

Improving Sales Turnover through Retail Behavior Education in Micro Enterprises at Permai, Pulau Pinang

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to enhance the sales turnover of micro-enterprises by educating school-aged children in Permai, Penang Island, Malaysia, on retail behaviour. Its novelty lies in early entrepreneurial empowerment through practical retail behaviour training. Using a participatory approach within a Community Engagement Programme (PKM), the study involved 30 primary and secondary school participants. The programme, conducted in May 2025 over one month, included observations, mentoring, and sales simulations. Findings show improved understanding of retail practices, pricing strategies, and customer interaction, which positively impacted participants' confidence and entrepreneurial awareness. The initiative contributes to the sustainability of community-based micro-enterprises by instilling business skills at an early stage, promoting local innovation, and fostering long-term socio-economic resilience.

INTRODUCTION

Micro-enterprises play a vital role in strengthening the local economy, particularly in densely populated residential areas such as Permai, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. However, limited understanding of effective retail strategies remains a major obstacle to increasing sales and ensuring the sustainability of these small businesses. Most entrepreneurs in the area run traditional, family-based businesses without sufficient knowledge of consumer behaviour, stock management, basic promotions, or attractive sales techniques. This situation calls for urgent and appropriate educational interventions that are easy to understand and directly applicable to the context of small-scale community businesses (Abdullah & Kamarulzaman, 2019; Ramayah, Yeap, & Ignatius, 2010).

This Community Service Programme (PKM) adopts a unique approach by targeting school-aged children below secondary level as future agents of change. They were chosen not only for their long-term potential in shaping a sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem but also because of their active involvement in supporting family businesses, especially in home-based micro-enterprises. By focusing on an age group rarely addressed in entrepreneurship development programmes, this initiative offers a distinct contribution through practical, interactive, and contextually relevant retail education based on simple simulations (Gibb, 2002; Kiggundu, 2002; Pittaway & Cope, 2007).

The programme provides tangible contributions in two key aspects: (1) creating a simple yet effective retail education model for children, and (2) introducing early intervention in community entrepreneurship education. This concept enriches the landscape of community engagement by extending beyond adult entrepreneurs to include younger generations as potential successors of family businesses. By integrating entrepreneurial values into enjoyable educational activities, the programme aims to foster early interest and basic entrepreneurial skills, while also creating a long-term impact on the sales performance of family-run micro-enterprises in Permai.

Furthermore, the retail education approach employed in this programme goes beyond theoretical understanding by incorporating hands-on experiences such as mock shop simulations, role-playing as sellers and buyers, and basic sales record-keeping exercises (Jones & Iredale, 2010). The methods are designed to be child-friendly while building self-confidence, responsibility, and creativity in entrepreneurship. The training also instils essential values such as honesty in transactions, friendly customer service, and the importance of cleanliness and orderliness in business operations (Hannon, 2005). In this way, the children not only learn how to sell but also develop a deeper understanding of service and customer experience within the micro-retail context.

Beyond being an educational activity, this programme also carries social and economic empowerment dimensions. The children involved in the training indirectly become agents for disseminating retail knowledge and practices within their households. They bring home new skills and understanding, which are then applied alongside their parents or family members in running micro-businesses (Ndofirepi & Rambe, 2017). This creates a positive ripple effect on family business practices, enhances sales opportunities, and strengthens household economic resilience (Pretorius, Nieman, & Van Vuuren, 2005). As such, this initiative not only diversifies the targets and methods of community service but also contributes sustainably to community-based economic development in the Permai area of Pulau Pinang.

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

This community service program is carried out in Permai, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. PERMAI Penang is an abbreviation for Indonesian Community Organization in Pulau Pinang, Malaysia—an NGO or non-governmental, non-political organization operating in the social, educational, and cultural fields. This final program will be implemented in May 2025. The target participants are students from PERMAI Pulau Pinang of school age aged 9 to 14 years (under secondary school level) who help their families in small-scale businesses or show interest in entrepreneurial activities. A total of 30 participants, consisting of boys and girls, with diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

The implementation method combined participatory and experiential learning approaches to ensure active engagement and practical understanding among the young participants (Lackéus, 2020). The activities were designed in a structured manner, including a series of workshops, interactive games, group discussions, and role-playing simulations. The materials presented covered key topics such as the basics of retail behaviour, customer service, product display techniques, simple pricing strategies, and basic record-keeping. Visual aids, props, and mock retail settings were used to create a realistic and enjoyable learning environment.

