BATIK CLAY IN CONTEMPORARY FASHION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CREATIVITY AND DESIGN

Maarof Saleh
Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch, Seri Iskandar Campus, 32610 Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia.

Mohammad Shafirul Riza Ibharim*
Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch, Seri Iskandar Campus, 32610 Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia.
shafirulriza@uitm.edu.my

Nasyirah Saleh
Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch, Seri Iskandar Campus, 32610 Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia.

Nor Idayu Ibrahim
Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch, Seri Iskandar Campus, 32610 Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia.

Dayang Intan Farahanies
Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch, Seri Iskandar Campus, 32610 Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia.

Abstract: This qualitative research focuses on the application of Batik Clay in the modern student fashion designing, which looks into how the traditional Malaysian textile is incorporated into the new fashion clothing. The studies examine student projects of UiTM Seri Iskandar, and examine the level of fabric coverage as well as how it is mixed with other materials in 22 designs in the casual category. The observations were made at the exhibition with the title of the 'Batik Fusion: From Blocks to Runway' where the garments were evaluated through the standard evaluation framework consisting of the following criteria: originality, integration, conceptual execution, and functional quality. The results show that students used Batik Clay in different capacities, 27.27% of the designs included the fabric as a controlling material (more than 55% coverage), 40.91% as secondary (between 25 and 55% coverage), and 31.82% as peripheral decor. The paper shows that Batik Clay has potential the primary and secondary textile in the modern world of fashion and still retains its cultural identity. The results are added to discussion on how to maintain traditional crafts by education in design and the importance of fashion programmes in mediating traditional textiles and modern design.

Keywords: Batik Clay, Traditional Textile, Fashion Design, Cultural Preservation

1. Introduction

Malaysian batik is a highly important cultural heritage, which is characterised by its colourful colour scheme, wide floral and geometric pattern, and the origin of the practice dates back to the first half of the 20th century due to the presence of Javanese merchants and migrants who established settlement in East Coast states of Kelantan and Terengganu (Mohd Zaki et al., 2021). Unlike the darker and earthy palette of the traditional Indonesian batik, Malaysian batik developed the alternative aesthetic with bigger patterns and preference to brighter colours, as the country is characterised by the unique cultural identity. In design education, the traditional textile like batik is an important tool of creativity that students can utilize to create new pieces that combine cultural heritage with modern fashion values (Talib et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, Batik Clay can also be called batik *tanah liat*, which is another resist method that uses clay instead of the traditional wax in the batik process (Nurcahyanti et al., 2021). The benefits of this technique are substantial: it consumes less fuel, it boils away no fabric in order to get the wax off, and it provides a safer working environment that can be used by both artisans and design students. In Malaysia, the innovation has been on the rise by Kraftangan Malaysia initiatives and incorporation into the university design curriculum, which has made Batik Clay a sustainable medium to link traditional craftsmanship and modern fashion practice.

Educational institutions should actively support traditional textile promotion because design students represent a vital force for revitalising Malaysian traditional crafts (Talib, Umar, & Mohamad, 2024). Previous studies demonstrate that traditional motifs can create valuable opportunities for modern fashion design. Research about student project integration of complete fabric pieces remains scarce because previous research has not studied this topic enough (Yusof et al., 2019). The research investigates how to unite traditional cultural protection with contemporary design education through student documentation of their Batik Clay work methods.

This study aims to find out the level of Batik Clay usage in modern student designs of fashion, both in terms of coverage of fabric on the garment and as an important or supporting material on the garment, and to examine the way of Batik Clay incorporation by the fashion students, how the fabric is used with other materials and also the way of fitting within the overall compositions of the design. The study contributes to the sustainable fashion educational discourse by showing how to convert traditional textiles into contemporary designs that maintain their cultural context. The study findings will aid teachers, creators and cultural policy makers to integrate contemporary innovation and heritage protection as Ahmad et al. (2021) mention.

2. Literature Review

Syed Shaharuddin et al. (2021) provided an extensive analysis of Malaysian and Indonesian batik production which details both production difficulties and modern developments that emerged during the twenty-first century. Wenyan Daud and Tahir (2023) explain that the research investigates the dual significance of batik which exists as both an artistic expression and a cultural and economic heritage. The previous research discusses current initiatives which aim to revive batik through modern manufacturing approaches that support environmentally friendly practices and creative design solutions.

