

GRAPHIC DESIGN EDUCATION AND THE  
IMPORTANCE OF SELECTED MALAYSIAN CULTURAL  
ART FORMS

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# GRAPHIC DESIGN EDUCATION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SELECTED MALAYSIAN CULTURAL ART FORMS

## ABSTRACT

Bauhaus was a German school of design that set the benchmark for worldwide graphic design education from the early 20th century till today. While the principles of graphic design are a sure guideline for students to abide by when producing graphic works, the researcher has found through experience that much of their graphic work lack local art forms in their content. Using a case study action research approach, the research first explored an initial group of 20 graphic design students' initial understanding of their knowledge of Malaysian Cultural Art Forms (MCAF). Then intervention activities that incorporated MCAF in the Malaysian graphic design class were implemented after which the students understanding of their knowledge in MCAF were determined. Finally, expressions of cultural identity were elicited. The students were from a private university in Selangor. After the findings from the initial group emerged, it mooted an idea that the expressions of cultural identity by students who did not experience the intervention activities should be compared with the group that had the experience. Thus, the whole study was a four-cycle case study action research.

In Cycle 1, the researcher conducted a focus group interview and administered questionnaires to gauge students' initial understanding of MCAF. In Cycle 2 intervention activities were incorporated into the classroom learning. The interventions included, a visit to a contemporary Malaysian art exhibition; participation in a batik workshop; a visit and hands-on experience making some craft work at a Mah Meri cultural village, and attending a talk about *wayang kulit*, as well as viewing some *wayang kulit* exhibits. Upon the completion of each activity, the students had to answer

a questionnaire with regards to their learning and understanding of each of the MCAF. Upon the completion of the interventions an open-themed project was given to the students where they were to identify a local social/health/environmental issue and produce a visual solution, based on their exposure to the four MCAF. From the students' work, rationale and reflection, and a focus group interview at Cycle 3, the researcher studied their expressions of cultural identity. In Cycle 4, the researcher gave an open-themed project (but in greater contextual detail) to a second group of students without the intervention activities for comparison.

Findings show that the first group of students did not have much knowledge nor understanding of MCAF before participating in the intervention activities. However, the students understanding deepened together with their expressions of cultural identity after participating in the intervention activities. As for the second group without intervention they also demonstrated some expressions of cultural identity. In conclusion, although Malaysian private universities' graphic design education curricula are underpinned especially by Bauhaus principles of design, MCAF related learning activities should be conducted. This study has found that planned interventions within the graphic design classroom can enhance the understanding and the knowledge of local cultural art forms, enabling students to put forward meaningful expressions of cultural identity.

# **PENDIDIKAN REKA BENTUK GRAFIK DAN KEPENTINGAN BENTUK SENI BUDAYA MALAYSIA TERPILIH**

## **ABSTRAK**

Bauhaus adalah sekolah reka bentuk Jerman yang menetapkan tanda aras untuk pendidikan reka bentuk grafik dunia dari awal abad ke-20 hingga hari ini. Walaupun prinsip reka bentuk grafik adalah garis panduan yang pelajar mematuhi apabila menghasilkan karya grafik, penyelidik mendapati, melalui pengalaman bahawa kebanyakan karya grafik pelajar kurang mempunyai bentuk seni tempatan dalam kandungan mereka. Dengan menggunakan kaedah penyelidikan tindakan kajian kes, penyelidik meneliti pemahaman awal dan pengetahuan awal 20 orang pelajar reka bentuk grafik tentang bentuk seni budaya Malaysia. Kemudian, aktiviti intervensi penggabungan bentuk seni budaya Malaysia dilaksanakan dalam kelas reka bentuk grafik dan seterusnya pemahaman pelajar tentang pengetahuan bentuk seni budaya Malaysia mereka ditentukan. Akhirnya, penimbulan ungkapan identiti budaya mereka dikaji. Pelajar dalam kajian ini berasal dari sebuah universiti swasta di Selangor. Selepas memperoleh data daripada kumpulan ini, timbulnya idea bahawa ungkapan identiti budaya oleh pelajar yang tidak melalui intervensi harus dibandingkan dengan kumpulan yang telah melalui intervensi. Oleh itu, kajian ini merupakan satu kajian kes penyelidikan tindakan empat kitaran.

Dalam Kitaran 1, penyelidik menjalankan temuduga kumpulan fokus dan mentadbirkan soal selidik untuk menentukan pemahaman awal pelajar terhadap bentuk seni budaya Malaysia. Dalam Kitaran 2, aktiviti intervensi dimasukkan ke dalam pembelajaran kelas. Intervensi termasuk, lawatan ke pameran seni kontemporari Malaysia, penyertaan dalam bengkel batik, lawatan dan pengalaman membuat kerja kraftangan di kampung kudaya Mah Meri, dan menghadiri ceramah tentang *wayang*

*kulit*, serta melihat pameran *wayang kulit*. Apabila selesai setiap aktiviti, pelajar menjawab soal selidik tentang pembelajaran dan pemahaman setiap bentuk seni budaya Malaysia tersebut. Setelah selesai aktiviti, satu projek bertema terbuka diberikan kepada pelajar di mana mereka mengenal pasti satu isu sosial / kesihatan / alam sekitar tempatan dan menghasilkan penyelesaian visual, berasaskan pendedahan mereka kepada empat bentuk seni budaya Malaysia tersebut. Daripada kerja, rasional dan refleksi pelajar, serta temubual kumpulan fokus di Kitaran 3, penyelidik mengkaji ungkapan identiti budaya mereka. Dalam Kitaran 4, penyelidik memberikan projek bertema terbuka (tetapi dengan konteks yang lebih terperinci) kepada kumpulan kedua pelajar tanpa pendedahan kepada aktiviti intervensi untuk perbandingan.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa kumpulan pelajar pertama tidak mempunyai banyak pengetahuan atau pemahaman tentang bentuk seni budaya Malaysia sebelum menyertai aktiviti intervensi. Pemahaman mereka semakin mendalam bersama dengan ungkapan identiti budaya mereka selepas menyertai aktiviti intervensi. Bagi kumpulan kedua tanpa intervensi, mereka juga menunjukkan beberapa ungkapan identiti budaya. Kesimpulannya, walaupun kurikulum pendidikan reka bentuk grafik kebanyakan universiti swasta Malaysia didasarkan oleh prinsip reka bentuk Bauhaus, kaitan dengan pembelajaran bentuk seni budaya Malaysia perlu diwujudkan. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa aktiviti intervensi yang dirancang dalam kurikulum reka bentuk grafik dapat meningkatkan pemahaman dan pengetahuan tentang bentuk seni budaya tempatan yang membolehkan pelajar mengemukakan ungkapan identiti budaya yang bermakna.

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## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

### **Introduction**

Culture is a very unique term when it comes to Malaysia. At the first glance of her capital city, Kuala Lumpur, one may get the impression that this country is mainly filled with Western modernity, from its infrastructure to most city folks' dressing and the widely spoken language of English. It is apparent that Malaysia is globalised. However, through closer observation, one will also discover that there is a mix of ethnic cultures, such as Chinese, Indian, Malay and various other ethnic groups. Although English is widely spoken, a majority of Malaysians converse in *Bahasa Malaysia*, the official language of this country. Cultural ethnic elements are all around, despite the advancement of a globalising Malaysia. This is evident through ornate religious buildings such as Hindu temples and Buddhist temples that exist in between high rise commercial buildings in the middle of the city, locals dressed in their traditional costumes not only on traditional festive seasons but also as everyday wear for some. Cultural art forms, such as woodcarving, weaving and wicker are among the many kinds found in Malaysia, although some are more common than others. Having the diversity in ethnic cultures and sharing a common globalised culture is indeed a unique phenomenon in Malaysia. The cultural identity that Malaysians have is therefore unique as it is not only formed by their individual ethnic backgrounds or origins but also a national one.

For a Malaysian graphic design student, the abovementioned is potential to set the ground for a rich exploration of cultural art forms and one's cultural identity.

Graphic design is a term given by an American book and advertising designer, W.A. Dwiggins in 1922 (Santoro, 2014; Béltrand, 2000). Practised internationally, graphic design, also known as communication design, conveys idea and experiences through pictures and words, be it physical or virtual, which could include a variety of imagery and letterforms (Cezzar, 2015).

As with all professional fields, graphic designers follow a set of rules or one can say refer to some fundamental guidelines to produce readable, comprehensible layouts of design when completing a piece of design work, regardless what platform it may be. New inventions and technology may give birth to many new styles and trends visually but ultimately the principles of visual communication have remained the same. Visual direction, message conveyance and stirring of emotions are all intended effects of visuals and type, put together to attract attention (Golombisky & Hagen, 2010).

While following the guidelines will give the designer a kind of direction to lay out the design work in a readable, legible and comprehensible manner, the type of visual content is not determined by the guidelines that graphic designers have to abide to. It is the visual that communicates with the viewer or reader of the design. Where do the inspirations of visuals come from? Visual elements are all around us, but a designer must be sensitive enough to know what kind of visuals to draw his or her inspirations from so that the design work communicates successfully to the people of the community that the designer works in. In art and design education, it is important to understand how visuals can produce and represent culture at the same time and therefore it is a must to pay close attention to visual forms of representation (Jewitt, 2008; Reif & Grant, 2010; Lai, 2012; Beguette, 2014).

Communities living in a society have different cultural backgrounds. There are many definitions of culture which are similar to each other but the one that is most

relevant in the context of this study is advocated by Spencer-Oatey (2000) where culture is categorised into four layers, namely i) basic assumptions and values; ii) beliefs, attitudes and conventions; iii) systems and institutions and iv) artefacts, rituals, products and behaviour (Spencer-Oatey, 2000). Products of culture come in many forms – architecture, costumes, jewelry, music, handcrafts, the visual arts and so on (National Standards for Foreign Education Project, 1999). With this research revolving around Malaysian cultural art forms in graphic design education, the focus will be on products of culture, specifically handcrafts and visual art. The cultural art forms found in the various types of cultures in Malaysia could be the sources of inspiration for designers to draw ideas from when designing for a specific community.

To achieve that, graphic design education plays a role to hone how the students can learn from the cultural artefacts in their surroundings. Not only does culture and its visual art forms serve to inspire designers but knowing and understanding culture from its art forms will create a sense of cultural identity. In a world where values, identity and lifestyles are constantly changing, it is the role of education to prepare students to develop their cultural identity and to be engaged with cultural diversity (Robinson, 1999; Marshall 2007; Hauser, 2009; Khoury & Khoury, 2009).

### **Background of the Study**

The school that perpetuated the education and theories of graphic design (before it was termed as graphic design) was *Staatliches Bauhaus*, or more commonly known as Bauhaus, founded in Germany by an architect, Walter Gropius, in 1919. The literal meaning of Bauhaus is “house of construction”, which stood for “School of Building.” Gropius and his colleagues started the school with the attempt to combine all sort of arts and architecture under one roof, to educate future craftsmen, painters, and sculptors

to put together all their skills in producing collaborative works (Lupton & Miller, 1993; Fiedler & Feierabend, 1999; Whitford 2003).

Bauhaus was the result of cultural, societal and political changes in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, brought on by World War I, the Russian Revolution, the German Revolution, continuous civil war between a still-monarchist right and socialist-inspired left. In the early twentieth century, Bauhaus used design to address issues in the German society such as industrialisation, technological advancement, the world war and they attempted to seek some kind of order and meaning through visual forms for the new of that time (Fiedler & Feierabend 1999; Whitford, 2003; Armstrong, 2009).

The Bauhaus teaching was unique as it was not about creating aesthetical pieces of work but in those works, one finds meaning and functionality, reflecting the needs of the people of those times. Bauhaus' pragmatic understanding, utilising and teaching of design had brought art and design into another level as a way to solve problems of society, manipulating creativity to make and shape reality and not merely documenting it. (Fiedler & Feierabend, 1999; Whitford, 2003; Meggs & Purvis, 2006; Ridgway & Haynes, n.d.)

The Bauhaus teachings have left a lasting impact on worldwide graphic design education till this day, 96 years after its inception. Although Bauhaus started at a time that was much different from now, its stronghold is still there to stay because the ageless questions that Bauhaus asks in regards to the teaching of art and craft, what constitutes to a good design, and the impact of architecture on the lives of people who reside in them, are still relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Whitford, 2003; Chen & He, 2013). In almost all forms of art and design, from art, architecture, graphic design, interior

design, industrial design and typography, Bauhaus has left its mark of excellence for designers to follow (Lupton & Miller, 1993; Bauhaus, 2011; Chen & He, 2013).

The Bauhaus was a school that focused on bringing crafts and fine arts together. It was an educational reform of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to meet economic demands that were vital for Germany before and during the First World War. Since Germany was not like America or Britain, which are rich with raw materials, there was a need to produce quality designers so as to design and export high-quality goods (Fiedler & Feierabend, 1999; Whitford, 2003). Bauhaus provided workshops where workshop-teaching was conducted by masters of each particular craft, teaching methods and techniques, while the understanding of forms and the mysteries of creativity were taught by fine artists (Whitford, 2003). In that regard, students were apprentices to these masters.

Although in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, changes and adaptation from Bauhaus had taken place, the fundamentals of workshops and apprenticeship had never really ceased in graphic design education curriculum. In the contemporary graphic design curriculum, apprenticeship per se had not been practised but what is equivalent to that is internship, where students in their final academic year will experience industrial placement to work with the experts of the design field. This is closely related to working with the masters in the times of Bauhaus.

To strengthen the point that Bauhaus' principles are timeless yet able to co-exist with designs for the changing world, it is worth to mention an ongoing effort at the Vitra Design Museum, in Weil am Rhein, Germany. An exhibition is being planned to commemorate the centennial celebration of Bauhaus in 2019. The words of the curator, Jolanthe Kugler, truly reflects the essence of Bauhaus, in that Bauhaus is

*“a process of thinking that started 100 years ago, it is still an ongoing process today...Bauhaus is not about the objects but way to convey what the designers wanted for the new world. To express this new way of thinking, they needed new forms.”* (Kugler, 2015, as cited in Coghlan, 2016).