Sessions were facilitated by a team of academic instructors and trained volunteers who guided the participants through each stage of the training. Each session began with short presentations and storytelling to introduce retail concepts in a relatable context, followed by hands-on activities that allowed participants to apply what they had learned (Nab, Lans, & Oonk, 2021). The role-play simulations were particularly effective, enabling the children to practice being sellers and buyers in a safe, supportive environment. To assess understanding and reinforce learning, mini-challenges and feedback discussions were conducted at the end of each session.

Method of Implementation

The implementation adopted a participatory, experiential, and age-appropriate learning approach, designed to be both educational and engaging. The programme was divided into four main phases:

1. Initial Assessment and Orientation
 - a. Conducting informal interviews with parents and community members to understand the current involvement of children in micro-businesses.
 - b. Briefing session with participants and their guardians to explain objectives and expectations.
2. Retail Behaviour Workshops
 - a. A series of interactive workshops covering topics such as customer interaction, basic sales strategies, product arrangement, hygiene in retail, and simple financial literacy (e.g., pricing, change, and recording income).
 - b. Use of colourful visual aids, storytelling, flashcards, and videos to explain concepts in an engaging way.
3. Simulated Retail Practice
 - a. Role-play sessions where children acted as sellers and customers in a mock-up retail environment.
 - b. Guided practice in managing small stalls, handling mock money, greeting customers, and arranging products effectively.
 - c. Real-time feedback from facilitators to reinforce good practices.
4. Reflection and Application
 - a. Group discussions to reflect on learning outcomes.
 - b. Encouragement for participants to apply what they learned in their family businesses.
 - c. Short project: "Mini Retail Challenge" where children manage a simulated stall for a day and are evaluated based on creativity, service, and basic profit tracking.

Each session was facilitated by a team of university lecturers, business practitioners, and trained student volunteers who used child-friendly communication styles. All materials were tailored to suit the age and literacy levels of the participants, using simple language and relatable examples from daily life.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this programme is built on the integration of Community Empowerment and Child-Centred Entrepreneurial Learning, as illustrated in the following key components:

1. Input
 - a. Target group: Children aged 9–14 from micro-business households.
 - b. Resources: Trained facilitators, learning modules, simulation tools, local community support.
2. Process
 - a. Retail behaviour education (theoretical and practical).
 - b. Experiential learning through role-play and simulations.
 - c. Interactive discussions and feedback loops.
3. Output
 - a. Increased knowledge and awareness of basic retail principles.
 - b. Improved communication and customer handling skills.
 - c. Basic financial literacy and record-keeping skills.
4. Outcome
 - a. Children demonstrate entrepreneurial behaviour in family micro-enterprises
 - b. Strengthened sustainability of household businesses
 - c. Long-term empowerment of the next generation of entrepreneurs

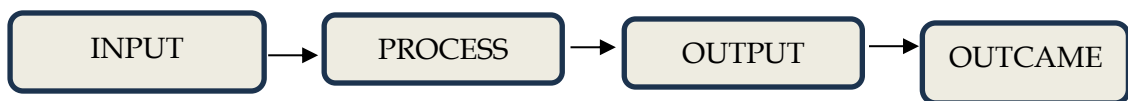


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the community service programme was divided into four structured phases, each designed to ensure gradual understanding and skill development among participants. The steps and materials delivered are summarised below:

Phase 1: Orientation and Initial Engagement

At the beginning of the programme, an introductory session was held to familiarise participants and their guardians with the objectives and benefits of the activity. Participants were asked about their experiences in family-run businesses and their interests in sales and retail activities. This initial interaction revealed that approximately 70% of participants had been involved in helping their parents sell food or products at home or in nearby markets.

Phase 2: Retail Behaviour Education Workshops

Over four sessions, interactive workshops were conducted covering the following materials:

- a. Basic customer service and communication.
- b. Product display and shop cleanliness.
- c. Simple financial literacy: pricing, giving change, and recording income.
- d. Marketing basics (e.g., offering promotions and being polite to customers).

Participants responded enthusiastically, particularly during storytelling and visual demonstrations. Their participation was measured using observation checklists, indicating a steady increase in engagement and understanding across sessions.