These topics are also reflected in research on eco fashion which involve indigenous crafts. Syed Shaharuddin et al. (2021) further analyse the Indonesian fashion brand ‘Threads of Life’ to show how traditional motifs and handcrafted products and local cultural elements can be combined with sustainable economic and environmental practices. The research team performed a qualitative case study to develop essential principles of aesthetic justice and social value and eco-friendly design which resulted in a sustainable design framework that preserves traditional elements while fulfilling current market requirements.

2.1 *The Use of Traditional Textiles in Fashion Design*

Academic researchers have demonstrated significant interest in investigating the current fashion design presence of traditional textiles. Poon (2017) discussed the development of Malaysian batik from its traditional community roots into a national fashion label. Which now commands substantial worth in modern fashion industry. The author explains that language revitalization requires cultural heritage protection through educational programs and media support which should fit modern society needs. The research by Nursari et al. (2025) applied innovation diffusion theory to study how local fashion brands transform batik for young consumers through their use of digital methods. Their creation of simplified designs and new cultural interpretations which appeal to contemporary fashion preferences.

At the student level, conduct student motif development research to understand student interactions with conventional textile designs. The research by Guntur et al. (2023), analyse Indonesian art thesis students and document that artefacts, ceremonies, legends and nature function as powerful stimuli for creating batik motifs. Students created 13 sketches each before they narrowed their work down to 4-5 final designs which showed their creative development through traditional cultural references. The research by Alfadwa Sunarya and Susanto (2025), examines how Yogyakarta teenagers view current batik design progress in their city. The authors demonstrate how young people develop their self-image through their exposure to global trends and their attraction to fashionable designs. The researcher

present obstacles which occur when people attempt to unite their cultural heritage with contemporary design elements.

2.2 *Concept of Creativity in Student Fashion Design*

The ability to develop unique and meaningful design products stands as the core definition of creativity which serves as a vital component in fashion design educational programs. The research by Guntur et al. (2023) explain that students develop their creative batik motif designs through inspiration from local traditions including ceremonies, folklore and natural elements. The students externalise ideas through sketching. Zhang and Rusli (2024) further highlight that this process enables students to generate new ideas while they explore different artistic elements which include form and composition and colour and motif repetition. The selection process for sketches includes quality filters which lead to better results through cumulative practice that enhances both creative originality and final design quality.

The iterative design process emphasises quantity (many sketches) then quality (selecting best concepts), reflecting standard creativity frameworks, Gwilt and Alison (2024) as referenced in the study. In another context, developed motif concepts based on local wisdom principles which resulted in new design combinations that would interest young consumers. The educational methods demonstrate how modern educational systems combine technical abilities with cultural knowledge and team-based creative thinking according to Talib et al. (2024).

2.3 *Importance of Cultural Heritage Preservation through Fashion*

Fashion design functions as a vital method which has gained international recognition because it protects intangible cultural heritage. Poon (2017) states that batik needs to keep its market value while people need to understand its actual value. Moreover, batik needs to appear in educational materials and media channels because this will boost both national pride and brand value. Young Malaysian designers use their designs to preserve Malaysian culture according to Abdullah (2023), who studied 61 neo-traditional batik designs. The designers use well-known Malay batik motifs which include flora and fauna elements to create innovative designs that maintain cultural heritage through their visual storytelling.

Academic researchers who study indigenous textiles in remote areas face similar obstacles which require them to work with government institutions and artisans to defend traditional fashion elements against modern fashion trends. The research demonstrates how academic institutions together with designer initiatives defend heritage texts through fashion which brings dormant cultural artifacts back to life (Zhang & Rusli, 2024).

2.4 *Definition and Conceptualisation of "Utilisation"*

Students used Batik Clay textiles to develop new products through design work which merged traditional materials with contemporary design elements. From case studies, the utilisation involves several dimensions:

I. Nursari et al. (2025) describe material integration as the transformation of traditional batik through techniques which include cutting and layering and pattern combination and fabric transformation using manual and digital methods.
II. Wenyan Daud and Tahir (2023) emphasis the symbolic use of batik motifs in representing cultural identity through organic and geometric designs which represent flora and fauna elements that carry cultural significance.
III. Guntur et al. (2023) highlight the ideation process, where students generate and refine motif concepts. The concept of utilisation includes ideation and selection- how raw traditional motifs are internalised and then externalised via design processes.
IV. Poon (2017) and Talib et al. (2024) support the concept of functional aesthetics, where traditional textiles are adapted into contemporary products while maintaining their functional worth and traditional significance while generating profitable outcomes which deference ancestral traditions.

3. Methodology

The research design used in this study was qualitative research in the form of observational research of fashion products designed by Semester 3 fashion students of UiTM Seri Iskandar. The study was meant to explore the design work of the students by examining how they use Batik Clay patterns with regard to the overall and the means of fabric utilisation in modern-day garment construction.

