Original Articles

The Role of Moral Education on the Dress Code in the Higher Learning Institution.

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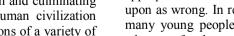[3]*Jabatan Pengajian Umum, Quest International University of Perak, Malaysia*

Abstract: The advancement of European dress to the rest of the world was linked to the definition of civilization as "a stage of social development considered to be more advanced" and "polite and good-mannered". The widespread of their fashion style in the 19th and 20th centuries influenced the way the rest of the world attire. The fashion trend and dressing style thus change the purpose of dressing through time. The dressing style in campuses especially in private institutions of higher learning is under particular scrutiny, as it is often said to be inappropriate for a learning environment. This study looked at the importance of moral education, and its role in implementing the dress code for students among university students especially between two types of university i.e. public university and private university. It looked on the dressing style of students, both male and female, and the factors that lead to their dressing pattern which is common among students. This study also advocated the students' understanding of the content of dress codes in their learning institution and the role played by moral education in regard to dress code. The overall study highlighted students' perception towards the implementation of the dress code and punishment in their learning institution. The methodologies used to carry out this study are questionnaires and interviews. This study will therefore ascertain the important of dress code among students at higher learning institution and the role of moral education in cultivating values in order to dress properly or decently.

Key Words: *moral education, dress code, higher learning institution, civilization.*

Introduction

Accepted wisdom holds that dress traditions reflect the full range of environmental factors – physical, cultural and social – in which they are produced and worn (Niessen, 2010). In cultural terms, civilization was the zenith of evolutionary development starting with savagery, moving on through barbarism and culminating in modernity. The development of human civilization generally may recognize the contributions of a variety of past civilizations: Mesopotamia, Egypt, sometimes India and China, and the Middle East, but again modernity was claimed to be achieved in Europe. That is why the notion of civilization in fashion was referred to Western Civilization.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, one of the physiological needs refer to clothes. So clothing is one of the basic needs of man. In every group, occupation or community there are certain accepted standard of dress that are considered right, proper and appropriate while other forms of clothing are looked upon as wrong. In recent times indecent dressing among many young people in our society and the widespread advocacy for the application of dress codes especially in our institutions of higher learning have received a lot of media attention and generated a bad mentality towards the students. In many higher institutions across the

world, indecent dressing among the youth has become the emblem of the modernity in general.

The Oxford Dictionary has explained dress as put on one's clothes. It's actually to cover one's body in order to protect the effects from cold, hot and also to cover our nakedness. According to Egwim (2010) from Jacob Omede (2011), the indecent dressing referred to one's attitude, male or female that dresses to show off parts of the body such as the breast, buttocks or even underwear. The word decent refers to conforming to generally accepted standards of respectable or moral behaviour. Therefore, decent dressing can be defined as dresses that in-line with society's norm, custom and values.

While dress code can be defined as a set of rules, usually written and posted, specifying the required manner of dress at a school, office, club, restaurant, etc. Some colleges and higher learning institution has their own dress code. According to Pauly (2008) in K.O.Fayokun et.al (2009), campus dress code is a set of rule, indicating the approved manner of dress. And also has the restriction towards certain dressing such as miniskirts, sleeveless tops, transparent clothes, spaghetti tops, sagging pants-showing buttock, boxes or underwear's or T-shirt and jeans which carry immoral messages.

Meanwhile moral can be defined as giving guidance on how to behave decently and honestly. It can also be seen as relating to issues of right and wrong and to how individuals should behave. It can be seen as something ethical, good, right, proper, honourable, just, and principled. As such, decent dressing can be referred to an act of accepted (ethical, good, right, proper) dressing style by the members of society and which mean in line with the societal norms and values whereby, indecent dressing is an act of dressing contrarily or indecently to a normal dressing code. In the context of Islam, Islam does not restrict anyone to wear good clothes or to practice fashion. What it restricts is to wear clothes that do not cover the body in a descent manner. In other words, modesty and dignity are important elements stressed in Islam in all aspects of life including the style of dress or the type of clothing one should wear.

Therefore, the authors believe that it will be beneficial for the higher learning institution to adopt dress code as it will create a better learning environment although some may argue that this action would restrict the individual student's freedom of expression. Furthermore, students can express themselves through other means for instance through art or creative writing, instead of not clothing.