Phase 3: Simulation and Role-Playing

This was the most active phase, where children practised as sellers and buyers in a mock retail setup using props. They arranged products, set prices, and interacted with each other following real-life scenarios. Facilitators observed that 80% of participants could simulate transactions correctly after two rounds of practice. Role-play also boosted their confidence and improved their use of polite and persuasive language.

Phase 4: Mini Retail Challenge and Reflection

The final session involved a "Mini Retail Challenge" in which participants worked in small groups to operate a simulated stall. Each group was evaluated based on teamwork, customer handling, stall arrangement, and record-keeping. The results were tabulated in the following table:

Table 1. Mini Retail Challenge - Group Performance Scores

Group	Customer Service (25)	Stall Display (25)	Teamwork (25)	Financial Recording (25)	Total (100)
A	22	20	23	21	86
B	24	22	25	24	95
C	20	18	21	19	78
D	23	21	24	22	90

Most groups demonstrated high competence in customer interaction and teamwork, while financial record-keeping still needed improvement among some participants.



Figure 2. PKM Team and Partner Documentation

The results indicate that the integration of simulation and practical application in retail education is highly effective for children in the targeted age group. Their active participation and improved performance show that even at a young age, they are capable of understanding basic retail concepts and applying them in simulated business environments. The use of age-appropriate materials and interactive methods helped overcome challenges related to attention span and comprehension.

This initiative not only imparted retail knowledge but also helped build soft skills such as communication, responsibility, and cooperation. More importantly, the children began applying these skills in real-life situations by assisting more confidently in their family businesses, as observed in post-programme interviews with several parents. In summary, the programme proved successful in achieving its goals. It fostered foundational entrepreneurial skills among young participants and contributed to long-term micro-enterprise resilience by engaging the next generation in meaningful ways.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This community service initiative has clearly demonstrated the viability and value of introducing retail behaviour education to school-aged children, especially those who are already informally engaged in family-based micro-enterprises. The programme's structured approach combining theoretical instruction with interactive, real-world simulations allowed participants to develop a concrete understanding of essential retail skills. These included customer communication, stall setup, basic financial recording, and service etiquette, all of which are crucial components for running small-scale businesses effectively. Notably, the high level of enthusiasm and engagement observed throughout the sessions reflected the participants' natural curiosity and readiness to learn when exposed to practical and relatable content. This level of involvement, reinforced by observable improvements in knowledge and behaviour, confirms that early entrepreneurial education not only equips children with tangible business skills but also nurtures critical soft skills such as self-confidence, accountability, teamwork, and financial discipline.

Furthermore, the programme's impact extended beyond individual learning; it supported the broader ecosystem of family-run micro-enterprises. By enabling children to better understand and contribute to their family's economic activities, the initiative strengthened intergenerational continuity in entrepreneurial efforts. This early involvement fosters a sense of ownership and identity tied to economic productivity, potentially reducing dependence on external employment in the future. Importantly, the initiative also highlighted the role of informal learning environments in complementing formal education, particularly in communities where access to structured business training is limited. By using simple, locally relevant methods and low-cost materials, the programme proved that impactful entrepreneurial education can be achieved without requiring advanced infrastructure or technology. In summary, the project not only met its immediate educational objectives but also laid the groundwork for a sustainable model of community-based entrepreneurial empowerment. It demonstrated that retail education at a young age is not only feasible but also essential in promoting long-term economic self-reliance and resilience in micro-enterprise settings.

1. **Integration with School Co-Curricular Activities:** To widen its impact, similar retail education programmes can be integrated into school-based entrepreneurial or life-skills curricula, especially in underserved or lower-income communities.
2. **Parental Involvement:** Future programmes should incorporate sessions for parents to align home support with what children learn during the training.
3. **Follow-Up and Mentorship:** Establishing a short-term mentorship system could help reinforce knowledge and allow children to continue practising their skills in real or simulated settings.

4. Scalability and Replication: The module used in this project can be adapted and scaled for other regions or age groups, including primary school children or youth at risk, to support wider social entrepreneurship education.
5. Digital Inclusion: Introducing simple digital tools (like calculators or mobile point-of-sale simulations) may further enrich the learning experience and prepare children for the realities of modern retail.

In conclusion, equipping children from micro-entrepreneurial families with retail knowledge is a meaningful step toward building future-ready generations capable of contributing to household income, community economy, and long-term self-reliance.

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