AN EXPLORATION OF LEARNING CONSTRUCTS OF ASIAN STUDENTS DURING WINE TASTING CLASS: A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK.

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to expand the knowledge of educationists and professional educators in the field of wine, sensorial studies and experiential learning. Considering that each person is unique, the processing of information into knowledge will be creating unique knowledge proper to the individual. The construction of knowledge from students learning oenology and their learning environment are leading to the current study. Learning models in constructivism and experiential learning agree on the uniqueness of constructs from each learner. So, in a country where wine is not part of the culture, the alienation of this product should affect, a priori, the learning constructs. This a priori assumption is the core essence of my study and my aim is to explore the constructs, created by students during wine tasting classes. The proposed framework will be used to pursue qualitative studies in experiential and organoleptic education to identify the constructs and eventually profile them.

Keywords: constructivism; experiential learning; organoleptic education; Asian students; Malaysia
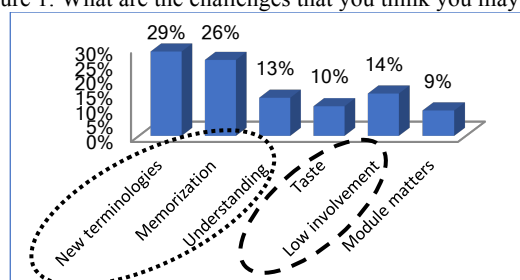
Introduction

Being a French citizen, inducing all my cultural backgrounds and omnipresence of wine, in a country where winter does not exist, where more than sixty percent of the population adopt Islam as religion and where eating and drinking habits present tremendous differences with the person I am, has created a lot of questioning about how culture exist and how cultural exchanges happen. I am a lecturer working at a Malaysian private university, dealing mainly with South East Asians and teaching various modules from practical to theory and from operation to management. One particular module has shown a specific interest and reflection as the students tended to show a lot of difficulties and frustrations during the class. Furthermore, their reflective learning assignments, submitted at the end of each semester, were often highlighting the confusions and complications related to the content of the module.

Oenology is a module grouping knowledge related to wine and related topics such as vineyard geography, wine making processes, varietal usages, differentiation of grapes and vine growing process. Besides discipline based knowledge, the module syllabus includes organoleptic skills to be developed through sensorial analysis and tasting abilities are required in this particular module. The students are assessed through class-tests and a final examination. The second class-test involves wine tasting and decision making based on a professional situation given by the lecturer.

Every semester, I do a survey during the first class of the semester, before any briefing, and the outcome shows significant information. Students are questioned about what they think of oenology, about their expectations during the semester and eventual challenges they may face during class. As shown in figure 1, based on information collected from the past four batches, the students tend to present relative concerns related to new terminologies, memorization, understanding of the content, the taste abilities, their low involvement with the product and other matters related to the time tabling and duration of the class.

Figure 1. What are the challenges that you think you may face?

The concerns and worries of the students can be justified by the cultural differences and taboos that can be reflected from who they are. Indeed, in average, the number of Muslim taking oenology is about twenty percent and some of the other students will be consuming wine for the first time. The origin of the students, their habitus as well as the presence of an evaluation based on their sensorial abilities towards a foreign product can be the causes of their major concerns.

Due to the cultural aspect of the students and their living environment, each student will process information differently and create knowledge out of it. The absence of wine as cultural product induces perceptions and representations that will vary with habitus. Charters (2006) identified three key representations of wine: utilitarian, experiential and symbolic. For instance, three different students with relatives and parents consuming wine only for celebrations such as wedding, parties or events may recognize wine in three different ways. The Utilitarian may look at wine as a product providing better health; while the Experientialist might look at wine as complex and aesthetic product and the Symbolic person could recognize wine as a product for celebration. Additionally, a student who never consumed wine before and only saw rich people or higher social classes

consuming it, could see wine as an elitist product. With a limited wine culture, due to the living environment and being involved with wine tasting during a class, learners can generate various interest, interactions, envies or affects per say. The *a priori* assumption that habitus will affect what the student will be processing will be studied and intended. With the growing wine market and westernization of Asian countries, learning wine for hospitality or culinary students will equip them with competitive awareness, knowledge, abilities and competencies.

As the research is focusing on the understanding of experienced moments described by the participants, as well as investigating and exploring the meaning of the knowledge and how the students interpret their learning experience, the research objectives resulting from the problematic exposed will aim to:
1. Explore the learning created and constructed by the students during the wine tasting classes.
2. Understand how the students build their knowledge and manage the aesthetic dimension development through sensorial analysis and group interactions.

