

# E-BOOK OF EXTENDED ABSTRACT

## THE 14<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL INVENTION, INNOVATION & DESIGN COMPETITION 2025



14<sup>TH</sup> **INDES** 2025

ENVIRONMENTAL • SOCIAL • GOVERNANCE



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INVENTION, INNOVATION &  
DESIGN COMPETITION 2025

**Organized by:**

Office of Research, Industry,  
Community & Alumni Network  
UiTM Perak Branch

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Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing in Publication Data

No e- ISBN: 978-967-2776-52-9

Cover Design: Dr. Mohd Khairulnizam Ramlie

Typesetting : Georgia

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# DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ARTS SCHOOLS TO NURTURE LOCAL ARTISTIC TALENT

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates how architectural design can support community-based learning and foster the preservation of local artistry in Malaysian art schools. Focusing on Sekolah Seni Malaysia Johor, Kuala Lumpur, and Perak, the research adopts a qualitative multi-case methodology involving spatial observations, semi-structured interviews, and a comprehensive literature review. These schools, as dedicated institutions for nurturing young talents in the arts, present a critical opportunity to embed cultural values within their physical environments. However, findings reveal significant shortcomings in current architectural designs, particularly in terms of cultural integration, spatial flexibility, and community engagement. Key architectural elements such as vernacular forms, artisan workshops, performance spaces, and climate-responsive layouts are either underutilized or entirely absent. This undermines the schools' potential to act as living repositories of Malaysia's rich artistic traditions. The research draws on international precedents and theoretical frameworks, including culturally responsive pedagogy, place-based education, and sustainable design principles. These perspectives reinforce the importance of designing learning environments that reflect and support cultural identity, local heritage, and community involvement. A contextual design framework is proposed, emphasizing inclusive and adaptive spaces that celebrate local artistry and provide platforms for intergenerational learning and public participation. The framework highlights strategies for integrating heritage architecture, flexible learning spaces, and environmentally conscious design solutions that align with Malaysia's climatic and cultural context. Ultimately, the study calls for a holistic approach to arts education—one that unites spatial design with cultural sustainability. By reimagining art schools as cultural hubs, architectural interventions can ensure Malaysia's artistic legacy is not only preserved but also thrives through active community involvement and experiential learning opportunities.

**Keyword:** Community-Based Learning, Cultural Heritage, Art School Design, Traditional Crafts, Collaborative Education, Malaysian Architecture

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia's rich cultural heritage—reflected in traditional crafts like *labu sayong*, *tekat emas*, and *tarian dabus*—is a vital part of the national identity. Yet, these art forms are under threat due to modernization, urbanization, and waning interest among younger generations, many of whom no longer view traditional arts as relevant (Kamus, 2012; Mahamood & Rahman, 2020). In response, the government established Sekolah Seni Malaysia to nurture artistic talent and preserve local heritage (Sharif, 2020). However, these institutions often rely on conventional school typologies that overlook the spatial and cultural needs of arts education. Architectural designs typically lack integration with vernacular values and fail to support the intergenerational and experiential nature of traditional learning (Utaberta & Rasdi, 2014). Architecture, as a visible expression of culture, plays a critical role in shaping educational environments. To effectively preserve Malaysia's intangible heritage, there is an urgent need to reimagine these schools as culturally grounded and community-engaged spaces.

This study explores how spatial design can foster community-based learning and enhance cultural continuity in Malaysian art schools.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative, multi-case study methodology was adopted to investigate three public arts schools in Malaysia: Sekolah Seni Malaysia Johor (SSEMJ), Sekolah Seni Malaysia Kuala Lumpur (SSEMKL), and Sekolah Seni Malaysia Perak (SSEMP). Data collection involved a combination of spatial observations, photographic documentation, and semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators. These methods enabled a detailed evaluation of how each school's spatial design, functionality, and atmosphere either contribute to or hinder the promotion of community engagement and traditional arts learning. A literature review on community-based learning environments, cultural education, and sustainable school design further grounded the analysis and contributed to the development of a conceptual design framework.