The researcher sees this as a call to infuse Malaysian cultural art forms into local graphic design education as cultural art forms are not only from the traditional sources but also contemporary, new world, where 21<sup>st</sup> century Malaysian culture is also influenced by.

Undoubtedly, efforts have been made in the past to incorporate Malaysian cultural art forms, particularly batik, into the educational curriculum towards the preservation of these art forms, as well as to inculcate a sense of national culture appreciation (Muliyadi Mahamood, 2007). Khatijah’s (2000) study did revolve around traditional art form to develop programmes for higher education in Malaysia but the inspirational art forms were mainly derived from art works specifically made by Malay artists, which does not reflect the multicultural setting in Malaysia.

The effort to instill the notion of a national culture was head started by the 1971 National Cultural Congress of Malaysia, stemmed from an upheaval in 1969 that saw to multicultural unrest in Malaysia (Azian Tahir, 2009). Although the incorporation of Malaysian cultural art forms were mainly practised by national schools and national universities, this cannot be said the same for Malaysian private higher education institutions (Badrul Isa, 2006). More importantly, after reviewing the *Huraian Sukatan Pelajaran Pendidikan Seni Visual Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah* (2002, p. v), the researcher found that none of the objectives in the document aimed for secondary school students to learn about their cultural art forms and cultural identity. In that regard, this study could bridge the gap between the student’s secondary school

learning about MCAF and in the graphic design course, emphasising on cultural identity.

According to EduSpiral, an official representative of top private universities and colleges in Malaysia, offering education advisor service that provide students with further education advice, the three top-choice private higher education institutions in Malaysia are Universities A, B and C (“Top 10 Design Colleges & Universities in Malaysia”, 2014). At these private universities, where graphic design programmes are well-known locally, the programme curricula are modeled after the Bauhaus curriculum where principles of design and hands-on (practical) lessons of graphic design are taught. Bauhaus’ practical approach towards art education, grounded by ideology and practical problem solving solutions to design makes it a model that many art schools in the world follow (Whitford, 2003; Swanson, 2010). The non-inclusion of Malaysian cultural art forms can be seen in the programme structures found from the brochures and websites of these private higher education institutions (refer to Appendices I, II and III). For the purpose of respecting the privacy of these universities being in the private sector and to avoid the conflict of interest, these universities’ actual names were kept confidential.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Studies have shown that the role culture plays not only in art and design education but also in education itself. Faizah’s (2008) study found out that cultural values influence the lives of three postgraduate students in terms of religion and family relationship orientation. In another research, Kim (2004) studied how creativity is influenced by an aspect of culture, Confucianism, through the case study of Korean’s gifted education. In art and design education, cultural identity is one of the important

ingredients to produce confident, self-respect designers who are observant and also respectful of the society they work in (Marshall, 2007; Meyer, 2008). In a multicultural country like Malaysia, education provides that avenue for students to be more aware and attuned to the various cultures (Badrul Isa, 2006). Education, including graphic design education, therefore acts as an important hub to inculcate the knowledge and understanding of culture to students, while enabling them to discover or investigating into their cultural identity (Stultz, 2006; Marshall, 2007; Khoury & Khoury, 2009; Berry & Candis, 2013; Munday et al., 2014; Hadjiyanni, 2014).

For designers, knowing and understanding cultures means that they have higher chances of communicating better with the society which they design for. Designers need to understand that their own views and thoughts of the world may not be the same as others. Understanding that may empower them to communicate better with the appropriate visuals (Scherer, 2010). While cultural values may be intangible, there are other aspects of culture that are tangible and visible. The most apparent is products of culture in the form of handcrafts, sculptures, architecture, art and everyday utensils (National Standards for Foreign Education Project, 1999). In graphic design education, which is a highly visual field, products of culture could serve as visual and conceptual idea inspirations for graphic design students. Another important aspect is that students can explore their cultural identity when they are faced with these products of culture (Stultz, 2006; Marshall, 2007; Khoury & Khoury, 2009; Berry & Candis, 2013; Munday et al., 2014; Hadjiyanni, 2014).

The study by Hadjiyanni (2014) posits that concepts can be a starting point to address issues pertaining to the complexity of culture in a society.

*“...concepts, an artistic synthesis of knowledge, can be the medium through which students can unravel the myth of ‘culture’ and expose its dynamic and*

*changing nature, the tensions and contradictions involved, as well as the multiple ways of belonging.” (Hadjiyanni, 2014, p. 23).*

In her study, Hadjiyanni (2014) discussed about how unravelling the complexity of culture can be done through looking at larger concepts and as understanding culture is strengthened, so does the students’ sense of cultural identity.

Stultz (2006) conducted a research in a similar area – investigating how cultural identities of students in post-secondary school graphic design education in the United States of America are in conflict with established educational environment.

*“Are students free to express their cultural backgrounds, their social identities, in classroom interactions and their creative work? Do students feel they have a personal voice in classroom critique? Are their own cultural experiences and meanings given validity, usefulness, or even agency, the capacity for socio-cultural impact, in their creative work, or is it the language of the instructor, the school, and the industry that must be used?” (Stultz 2006, p. 1)*

Stultz’s study stresses on the importance of personal creative expression in a classroom and how cultural identity plays a role in that, influencing students’ persistence and success.

The abovementioned studies focus on the importance of art and design education in creating awareness and the sense of cultural identity in students through class room activities that are related to culture.

In that regard, the problem that is identified for this research is that Malaysian graphic design education in the private sector does not put much attention to students’ expression of cultural identity. This is evident in the graphic design programmes offered by the three top-choice Malaysian private higher education institutions - University A, B and C - focus more on Bauhaus-related practical and theoretical

subjects but include none of Malaysian cultural art forms, in relation to graphic design. University A's and University C's graphic design programme structures show that they do not offer any cultural studies at all (refer to Appendices I and III, respectively). Although the graphic design programme structure of University B consists of a module called Visual Culture, the content of the module is entirely unrelated to local, Malaysian culture (refer to Appendix II).

It is important for designers to know and understand their own culture or the culture of the society in which they are practising because designers are solvers of problems in societies (Meggs, 1998; Preble et al., 2013; Santoro, 2014). If they do not know well the culture that surrounds them, how will their ideas communicate with the people of that culture? Understanding their surrounding culture enables graphic designers to convey messages in their designs more effectively (Scherer, 2010). Culture serves as a great inspiration for designers (Ridgway & Haynes, n.d.). Although Bauhaus has its practical and almost scientific approach towards art and design education, it has taught educators to be sensitive and well versed to their surroundings (Ridgway & Haynes n.d.). This is very true as Bauhaus itself was born out of the need for design and societal change of the twentieth century.

The principles and theories of Bauhaus, no doubt, are suitably adopted in order to impart a standardised cannon of knowledge in the design field, but modeling after a curriculum which was designed for its own cultural, societal and political background does not match to Malaysia's own cultural, societal and political changes. Looking at this problem in a modern world, Malaysian graphic design students will face a dilemma of cultural identity, as they strive to comprehend the confusion between the identity formed from the West and that of their own (Davies et al., 1993; Cheng, 2008; Ang et al., 2015). It is therefore in the researcher's opinion that to model a curriculum after

another culture may not be totally suitable for Malaysian students because Malaysia has her own cultural identity and has a myriad of cultural art forms that reflect that identity. This aspect should be blended in the curriculum.

With her own history and a multicultural background, Malaysia is rich in cultural art forms, a great source for the field of graphic design education. While the fundamental design theories from the days of Bauhaus serve as the basis for graphic design education, the contents of the curriculum should be derived from the Malaysian culture. As Dewey (1980) said, a large part of us are what we experienced from the world and how we act from there is by further experience.

One may point out that Bauhaus' timeless and universal design principles and ideas fit well into this age of globalisation. Globalisation is defined generally as the synthesis of nations' cultures, ideologies, economy, associations, and national and ethical unities, that all contribute to a reality of civilisation in the current times (Tokkulovna, 2013). While we cannot avoid globalisation, we need to be well-versed in our own cultures as well because globalisation requires nations to integrate together culturally, ideologically and economically. Universities that have modeled their curricula after Bauhaus mainly focus on the visual aspects, design principles of Bauhaus, forgoing another important aspect, which is to draw inspiration from the culture around us. These universities, basically not contributing to new knowledge, only replicating developments that are from abroad (Altbach, 1981). They are producing students that suit what the design industry looks for – design works that are at the same level with each other on an international stage but stripped off cultural expressions. On the same flow of thought is Stultz (2006), in his thesis, who claimed that tertiary education mainly prepares students to be in the workforce and schools add on or support this by defining the kind of graduate that would be useful for the industry.

To this, the researcher opined that the students' individual expressions, which often are influenced by the culture they come from, are muted and what educators produce are only replicas that meet the same kind of industry expectations that the industry wants.

Globalisation is inevitable and universities in order to be at par with the world, have taken to being at the same level with a greater information system. Although Bauhaus has brought about many helpful and useful ideas, the adopting and implementing of a foreign curriculum into Malaysian graphic design education may result in students being unaware of their own cultural identity and lacking in reference and expression of local cultural art forms in their design work. With this dilemma at hand, art and design educators are relooking into their values and understandings of what is beauty, as they begin to experience a changing world (Mullen & Chalmers, 1990).

While Hadjiyanni's (2014) research strikes a similarity with this study in terms of the importance of culture in art education, it revolved around conceptual ideas, whereas this present study focused on incorporating and conducting activities for a graphic design module, based on Malaysian cultural art forms. Stultz's (2006) study focused on discussing the relationship between cultural identity and students' personal creative expression and success, and how that relationship can be dampened by an established educational environment, differing from this study. This present study revolved around intervention activities pertaining to four selected Malaysian cultural art forms that were infused into a graphic design course, so as to bring about a sense of identification with the Malaysian culture, be it collective, individual, past and/or present and not merely copying Eurocentric ideas. Eurocentric ideas are defined as a focus on European culture and history, excluding wider contexts of the world and implying European culture as superior (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016).

### Research Objectives

1. To determine the initial understanding of graphic design students in a selected local private university in their knowledge of four Malaysian cultural art forms (MCAF):
  - a) batik
  - b) *wayang kulit*
  - c) Mah Meri masks
  - d) contemporary Malaysian art
2. To identify the possible reasons that could have led to the initial understanding of graphic design students in a selected local private university, in their knowledge of four MCAF:
  - a) batik
  - b) *wayang kulit*
  - c) Mah Meri masks
  - d) contemporary Malaysian art
3. To bring about changes in students' understanding through planning and designing intervention activities that incorporate the four MCAF of batik, *wayang kulit*, Mah Meri masks and contemporary Malaysian art into a graphic design course in a selected local private university.
4. To ascertain the status of the graphic design students' understanding in a selected local private university in their knowledge of four MCAF after participating in intervention activities.

In the beginning of the present study after the status of the students' understanding has been determined following the planned interventions of the four MCAF, the researcher

wanted to explore the selected students' expressions of cultural identity. Nevertheless, as the study was ongoing, the emerging findings pointed to an idea that the expressions of cultural identity by students who did not experience the intervention activities should be compared with the group that had the experience. Thus, the final question objective was put forward as follows:

5. To explore graphic design students' expressions of cultural identity
  - a) with MCAF intervention activities
  - b) without MCAF intervention activities

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the initial understanding of graphic design students in a selected local private university in their knowledge of,
  - a) batik?
  - b) *wayang kulit*?
  - c) Mah Meri masks?
  - d) contemporary Malaysian art?
2. What are the possible reasons that could have led to the initial understanding of graphic design students in a selected local private university in their knowledge of,
  - a) batik?
  - b) *wayang kulit*?
  - c) Mah Meri masks?
  - d) contemporary Malaysian art?

3. What intervention activities incorporating the MCAF of batik, *wayang kulit*, Mah Meri masks and contemporary Malaysian art are required to bring about changes in students' understanding for a graphic design course of a selected local private university?
4. What is the understanding of graphic design students in a selected local private university in their knowledge of four MCAF after participating in intervention activities?

As explained in the previous section, because of the emerging findings, the idea to compare the expressions of cultural identity between students who experienced the intervention with those who have not, arose. Thus, the fifth question was put forward as follows:

5. What are the graphic design students' expression of cultural identity
  - a) with MCAF intervention activities?
  - b) without MCAF intervention activities?

### **Rationale of the Study**

This study is important because culture is often sidelined and deemed as a separate topic altogether when graphic design is taught (Badrul Isa, 2006). It is difficult to find culture-centredness in real class rooms, although it has been advocated in writings of design educators (Stultz, 2006). In addition, what has been interpreted as culture is only at the superficial level as culture is multi-faceted and continuously changing with the times and process of modernisation (Hadjiyanni, 2014). The principles and teachings of Bauhaus run deeper than the practical and theoretical knowledge and as such, graphic design education in Malaysia should not only adopt

such teachings but also be inspired by the surrounding culture. In the words of Moholy-Nagy, one of the professors at Bauhaus,

*“What we need is not the ‘total artwork’ with life flowing along separately beside it but rather a self-constructed synthesis of all aspects of life in an all-embracing total work (life) that transcends all isolation...”* (Schmidt, 1993, p. 302).

Without culture-centredness in the graphic design class room, students will have little chance to explore how they can express their cultural identity. In the current situation, design skills and idea conceptualisation are more valued than that of cultural knowledge (Lim, 2015). Malaysia and Singapore had been commented by Lim (2015), in his research paper, that design education in these two countries are still giving more attention to technical skills in design. To have an understanding of the knowledge in one’s own culture is important because when one is equipped with that knowledge and understanding, it brings about a sense of how to express cultural identity (Lin, 1999; Hamdy, 2010). This in turn leads to self-confidence to produce effective ideas, pertinent to a graphic designer who is sensitive to the culture around him or her. “Identity lies at the very core of culture, and it is the key to our understanding of self.” (Peters, 2005)

The study in this area is chosen because creativity, which very often drives a graphic design idea, is dependent on culture.

