 school handbooks. In this they studied the expectations of students in which there was a classification to what items the students deemed conventional, modest and prohibited. Conventional attire, including professional attire, was categorised as being neat, clean, having well groomed hair and footwear. Prohibited items were jeans, shorts, sweat suits, flip flops and t-shirts. Modest dress wear were skirts of modest length, wearing foundation undergarments and keeping traditionally private body parts covered at all times. In this study, focus will be hence given to clothing articles that the students deem as acceptable and those that are not.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The location of the research was Sunway College Johor Bahru, a private college situated in the heart of Johor Bahru city, in which the respondents consists of 114 pre-university students across three programmes which include A-levels, Australian Matriculation(Ausmat) and Monash University Foundation Year(Mufy). Their response towards the attire worn by their lecturers(teachers) will be analysed in Part B of the questionnaire by three elements, (a) impact on the learning process, (b) role model and image effect and (c) attire as a form of non-verbal communication and in Part C by 40 items of clothes that will be deemed as appropriate or not. This will be compared against Part A of the questionnaire which will provide relevant demographic data. The method of sampling was random in which the respondents were given a likert based questionnaire which was modified from the journal paper Rationales and Norms for Teacher Dress Codes: A Review of Employee Handbooks by Beth W. Freeburg, Jane E. Workman, Sally E. Arnett and Joyce R. Robinson (2011) by using a closed response format with a 5 scale numbering in expressing the students' response. To add to that, the researchers also use a closed response format to label whether a particular clothe item was acceptable or not.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall, all three element showed a very positive indication that the teachers attire had impact on whose learning process and it did reflect on the teachers image as role models (Figure 1). However, the A-levels programme showed a greater overall mean in all three elements compared to other programmes (Figure 2).



the difference between the male and female mean was not very significant. The clothe items deemed not acceptable were very significant for fabric like spandex(48.25%) which topped the list whereas attire that revealed the undergarments(8.77%) and see through clothes(8.77%) were also highly not favoured.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Attire has an effect on the learning effectiveness of a student although it is not very prevalent. The level of impact attire has on students varies across pre-university programmes and gender. The acceptance levels of students on the attire of their teachers whom are female are much less rigid in comparison to the teachers whom are male. This shows that the teaching environment is enhanced by positive dressing.

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