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The Application of Various Media in Making Weaves Through the Teaching and Learning of Art Handicraft

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Abstract

The focus of this research was on the use of various man-made media or materials, such as plastics, threads, and wires, to make weaves through the teaching and learning process. Arguably, with the use of such materials, practitioners would no longer have to rely on using natural materials, such as rattans, bamboos, and screw-pine leaves, for teaching and learning purposes. This study used a qualitative approach based on a field study in actual settings involving direct observations, unstructured interviews, and the collection of students' works. Findings revealed that the use of a variety of materials helped students create a range of attractive weaves. Equally revealing, such a diverse use of such materials also helped improve students' creativity in making weaves of high appeal.

Keywords**:** *Materials, media, students' creativity, teaching and learning process, weaves*

1. Introduction

Weaving is a process of making plaited mats by joining the strands of plants, such as coconut leaves, rattan, roots, bamboos, *pandan*, screw-pine leaves, and other plants that can be dried. In general, such plants are malleable that can be easily bent for a weaving process, a process that used to be a popular form of handicraft-making activities practiced by past societies to make mats, baskets, and lids. However, the practice of such activities has been declining rapidly as new, emerging methods using new materials and advanced technologies are being used, rendering such a practice almost obsolete.

2. Background of Study

For three centuries, handicraft weaving was a traditional art that was in its prescient state, which was untempered by western cultures. Bamboos, rattans, screw-pine leaves, and *ribu* are the main materials used to produce weaved handicrafts. The uniqueness and creativity of Malaysian artisans are made evident through the creation of beautiful, exquisite baskets, mats, partitions, containers, wall decorations, house roofs, blinds, and others. Historically, during the Neolithic era, such art was used to make ropes, houses, and tools for daily uses such as baskets. Materials derived from plant roots and rattans were the primary material used to make such weaved products. In that era, weaving was an activity engaged by women during their leisure time. In general, such handicrafts were utilized for personal and social purposes, of which the latter was as used gifts and presents during special occasions. Given the pervasive use of such handicrafts, women who lacked weaving skills were deemed uncultured or uncouth, which cast a bad impression of such women during that time. Thus, weaving was extensively practiced by women, with men being tasked to find the essential materials.

With a greater emphasis on the economic benefits of such products, handicraft weaving has become an important activity for both men and women to generate income. Typically, handicraft weaving is being carried out by skilled individuals or by small enterprises mainly located in villages. Over recent years, rapid global economic developments have steadily transformed once a small-scale handicraft industry into a full-fledged industry, entailing the establishment of dedicated organizations, agencies, and corporations, such as

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Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia, to monitor and manage this striving industry. Increasing demand for such products has spurred the growth of the handicraft industry, with many customers wanting a wide spectrum of designs. As such, the design of weave products is no longer confined to traditional shapes and forms. In fact, the industry has adopted a range of designs (in terms of shape, form, and pattern) using new techniques to meet the continually changing taste of customers. Lately, many experimental studies on weaved handicraft have been carried out to examine the use of various media in learning the design of such a craft.

3. Research Objectives

This research was carried out to examine the creation of weave handicrafts through the experimentation of the use of materials such as rattans bamboos, coconut leaves, screw-pine leaves, *pandan*, and other natural materials. The weave handicrafts produced included various types of ropes, straws, ribbons, cables, fabric, and papers. Such experimentation enabled the researchers to examine the design and development of such products, to analyze the different use of each material, and to examine the creation of such products. This experimentation could help students enhance their understanding and knowledge regarding the elements of lines, forms, shapes, connections, space, and colors. Of late, the advent of new technologies has paved the way for using more innovative materials for the design and development of such handicrafts. Surely, the use of newer materials can help practitioners to put into practice their ideas more creatively and innovatively. Figure 1 shows a beautifully crafted woven handbag made from new materials.

Figure 1: A beautifully crafted weave handbag made from new materials

Source: Students' studio-based creations

4. Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach based on a case study method. With such a method, the researchers carried out fieldwork in a real situation. Using such a research approach, qualitative data in the form of words and statements were collected from several students' handicraft works, field notes, and other official records. In particular, the primary data of the study were collected from the students through interviews, observations, and visual recording. To complement such data, the researchers also used secondary data collected from reference books, journal papers, and relevant information from the web. Prior to conducting the study, several practical considerations were weighed in by taking into account the focus of the study and other similar studies of the same nature. In addition, financial and logistical considerations were taken into account, such as cost, capacity, and available sources, to ensure the study could be carried out without any major problems. In fact, a preliminary field observation helped the researchers to determine and select suitable students who were learning a weaving course to be the research subjects.