## **3. FINDINGS**

The evaluation of Sekolah Seni Malaysia Johor, Kuala Lumpur, and Perak revealed critical gaps in spatial planning, cultural integration, and design functionality—undermining their role in fostering community-based learning and preserving local artistry. A key issue was the lack of meaningful cultural embedding in the architecture. Vernacular elements such as Malay roof forms, spatial hierarchies, and traditional material palettes were either absent or used superficially, resulting in a physical environment disconnected from its cultural purpose. This weakened the schools' potential as spaces for cultural immersion. Studios and workshops were also poorly configured for creative practices. Their rigid layouts, limited flexibility, and insufficient ventilation or acoustics hindered both individual expression and collaborative work. Performance spaces were under-equipped to support rehearsals or community showcases. Outdoor learning areas—where available—were underutilized due to minimal shading and weather protection, making them unsuitable for traditional art demonstrations. This limited opportunities for hands-on, experiential learning rooted in local practices.

Crucially, the schools lacked physical infrastructure to support partnerships with local artisans. No spaces were allocated for collaborative residencies, workshops, or public exhibitions, reinforcing the separation between institutional learning and community heritage. Finally, the absence of a standardized design framework meant each school adopted ad hoc planning models that often overlooked the specific needs of arts education. These fragmented layouts led to inefficiencies, poor circulation, and a disconnect between academic, creative, and cultural functions. Collectively, these findings highlight the need for a culturally grounded and pedagogically responsive architectural strategy to transform art schools into vibrant custodians of Malaysian heritage.

This study reveals a critical gap in how architectural design is being underutilized as a tool to support cultural continuity and community-based learning in Malaysian art schools. As noted by Utaberta and Rasdi (2014) and Nor Zalina Harun (2018), architecture is more than shelter—it is a vessel of cultural meaning and identity. Without spatial references to local heritage or community engagement, schools risk becoming disconnected from the traditions they are meant to preserve. International precedents such as Dar al-Kalima and ArtEZ Institute highlight how participatory and vernacular-based design can enrich learning environments through direct integration with local artisans and practices.

Thani (2021) similarly stresses that heritage education must extend beyond classrooms into community spaces. In contrast, the Malaysian schools studied fall short of such approaches, with designs that do not reflect culturally responsive pedagogy (Rowe, 2016). Research supports that architectural elements like tropical planning, shaded outdoor areas, and local materials help reinforce a sense of place, particularly in creative education (Abdullah et al., 2011). Yet, the rigidity and acoustical limitations of current school layouts hinder collaborative and expressive learning—falling behind international standards that value flexibility and material engagement (Corazzo, 2019).

Place-based education, as outlined by Huhmarniemi and Hiltunen (2023), emphasizes learning environments shaped by local culture and context. However, the lack of dedicated spaces for artisan interaction in these schools shows a missed opportunity to embed cultural learning in both form and function. In conclusion, Malaysian art schools require a holistic and culturally grounded design approach—one that supports intergenerational knowledge transfer, flexible learning, and community integration. Reimagining these institutions as cultural nodes can ensure that heritage is not only protected but continuously reinterpreted for future generations.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that there is an urgent need to redefine the architectural identity of Malaysian art schools through a community-based learning lens. In response, a comprehensive design framework is proposed to guide future development. The framework emphasizes architectural strategies that merge cultural preservation with educational innovation. It includes the adoption of facades and built forms inspired by local heritage, the creation of flexible and modular spaces for interdisciplinary activities, and the incorporation of designated zones for community interaction. Interior spaces should evoke cultural narratives through materials, patterns, and spatial arrangements, while outdoor learning environments must be climatically adapted and functionally integrated into the overall layout. Ultimately, these schools should be conceived not only as places of learning but also as catalysts for cultural continuity and creative evolution. The proposed design principles aim to inform architects, educators, and policymakers on how to transform art schools into resilient, inclusive, and culturally empowered spaces.

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e ISBN 978-967-2776-52-9



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