The nature of the study and intends of the research objectives lead to the following questions:
1. What are the students experiencing during the wine tasting classes? What is the knowledge constructed from the wine tasting sessions?
2. How does student deal with the knowledge and how to they manage it?

Many studies have been explored and results been defined and theorized regarding the learning and learning experiences of the students. Many are focusing on the cultural and cross cultural aspect affecting or influencing the learning of the students. However, very few researches have been conducted qualitatively in Asia, following interpretivist worldview, and there is a current need to construct knowledge from an Asian context (Mura and Pahlevan Sharif, 2015). Additionally, few researches are focusing on the cultural dimension of the learner in the context of wine studies and aesthetic appreciation and rarely in a Malaysian context.

This intended research might provide additional in-depth knowledge in the field of culture and education in the hospitality industry. Additionally, majority of the research in education followed quantitative approaches which limit the true understanding of the educational development of a learner (Coessens and Van Bendegem, 2008). Therefore, the uniqueness of the current research lays on the paradigmatic orientations as well as the ontological and epistemological intends. This research can impact the research community as well as the educationist as it can help to structure findings and interpretations and be used as guidance for similar studies. The fundamental structure of the model proposed is supported by diverse studies and combines communication and educational models into one.

This paper is divided into five parts comprising of the introduction of the research and followed by the contextualization of the research to understand the study scope and boundaries. The studied literature reviews about culture, teaching and learning, education and wine and will be developed in the third part while the proposed methodology and framework will constitute the fourth part. The conclusion and expected findings will mark the end of this paper.

Research background

Geopolitical context

Malaysia has adopted since 2010 an image that helps to show a unique social positioning at the national but also at the international level. The concept of One Malaysia or Satu Malaysia has the objective to modernize the society and manage the diversity and the multicultural aspect of the population (1Malaysia, 2016). The concept of 1Malaysia aims to bring up national values to be shared among any ethnic group such as loyalty, humility, integrity or acceptance of others. Malaysia's population is reaching 28.7 million of citizens and comprises of 69% Malays, 23% Chinese, 7% Indians and 1% Others (Mahidin, 2017). Islam is recognized to be the official religion and not being the country's national religion. The Article 3.1. of the Constitution of Malaysia (Bari and Shuaib, 2009) states that Islam is the religion of the Federation, however other religions can be practiced in peace and harmony anywhere within the federation. This acceptation of various religious practices has implication in the way culture is being practiced by the various sociocultural groups. The Bumiputra also recognized as Malaysian Malays are Muslims and by the religion they are not allowed to consume alcohol. The alcohol consumption has always been very small due to the high percentage of Muslims in the country, and alcohol is not part of the main culture even if it is consumed in the country (WHO, 2014). Each race tends to have different lifestyle and consumption behaviours. Alcohol, and wine, is not only a big business; it has come a social part of social relation that can be widely seen in many areas in Malaysia. Alcohol plays a very important role and has various functions such as religious, familial, social and even political. "*Drinking is an act of identification, differentiation and integration, and is a projection of homogeneity and heterogeneity in ethnicity and national identity.*" (Wilson, 2004, #12). Even in Malaysia, where wine is not part of the culture such as what sake is for Japan, beer is for Germany or wine is for France; it can be understood that wine is more than a drink, more than being a simple product

Oenology as module

Wine is a very old product which gained in symbolic values throughout the centuries. From its first appearance 6000 B.C. wine has changed and improved until what we can currently find in the market today (McGovern, 2003; Littleton, 2005). Throughout the history, wine became an emblematic product due to its effects on human behaviour. Containing alcohol, it has the ability to change people perceptions, intellect and attitudes. Religious, holy, sacred, believes or historical symbolic, wine has truly affected the culture of many populations across the globe (McGovern, 2003; Littleton, 2005; Charters, 2006; Henderson and Rex, 2011). Few studies have been done in the education field related to the wine sector and barely in Asian countries and even less in Malaysia.

Module such as Oenology is not really in adequation with the lifestyle, the living knowledge and skills in Malaysia. Nevertheless, as Durkheim explained (1922, p4-5, p49) education is a fundamental axiom as education is not only developing a human being but it consists in creating a human being socially constructed as per the current needs of a society, at a national level or a universal level. Oenology can be considered as need from the industry due to the increasing number of local wine drinkers (TDA, 2012, 2015), the segmentation of the consumers (Charters, 2006; DiasSoeiro, 2012) but also the growing and expected growing number of tourists; therefore, this module can be a requirement to be part of a programme curriculum.