The purposive sampling methodology was chosen to make sure that the chosen works were directly related to the research purpose. The analysis covered all 22 designs of the casual category entries in the final assignment that involved the use of traditional textiles. The sampling strategy was appropriate because it enabled the study to cover the target population in a comprehensive way that is, the students enrolled in the course taught in fashion design who were required to specifically use Batik Clay in their creative work.

Primary data were observed by using direct observation on the final garment displays at the exhibit titled Batik Fusion: From Blocks to Runway (South Court, AEON Mall Station 18, Ipoh, Perak) between 25 and 27 July 2025. The garments were photographed and documented with the help of the standardised observation protocol to guarantee the uniformity in the data capture. The observation was based on four essential dimensions which were derived based on the research framework: the percentage of fabric covered by Batik Clay, positioning of Batik Clay in the garment, the ways of integrating with other materials and the overall design execution.

3.1 *Evaluation Criteria*

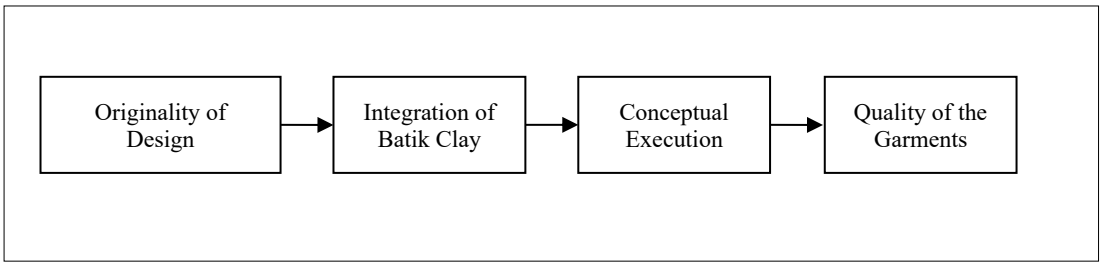


Figure 1: Framework for Evaluation Criteria to Assess Creative Pattern

Each garment was assessed based on a standardised assessment tool of four criteria as shown in Figure 1. The criteria were operationalised to provide systematic and uniform analysis of all 22 designs. The *'originality of design'* was measured through the analysis of the newness of silhouette, methods of construction, and the innovative interpretation of classic motifs. Original designs were those which portrayed unusual methods of constructing garments, pattern cutting or a combination of Batik Clay and modern styling.

'Integration of Batik Clay' was tested on two aspects: the coverage of the fabrics and the way of incorporation. The fabric coverage was divided into dominant (over 55 percent of garment surface), moderate (25-55 percent), and minimal (less than 25 percent). Manner of incorporation meant the use of Batik Clay as a primary structural element, secondary decorative element, or conceptual statement within the overall story of design.

The integrity among the design concept and its realisation was called '*conceptual execution'*. This criterion evaluated the creativity shown in integrating Batik Clay with other materials, how the design narrative conveyed a cultural meaning, and the general consistency between the intended idea and the final garment.

The *'quality'* of the item in terms of use or the quality of the garment in relation to wearability, comfort, durability and so as to suit the current fashion context was evaluated as the functional quality. The

garments were tested on the capacity to improve or deteriorate practical functionality with the integration of Batik Clay, understanding the compromise between aesthetic experimentation and the comfort of the user.

3.2 *Data Analysis*

The thematic analysis was used to analyse the data in accordance with the six stages outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process of analysis started with familiarisation whereby the researchers repeatedly saw the garment exhibits and analysed the photographic documentation in order to form a familiar feeling of the data. Primary patterns were then created according to the four evaluation criteria, paying special attention to tendencies that were observed among the 22 designs.

These codes were further summarized into a larger theme, which underwent review and were narrowed down to make certain they were related to the raw data. The last themes were identified and titled to get the essence of every analytic category, which is the essence of the findings section. To improve the credibility of the results, triangulation of the investigators was used, that is the garments were rated by two researchers independently and the results were compared. Any coding or interpretations discrepancies were solved by means of discussion in order to reach a common agreement, thus making the analysis more credible.

