


Chapter 5

Studying Wine in Non–Wine–Producing Countries: How Are Southeast Asian Students Coping With Their Learning?

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ABSTRACT

Throughout their studies, students experience either more or less difficulties with their learning. It is worth investigating the challenges faced by students when the cultural aspect interferes with their learning. This study explored how learners, originally from Southeast Asia, where wine is culturally a distant or absent thing, experience learning. The data were collected from students from Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia through observations over a period of 14 weeks, 12 interviews, and four focus groups. The aim of this study was to explore the challenges involved in learning about wine, and the data showed that there were cultural, sensorial, social, and educational concerns in this regard. The findings revealed the wide range of challenges experienced by students, and can contribute to the teaching of modules on culturally distant types of content by lecturers.

INTRODUCTION

Study Background

The module on Oenology or Wine Studies focuses on a lot of knowledge, and the learning and development of several skills. This module is taught in a wine lab, where the learners enjoy being in a specialized classroom. The module is covered by over fourteen classes of three hours each. Therefore, the students have a total of forty-two hours of face-to-face classes and direct interaction with the lecturer. Part of the syllabus is knowledge of the geography and location of wine-producing countries, knowledge of the

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various varietals used in different parts of the world, as well as some business knowledge of the wine industry, which includes wine and cellar management. The module follows a constructivist pedagogical approach aimed at developing a more experiential and meaningful learning. The grade obtained reflects the knowledge and skills developed during the class and also contributes to a grade point average that allows the students to evaluate their overall performance.

This study was carried out in Malaysia, where Asian parents tend to have high expectations and push their children to achieve high scores. Indeed, in Asian cultures, parents are generally very concerned with their children's educational development (Rao, & Sun, 2010; Zhang, Biggs, & Watkins, 2010). Hence, the grade obtained during the class was regarded as very important, and the students were generally focused on how much they scored rather than how much they learned. According to Zhang, Biggs and Watkins (2010), there is a high level of competitive pressure among students to achieve excellent academic results. Consequently, students will give strong emphasis to the assessments that they need to complete, with an important concern in relation to success and failure.

Problem Statement and Aim of the Study

Besides the challenges mentioned by the students in relation to knowledge-based concerns, tasting and interactions with the product seemed to be unique aspects that needed to be investigated. The nature of the module and its expected learning outcomes affected the perceptions and expectations of the students before the class as well as their learning during the class. The students showed a real interest in the module as they thought that oenology would be “fun”, “cool”, “interesting” or “make them look good”. However, some were concerned about the learning experience as the module could be “difficult to pass with high marks”, “confusing”, “complicated”, “difficult”, “hard to understand” or “challenging”. This might have been related to the cultural dimension of the learning style of Asian students (Rao, & Sun, 2010). Furthermore, there is a culturally low involvement by Southeast Asian populations in wine as a consumable product due to the low availability and high price of wine, which limit its accessibility (Rozin, 1996). Indeed, the students seemed to be very concerned about their lack of experience with wine due to “religious reasons”, “lack of familiarity”, “rarity of drinking wine” or “never having drunk wine before”. Reflecting on the concerns expressed by the students, this study was aimed at exploring the experiences of the students during the learning process. The study investigated the types of challenges faced by the students in view of the cultural and educational gaps between the learners, their learning style, and the content of the module.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Context of the Study

The consumption of alcohol in Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei is very small due to the high percentage of Muslims in these countries. The population of Malaysia is comprised of Malays (69%), Chinese (23%), Indians (7%), and others (1%) (Mahidin, 2017). Among those classified as “Others”, the Ibans constitute 30.3% of the total population of Sarawak, while the Kadazans/Dusuns make up 24.5% of the population of Sabah. Islam is recognized as the official religion, but it is not the national religion of the country. Article 3.1. of the Constitution of Malaysia (Bari, & Shuaib, 2009) states that Islam is the

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