Literature review

Socio-cultural constructs

Wine courses, besides being an excuse to consume an alcoholic beverage, are also an opportunity to learn about more than a product (King, Donaldson and Harry, 2012). Wine knowledge involves various dimensions such as cultural, social, professional, physiological, psychological or educational, relating to extrinsic and intrinsic attributes that makes understanding and learning about wine very complex (Cox, 2009). Aesthetic such as taste, beauty, arts, music is very subjective and perceived differently by each individual; however, it tends to allow individuals to express their though, likes and dislikes. Bourdieu (1979, p12, 56, 68) identifies differences of patterns among social classes in a society. The socio-cultural practices can be identified from the profession, income, and house location and living conditions of the family.

Why is wine so symbolically involved in many societies and civilizations? Looking back to the Neolithic era, wine was produced but not understood as the concept of alcoholic fermentation was slowly discovered in the early 1800's. The natural and geographical benefit to grow grapes and the ability to convert sugar in higher alcohol content might be one of the reasons why wine became more popular than beer or other fermented products produced at that time. The magical process to get higher alcohol drink started to be consume by elitists and wine became an elite product (Charters, 2006, p158), symbolically represented (Barthes, 1957; Fischler, 1990; Poulain, 2002) and consumed differently (Charters, 2006; Vasudha et al., 2013).

Wine and representations

Authors such as McGovern (2003), Amunategui (2004), Charters (2006) have defined wine and detailed this beverage at various level. For instance, the difference between varietal wine and terroir wines is not as the difference between new world wines and old world wines but as the distinction of Noble wines (Amunategui, 2004), true typicité (Parr, Sherlock and Green, 2007) and legitimacy (Maguire and Lim, 2015; Corbeau and Poulain, 2002, p147). Consequently, can an Asian student understand the concept of terroir wine?

Hall (1959) clearly indicates that the learning of new culture will go through phases. In the first phases, even if the culture is learned, the individual will still be influenced by its own cultural traits and representations. The duration of each phase varying with individuals; the more mature the individual is, the more able it can, the fastest the movement to further phases may occur. "*To master a foreign culture, it is necessary to master its patterns and isolates as well as its sets*" (Hall, 1959, p103). The sets are combinations of objects, tangible and intangible, that can be classify into three categories: formal sets, informal sets and technical sets. Therefore, the notion of terroir wine should be complicated and difficult to understand by learners.

Château (2009) describes wine as a cultural object full of various significations. Besides being a beverage, wine is also a communication medium, a drinking and tasting practice, a function related to a communication space, a way of speaking, a gesture, an identity. Various connotations are given to wine which vary with people, according to their interests and needs.

Learning styles

Asian students are often alleged to be lacking of rationality; this accusation reflects Asian education as whole due to the fact that Asian students are often stated as passive learners with a lack of creativity and critical thinking (Lam, 2016). This generality may be referring to certain practices in Korea, Japan or Singapore where the education systems are very rigid, inflexible, standardized and focus on high achievement. The perspective of rationality is a western concept and the interest of this sub-chapter is to have a more insightful notion of Asian learning style. This understanding will help to focus the area of research and set a certain context. Taken rationality as the use of reason appropriately to resolve choices the best way as possible, "*rationality is basically a matter of seeking to do our very best to work cost-effectively towards the realization of our cognitive, practical and evaluative goals*" (Lam, 2016, p11).

In the Asian learning attitude, there are patterns among learners. For instance, Rao and Sun (2010, p48-50) inform *the importance of results and achievement with high expectations from parents*. As well, they inform about the effect of pressure from peers, school and parents that affect the self. Furthermore, according to Zhang and Watkins (2010), western learning theories such as Behaviourism, Liberalism, Connectivism, Humanism and Constructivism can be observed in the Confucian concept. In alignment with the educational development of graduates towards the 21st Century Skills (P21, 2006), DiasSoeiro and Balasubramaniam (2016) demonstrated certain correlations between new emerging educational paradigms and Asian learning style. They identified that the enthusiasm and learning satisfaction from Asian culinary students tend to increase in situations such as sharing, communicating, collaborating with peer and / or with lecturers take place.

Confucius learning style has nothing to do with memorizing as an absorption of information but a more thorough, systematic and organized methodology integrating reflection, wisdom, critical thinking, synthesizing in an open minded, fair and autonomous way (Hall and Ames, 1987; Kim, 2003; Rao and Sun, 2010).