*“But for everyone, creative achievement always draws from the ideas and achievements of other people: from the books, theories, poems, music, architecture, design and the rest that mark the trails of other people’s creative journeys. Just as different modes of thinking interact in a single mind, individual creativity is affected by dialogue with others. In these ways, creative*

*development is intimately related to cultural development.*” (National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education 1999, p.43).

Culture encompasses most parts of our lives. There are many aspects to culture. The way we think, act, judge and make decisions are all part of our cultural upbringing (Ovando & Collier, 1985). Therefore, the researcher believed that Malaysian graphic design education needs to include local cultural art forms into relevant courses as it is important to create awareness, knowledge and ultimately builds up understanding of culture in graphic design students, which could lead to more opportunities to explore one’s expressions of cultural identity.

*“Cultural differences and similarities can be documented not only at the level of the psyche (people’s motivations, beliefs, emotions, or cognitions) but also via shared, tangible representations of culture (such as advertising, texts, architecture, and so on).”* (Lamoreaux and Morling 2012, p.299)

Due to the prevalent nature of culture, the researcher felt that it is rather difficult to ignore it. As such, her view was that designers need to study it and understand it, in order to know themselves and their target audience better. More importantly, they will be able to communicate well using the visual cultural language of that culture to communicate with members of that culture.

Being a graphic design educator in Malaysia for close to two decades, and a Malaysian herself, the researcher is aware that graphic design’s main role is to solve problems – be it industrial, personal, educational, and other sectors but at the end of the day, problems in culture and society – in a visual and textual manner. As such, it is only apt to include topics and/or aspects of our rich multicultural setting into the curriculum. There are significant ways by which a student defines him- or herself in connection to culture, expressing a cultural identity (Berry & Candis, 2013). Malaysian

culture is rich with multicultural traditions, historical with its colonial past, globalised with its welcoming and assimilation with Western and upcoming Asian cultures, a ground for Malaysian students to discover and explore their cultural identity (Cheng, 2008; See, 2011; Ang et al., 2015). According to Lawton (2010), art educators should be concerned with teaching their students to make critical connections between the classroom and the outside world. Malaysian graphic design education should therefore not confine the studies to theories and principles of the Bauhaus but to immerse the students in Malaysian cultural art forms so that the students can learn more about themselves and explore how they can express their cultural identity in Malaysia's multicultural setting. Cultural diversity needs to be fortified and taught to students because in this age, education is becoming more industrial. Educators should facilitate students' learning in this obscure world where they try to find meaning (Ballengee-Morris & Sturh, 2001).

Besides that, the field of graphic design is multidisciplinary and this means that it synthesises with other disciplines to be able to function (Swanson, 2010). "Graphic designers often collaborate with writers, illustrators, photographers, and printers, making for an energizing work environment." (Santoro, 2014). In the researcher's opinion, a good poster design will not materialise without the designer's knowledge of the principles of design and skills in typography and colour. At times, the expertise in photography is needed too, not to mention in yet some other design projects, an architect's professional view might be sought after. An even more successful poster that reaches out to its target audience would include the kind of language, be it spoken, read and/or symbolically. This requires the cultural knowledge and sensitivity of the designer, who is attuned to or aware of how to express his or her cultural identity.

Hence, to equip a designer with such knowledge and awareness, this must begin from the class room.

These particular four MCAF were selected because in their individuality and original historical paths, that they came from various cultures and what has become of them today is the result of assimilation of cultures. Besides that, these cultural art forms also relate to the multicultural setting of Malaysia, reflecting one of the three principles in the National Culture Policy that states, “Suitable elements of the other culture [sic] may be accepted as part of the national culture.” (National Culture Policy | JKNN, 2016). The national culture of Malaysia is one that is diverse because of her multiculturalism. The graphic design students’ expression of cultural identity is therefore an interesting aspect that was explored in this study. The four MCAF were selected partly due to the available accessibility to venues for workshops, exhibitions and talks. Easy access to cultural venues creates opportunities for students to learn about culture (EACEA, 2008).

By designing activities that infused these particular cultural art forms in a graphic design course, it was hoped that deeper and more complex meanings of culture would be grasped by the students. In doing so the students’ own interpretation and understanding of cultural identity could be expressed in their work of design. There are many ways to preserve cultural identity, one of which is to be inspired creatively by its forms (Asfour 2006).

The research path that this study was thus guided by the 9 steps of action research, as recommended by Mertler (2012, p.36). The steps are:

1. Identifying and limiting the topic
2. Gathering information
3. Reviewing the related literature

4. Developing a research plan
5. Implementing the plan and collecting data
6. Analysing the data
7. Developing an action plan
8. Sharing and communicating the results
9. Reflecting on the process

These steps are not to be rigidly followed as each action research method is unique to the researcher's study and problems' needs. Johnson (2008) reminds that these steps are meant to serve as guidelines in conducting action research projects. They must be adapted to a particular research problem or topic. Furthermore, the steps themselves should not necessarily be seen as cast in stone." (Mertler 2012, p.38). As such, the researcher of the present study had adapted the steps into her own research. Below is the adaptation of the researcher of Mertler's nine steps into the researcher's study.

Step 1 Identifying and limiting the topic – The researcher related this step to having identified the research problem, which is, concisely put, Malaysian graphic design programme structures lack the incorporation of local cultural art forms into graphic design courses. It is important that graphic design students in Malaysia have a better understanding of their own culture as it will improve communication to the target audience they design for. They will also be able to explore their cultural identity. Designers ought to take into consideration of the culture surrounding them, as this obligation is not commonly practised by current designers (Scherer, 2010). The present study involved 4 selected MCAF – batik, *wayang kulit*, Mah Meri masks and contemporary Malaysian art - that were incorporated into activities in a graphic design course of a selected particular private higher education institution, attended by 20

students of mainly Malaysian nationality. The 4 MCAF were selected due to their multicultural backgrounds and easy access to those cultural venues.

Step 2 Gathering information – This step sees to the researcher gathering as much information as possible when identifying the research problem as well as during the research process through literature review, class observation and questionnaire.

Step 3 Reviewing the related literature – This step is important as it gave the researcher a better understanding in the related area of research that had been conducted in the past, as well as finding a gap for the study.

Step 4 Developing a research plan – This is where the method to collect data and tool of data collection was determined by the researcher, through the deliberation of the research problem that was to be studied and how each research question could be addressed effectively. As the field of study is within graphic design education, studying students' understanding in their knowledge of Malaysian visual cultural art forms and exploring their expression of cultural identity before and after participating in intervention activities, both design and culture are subjective and interpretative in many ways, it is pertinent to use a research method that is able to present the various findings without setting any predetermined constructs to data collection. As such, action research was the best approach to study this research problem. A model of the research method was designed through the adaptation of two relevant existing action research models, underpinned by relevant learning and curriculum theories.

Step 5 Implementing the plan and collecting data – The research was carried out in a semester of 14 weeks in a graphic design course, attended by 20 students. Data was collected according to the research plan that was designed.

Step 6 Analysing the data – The data that was collected was analysed with the help of relevant literature. Analysing the data determined the next course of appropriate action to be taken.

Step 7 Developing an action research plan – This step was where a plan of action was designed to address issues which arose from the analysed data.

Step 8 Sharing and communicating the results – The results from each stage of the action research was shared and discussed among the students, facilitated by the lecturer, who is the researcher of this study and reviewed by the peer observer to validate the research. The sharing session was in the form of a formal presentation.

Step 9 Reflecting on the process – After the sharing and communication of results took place, reflection took place in two ways. The students reflected on what they have learnt through a written reflection. As for the researcher, reflection was done to decide the next cycle of action research to be implemented.

It is worth to note that Steps 1, 2 and 3 were already established from the beginning of this research when it was at its proposal stage. Therefore, as the research methodology took place after the researcher's proposal was approved, Mertler's (2012) Steps 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9 can be summarised into 4 basic steps of action research, namely Plan, Act, Develop and Reflect (Mertler & Charles, 2011). Step 4 (Developing a research plan) is Plan; Step 5 (Implementing the plan and collecting data) is Act; Step 6 (Analysing the data) and Step 7 (Developing an action research plan) are Develop and Step 9 (Reflecting on the process) is Reflect. These 4 steps will be further discussed in the research design of this study in Chapter 4.

## Significance of the Study

Due to the ever evolving nature of culture and Bauhaus' core of art and design education that graphic design students should learn from the culture around them in order to be more aware of how to express their cultural identity, it would be appropriate that Malaysian cultural art forms are incorporated into graphic design education.

In line with the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education), where one of its aspirations is for Malaysian students to reflect the mix of Malaysian ethnicities, recognising unity in diversity, this study focused on exploring graphic design students' expression of their cultural identity through learning from local cultural art forms.

On a bigger scale, this study is also in line with UNESCO's effort to introduce the concept of Creative Cities in many cities worldwide, including in Asia. Culture is an important ingredient to achieving this mission.

*"Heritage constitutes a source of identity and cohesion for communities disrupted by bewildering change and economic instability. Creativity contributes to building open, inclusive and pluralistic societies. Both heritage and creativity lay the foundations for vibrant, innovative and prosperous knowledge societies."* (UNESCO).

According to Landry (2012), creative cities are cities that encourage creativity and innovation in their urban development policies. Apart from that, a creative city also considers creativity in its external and internal environment. One other key characteristic of a creative city is in its long term planning and creative provision for creative change to happen in all aspects of the society and all levels of economic enterprises. In order to meet the efforts of UNESCO in producing creative cities, Malaysian graphic design education should delve into the various local ethnic cultures

that offer rich cultural art forms that can be learned by the students, enabling them to explore and express their cultural identity in their work.

Although pottery and wicker (Huraian Sukatan Pelajaran Pendidikan Seni Visual Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah, Huraian Tingkatan 1 Pendidikan Seni Visual, 2002, p. 8), carving and embroidery (Huraian Sukatan Pelajaran Pendidikan Seni Visual Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah, Huraian Tingkatan 2 Pendidikan Seni Visual, 2002, p. 6) and weaving and batik (Huraian Sukatan Pelajaran Pendidikan Seni Visual Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah, Huraian Tingkatan 3 Pendidikan Seni Visual, 2002, p. 6) are part of the curriculum, which means the students would have prior knowledge gained from schools before they entered university, how the students could express their cultural identity these art forms was not tapped into when learning about these MCAF. As a tertiary level educator in the graphic design field, the researcher had come across numerous cases where students' expression in their work reflects the lack of cultural identity. She found that it could be possibly due to the lack of exploration of cultural identity even when exposed to MCAF in school. The exploration of cultural identity is important as it makes one question and find possible answers about one's idea of oneself, how others perceive oneself and the role of oneself in the culture where one belongs (Weedon, 2004; Browne, 2008; Lustig & Koester, 2012; Farah A. Ibrahim & Heuer, 2016). In the researcher's opinion, as graphic designers of the future, if a student has a strong sense of his or her own cultural identity and expresses it well in their work, that could improve the communication with their targeted audience. This made this study viable in relation to exploring Malaysian graphic design students' expression of their cultural identity. As such, this study contributes to the body of knowledge relevant to graphic design education in Malaysia.

## Scope of Study

The scope of this study was on four selected Malaysian cultural art forms (MCAF) in a graphic design course. The selected MCAF consisted of a combination of traditional and contemporary art and design forms as the Malaysian culture is a mix of traditional and modern cultures (Hooker, 2003). Each MCAF focused on exploring students' expression of their cultural identity through visual and/or conceptual and/or cultural understanding. These MCAF were selected due to the uniqueness in their visual and contextual qualities. Since graphic design students primarily work with visuals and materials (Armstrong, 2009; NCERT, 2011; Wagner & Watch, 2017), batik's form of printmaking, *wayang kulit* puppets' forms and shapes, contemporary Malaysian art's variety of styles and Mah Meri's traditional use of natural materials such as wood and leaves would serve as a suitable start for the students' acquisition of knowledge and understanding of MCAF.

Possessing visual, conceptual and cultural understanding in MCAF will provide opportunities for the students to explore and express their cultural identity (Lin, 1999; Stultz, 2006; Marshall, 2007; Khoury & Khoury, 2009; Hamdy, 2010; Berry & Candis, 2013; Munday et al., 2014; Hadjiyanni, 2014). The 21<sup>st</sup> century world is filled with visuals (Jewitt, 2008). Visuals are important to graphic designers due to the fact that graphic design's role is to solve problems utilising the arrangement of visuals and text (Santoro, 2014). In graphic design, concepts are the anchor that fuse ideas together to convey a message effectively (Felton, 2013; Kadry, 2015). For graphic design students, to have some or strong cultural understanding of their society is pertinent because "graphic design reflects and shapes the culture in which it exists." (Santoro, 2014). The intent of the study was not to trace the students' internal thought processes or their thinking skills involved in the outcome of the expression of cultural identity. The focus

of the study is on the outward graphic design students' expression of their cultural identity after participating in the intervention activities. Expression itself in visual form is important in art and design as it is a tool for conveying a message (Preble et al., 2013). It is no doubt that the foremost function of graphic design is to solve a problem through functional forms but of equal importance are also aesthetics and meaning (NCERT, 2011). When designers are able to explore and express their cultural identity in their work, the aspects of aesthetics and meaning would be more apparent and reachable to the audience as the visual language would be easier to be understood (NCERT, 2011; Santoro, 2014).

### **Definitions of Terminologies**

This section contains terms that are used in this study. These terms are defined within the context of this study. These definitions are grounded in the review of the literature.

#### **Graphic Design**

Graphic design is a wide field that finds itself in many categories, corporate design, environmental design, motion design, interaction design, type design, publication design, book design, book jacket design, signage design, brand and identity design, package design, information design, collateral design and advertising design (Meggs, 1998; Santoro, 2014). A graphic designer manipulates text and visuals, through one or the combination of digital technology, photography, manual illustration or printmaking, to convey a message or to persuade some actions to be taken by the viewer by appealing to his or her intellectually and/or emotionally (Santoro, 2014). In the context of this study, the graphic design programme from the selected private

university, contains the teachings of the fundamentals of graphic design practice that are described above.