4. Findings on the Extent of Batik Clay Utilisation in Contemporary Student Fashion Designs

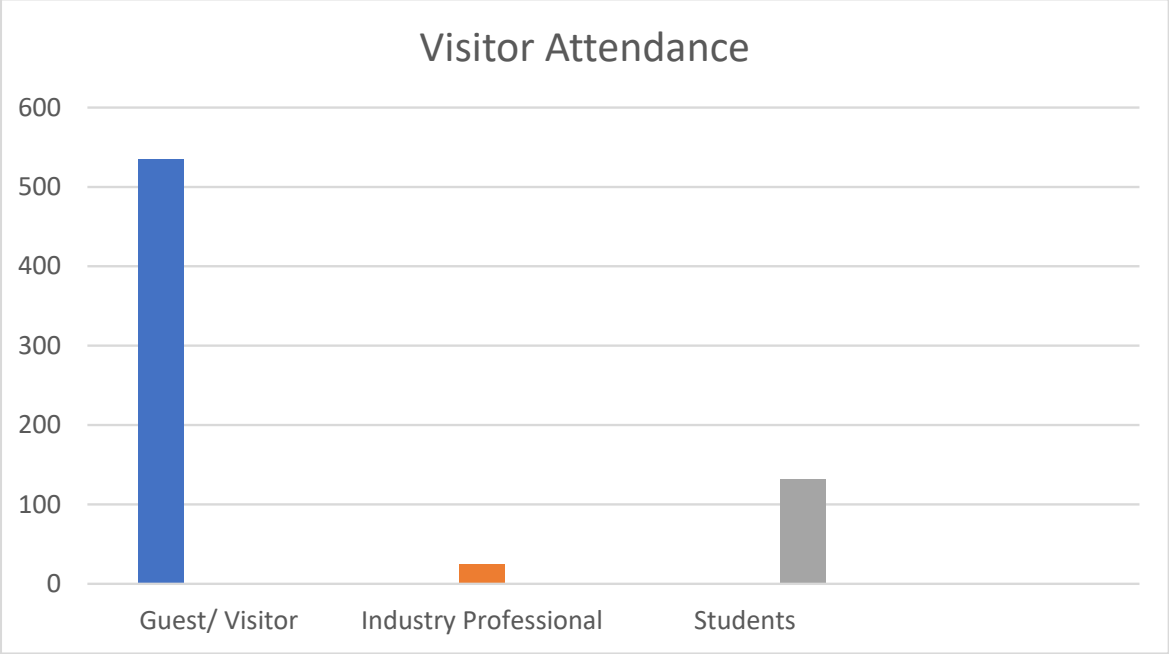


Figure 2: Visitor attendance from 25 July 2025 (Friday) to 27 July 2025 (Sunday)

Figure 2 show the chart shows visitor attendance in South Court, AEON Mall Station 18, Ipoh, from 25 July 2025 (Friday) to 27 July 2025 (Sunday). The program collected 666 respondents and most are guests/visitor with 535 respondents (80.3%) demonstrating considerable public interest and participation, 131 students (19.7%) were the second-largest group, demonstrating educational community participation and 24 respondents from Industry Professionals (3.6%). The data suggests that the event attracted a broad audience, with more students and few industries expert.

The analysis in table 1 and 2 below, shows varying levels of Batik Clay usage among the garments. Approximately 27.27% (6 designs) of the designs used Batik Clay as the dominant material

(constituting more than 55% of the total garment), while 40.91% (9 designs) incorporated Batik Clay in a moderate capacity (between 25% and 55%). The remaining 31.82% (7 designs) used Batik Clay minimally, either as accents or in small sections of the design (below 25%). The students demonstrated a deliberate yet different method of using Batik Clay through their designs which included both complete pattern usage and symbolic and thematic applications.

Table 1: Prominent Categorisation of Batik Clay Usage Based on Fabric Coverage From 22 Design

Level of Batik Clay Usage	Percentage (%)	Number of Design	Description
Dominant	27.27	6	Batik Clay used on more than 55% of the garment surface.
Moderate	40.91	9	Batik Clay used on between 25%-55% of the garment.
Minimal	31.82	7	Batik Clay used on less than 25% of the garments; often as accents or details.

Table 2: Selected Design by Percentage Category

Dominant (more than 55%)	Moderate (between 25%-55%)	Minimal (less than 25%)
		
		
		

4.1 *Originality of Design*

The student designs present an original approach through creative method of combining Batik Clay with contemporary fashion elements. The students employed contemporary design of garment construction methods through the designs which included unbalanced fabric cuts and large sleeve volumes and unique panel arrangements. The experimental designs show how students' individual creativity to create work which stays true to cultural heritage.