Organoleptic education

The modernization of the society, the modification of the familial structure, the progress of the woman's involvement in the society and the alimentation's industrialization have changed the food consumption portray and the way of living (Ologoudou, 2004, p11), and the way of thinking (Corbeau, 2006).

The food consumption that includes the products and its qualities used at home, the cooking methods and by whom and how it is cooked and eaten will change the rapport that an individual have with the food and drinks. The notion of forbidden product as well as edible versus non-edible products differentiation and conceptualization will be taught, endocultured by the parents (Fischler, 1988), and eventually grandparent depending the familial structure, which affects the rapport with the preferences and disgusts (Fischler, 1988; Corbeau and Poulain, 2002; Corbeau, 2006).

Sensorial analysis and organoleptic education refers to the five senses normally inner to each individual that comprises of touch, see, smell, hear and taste (Reverdy, 2011). Sensory intelligence requires the expression of the common five senses; however, the human body possess interoceptors and mechano-receptors that contribute to the monitoring of the body as well as *perceiving the expression, sensation and recognition of the feelings*, what Beard and Wilson perceive as a sixth sense (2013, p166).

Experiential learning
The learner will move, or change, from a current position to a desired future position which will be what is going to be learnt (Beard and Wilson, 2013, p254). It is important to keep in mind that the learners are adolescents and they are in the process of physical, mental, psychological, sexual and intellectual changes that will affect their behavior, stability, demands and emotions (Rao and Sun, 2010, p38).

Using the work of Proctor, Cruickshank, Gage and Berliner, Huitt (McIlrath and Huitt, 1995) has developed a model that groups various parameters influencing the learning experience of the learner. The learning process involves the school processes and the school characteristics which groups notions such as the classroom size, the organizational structure or any resources needed by the students. The actors embedded in the processes are mainly the teacher and the students, including their characteristics and behaviour; nonetheless, Russell (1977) adds the familial context and family and social background in the input whereas Mc Ilrath and Huitt (1995) include it in the context. Learning by doing and thinking how to do summarize what experiential learning is. Firstly, the rapport between the individual and the surrounding; then, the cognitive and rationality of the self with this surrounding; and finally, the awareness of the experiencer about emotions, perceptions and mindset towards the experience; all those notions exist through the experience. Therefore, the socio-cultural and environmental factors will contribute to a certain understanding and level of interpretation. Hence, the wine classes and the experiences gain by the students will differ from one to another.
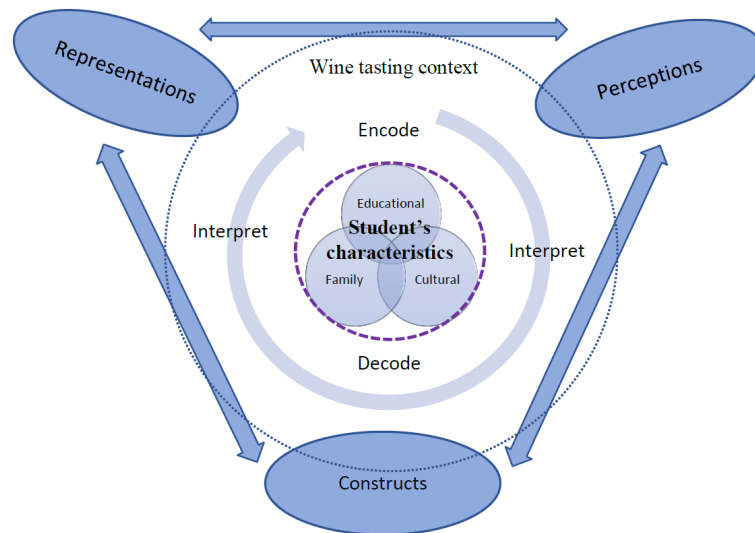
The whole learning system is based on the individual and the take away acquired from the learning experience. It shows how important it is in experiential learning to involve the mind, the heart and the body, through the senses. The whole combination enriches the learning and develops the students based on what they did. Because of the learning expected to be experienced, the individual habitus will create a personalized understanding and construct of knowledge based on the belonging and doing dimensions (Beard and Wilson, 2013). The role of the lecturer is then to evaluate the understanding and applications of the knowledge more than the knowledge itself.