Methodology

This study was conducted in order to identify perception of the students and authority on decent and indecent dressing at the higher learning institution. Beside that this study also analyses the role of moral education on the university's dress code.

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, survey and interview were conducted. The respondents are students from public (Institution A) and private (Institution B) higher learning institution. A total of 250 students were randomly selected to make up the sample. 3 Interviews were conducted to obtain data on the perception of dress code by authority and the relation between moral education and dress code.

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Result & Discussion

There are three main questions asked to the students to know their understanding of university dress code.

The first question is on whether dress code is necessary or not in higher learning institution and should the university make it compulsory. The result shows that 57.9% said that it is necessary to have dress code in general while 27.7% does not agree. The balance 14.4% just doesn't care. This shows that both students from public and private higher learning institution agreed with the need of dress code however with slight different on the reason. Pertaining whether the higher learning institution should make the implementation of dress code compulsory or not, the data shows that about 45% of the students agree while 43.6% disagree. Small differences occur.

The second question pertaining implementation of dress code is against human rights shows that 47.3% of the students agree that it is against human rights while only 30.7% disagree. Beside that 22% or 54 students over 250 being neutral.

The third question is on what is considers as appropriate or decent dressing styles and inappropriate or indecent dressing styles by the students at higher learning institution. The Table 1 below shows the insight of students on what is decent or indecent dressing style of university's students based on the list given.

Table 1: Students insight on Appropriate / Decent or

Higher Learning Institution	Appropriate / Decent Dressing Style	Inappropriate / Indecent Dressing Style
Institution A	Sneakers Sport shoes T-Shirt Shirts Suit Long skirt Jeans Long pants (slack)	Tattoos Earrings (for guys) Slippers Singlet Bermuda pants Sagging pants Mini skirt Hot pants Tube

	Khakis	Pyjamas
Institution B	Sneakers Sport shoes Slippers T-Shirt Shirts Suit Long skirt Jeans Long pants (slack) Khakis Bermuda pants Sagging pants Mini skirt	Earrings (for guys) Singlet Hot pants Tube Pyjamas

In general, the implementation of dress code is important at higher learning institution as shown from the first result. Dress code is necessary at the higher learning institution because we want to educate people, not just provide them with the knowledge for an academic purpose (i.e. holistic education). Students with different background of studies should be taught to dress suitably and professionally for the occasion. It helps to train students to understand the real industry expectations on them and further develop their own ways of expression. It is also a requirement set for some courses that students must dress in proper manner to avoid danger e.g. laboratory, workshop etc. and this is essential to be followed. Moreover, it is to ensure that an image of civility, proper & appropriate behaviour is project to the community and nation at large. In this circumstance the students do agree with the dress code.

Recently, freedom of expression has become an epitome amongst youth in Malaysia. This freedom of expression is not solely limited to verbal communication but also art and fashion. In reference to the second results, about 47% of students said that the implementation of dress code is restraining individual from expressing themselves especially in the dressing style. In other words, to many students, the prescription of dress code appears as an infringement on their human rights because they believe that they should be free to put on whatever they like. (Bolarin and Pemede, 2008) Although to some extent writers agree with this but at the same time we need to remember that teaching / learning process needs conducive environment so little or no distraction is good. Another reason given by the students is that the dress code is believed to hamper them to become fashionable or update new fashion trends.

The assumption that the dress code will stop the students to become fashionable is wrong. It will not stop them to follow new fashion trends but rather appropriately. The dressing style of the students at the higher learning institution today can be categorised as

modesty or decency and immodesty or indecency. Modesty or decency is a mode of rejection towards sexual attraction, immodesty on the other hand is considered the other way round. Revealing parts of body can be indecency to some culture or religion and tolerance is expected in the societies with many beliefs. Generally, most people will wear what is acceptable to their society, culture and religion. To some countries wearing immodestly could be an insult and an implementation of law could be taken place.