## **Culture**

Culture is defined as a way of life of a community that consists of basic assumptions and values; beliefs, attitudes and conventions; systems and institutions; and artefacts, products, rituals and behaviour (Spencer-Oatey 2000) Culture is dynamic and it changes through time. As such, we have traditional and contemporary culture. “It is a changing phenomenon, incorporating individual and social behavior both learned and shared within a community of people.” (Heaton 2014, p.80) Culture in the context of this research refers to the Malaysian rich mix of cultures through their artistic expressions found in the cultural art forms. Malaysia has a rich mix and history of early diaspora of Chinese in small numbers around 1400s, Arabs and Hindus trading in the Straits Settlements in the 16th century, the British colonisation in the 19th century, Japanese occupation close to the mid-20th century, the latter half of the 20th century saw to a nation trying to build its own national culture and in the 21st century there is an influx of cultures from the Far East (South Korea) and the West. (Kaur 2009; Shim 2006; Pan 1998; Hirschmann 1987) These influences and traditional local cultures have assimilated into a contemporary Malaysian culture.

## **Cultural art forms**

In the context of this study, Malaysian cultural art forms can be defined as traditional and contemporary art of artistic expressions in the Malaysian culture. The most apparent is products of culture in the form of handcrafts, sculptures, architecture, art and everyday utensils (National Standards for Foreign Education Project, 1999).

Malaysian cultural art forms range from textile art such as batik, pua kumbu, tekat (embroidery); wayang kulit (shadow puppet play), earthenware, woodcarving, bunga malai (garland-making), kolam, songket weaving, wicker and contemporary art, among many more (Farish Ahmad Noor & Khoo, 2003; Marshal Cavendish Corporation, 2008; Muhammad Haji Salleh, 2008). In this study four art forms were selected and are defined below.

### **Batik**

Although batik exists from the different cultures within this region (Van Roojen, 1993; Legino, 2012), each culture's batik is unique. As Malaysia has her own version of the batik and due to the rich background of batik origins that came from various cultures, it is an art form worth to be studied in a graphic design class room. Printmaking is one of the main areas of learning art and design (Hughes & Vernon-Morris, 2008; Collins, et al., 2017). Batik was incorporated into a graphic design course to explore students' expression of their cultural identity through one or all of the following:

- a) visually and conceptually – art and design elements for pattern-designing such as lines, shape, colours and production.
- b) culturally – to build students' knowledge and enrich their understanding that Malaysian culture itself is a assimilation of various cultures – just like the historical path of batik and how it has evolved.

### **Wayang Kulit (Shadow play)**

“Shadow play using single-character figures are highly popular in Southeast Asia” (Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof, 2006) Having strong connections from many cultures,

particularly South Asia, the Middle East and the Near East, the Southeast Asian shadow play consists of dramatic repertoire, performance elements and puppets (Wong & Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof, 2018). In Malaysia, there are many forms of solo theatre, with the main feature being the narration of stories by a single performer, be in with or without music (Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof, 2004).

The Malaysian *wayang kulit* art form, has one general form in Malaysia (Madiha Ramlan & M. A. Quayum, 2010). Before the 1970s, there were four styles of *wayang kulit* that were active in some parts of peninsula Malaysia – *wayang kulit* Siam (subsequently renamed *wayang kulit* Kelantan), *wayang kulit* gedek, *wayang kulit* purwa and *wayang kulit* Melayu (Madiha Ramlan & M. A. Quayum, 2010). The most important style in Malaysia is the *wayang kulit* Kelantan (Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof, 2006).

Traditionally performed in religious festivals, weddings, births and circumcisions, *wayang kulit* was believed to have strong ties with the spirit world to call up spirits, receive blessings, giving thanks for wishes came that true. Besides being an entertainment to the community, it taught moral values and was the continuity of folklore and historical legends (Dahlan bin Abdul Ghani, 2012).

In Southeast Asia, the first clear mention of the *wayang kulit* art form is found in the 10<sup>th</sup> century Javanese poetic versions of the Indian epics, *Kakawin Arjunawiwaha* (Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof, 2006).

The production of *wayang kulit* involves a variety of things, namely a narrative, storytelling, character design, form and shape, materials and audience. These are all fundamentals pertinent to a graphic designer (Armstrong, 2009; NCERT, 2011; Wagner & Watch, 2017). Infusing these aspects into the graphic design class room will enable the students to see the similarities between *wayang kulit* and graphic design

(Dahlan Abdul Ghani & Sidin Bin Ahmad Ishak, 2012). Graphic design production requires similar items as stated above, in order to produce a work of design (Collins et al., 2017). For example, an advertisement needs an objective (story), character to be portrayed in the story, form and shape of the advertisement layout, materials (brochure or television commercials or online advertisements) and an audience. These are tied to *wayang kulit*'s production. *Wayang kulit* was infused into a graphic design course to explore students' expression of their cultural identity through one or all of the following:

- a) visually and conceptually – character design, design process, media and material exploration
- b) culturally – to build students' knowledge and enrich their understanding that Malaysian culture itself is a assimilation of various cultures – *wayang kulit* although was originated from Hindu culture, has been localised into a Malaysian art form.

### **Mah Meri Masks**

Sculpturing in the field of graphic design is an important study as it enriches students' understanding and study of form from a 3-dimensional angle (Ocvirk, 2002). Fostering that with an appreciation of one of the important cultures that made up a unique overall Malaysian culture, the study of Mah Meri wood carvings must not be excluded from the graphic design class room because it informs and enriches students' understanding of the Mah Meri culture as part of the Malaysian culture (Abdul Wahid Jais, 2010), and because graphic design's roots lies within the field of art, where crafts is part of. Mah Meri masks was incorporated into a graphic design course to explore students' expression of their cultural identity through one or all of the following:

- a) Visually and conceptually – 3-dimensional forms, sculpting, media exploration, manipulation of tools, handcrafts.
- b) Culturally - to build students' knowledge and enrich their understanding that Malaysian culture is an interesting mix of modern and tribal cultures, to enable them to see that cultural influences do not just come from outside of Malaysia but also within Malaysia.

### **Contemporary Malaysian Art**

Contemporary art refers to the production of art of the recent and current times, typically from the 1970s onwards. This also means that these works are mostly produced by living artists. Contemporary art can be inspired by themes and ideas, while being characterised by the fine line between art and cultural phenomena such as digital technology, television, cinema, mass media and entertainment (Moran & Byrne, 2009). Contemporary Malaysian art encompasses mainly late twentieth and twenty-first century globalisation, 'world culture', with a mix of local, indigenous themes, 'critical regionalism' (Antoinette, 2014). For graphic design students, viewing and studying contemporary Malaysian art is one avenue for them to see how they are part of a modern Malaysian society that still has its roots in ethnic traditions amidst the modernity. Contemporary Malaysian art was incorporated into a graphic design course to explore students' expression of their cultural identity through one or all of the following:

- a) Visually and conceptually – to study the multitude of forms and meaning behind some contemporary Malaysian art works.
- b) Culturally - to build students' knowledge and enrich their understanding that Malaysian culture itself is not only an assimilation of various cultures but also through

visual language derived from mass media, social media, digital technology and entertainment.

### **Cultural Identity and Expressions of Cultural Identity**

Cultural identity refers to an identity which is formed by the society in which one lives in, starting from the family, community, country and the world. One's identity can sometimes give a better definition of who one is if one traces back to one's cultural history (Hall, 1990; Marshall, 2007). Identity is not only about how one views oneself as but also how others view a person (Lin, 1999). There are two types of cultural identity. One is of a fixed impression that histories have left behind and the other is a constantly, dynamically changing one from the influence of other cultures due to globalisation (Hall, 1990; Lustig & Koester, 2012). "Youth's cultural experience are transforming as a result of the rising tide of globalization." (Ang et al., 2015, p.2). In the context of this study, the outward expressions of Malaysian cultural identity among the graphic design students of the study was the focus. These expressions are particularly related to the four art forms exposed to the students in the study.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)**

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) refers to pedagogy that embraces and integrates students' cultural heritage into the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2012; Lee, 2012). CRT posits that main emphasis to students' learning is culture. In the context of this research, products of culture in art forms represents some parts of culture itself, therefore CRT was adopted as it is a pedagogy that engages and facilitates students' holistic learning and acquiring of cultural knowledge and understanding in a graphic design course.

### **Limitations of Study**

There are a few limitations in this study. Firstly, data was collected from only one semester in a graphic design course attended by 20 graphic design students, in a particular private university in Selangor, Malaysia. Secondly, collecting the data from a particular sample would mean that the findings were unique to that class only. Therefore, the researcher did not aim to generalise the findings. Nevertheless, this research may propel more studies in future as the research method is action research, which has no definite conclusions and is always open for further improvement for the instructor. This is because to teach the entirety of a culture is impossible as culture is a living phenomenon and one has to experience it to know, learn and appreciate its underlying processes (Desai, 2000).

### **Chapter Summary**

The background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, scope of study, definition of terminologies and limitation of study thus set the contextual stage for this research. The following chapter consists of a literature review pertaining to graphic design, graphic design education in relation to culture, culturally responsive teaching, cultural art forms, cultural identity, and past methodologies. The review serves as a support to the conceptual and theoretical foundations of this study.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### Introduction

This research set out to investigate some graphic design students' initial understanding in their knowledge of four selected Malaysian cultural art forms (MCAF), namely batik, *wayang kulit*, Mah Meri masks and contemporary Malaysian art. Subsequently, the study looked into what were the possible reasons that led to that initial understanding. Intervention activities that involved the four MCAF were then planned and designed for a graphic design course, underpinned by relevant theories of learning and theories of curriculum. The intervention activities were then carried out in the graphic design course. The students' understanding in their knowledge of the four selected MCAF after participating in the intervention activities was studied and the discussion is found in Chapter 5. The study further on explored the students' expression of cultural identity with and without intervention activities.

The present study emphasised on the importance of cultural identity in graphic design education. In that regard, relevant literature on Bauhaus, graphic design, culture, cultural identity, cultural art forms, culture-based education, culturally responsive teaching, cultural interventions in art and design education and cultural identity in art and design education were reviewed. To facilitate this study, the key areas related to the study will be found in the review of literature in this section.

## **Graphic Design, Culture and Cultural Identity**

### **Bauhaus**

Bauhaus was a school in Weimar, Germany, that was started by Walter Gropius, an architect, in 1919. Bauhaus, an arts and crafts education institution, focused on merging craftsmen, artists and architecture education under one roof. Bauhaus aimed at preserving all kinds of arts, from crafts to architecture, and to train future craftsmen, painters and sculptors to put together their skills in projects of collaboration (Bayer et al., 1938; Adams, 1994; Whitmore, 2003). To solve the problems of functional design and machine production in the early twentieth century, Bauhaus explored, combined and applied ideas appropriated from advanced art and design movements. Many design products of the century such as furniture, architecture, product design and graphic design were formed by the teaching and learning at Bauhaus and from there, a modern design aesthetic was born (Bayer et al., 1938; Meggs, 1998).

Two major influences to modern day graphic design propelled from Bauhaus. One is a concept called, 'form follows function' and the other is the Swiss Design. 'Form follows function' means that the look of a product, object or even architecture that is designed, should reflect its way to be used. There may be various kinds of design work but ultimately, they are found to be consisting the expression of 'form follows function'. 'Form' and 'function' (utilitarian value) are inseparable and if a piece of design work is good, 'form' and 'function' will be apparent (Bayer et al., 1938; Golombisky & Hagen, 2010).

The teachings of Bauhaus spread beyond Germany and by 1950s a design movement, named Swiss Design or more widely known as International Typographic Style, emerged (Meggs, 1998; Collins et al, 2017). The International Typographic Style

is an important influence to graphic design. A typical look of the International Typographic Style would be a mathematically constructed grid that formed by asymmetrical organisation of design elements such as lines and shapes, to achieve visual unity of the entire design layout. This is accompanied by objective photography and body text (copy) that describe the information in a clear and factual manner (Meggs, 1998; Collins et al., 2017). As observed by the researcher in her experience as a graphic design student and educator, the ‘form follows function’ concept is found in the International Style where the overall layout of a design is clean and stripped of all ornamentation serves its function to inform the viewer or reader a message.

Bauhaus teachers conducted workshops, where students learned directly from these “masters”, the practical and theoretical knowledge of design. Hence, the term apprenticeship was used in the Bauhaus to refer to learning under a master of a specialised field in art and design (Bayer et al., 1938; Fiedler & Feierabend, 1999; Whitford, 2003). While these principles still lay true and used as guides in graphic design education in Malaysia today, there lacks the assimilation of local visual cultural art forms in the classroom, as found from the graphic design programme structures of the three top-choice private higher education institutions (refer to Appendices I, II and III).

## **Graphic Design**

Graphic design, in a wide definition, is a term that describes any form of visual communication that serves the purpose of solving problems and to communicate a message, using text and visuals (Meggs, 1998; Preble et al., 2013; Santoro, 2014). The problems to be ‘solved’ means to disseminate information, to convince, to create

awareness or to make known, to a target audience or sometimes the public at large, a piece of news or other types of information, be it commercial or not (Preble et al., 2013; Santoro, 2014). Corporate design, environmental design, motion design, interaction design, type design, publication design, book design, book jacket design, signage design, brand and identity design, package design, information design, collateral design and advertising design are all various categories where graphic design is applied (Preble et al., 2013; Santoro, 2014).

As a professional field, graphic design is multidisciplinary because it engages various specialists in relevant fields to complete a task. “Design is ‘integrative’ in that, by its lack of specific subject matter, it has the potential to connect many disciplines.” (Swanson, 2010). Connecting many disciplines means that in order to create a graphic design work, other collaborators are involved in various stage of the design process (Armstrong, 2009; NCERT, 2011; Wagner & Watch, 2017). Collaboration with others in various stages of design is pertinent as the design process requires multiple tasks to be performed by experts in the field (NCERT, 2017).

Figure 2.1 features a broad outline of the design process. According to NCERT (2017), at Stage 1 of the design process, after the design problem is identified, thorough research is conducted to position the project. The designer looks into similar design projects and their solutions in order to develop a strategy to solve the problem.