5. Findings

The following subsections provide detailed accounts of the findings of this study.

Media

The selection of suitable media for making weave handicraft was important to ensure the products would be both appealing and neat. In contrast, the use of inappropriate media or materials could degrade the quality of such products, making them defective or damaged. Naturally, each material or medium has unique characteristics that determine the aesthetic and functionality of the finished products.

1. Papers

Certainly, papers are the most basic material used for weaving purposes in schools. Such material is normally used by teachers or instructors as an alternative to natural materials or plants. In fact, it is a common practice to use color papers to make beautifully crafted weave products. Figure 2 shows some examples of color papers that can be used for weaving handicrafts.

Figure 2: A ream of color papers

i) Weaves made from Papers

One of the popular designs of weave handicrafts is the chequered design. Essentially, such a design is based on an array or a pattern of squares, which can be divided into five (5) types based on fauna, flora, geometry, abstract form, and the name of places and designers. For example, a chequered design based on eight divisions is an

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example of the geometrical chequered design, which is appropriate for decorations. Clearly, the use of color papers in making such a design can help create a beautiful piece of art. In principle, weaving chequered handicrafts only needs two contrasting colors to project the amazing effects of motifs. Repetitive and intricately arranged chequered patterns can help produce harmonized motifs. The neatness of such patterns can be made more pronounced by using papers of the same thickness that are carefully arranged. Figure 3 shows a chequered design based on eight divisions of a piece of weave cloth made by one of the students in this study.

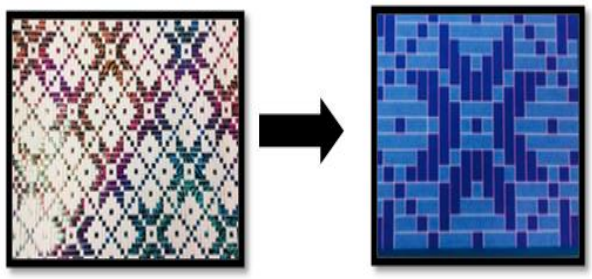

Figure 3: An eight-division chequered design

Source: Students' studio-based creation

2. Plastic Strings

Interestingly, plastic strings can also be used to make beautiful weave handicrafts. Lately, practitioners have various options in choosing a range of types of plastic strings, which come in many colors that they can use to create attractively appealing weave products to meet a variety of tastes demanded by customers for such artifacts. One of the reasons that attract customers to purchase weave handicrafts made from plastics is that cleaning such products is relatively easy. Figure 4 shows some examples of plastic strings available in the market.

Figure 4: Some examples of plastic strings

i) Weaves made from Plastic Strings

To date, the art of weaving with the use of plastic strings has allowed weavers to create a wide spectrum of exquisite and unique products. Over recent years, such products have become increasingly popular not only for aesthetical aspects but also for functional aspects relating to the ease of maintenance (i.e., easy cleaning) and high durability and strength. Typically, such products include baskets with intricate geometrical forms that have square or triangular corners. Also, such products are designed and developed with the principles of symmetrical balance involving the configuration of artistic elements that can help create products with symmetrically distributed patterns at their left and right sides. Figure 5 shows a weave basket made from plastic strings with a symmetrical pattern of motifs.

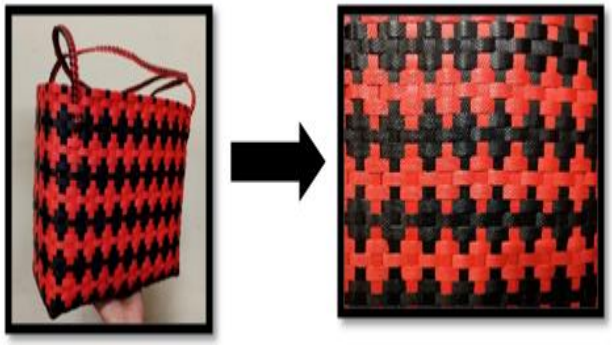

Figure 5: A weave basket made from plastic strings

Source: Students' studio-based creations

3. Wires

Given their malleability and high resistance to corrosion, wires have been widely used to make weave handicrafts. With a wide range of sizes or thicknesses, weavers can use wires to make such products of various shapes and forms. Figure 6 shows a wire coil made from a high corrosion-resistant material that practitioners can use for weaving purposes.