The definition of what is decent dressing and indecent dressing practice in most higher learning institution is quite similar. As point out by Interviewee A, decent dressing is according to the norms regulated by the university. In other words, since the university has come out with its regulations on what is appropriate dressing, then dressing according to the regulations is 'decent'. What is decent or appropriate dressing according to the university may differ with what the students assumed as shown in the Table 1. Indecent or inappropriate dressing style in most of higher learning institution in Malaysia refers to dress in tight, figure hugging, revealing sexy clothes, untidy, unnecessary jewellery or accessories. For example, singlet, bermuda pants, sagging pants, mini skirt, hot pants, tube, pyjamas, tattoos, slippers, earrings (for guy) and others.

The violation of dress code for example at Institution B, will leads to disciplinary action. When the students violating the University dress code (especially while attending lecture, tutorial, examination, workshop or any activities inside or outside the campus) they will be given warning letters and then barred from entering the university compound. Although there is no specific percentage given on violation of dress code but there are cases where lecturers have denied their students from entering class if they were dressed inappropriately. However, there are some universities which did not implement the dress code that had been established completely. One of the reasons is that the enforcement is weak and it lies on the shoulder of certain body to carry out the responsibility for instance the Department of Student Affairs or security officers.

As for Institution A, when students fail to comply with the dress code set by the University they will be refused service at some of the areas in the campus: all service counters, offices, the Cultural and Arts Centre, lecture halls, tutorial rooms, library and laboratories. In addition to that they can be charged under the institution's Rules and Regulations (Students Conduct).

Decent dressing and indecent dressing can be discussed based on moral theories. As people develop their thinking concerning morality over time, they do so as a result of interactions with individuals and social institutions. In different societies each with their own

cultures there are different ideas concerning how humans are to behave. Different societies and cultures have different rules, different mores, laws and moral ideas. In the twentieth century people became quite aware of these differences. The impact of this information when coupled with the theories of the Existentialists and Pragmatists became quite significant in the realm of Ethics.

The Existentialists with their theory of radical freedom and human choice and responsibility placed morality within the sphere of individual human decision-making. There were no essences before existence of beings and there would be no rules before the existence of the beings that would make the rules for themselves. With this freedom of choice, our new generation students especially from higher learning institutions dare to dress indecently and show their body. Say for example, and wearing just ample cleavages on display, depicting size and shape of their private parts with mini that barely skim the bottom. It appears now to be fashionable; one has to become half nude, dressed in sleeveless/see-through tops without bra.

Thus, the society's assumption that when discuss about decent dressing or indecent dressing it will always link to moral values is true. This is because each and every culture has its own dressing code. Though the dressing code might vary from one culture to another but each culture has a standard and acceptable dressing code. So any deviation from such dressing code could be term as indecent dressing. So when peoples tend to disobey or dress contrarily from the society's norm and culture its can directly affect the values of that particular society.

Moral educations contribute in forming student's dress code especially at the higher learning institution as the "moral education" is an umbrella term for two quite different tasks and approaches. The first, which might better be called moral "socialization" or "training," is the task of nurturing in children those virtues and values that make them good people. The second task of moral education is to provide students with the intellectual resources that enable them to make informed and responsible judgments about difficult matters of moral importance. Both are proper and important tasks of schools—and both cut across the curriculum.

In addition, one of the purposes of moral education is to help make students virtuous - honest, responsible, and compassionate. Another is to make mature students informed and reflective about important and controversial moral issues. Both purposes are embedded in a yet larger project—making sense of life. Thus, dress code in higher learning institute can help our student to be mature and think before act.

Conclusion

The focus of this study has been on the dress code implementation at higher learning institution that directly or indirectly influences the dressing style of the students. It is the belief of these authors that the success of dress code implementation is not solely depends on the students but also other groups of people in the institution such as lecturers and officers. Everyone has to uphold the rules without fail. Unfortunately, due to weak in enforcement of the dress code in many higher learning institutions especially at the private universities / colleges make the dress code as accessory.

The authors believed that this indecent dressing among the students does not come into consideration through overnight, but it is an accumulated behavioral pattern that could be attributed to the home, maybe effects from modernization or globalization arising wrong values, peer pressure, mass media and so on. Thus, this issue of dress code at higher learning institution is an area that should be look at especially in Malaysia today.

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