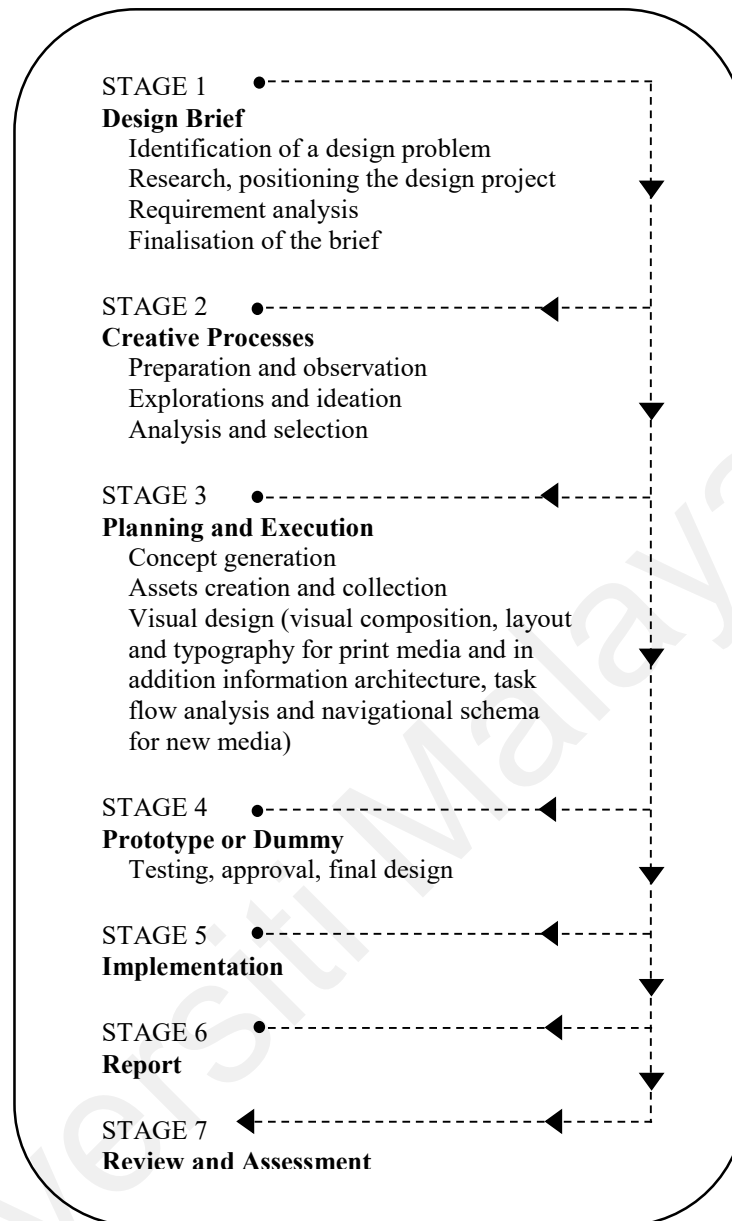


Figure 2.1 A broad outline of the design process

Source: NCERT. (2011). *Graphic Design Processes*. In *Towards a New Age Graphic Design*. India: National Council of Education and Training, p. 16.

The requirement analysis at Stage 1 involves the designer in conducting initial survey of the target group of audience so that there is more understanding by the designer towards the project. This is where understanding the culture of the target audience and being sensitive to culture is important because designers are responsible to interpret and reinterpreting cultural messages into visual messages that contain a

shared meaning understood by the target audience in a society (Moalosi et al., 2007; Meyer, 2008; Chmela-Jones, 2011).

Finalising the brief at Stage 1, the designer reflects on the research that was done and work with relevant parties to make changes where necessary. The changes may involve reorientation of the theme and defining the scope and duration of the project, budget and cost. Sometimes the client will be involved at this stage to provide more specifications, like branding (NCERT, 2011). At the end of this stage, the brief should provide a very clear picture of the user needs and business goals (NCERT, 2011). Stages 2 involves the creative processes, Stage 3 the planning and execution of ideas, Stage 4 producing a prototype or dummy to be tested and finalised, Stage 5 sees to the implementation of the finalised design, Stage 6 is where a report is churned out to record the whole design process of a particular project, and lastly, Stage 7, a review and assessment of how well the design is accepted by the target audience is conducted.

To solve problems through visual communication is one of the main roles of graphic design (Preble et al., 2013). Visuals are often used as a way to communicate an idea or to tell a story. Throughout history of mankind, visuals are found wherever man is. From the prehistoric cave paintings of Lascaux, France, to the 21<sup>st</sup> century of graffiti walls of cities around the world, visuals surround us (Meggs, 1998; Preble et al., 2013). Inspirations for visuals should come from the culture that the work of design is to be found because the message to the target audience of that culture will then be conveyed eloquently (Meggs, 1998; Preble et al., 2013).

## Cultural Identity

According to Dahl (2003), the origin of the word *culture* came from the Latin word 'colere', which carries the meanings of 'to build', 'to care for', 'to plant' or 'to cultivate'. Therefore, the term culture usually denotes human's intervention in creating something. Culture encompasses to language, beliefs, values and norms, customs, dress, diet, roles, knowledge and skills, art, materials, products and more, that make up a way of life of a particular society (Browne, 2008; Meyer, 2008; Spencer-Oatey, 2012).

Humans, having a common history, geographic location, language, social class and/or religion, create, share and transform values, traditions, social and political relationships and worldview. Besides the tangibles such as food, holidays, dress and artistic expressions, culture is also intangible seen through attitudes, values and family relationships (Nieto, 2000). Culture is not stagnant. Its nature, which is adaptable to human and physical conditions, makes it dynamic and change (Forde, 1934; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Keesing, 1974; Arvizu, 1994; Nieto, 1999; Spencer-Oatey, 2012; MacDonald, 2014). Who we are, how we think and how our knowledge is formed are all influenced by the culture we are exposed to and/or brought up in (Ovando & Collier, 1985; Sharan B. Merriam & Mazanah Mohamad, 2000). It is through culture, when an individual socialises with members of a culture, and the influence of family, education system and mass media that identities of people are formed (Browne, 2008; Farah A. Ibrahim & Heuer, 2016). Establishing one's own cultural identity and learning about others' enables one to find similarity and differences with the society, and thus forming social connections (Weedon, 2004; Browne, 2008; Farah A. Ibrahim & Heuer, 2016).

Cultural identity is the way by which one recognises, defines and connects to one's culture. Cultural identity represents the identification with the community one is

from, that shares common values (Weedon, 2004; Marshall, 2007; Browne, 2008; Hauser, 2009; Farah A. Ibrahim & Heuer, 2016). Cultural identity oftentimes is understood as having its roots in a local place. These roots, specified historically, are connected to cultural values, symbols and language (Hauser, 2009). Physical, behavioural, ancestral, preferential and intellectual attributes are some of the ways by which one might use to describe one's cultural identity (Weedon, 2004; Marshall, 2007; Browne, 2008).

According to Hall (1990), there are at least two different ways that describe cultural identity. One of the ways is that culture is deemed as one, shared culture, somewhat a collective 'one true self', hidden among many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves'. These people have a common history and ancestry. This denotes common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which represent the people as 'one' (Hall, 1993). This also carries the meaning that there are stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning in culture, despite the successive phases of change in one's actual history. As Malaysians, one can relate to this description as one sees oneself as a nation. Bauer (1907) defined a nation as *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, and in English it means, 'the totality of men bound together through a common destiny into a community of character.' (Encel, 1986). We can call ourselves as one in terms of the same historical experience all Malaysians share – British colonisation, Japanese Occupation, Merdeka (when Malaysia gained independence) (Hooker, 2003). Malaysians identify themselves with a national identity due to the common national struggles of the past and the achievements that we have gained (Cheng, 2008).

However, as there is a mix of ethnic cultures, such as Chinese, Indian, Malay and indigenous (Hooker, 2003) that make up Malaysia, cultural identity is therefore a

complex phenomenon which Malaysians face in conjunction with a national identity (Cheng, 2008; See, 2011; Ang et al., 2015). It is interesting to note that as the nation goes global, becoming part of the global village, cultural changes take place (Ang et al., 2015). Indeed, the historical past and achievements had set a background for a national identity but globalisation has created a new perspective that exists alongside traditional ethnic cultures (See, 2011; Ang et al., 2015). This in turn becomes a quest for Malaysians searching for a cultural identity (Cheng, 2008; Ang et al., 2015).

In accordance to the change in culture which is brought on by globalisation causing Malaysians to search for their cultural identity amidst a national identity, one may refer to Hall's (1990), other definition cultural identity. Interestingly, this second view sees culture as 'becoming' and 'being'. This means that a culture changes due to continuous changes that take place in the world, country, society and community. It is never still or stops at a juncture.

*"Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and positioned ourselves within, the narratives of the past."* (Hall, 1990).

Lustig & Koester's (2012) statement, "Cultural identities are dynamic, and they exist within a changing social context. As a result, a person's identity changes as do one's ongoing experiences in life", further resonates the fact that cultural identity changes as it is influenced by our daily life experiences and social changes that take

place in the world around us. Not only does one's roots and heritage play a part in forming one's cultural identity, ongoing life experiences are pertinent to that process too (Lustig & Koester, 2012).

### **Cultural Art Forms**

Art comes in many forms (Preble et al., 2013). The purpose of art is to communicate information, day-to-day living, spiritual sustenance, personal expression, social and political purposes and visual delight (Preble et al., 1999). Art is one of the products of culture (Schein, 1984; National Standards for Foreign Education Project, 1999). "All societies have produced objects and rituals that extend communication and meet physical and spiritual needs." (Preble et al., 1999).

To understand the significance of products of culture, firstly it is important to look at how products of culture are connected to culture. According to Schein (1999), in his analysis of a particular group of people or organisation, there are three distinguishable fundamental levels, which one can see how culture is manifested: 1) observable artefacts, 2) values and 3) basic underlying assumptions. Spencer-Oatey's (2000) four layers of culture, which are 1) basic assumptions and values, 2) beliefs, attitudes and conventions, 3) systems and institutions, and 4) artefacts, products, rituals and behaviour; are similar to Schein's in terms of indicating that artefacts and products of culture are part of what culture is.

Schein's model of levels of culture and their interaction (1984, as cited in Spencer-Oatey 2012), shown in Figure 2.2, had been adapted by Spencer-Oatey. Due to the least criticism the model has received (Alvesson & Berg, 1992), this model had been selected to explain about how products of culture is reflective of a culture's deeper concepts. In this model, Schein (1984) explains that artefacts and creations such as

visible and audible behaviour, patterns, technology and art are interconnected with values and basic assumptions. Basic assumptions, which are invisible, are normally taken for granted and exist in the pre-conscious mind (Schein 1984; Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Values exist in our greater awareness and as for artefacts and creations, they are visible but not always decipherable (Schein 1984; Spencer-Oatey, 2012).

According to Schein (1985), culture has to be studied at the level of the deeply held basic assumptions that members of a culture share. Basic assumptions are historically established structures that are normally taken for granted, stored in a culture's members' pre-conscious mind and reflect beliefs about human nature and reality, which could be invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration (Mazur, 2015). Basic assumptions shape the values (principles, standards and goals) that exist in the greater level of awareness in members of a culture. Values are then materialised in the form of artefacts and creations, which are often not decipherable (Schein, 1985; Mazur, 2015).

As seen in Schein's model (Figure 2.2), art is one of the specified elements of artefacts and creations in this model. To recap, art is one of the ways by which values in a culture are materialised (Schein, 1985). Art can express and enhance important cultural values, meet practical needs, and shape spiritual life of individuals and in a society (Preble et al., 1999). Cultural art forms are vital to the aesthetic expression of a culture and perpetuate ideas about cultural identity (Burkhart, 2006; Burstein, 2014).

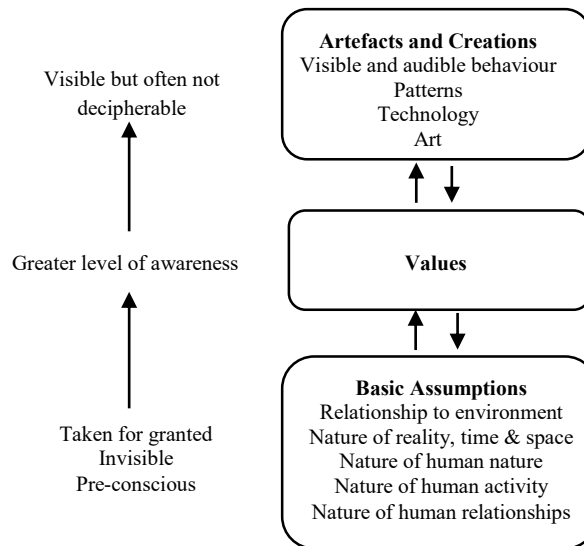


Figure 2.2 The levels of culture and their interaction

Cultural art forms can be categorised into performing arts such as dance, theatre and music, and visual arts, which include drawing, painting, photography, ceramics, sculpting and architecture (Preble et al., 1999; Soemantri, 1998). In Malaysia, some common cultural art forms are textile art like batik, *pua kumbu*, *tekat* (embroidery); *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet play), earthenware, woodcarving, *bunga malai* (garland-making), kolam, *songket* weaving, wicker and contemporary art (Farish Ahmad Noor & Khoo, 2003; Marshal Cavendish Corporation, 2008; Muhammad Haji Salleh, 2008). In this present study, the selected Malaysian cultural art forms are batik, *wayang kulit*, Mah Meri masks and contemporary Malaysian art.

Batik is one of the most common yet significant and well-developed visual art forms that is found in Southeast Asia. The history of batik is long, dating back to more than a millennium. (Van Roojen, 1993; Soemantri, 1998; Legino 2012). The Batik Guild (2015) claims that early forms of batik that date back to over 2000 years ago, have been discovered in the Far East, Middle East, Central Asia and India. Although in each of these areas, batik developed independently, it had not been monopolised or

controlled by any trade or cultural exchanges. Nevertheless, through the caravan route, it began to spread to Southeast Asia. (The Batik Guild, 2015). According to Van Roojen (1993), the batik technique is more than a thousand years in age. In the early centuries AD in many West African, Middle Eastern and Asian communities, cloths ornamented with similar resist technique have been found. It is common knowledge that batik was brought to Southeast Asia by Indians who traveled there in about 100AD (Van Roojen, 1993). Although batik exists from the different cultures within this region, each culture's batik is unique.