Proposed methodology
The field and scope of the research intends to explore and investigates the sensorial experiences during wine tasting classes among Malaysian students. The *a priori* emotional, semantical and interpretational outcomes from individual learner will be studied and examined to understand eventual underlying constructs built from wine tasting learning experiences among undergraduates. Considering that each individual is unique and is developping his or her own understanding of the world surrounding them, the multi-realities situation and conditions present the key characteristics to identify the approach to be adopted for this research. Furthermore, the nature of wine tasting classes as experiential learning implies experiences considered unique by each learner. The information collected are considered exclusive as what the participants shared is unique since what happen has happened and will never happen or be explained the same way again. The emotions, feelings, needs, wants and other factors influencing individuals will affect their interpretation (Dupuis, 1999; Beard and Wilson, 2013, p31).
As per the study context previously informed, the current study follows a qualitative research design approach and due to the nature of the data to be collected and the scientific knowledge to be disclosed, a constructivist worldview will be followed and adopted to conduct the research. Additionally, Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p31) emphasize on the interpretive perspective of qualitative research not only as worldview but as a methodology (p21), theory (p22) or paradigm where constructivist belongs to (p31). As key characteristics of constructivist paradigm, individuals create meaning through experiences; therefore, the subjectivity is dominant (Creswell, 2014, p8); knowing that experienced meaning comes from *social constructs* (Minichiello and Kottler, 2010, p23). Each person will have his or her own set of understandings and will create understanding, construct and structure knowledge from it (Gillham, 2005, p6; Alvermann & Mallozzzi, 2010, p488).

Figure 2. The proposed research framework

Based on the literature reviewed, and adapting the Osgood and Schramm's communication model of coding and decoding, the figure 2 summarizes and conceptualizes the future research aiming to identify the axiological, ontological and epistemological stances from the student's point of view. By proposing this framework, my intentions will aim to explore those representations (symbolic, micro and macro cultural…), perceptions (symbolic, social, sensorial, humane…) and constructs (educational, sensorial, physiological…) generated from the learning and transformational experience that will contribute to the self-development of a learner.

The study requires information that can be collected from various sources. As a qualitative approach with a constructivist worldview, research tools must provide sufficient and relevant information that can support interpretivist designs. Participant or non-participants, structured or non-structured observation can collect traits, behaviors, attitudes and facts that interviews will not be able to provide. To reduce biasness and to ensure the validating of the quality of the findings, triangulation is advised by juxtaposing other information from interviews which can be individual, collective or both and enforced by focus groups. The collection of future findings need to be strategized with the analysis as besides thematic analysis, the researcher can add value by having additional narrative or semantic analysis. Therefore, reflective learning reports from the learners, strategically guided, can provide information to confirm the previous findings or add new areas to explore. This research aims to collect information from a participant and semi structured observation, semi structured individual and group interviews and supported by reflective learning reports. The selection of students will solely be based on the single criterion of attending the course and any participant must be volunteer as none of them should feel forced to share personal information or the findings might be at stakes. The stated methodology will aimed to support the proposed framework exposed in figure 2.

Expected findings and conclusion

When a student enters and leaves a classroom, lecturers have a conviction that the students will be learning during their class and assume that learning will take place (Nola and Irzik, 2005). This paper does not question if the learning is happening but explore what are the various outcomes, maybe beyond the learning outcomes expected, that a student can experience.

Experiential learning involves the whole self of the learner. For instance: the cultural, familial and educational background forms the student's characteristics and made him or her as a person in a social group; what Beard and Wilson (2013, p120) named *Belonging* (dimension one and two) and *Doing* (dimension three). The wine tasting class is the medium through what the student will sense and use the different senses (dimension four) or what McIlrath and Huitt (1995) name the context. Then, the processing of information and construction of knowledge starts in what Huitt name classroom processes or referring to the dimension five and six from Beard and Wilson's model. The difference between feeling and knowing is the processing time. Short term actions and reactions replicate feelings and innate behaviors while knowing and thinking require a longer processing time. This processing of information generates learning and goes through a series of coding, encoding, decoding and interpretations from the student's backgrounds. As output, the students create knowledge and build who he or she is becoming; it is the seventh dimension of *Being* which can be divided into constructed knowledge, representations and perceptions.

The various learning and learnt outcomes gained during the class will be studied to understand the learning and identify eventual social, cultural and intercultural connections as well as the individuals' interactions with the products and the peer members of the class. The involvement of a foreign product, for instance wine, which contains numerous cultural, local and international representations, might bring complexity to the future outcomes of this study. The diversity and variety of outcomes classified by the proposed model will support the answering of the two research questions. The tridimentional outoms, manely constructed knowledge, representations and perceptions, will answrer the first question while studying the coding, decoding and student's interpretations will structure the second question. Similar studies related to diverse discipline in aesthetic education can benefit from this proposed framework as this model helps to explore learning outputs. By proposing this model, multiple studies can be designed, contributing to the world of knowledge and education.

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