The project demonstrates how Batik Clay can adapt to various environments through its combination of heritage elements with modern design elements which enables traditional textiles to serve contemporary purposes. The educational method at fashion schools enables students to develop original designs which preserve cultural heritage according to Talib et al. (2024). The distinctive designs prove that heritage textiles need. To become fundamental elements of contemporary fashion, enable cultural heritage preservation through innovative design approaches (Mohamad & Hassan, 2022).

4.2 *Integration of Batik Clay Motifs and Fabrics*

The students exhibit outstanding flexibility through Batik Clay integration because this material as the main element and also as an additional design component. The traditional textile Batik Clay dominated more than 55% of the garment design which made the clothing items display cultural heritage through design elements. In other designs, Batik Clay was employed in a more subtle manner. Often as an accent or decorative element and accounting for less than 25% of the garment's surface. The students demonstrate their ability to safeguard cultural heritage through selection of clothing which unites heritage elements with modern fashion elements. The students used Batik Clay as a key design feature or applied it to tribute the traditional cloth while adapting it to modern fashion.

The students' work shows that the integration of traditional Batik Clay can improve designs to be used in contemporary contexts. The brand demonstrates its ability to adapt through its method of converting classic elements into modern designs which attract present-day consumers. As discussed by Ahmad et al. (2021), traditional textiles which designers use in their modern designs function as a vital approach to protect cultural heritage while fulfilling present-day market requirements. Poon (2017), explains that people should preserve cultural value through their adaptation of traditional designs which should match contemporary ways of living.

4.3 *Innovation in Conceptual Execution*

Student fashion ideas using Batik Clay combine traditional and modern aspects, revealing the textile's versatility. Students' creative use of Batik Clay in contemporary design to kept the textile current. Students used Batik Clay as a main fabric and a subtle background detail to show how versatile it is and to make it a useful and culturally important part of their projects. Ahmad et al. (2021) advocate using heritage fabrics into modern fashion to preserve culture while following trends. Poon (2017) adds that traditional motifs can thrive in modern marketplaces if modified carefully.

However, superficial Batik Clay use may be bad. Using the textile as a decorative accent instead of incorporating it within the design may weaken its cultural importance. Some student may not fully utilise Batik Clay in their work, which may reduce its cultural value. A deeper, more true connection with the cloth could raise its function in modern fashion, preserving its material form and cultural importance.

4.4 *Functional Quality of the Garments*

The combination of Batik Clay with modern student fashion presents new designs which achieve multiple functions. Students achieved a positive result through the combination of historical elements with modern clothing designs which maintained both cultural value and functional aspects. The designs which use Batik Clay as the main element or decorative element continue to deliver comfort and durability and visual appeal which suitable for modern fashion. The designs achieve an excellent

combination of traditional elements with contemporary design elements which makes the material both useful and meaningful to its cultural heritage.

The functional quality of clothing items becomes affected in particular situations as shown in Table 3. The designs showcase original concepts which focus on making things look attractive rather than ensuring the garment remain operational. The experimental design elements which include asymmetrical cuts and voluminous sleeves create innovative looks but sometimes make the clothing difficult to wear and uncomfortable to wear. The decorative use of heritage textile by designers results in its cultural value and practical significance being lost because the fabric no longer serves its original function (Mohamad & Azizan, 2018). Students need to achieve two goals when working with traditional textiles because both must create innovative designs and make the fabrics enhance both functionality and wearing comfort of the garment.

Table 3: Level of Success for 'Functional Quality of the Garments' From 22 Design

Level of Success	Percentage (%)	Number of Design	Descriptiom
High	18.18	4	- Garments offer both aesthetic appeal and wearability. - Comfort and durability are maintained while incorporating Batik Clay. - The designs are well-balanced, merging traditional textiles with contemporary styles.
Moderate	50.00	11	- Functional but slightly compromised by experimental design features. - Some designs show slight discomfort or limited wearability. - Batik Clay is integrated creatively but does not always enhance comfort.
Low	31.82	7	- Garments suffer from impractical design choices, affecting comfort. - Overly avant-garde elements reduce the functionality of Batik Clay in garments.

5. Conclusion

The research shows Batik Clay functions as a creative resource which student fashion designers can use to incorporate this traditional textile into contemporary designs. The students at UiTM Seri Iskandar used Batik Clay to create modern designs which proved its dual functionality as both primary fabric material and decorative element. The designs showed two distinct design methods because certain design combinations achieved successful results between functionality and aesthetics, other designs traded user comfort for innovative appearance. The research shows that fashion education should preserve its traditional textile education because this method allows students to develop innovative designs while safeguarding their cultural heritage. Student work projects that use Batik Clay as their material implement an effective method to safeguard and improve cultural heritage which suits modern society.

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