*Wayang kulit*, or shadow puppet play, is an age-old art form which, in Southeast Asia, the storyline was originated from the great Hindu epics of Ramayana and Mahabhrata (Orr, 1974; Soemantri, 1998). The history of the Southeast Asia region and the development of the arts has been much influenced by the Indian Hindu-Buddhist culture (Van Roojen, 1993). Likewise with the shadow puppet play, its roots are commonly known to be from India, China, Egypt, Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia), Turkey and Europe (Orr, 1974; Abdul Ghani & Ahmad Ishak, 2012). In the Malaysian culture, the *wayang kulit* art form shares similarities with shadow puppet plays of neighbouring countries like Indonesia and Thailand (Orr, 1974; Soemantri, 1998).

In Peninsula Malaysia, there are three main ethnic groups of indigenous people or aborigines, known in the national language as Orang Asli, namely Semang-Negrito, Senoi and Proto-Melayu, where Mah Meri is one of the tribes of Senoi (Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli Negeri Selangor, 2011; Tarmiji Masron et al., 2013). According to Nicholas (1997), the Orang Asli are the minority of Peninsula Malaysia. In a study by Reita Rahim (2007), the number of the Mah Meri tribe has declined to only 2% from the overall indigenous people of Malaysia. Efforts are made to preserve, render support

and help to the tribe adapting to modern community (Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli, 2016). In the 2015 annual report of *Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli*, other efforts are made to impart knowledge to the public regarding this tribe through the print media, electronic and social media an official blog, Facebook and Twitter (Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli, 2016). Other efforts are the setup of the Mah Meri Cultural Village (Mah Meri Cultural Village, 2014) and the tourism sector to promote Mah Meri's products of culture, like wood carving and handicrafts, and the culture itself (Puvaneswaran Kunasekaran et al., 2013; Joseph, 2014; Siti Sarah Adam Wan et al., 2015; Lin, 2016).

The Mah Meri tribe is famous for its statue and mask sculptors (Abdul Wahid Jais, 2010; Nur Hisham Ibrahim & Wollmering, 2012; Thwaites, 2013). The masks of the Mah Meri tribe carry symbolic and spiritual meanings that reflects the culture of the tribe (Thwaites, 2013; Joseph, 2014; Lin, 2016). Between the years 2002 and 2006, numerous Mah Meri sculptures were sent as entries to the UNESCO – AHPADA (ASEAN Handicraft Promotion And Development Association) programme, where 22 of the entries were awarded with the Seal of Excellence (Mah Meri Cultural Village, 2014; Siti Sarah Adam Wan et al., 2015). Although not much research has been done about the artistic side of this tribe (Joseph, 2014; Lin, 2016), a few gallery-museums in Peninsula Malaysia do feature wood sculptures and masks of the Mah Meri. In the National Museum of Malaysia, a special building, the Orang Asli Crafts Museum, houses sculptures and wood carved masks by the Mah Meri tribe (Department of Museums Malaysia, 2017). A gallery in Tanah Rata, Cameron Highlands, Pahang exhibits a number of Mah Meri sculptures and masks (Cameron Service/Mountain Tour & Travel Sdn. Bhd. Cameron Highlands, 2015). A special gallery is dedicated to the wood carving works of this tribe in the Mah Meri Cultural Village in Pulau Carey, Selangor (Mah Meri Cultural Village, 2014). The researcher noted the artistry,

uniqueness and rareness of the Mah Meri masks, this Malaysian cultural art form and therefore found it suitable to be incorporated into a graphic design class room for the purpose of this study.

Contemporary art can be referred to as modern art, provided that the understanding of the term “modern” denotes a general period after the Renaissance (Moran & Byrne, 2009). “Modern” can refer to what is current, present or contemporary (Moran & Byrne, 2009). Thomas (2006) argued that plurality and various artistic practices of people around the world must be acknowledged by contemporary art. In doing so, that recognises that the traditional still exists and present in contemporary art (Thomas, 2006).

A multiethnic and multicultural Malaysia in the last 30 years has developed from being economically agricultural to industrial (See, 2011). This has inevitably propelled the country to go global to be in line with the rest of the world (Phua & Soo, 2004). Globalisation affects most aspects of life, such as language, food, fashion, music, Internet technology, entertainment, information industry and lifestyles (Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004; See, 2011; Ang et al., 2015). According to Waters (2001), globalisation affects us in many ways, one of which is diminishing the boundaries of economic, social and cultural arrangements and begs the question of cultural identity (Kaul, 2012). Malaysian youths often find it a challenge to describe their cultural identity with two opposing phenomena, globalisation and ethnicisation, existing simultaneously in Malaysia (Ang et al., 2015). In the researcher’s opinion, the incorporation of contemporary Malaysian art into a graphic design course will allow the students to explore their cultural identity through the study of contents and subject matters of globalising Malaysia, which can carry a strong notion of modern discourses, while making reference to traditional practices or traditional familiarity.

Thus, in the researcher's opinion, through products of culture, specifically cultural art forms, graphic design students can explore their cultural identity.

*"Culture can be defined as the webs of significance we spin as human beings: Who we are and how we interact with the world is an intriguing intersection of language, values, beliefs, and behaviors that pervade every aspect of life that can be used to explain phenomena in the classroom or that can be learned as a series of facts, physical elements, or exotic characteristics."* (Ovando & Collier, 1985)

The researcher believed that to infuse the abovementioned four Malaysian cultural art forms into class room activities would create opportunities for graphic design students to deepen their cultural understanding and enable them to explore their cultural identity, especially in a multicultural society. In order to understand one's culture and learn of one's cultural identity, visuals have been commonly seen as a way to communicate in art and design education (Burkhart, 2006; Hadjiyanni, 2014).

### **Graphic Design and Culture-Based Education**

The following features the review of various literature that discusses about graphic design education in relation to cultural identity.

### **Cultural Identity in Art and Design Education**

Munday's (2014) research involves contemplating about one's cultural identity through arts making classes attended by pre-service teachers whose responsibility is to educate young children about local, Australian art but these pre-service teachers are themselves lacking the confidence to do so. In Munday's (2014) study, the pre-service

teachers are tasked to describe about how they perceive themselves. Munday (2014) explains how carrying out this task and exploring their personal art practice will lead to answering questions about the curriculum that connects art to culture and society. Assessment of their art work, ponderings about how the teachers themselves are perceived by authoritative figures, how these teachers relate their work to a social issue that has meaning for them are some of the activities are carried out in this study by Munday (2014) to look into deeper issues posed in the curriculum. The study investigates how these teachers can facilitate students' learning of the creative arts to have a strong sense of self as well as how others perceive them so that they can generate ideas that are uncommon. This study (Munday, 2014) focuses on pre-service teachers. Although the activities are much related to art and culture, the researchers' concern lies in the confidence of the teachers in teaching art linked to culture. According to Munday (2014), research could be further conducted to see if there are any improvements in teaching and learning, and what the implications of cultural influences are, after the teachers have done the contemplations and assessment of artworks.

In the same field of study, cultural identity through art making, Marshall (2007) explores the use of imagination for making cultural connections as well as investigating cultural identity through art making. In an American setting, Marshall (2007) posits that the multicultural background of the country brings about the need to have a culturally sensitive and inclusive art and design education where perceptions of the world in a wide spectrum is discussed so that art from various cultures are studied. Marshall (2007) made a very interesting point, which is, when art and design educators set out to teach, do they focus on one culture in the class room or a collective of cultures since most people are of multicultural background. To study the world from a wide angle in these art making classes, will open up the students to find out more about their

cultural identities (Marshall, 2007). Marshall's (2007) using art as a way to approach the subject is commendable as art is a form that pleases the senses, through symbolic meanings. This study implies the need for the art educator to be sensitive and to be aware of cultural perceptions. This also implies that the study the various aspects of culture through the arts will open doors to deeper knowledge, understanding, respect for other cultures and exploration of cultural identity.

Lin (1999) investigated the cultural identity constructed by Taiwanese-Canadians through public ethnic festivals and how that can serve as implications for multicultural art education in Canada. Lin (1999) highlighted that there are two ways to define identity, one is how we view ourselves and the other is how others view us. Lin (1999) asked questions pertaining to why is it important to know who we are, how we know who we are, and what happens when one is placed mistakenly in an ethnic group by the mainstream society. The study also delved into the question if certain popular places, such as Chinatown, common to the Canadians at large, is the "right" place to study about the Chinese culture in Vancouver (Lin 1999). The researcher (Lin, 1999) went on to ask if the Canadian Chinatown is created to preserve Chinese culture or is it a real place where Chinese immigrants actually live in. She pointed out that these are valid questions to address, given that there is a gap between traditional culture and contemporary social context of the Chinese students in Canada (Lin, 1999). Lin (1999) claimed that although ethnic cultures are included in multicultural art education, important topics that can cultivate cultural identity - modernisation, cultural intervention, immigration experience, and how ethnic traditional cultural forms project the Western influence - are generally ignored. These important topics brought up by Lin (1999) draw parallels to this present study where in local setting here in Malaysia,

where a multicultural, multiethnic and globalising society exists and the question of cultural identity is often one that many often ponder upon (Ang et al., 2015).

Cultural identity is one of the main areas of research or discussion when it comes to art and design education, as the instances of studies in the above have shown. To the researcher, these studies imply that the matter of cultural identity is of an urgent one, especially in nations that are developing, and facing a dilemma where globalisation and ethnicisation are existing together (Encel, 1986; See, 2011; Ang et al. 2015).

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)**

According to Bruner (1996), a child learns through beliefs within a culture, therefore culture shapes the mind of the learner and it acts as a toolkit to how we construct the world and how we perceive ourselves and others. “Learning, remembering, talking, imaging: all of them are made possible by participating in a culture.” (Bruner, 1996, pp. x-xi). Students’ intellectual and social development are part of culture, where communicating, reasoning, solving problems, remembering and learning are all influenced by culture (Principles of Culturally Responsive Education, n.d.; Bruner, 1996; Takaya, 2008). With globalisation that keeps on increasing in Malaysia, we cannot deny that changes in culture, society and values, among many others aspects, are happening in tandem (Waters, 2001; See, 2011; Ang et al., 2015). In art education, this can be addressed by looking into our cultural identity (Khoury & Khoury, 2009; Hamdy, 2010; Hadjiyanni, 2014). There is a need to explore the Malaysian cultural identity, seeing that we are a mix of various cultures and we have much influence from outside such as American and Korean cultures in the form of

advertising, brands and entertainment, among many more (See, 2011; Ang et al. 2015). For graphic designers, it is important for them because the language that they feature in their work has to communicate effectively with the target audience (Hollis, 2001). According to Mullen and Chalmers (1990), as art educators go through changing views of the current social, cultural and political presence, many of them are relooking into their cultural aesthetic values and understandings. In order to expand students' intellectual horizon and academic achievement, teachers ought to have the knowledge to utilise culture to scaffold the students' learning, through the students' own culture and experience, valuing and recognising their own culture (Gay, 2002).

Hollins (1996) posited that cultural practices serve as learning tools within and out of school. These shape thinking processes and form the link between culture and classroom instructions. As such, with much recognition and respect, CRT utilises students' identities and backgrounds as meaningful sources for creating optimal learning environments (Nieto, 2000). CRT is a pedagogy where teachers work with students in class room activities utilising and engaging in cultural products such as art, leading students to explore their cultural diversity and cultural identities (Lee, 2012). CRT celebrates cultural diversity in the class room and the incorporation of cultural perspectives into the class room is seen as a vital teaching and learning strategy (Peterek, 2009). The importance of CRT, is expressed by Geneva Gay as "the validation, information, and pride it generates are both psychologically and intellectually liberating." (Gay, 2000, p. 35).

According to Ladson-Billings (1994) CRT revolves around a pedagogy that places high importance on students' cultural references in various aspects of their study. The core of learning is culture, which shapes the processes of a community or an individual (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Bruner, 1996). CRT is "an approach that

empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes.” (Ladson-Billings, 1994). With reference to the above, the researcher opines that by incorporating local cultural art forms in a Malaysian graphic design class room, students will learn to recognise, appreciate and value their own cultures and in doing so, they are able to explore and express their cultural identity.

There are various sources that define the principles of CRT. The principles do not vary much from each other in these sources but they do have a slight difference in terms of number of principles, sequence and terminology that can be seen as using of synonyms. The following are three definitions of the principles of CRT.

According to Brown University’s The Knowledge Loom: Educators Sharing and Learning Together (2008), there are nine principles of CRT, namely 1) communication of high expectations, 2) active teaching methods, 3) teacher as the facilitator, 4) positive perspectives on parents and family, 5) cultural sensitivity, 6) reshaping the curriculum, 7) culturally mediated instructions, 8) student-controlled classroom discourse, and 9) small group instruction and academically-related discourse.

1) Communication of high expectations refers to frequent messages from the teachers and the school that students will succeed. This is derived from genuine trust and belief that the students have the capabilities to learn well. This builds confidence in students when they are not stereotyped.

2) Active teaching methods sees to students playing the active role in learning through crafting curriculum and developing learning activities. Ownership is

formed from this kind of instructional design which can result in more engagement with lifelong learning.

As for 3) teacher as the facilitator, the role of the teacher is to facilitate students' learning through instructing, guiding, mediating, and consulting of knowledge. While students are learning, teachers act as navigators that steer them to directions relevant to their learning.

In 4) positive perspectives on parents and family, students, parents and community members participate in conversations involving issues that are important to them. Issues in classroom curriculum and activities are also included in these discussions. This creates inclusion of all stakeholders when it comes to incorporating cultural aspects in the teaching and learning scene.