Figure 6: A wire coil

i) Weaves made from Wires

Lines on a weave basket provides tactile sensation when users use their hands to touch it. In general, weaves with bases made from wires are sturdier and stronger than other weaves made from other media. However, to achieve such strength is not easy because bending and testing wires, especially thicker wires, entails weavers to exert a great deal of force. Compared to rattans, weaving wires are more difficult than weaving rattans, as the former is harder. From a practical perspective, it will be

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better to use rattans than wires, but the scarcity of rattans has made the use of wires more viable. Figure 7 shows a piece of weave made from wires.

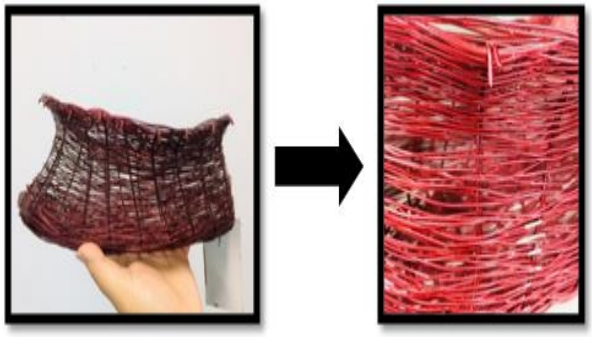

Figure 7: A piece of weave made from wires

Source: Students' studio-based creation

4. Threads

Threads can also be used as an alternative to natural materials to make intricate weaves. From an educational standpoint, the use of threads in weaving art can help facilitate the learning process as students will find it easy to make all sorts of weaves, given their physical properties of being soft and light. Figure 8 shows several rolls of threads of different colors.

Figure 8: Several rolls of threads of different colors

i) Weaves made from Threads

Threads that are commonly used for making weaves are sheep wool threads, *makarami* threads, *godam* threads, among others. Such products contain several layers of varying areas, heights, and masses. Also, they have concrete forms because of their three-dimensional characteristics, which can be not only seen but also touched at various angles. As such, weaves made from threads tend to look neat and orderly, as threads can be easily operated on in the final process, which is the process of refining weaves. Being inexpensive, threads are a popular choice of medium or material for weaving among most practitioners. Figure 9 shows a weave made from threads that are both interesting and unique.

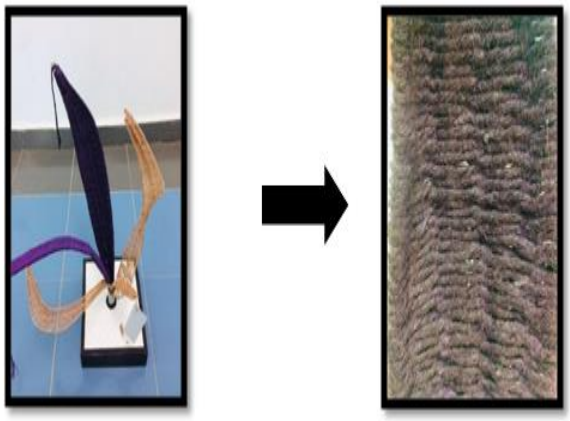

Figure 9: A weave made from threads

Source: Students' studio-based creations

6. Findings and Discussion

This study, which focused on the learning of weaving using a variety of media or materials, such as papers, plastic strings, wires, and threads, revealed several interesting findings. Evidently, such media and materials have different physical and mechanical properties and characteristics that determine their strengths and weaknesses in relation to natural materials, such as rattans or bamboos. As such, it becomes imperative to choose appropriate media or materials to make weaves with specific requirements. In addition, the selection of appropriate media or materials of suitable sizes or thicknesses can help create neat and exquisite weaves that are in great demand to satisfy the high taste of a majority of customers. Furthermore, the use of appropriate colors plays an important role in creating beautiful patterns or motifs of such products.

7. Conclusion

Overall, the findings of this study can help researchers, students, teachers, and practitioners of weave handicraft to apply alternative media or materials, such as papers, plastic strings, wires, and threads, to make products that are equally beautiful, attractive as those made from natural media or materials, such as rattans. In particular, such findings can help enhance students' knowledge and understanding of artistic elements, such as lines, shapes, forms, links, space, and colors. Over recent decades, the use of natural materials, such as rattans, screw-pine leaves, and bamboos, has drastically dropped because of the scarcity of such materials. To make matters worse, replanting plants, which are the sources of such materials, has not been carried out systematically, thus making such plants becoming scarcer. As demonstrated in this study, there are other alternatives that are as good as the natural materials that practitioners, teachers, and students can use to make equally amazing weaves. More importantly, by using a variety of new materials, they can become more

creative and resourceful in making innovative, exquisite weaves, which deserve admiration from customers.

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