5) Cultural sensitivity, in this context, is defined as teachers gaining knowledge of the various cultures in their classrooms and include them into the design of classroom instructions. With the inclusion of cultures in classroom instructions, the teaching and learning will be more relevant to the stakeholders.

6) Reshaping the curriculum means that the curriculum is reshaped to suit the cultures where students came from. To reshape a curriculum in this regard means being responsive to the cultural settings of the society and how learning can take place with reference to that real world.

7) Culturally mediated instruction refers to instructions embedded in the curriculum content that consist of cognition interceded by culture, social settings that are culturally accepted for learning, and knowledge that carries cultural values.

As for 8) student-controlled classroom discourse, some parts of the lesson will be placed in the students' charge. This will enable teachers to gauge the students' way of communication learned from their home and community.

Finally, 9) small group instruction and academically-related discourse focuses on organising instruction in groups that are student-controlled and low-pressure, with the aim of assisting academic language development.

As for Ladson-Billings (1994), in her work *Dreamkeepers*, there are eight CRT principles which she defined as: 1) Communication of high expectations, 2) Active teaching methods, 3) Practitioner as facilitator, 4) Inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse students, 5) Cultural sensitivity, 6) Reshaping the curriculum or delivery of services, 7) Student-controlled discourse, and 8) Small group instruction.

The last definition of the principles of CRT is by Brown University (2017). This set of principles are derived and adapted from Ladson-Billings' definition of CRT in *Dreamkeepers* (1994). According to Brown University (2017), there are seven CRT principles. They are: 1) Positive perspectives on parents and family, 2) Communication of high expectations, 3) Learning within the context of culture, 4) Student-centred instruction, 5) Culturally-mediated instruction, 6) Reshaping the curriculum, and 7) Teacher as the facilitator.

Apparently, there is an overlap of most of the CRT principles from the three sources, as shown in Table 2.1. This is due to the adaptation from Ladson-Billings' (1994) definition of CRT principles (The Knowledge Loom: Educators Sharing and Learning Together, 2008; Brown University, 2017). It must be noted, however, that the principle of communication of high expectations that is found in all three sources, and the principle of positive perspectives on parents and family, listed in The Knowledge Loom: Educators Sharing and Learning Together (2008) and Brown University (2017) are not relevant to this present study because they mainly address poor achievements of some students in the United States of America, "students of colour" who are financially poor and have problems in their studies, be it caused by cultural differences

or family support (Howard, 2012). As this present study revolves around the exploration of Malaysian graphic design students' cultural identity, those two CRT principles will not be part of the theoretical underpinning.

Table 2.1

*The overlapping of CRT principles among three sources*

Source	Ladson-Billings (1994)	The Knowledge Loom (2008)	Brown University (2017)
Principles of CRT	1) Communication of high expectations	1) Communication of high expectations	1) Communication of high expectations
	2) Active teaching methods	2) Active teaching methods	
	3) Practitioner as the facilitator	3) Teacher as the facilitator	2) Teacher as the facilitator
		4) Positive perspectives on parents and family	3) Positive perspectives on parents and family
	4) Cultural sensitivity	5) Cultural sensitivity	4) Learning within the context of culture
	5) Reshaping the curriculum or delivery of services	6) Reshaping the curriculum	5) Reshaping the curriculum
	6) Inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse students.	7) Culturally mediated instructions	6) Culturally mediated instructions
	7) Student-controlled discourse	8) Student-controlled classroom discourse	7) Student-centred instruction
	8) Small group instruction	9) Small group instruction and academically-related discourse	

### **Some Research that Involved Cultural Interventions in Art and Design Education**

Interventions, in the context of culture-based education in art and graphic design courses, had been previously practised and conducted research on, to facilitate and enrich art and design students' learning. Lai (2012) designed a culturally responsive art project that was implemented in her art appreciation class, with the focus on art of various cultures in the United States of America. The aim of the project was to enable students to have more intercultural interaction and to be more aware of local

and global issues through interviews with local artists and study their art work. Lai's (2012) research drives home the connection of the students with their surrounding culture. Sensitivity towards other cultures, especially in a multicultural setting is an important aspect that education should provide (Ballengee-Morris & Sturh, 2001; Badrul Isa, 2006). Although this study of Lai (2012) revolves around the awareness of culture, it mainly focuses on fostering intercultural interaction.

Khoury and Khoury (2009) recognised that there is so much beauty and authenticity in the various aspects of the local Lebanese culture and these are in danger of being lost to Westernisation that is taking over Lebanon and the Middle-East in a bigger picture. As education is one of the important sectors in Lebanon (Marston, 1994), a proposal was made to change the current graphic design programmes, faculties and student learning in Lebanon so that more appreciation of local culture can be inculcated. Khoury and Khoury (2009) cited an example of how cultural studies are imbedded into the curriculum of a graphic design and illustration programme from The Cambridge School of Visual & Performing Arts. The proposal and effort seem plausible but changes take time, what with the designing of a module, testing it, going through the proper channels for endorsement and approval, prior to implementing it into the curriculum.

The research of Kokko and Dillon (2010) included crafts and crafts education as expressions of cultural heritage in the International Study Programme in Finland. As all the fifteen students, all trainee teachers, were from different nationalities, Kokko and Dillon studied personal values, and meanings placed on crafts; cultural and family influences; and crafts at school (2010). Relevant activities such as lectures and visits to craft classes and local craft exhibitions were conducted. Kokko and Dillon's (2010) study, however, is limited to crafts as expression of cultural heritage when cultural

heritage products are more than only crafts. In the researcher's opinion, perhaps by being focused on one aspect of cultural heritage, the Kokko and Dillon might be able to scaffold their research to another with data collected from their initial research.

Similar to Khoury's and Khoury's study is Hamdy's (2010) research although the latter's is contextualised to the Arabian culture. Hamdy finds it pertinent for young designers to see how important it is that the designs they create should contain the uniqueness of the Arabian culture (2010). Although the study does not specifically discuss or suggest any intervention activities, the Hamdy provided substantial visual and textual examples of emergence of young Arabian designers who incorporate Arabian cultural art forms into their modern work of design. Hamdy used these as examples to posit that it is necessary for design educators to include cultural interventions into graphic design education (2010).

The studies of Lai (2012) who gave a culturally responsive art project to the class to study local and global cultural issues; Khoury and Khoury (2009) investigating how Lebanese culture should be upheld in art and design education amidst the Westernisation in Lebanon; Kokko and Dillon (2010) whose study revolves around using crafts and crafts education to study personal values, and meanings placed on crafts, cultural and family influences; and Hamdy (2010) suggested, through exemplary works, that Arabian cultural identity should be more apparent in Arabian graphic design works, imply that intervention activities for culture-based art and design education should and can be drawn from the local surroundings.

## **Past Methodologies**

The nature of action research which allows the researcher to creatively yet systematically devise ways to solve teaching and learning problems in class through observing, identifying, conducting research, planning, developing, delivering, sharing with peers, evaluating and receiving feedback for further improvement is therefore seen as a suitable research methodology to this present study. Due to the recursive, participatory and reflective aspects of the study, action research was selected as the research methodology.

In a guest editorial, Mullen and Chalmers (1990) questioned the connection among society, cultural values and knowledge, and art education. Art is broadly defined and socially contextualized (Mullen & Chalmers, 1990). The changing views of culture, society and politics have rendered art educators to examine aesthetic values and artistic understandings. This editorial puts together papers that discuss how a culturally adapted pedagogy is important to educating the generation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Mullen and Chalmers (1990) used a collection of proposals to prompt readers to think about pedagogy in art and design education. They recommended that art educators should question current practices in the field, observe their teaching, plan the content of the next lesson, evaluate students' learning and critically reflect upon the practices in education so as to refine them (Mullen & Chalmers, 1990). This editorial highlights that culture shapes art education (Mullen & Chalmers, 1990).

Tavin and Hausman (2004) touched on how with the wave of globalisation, cultures change and along with that, visual art education must play a role in order to move on with the globalising world. There is a need for art educators to look into the surrounding visual culture to bring to class the lessons of globalisation. Tavin's and

Hausman's (2004) study supports the present study to infuse Malaysian cultural art forms into a graphic design class room. Tavin and Hausman (2004) cited an example of such practice, conducted in a graduate art education class at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Students in the class were given the task to conduct readings on issues of globalisation and engage in class discussions. This involved critical thinking and encourage debate and exchange of ideas. At the end of the semester, each student will visit a visual culture site and discuss what has been observed by relating to the readings done earlier. Exercises such as the example given by Tavin and Hausman (2004) tie together theoretical knowledge and practice, and the application of critical thinking. These are important traits that graphic design students should possess in understanding better the culture that they are in.

Culture plays a role in influencing graphic design students' personal expression of their work, claims Stultz (2006), in his PhD thesis. In a case study research conducted in a post-secondary professional graphic design education institution, Stultz (2006) purposefully selected three students who each represent a case study itself. Each of the students comes from a unique cultural background, different from each other. Interviews, observations and artefact discussions were conducted to collect data. It is interesting that Stultz (2006) studied the individuality of the students' work which is influenced by their cultural background. However, as graphic designers, personal expression in design, although to a certain extent is valuable, should not precede functionality of design. The researcher understands this study as one that steers more towards understanding students better, rather than making a change in the class room setting involving cultural art forms.

Meyer's (2008) study revolved around how graphic design educators can improve graphic designers' integrity through being more culturally attuned in the

classroom. Her research proposed a reform to design education to meet her research objective (Meyer, 2008). She studied the design programme of Iowa State University, its students' and instructors' perception of cultural learning and then proposed a new model of education based on activity theory (Meyer, 2008). Proposing this activity theory model of education as a new pedagogical model, Meyer (2008) attempted to promote awareness of culture and cultural sensitivity in a graphic design curriculum for future designers to function effectively in their field. Meyer's (2008) model was adapted from Engerström's activity theory model. Engerström's activity theory analyses cultural and technical aspects of human activities, relating to essential players of culture (stakeholders) and leads to an overall outcome (Meyer, 2008). Due to its multidisciplinary nature, the model was akin to graphic design education (Meyer, 2008). Figure 2.3 features Meyer's (2008) adaptation of Engerström's activity theory model as her proposed pedagogical approach to graphic design education that involve all stakeholders, seeking to address issues of cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity. In the model in Figure 2.3, the words in brackets are Meyer's interpretation of Engerström's stakeholders in the model.

Khoury and Khoury (2009) find a problem within the Lebanese graphic design sphere where Westernisation has caused an identity crisis. "With every new import, Westernization threatens the survival of Lebanese visual culture." (Khoury & Khoury 2009, p.1) They propose that change can come through design programmes, faculty and student learning. Integration of culturally significant projects in graphic design modules is one of the ways to engage learning about Lebanese culture. They cited The Cambridge School of Visual and Performing Arts, in their BA Graphic Design and Illustration programme, as an exemplary model. The programme has a specific module, Graphic Design and Illustration Critical and Cultural Studies, that encourages students

to critically study cultural issues, analyse them and relate to the students' own design work.

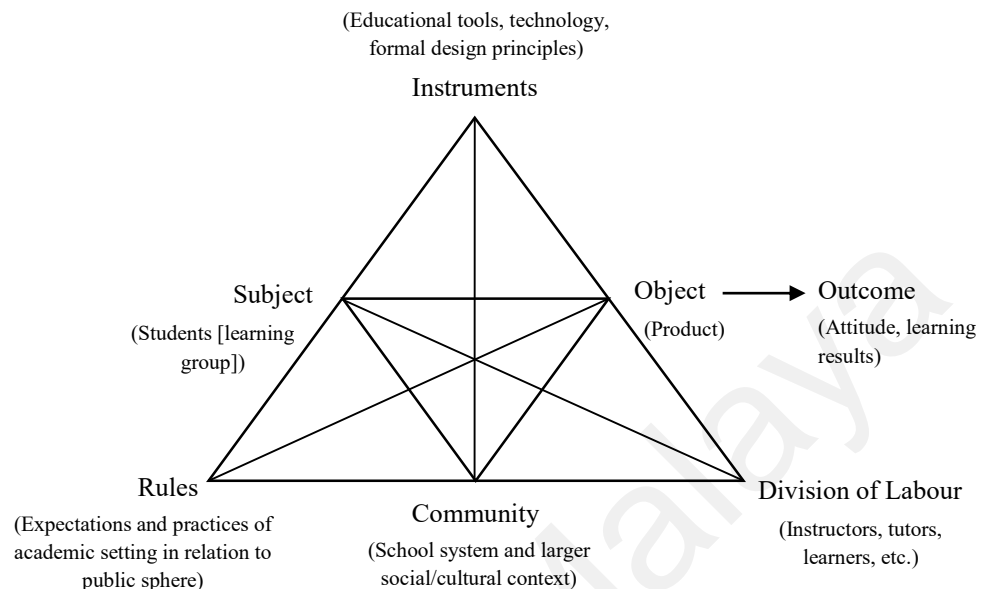


Figure 2.3 Meyer's (2008) activity model, adapted from Engeström's activity theory model  
Source: Meyer, R. J. (2008). *Culture, Context and Communication: Developing a Culturally sensitive Curriculum in Graphic Design Education*. (Masters Thesis, Iowa State University).

Hamdy's (2010) paper focuses on integrating Arabic culture into Arabic design education. The researcher studies how changes had taken place in the Arab world that requires design education to change along those changes and the importance of exposing young Arab designers to non-Western schools of thoughts. Hamdy's (2010) study looks at three graphic students' projects as examples of how culture-specific elements are adopted into their work and presented in a contemporary framework.

The case studies conducted in Scherer's (2010) Masters thesis involves studying and comparing American and Asian advertisements produced by a global technology company. Cultural dimensions, social context, image meaning and content, colour and symbolism were the criteria by which the advertisements will be studied

and compared to each other. Further on from there, the identified criteria of cultural content that is useful for the designer was proposed to be integrated into the graphic design curriculum.

In the exploration of idea through a paper presentation, Ivon and Kuscevic (2013) suggest that learning, in and out of school, is a cultural act. They opined that school's cultural-heritage environment produces students who would reflect the qualities of the school's cultural-heritage. The paper discusses how that can be achieved through students partaking in activities that contain creative and artistic expressions, which require them to be actively involved with their communities.

Although the studies discussed in the literature essentially revolve around culture and art and design education, they each have various unique scenarios and issues to be addressed in the class room. Therefore, the researchers and educators strive to propose changes to or address those issues with ways they deem fit as solutions, through a general process of observation, a review of literature, carefully planned activities that are relevant, class room participation, discussion, reflection and evaluation.

Hadjiyanni's (2014) action research is found in her six-step concept proposal course for her interior design class room. The researcher opines that interior design educators should educate their students to understand culture beyond the surface of what they see, to comprehend what it means to be a member of a certain, marginalised culture. She proposed six steps for teaching culture through visuals, implemented in her third year interior design class. She identifies that students often design according to market trends or what they deem suitable. Hadjiyanni finds that the problem arises

when the clients come from various cultural background and the trendy, universal designs do not match the needs of those clients.

In her class, most of her students are Americans with European descents who have little exposure to other cultures, she requires the students to study the underlying issues with everyday activities of 4 chosen minority or marginalised cultural groups. The first step in Hadjiyanni's proposed six steps is interdisciplinary literature review, where the students will have to read to enrich their knowledge and understanding of culture in various disciplines. The next step is that the understanding from the reading is supported by visits to relevant places of culture. The third step is the students will have to find a classmate to work as a partner to visualise what they have found out from the reading and visits. A group discussion will be held to decode the visuals to find out the students' understanding through their visualisations. This part is important as concepts are derived from the decoding session. These preliminary concepts will be shared and debated as to how effective they are to convey a complex and plural nature of culture. From there, students are to develop their concepts. Step four sees to the students selecting one concept proposal that has the best representation and implications related to culture. In the fifth step, a critique session is held in class where each team is to review and give feedback to other teams' concept proposal. After that, the refinement is made. The final step, step six, is where students submit the final concept proposal for assessment. The collected proposals are categorised according to the 4 chosen minority groups. Hadjiyanni (2014) gave some examples of the proposals and their descriptions. After evaluating all the proposals, Hadjiyanni (2014) concluded her research by stating the importance of being sensitive to cultures for designers. She did not conclude with a definite closure but objectively indicated that artistic translations of culture into art can have various interpretations.

In another instance of action research, the dire need to engage globalisation into the art and design class room is highlighted by Tavin and Hausman (2004). They see the importance to develop a deep-seated understanding of one's life and that of others through a combination of creative expression, theoretical knowledge, everyday experiences, and social critique that bring about a strong foundation for understanding the implications of globalisation. To propose a solution to this, the researchers studied an art education class at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago that focuses on global visual culture. The teachers of this course look into how visual culture of various forms are perceived and understood by global culture and how that in turn shapes the society at large. Students are to explore how individuals and groups are influenced by various visual cultural forms in the context of globalisation. The students are tasked to read and respond critically on globalisation and conduct seminar that engages the class to debate about their readings and responses. At the end of the semester, the students are given the freedom to select a cultural site, object or image or images to study based on the readings they have done in relation to globalisation. The focus is on how visuals influence our thoughts and actions. The final stage of the project allows the students to decide which way is best to present the outcome of their study, whether it is in-class presentation, field trip or other critical activity, solely conducted by the students themselves. Some of the project outcomes, as highlighted in this research, see the students, having equipped with the readings that they had done earlier on the topic of globalization, interpreting, critiquing and challenging real life issues. In their conclusion of the paper, Tavin and Hausman voiced that change is inevitable in a globalising world and although it is difficult to grasp the changes, teachers need to adjust to those changes in their lives and in their pedagogy.

From the methodologies above, Mullen and Chalmers (1990), Tavin and Hausman (2004), Stultz (2006), Meyer (2008), Khoury and Khoury (2009), Hamdy (2010), Scherer (2010), Ivon and Kuscevic (2013) and Hadjiyanni (2014), the researcher comes to the understanding that for researchers-educators to be engaged with students' learning involving culture, observation, reflection, critical questioning, developing of ideas are keys to improve on pedagogical approaches to deepen students' understanding of their culture and open doors for them to explore their cultural identity. At each stage of the research, reflection was required before the researcher moves from one stage to another. "Action research is a recursive, cyclical process that typically does not proceed in a linear fashion" (Johnson, 2008).

With Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) often cited as the one who coined the term action research in about 1934 (Mills 2011), the history of action research has been well recorded and discussed (Kemmis, 1988; Adelman, 1993; Noffke, 1994; Gunz, 1996). Lewin had many practical experiences in the 1940s and as a result, he described action research as a process that "gives credence to the development of powers of reflective thought, discussion, decision and action by ordinary people participating in collective research on 'private troubles' that they have in common" (Adelman 1993, p.8). According to Mills (2011), although there are different schools of action research thought, there already existed many early action research followers. One American action research group which advocates progressive education movement, based its thoughts on the work of John Dewey (Noffke, 1997), while reform to curriculum and the teaching profession efforts were made in the United Kingdom (Elliot, 1991) and Australians strove towards collaborative curriculum planning (Kemmis, 1998).

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has thus outlined the important aspects of the study starting from Bauhaus and graphic design, to culture, cultural identity, cultural art forms, culture-based education, culturally responsive teaching, cultural interventions in art and design education, and finally cultural identity in art and design education. The conceptual and theoretical framework of this study is found in the next chapter. The frameworks established the infusion of Malaysian cultural art forms in a graphic design classroom, for the purpose of exploring the students' expression of cultural identity.

## **Chapter 3 Conceptualisation of the Study**

### **Introduction**

Culture and graphic design education has been an area of interest for many researchers throughout the years. Bauhaus was a German leading art and design institution that sought to reform art education in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among its primary concerns were the economic status of Germany during and after the World War One, as well as to unite crafts and fine arts under one roof (Fiedler & Feierabend, 1999; Whitford 2003).

In the contemporary era, Mullen's and Chalmers' (1990) pedagogical-centred paper revolves around considering culture and society in art education. Lin (1999) studied the construction of Taiwanese-Canadian cultural identity in public cultural festivals in Canada and proposed its implications to multicultural art education. The research of Tavin and Hausman (2004) implies that art education should include changes in culture that is brought on by globalisation. In his PhD thesis, Stultz (2006) studies how cultural identity plays a role in personal creative expression in the classroom of American graphic students of various cultural backgrounds. In the same year, 2006, Badrul Isa wrote about how multicultural art education influences the unity of a multicultural society. Meyer (2008) researched into how graphic designers' integrity can be improved by graphic design educators through social, cultural and educational paradigms. Khoury's and Khoury's research in 2009 highlights that cultural identity is at risk of being lost in graphic design education, due to Westernisation, as with the case in Lebanon. Hamdy (2010) studies how identity changes alongside globalisation and because of that, it is important to integrate culture into graphic design education. Integration of contemporary cultural studies that are

influenced by the emergence of the World Wide Web into the graphic design curriculum was the Masters thesis of Scherer (2010). The research of Ivon and Kuscevic (2013) centres around schools' pedagogical, creative and artistic aspects in developing students who can adjust their behaviour and lifestyle to their cultural surroundings. An attempt to deconstruct the complexity of culture through art in design education was the research of Hadjiyanni (2014). With its purpose to eliminate issues of power, race and injustice, Bequette (2014) studies how a model can be designed for place-specific material culture for culture based arts-education.

From the abovementioned, it is apparent that much research had been conducted on culture in art and graphic design education. According to Badrul Isa (2006), knowledge and understanding of a multicultural society is important because the learners will know more of themselves and other cultures that make up the multicultural society. As a result, the learner will also be more sensitive towards other cultures, as advocated by Ladson-Billings (1994), Gay (2000) and Ballengee-Morris & Sturh (2001). From there, the researcher viewed that as for Malaysian graphic design students, the understanding of the students' knowledge of Malaysian cultural art forms (MCAF) of the multicultural society in Malaysia will not only inspire them visually, conceptually and culturally but that would also propagate the exploration of their own cultural identity that could be expressed in their art and design work.

This chapter brings about the conceptualisation of the study towards the inclusion of MCAF in a graphic design classroom. This research explored 20 graphic design students' initial understanding in their knowledge of four selected MCAF and identified the possible reasons that led to that initial understanding. Through students' participation in a graphic design course that carried out intervention activities incorporating four selected MCAF, the researcher aimed to find out if there was any

transformation of understanding of these students after participating in those intervention activities. At the same time, the researcher also set out to explore the students' expression of their cultural identity with and without the intervention activities.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Although there is no one absolute definition of culture, culture can be described as a unique group of people whose beliefs, values, customs and meanings are distinguished from others (Robinson-Pant 2005; Browne, 2008; Meyer, 2008; Spencer-Oatey, 2012). This means to say that culture does not describe individuals but rather patterns of communities together at large. Culture does not stay stagnant, it adapts to new influences and at the same time redefining old traditions (Forde, 1934; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Keesing, 1974; Arvizu, 1994; Nieto, 1999; Spencer-Oatey, 2012; MacDonald, 2014). Therefore, culture is dynamic because it changes with time (Moalosi et al., 2007). As such, culture is important as it governs our everyday life, whether we are aware of it or not. Culture has much influence on how we think, act and make decisions (Sharan B. Merriam & Mazanah Mohamad, 2000).

Culture plays an important role in graphic design education as it equips students with the knowledge and understanding of the culture in the community that they work or reside in (Meyer, 2008; Scherer, 2010; Hadjiyanni, 2014). To add cultural value to graphic design, educators should effectively focus on the importance of culture in the class room (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2002; Stultz, 2006; Meyer, 2008; Scherer 2010; Hadjiyanni, 2014). Cultural products such as cultural art forms can serve as inspiration or reference to graphic designers. Although, no doubt, the fundamentals and principles of design do not change as they act as guide to producing functional and

readable design, according to Golombisky and Hagen (2010), cultural knowledge and understanding will enable designers to draw relevant visual, conceptual or even symbolic ideas derived from the culture that surrounds them for better communication to the society that the design is made for (Ridgway & Haynes n.d.; Scherer, 2010).

As the understanding in the knowledge one has of cultural art forms builds, the exploration of cultural identity could also perpetuate from this understanding (Lin, 1999; Hamdy 2010). Cultural identity serves to help one understand oneself (Lustig & Koester, 2012). To understand the self through culture means to study the elements of culture, one of which is art (Peters, 2005).

Studies from Bequette (2014), Hadjiyanni (2014), Ivon and Kuscevic (2013), Hamdy (2010), Scherer (2010), Khoury and Khoury (2009), Meyer (2008), Badrul Isa (2006), Stultz (2006), Tavin and Hausman (2004), Lin (1999) and Mullen and Chalmers (1990) denote that much research has been conducted to show a significant connection between culture, cultural identity and graphic design education. As graphic design is visual-oriented, it uses visuals, text and symbolic representations to communicate ideas (Meggs, 1998; Whitmore, 2003; Santoro, 2014). The richness of Malaysian cultural art forms has much to offer – as Spencer-Oaty (2000) described artefacts, products, rituals and behaviour as the fourth level of culture – in the graphic design education in the local setting.

The implications of the past studies are:

1. Culture is complex as in it has four layers, as proposed by Spencer-Oatey (2000), adapted from Schein (1984), namely, i) basic assumptions and values; ii) beliefs, attitudes and conventions; iii) systems and institutions; iv) artefacts, products, rituals and behaviour.

2. Culture is prevalent and it changes with time and social changes. Through social changes, cultures' value systems change accordingly. In that process of change, they embrace new forms and meanings, while redefining traditional ones (Forde, 1934; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Keesing, 1974; Arvizu, 1994; Nieto, 1999; Moalosi et al., 2007; Spencer-Oatey, 2012; MacDonald, 2014).
3. Cultural identity can be explored and expressed through understanding culture, addressing issues of instability and separateness of a community. A society that is open and inclusive of all culture depends on creativity. Societies will improve, be more knowledgeable and forward-moving, if they uphold cultural creativity (UNESCO).
4. Creativity is one of the main ingredients of producing quality graphic design work. Products of culture, such as cultural art forms, can be inspirational to graphic designers. To realise its main role, graphic design needs to convey message or knowledge or information. As such, creativity is the core of knowledge-forming in graphic design. Inspirations for creative ideas can be easily drawn from our surrounding cultures. Designers learn not only from the principles and workshops of Bauhaus but also the inspirations our surrounding culture can give them. (Erdurak 2002; Ridgway & Haynes n.d.)
5. There are many ways to explore culture in art and design class rooms to create a better understanding of the underlying issues concerned with values, systems and assumptions. Exploration of culture may bring about positive outlook to inevitable changes, and appreciation of the cultures of others (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2002; Badrul Isa, 2006; Hadjiyanni, 2012).
6. Bauhaus' principles and teachings that are adopted by Malaysian graphic design education should also involve the culture of the local people because by

being more attuned to one's culture, there is more integrity in graphic designers (Meyer, 2008). So, as the researcher gathers, Malaysian graphic design education should not only adopt the curriculum of Bauhaus but also look into how design can speak to Malaysians through utilising local cultural art forms. This will create opportunities for the students to find out more about their cultural identity (Marshall, 2007).

Despite the myriad of studies conducted, a gap was identified – Malaysian graphic design students' understanding of their cultural knowledge through MCAF and their expression of cultural identity through their design work. From the structure of graphic design programmes in three top-choice private higher education institutions in Malaysia, it is found that MCAF is not included as part of the curricula (refer to Appendices I, II and III). From the identified gap, a study was conducted to find out about the initial understanding of graphic design students in their knowledge of MCAF and what possible causes led to that initial understanding. The research involved intervention activities that incorporated four selected MCAF into a graphic design class room. A study was thus conducted to find out the understanding of graphic design students before and after participating in the intervention activities. The research investigated students' expression of cultural identity in their design work, with and without intervention activities.

The following, Figure 3.1, shows the implications of past studies that led to the gap in the research. As for Figure 3.2, it outlines the conceptual framework of this study.

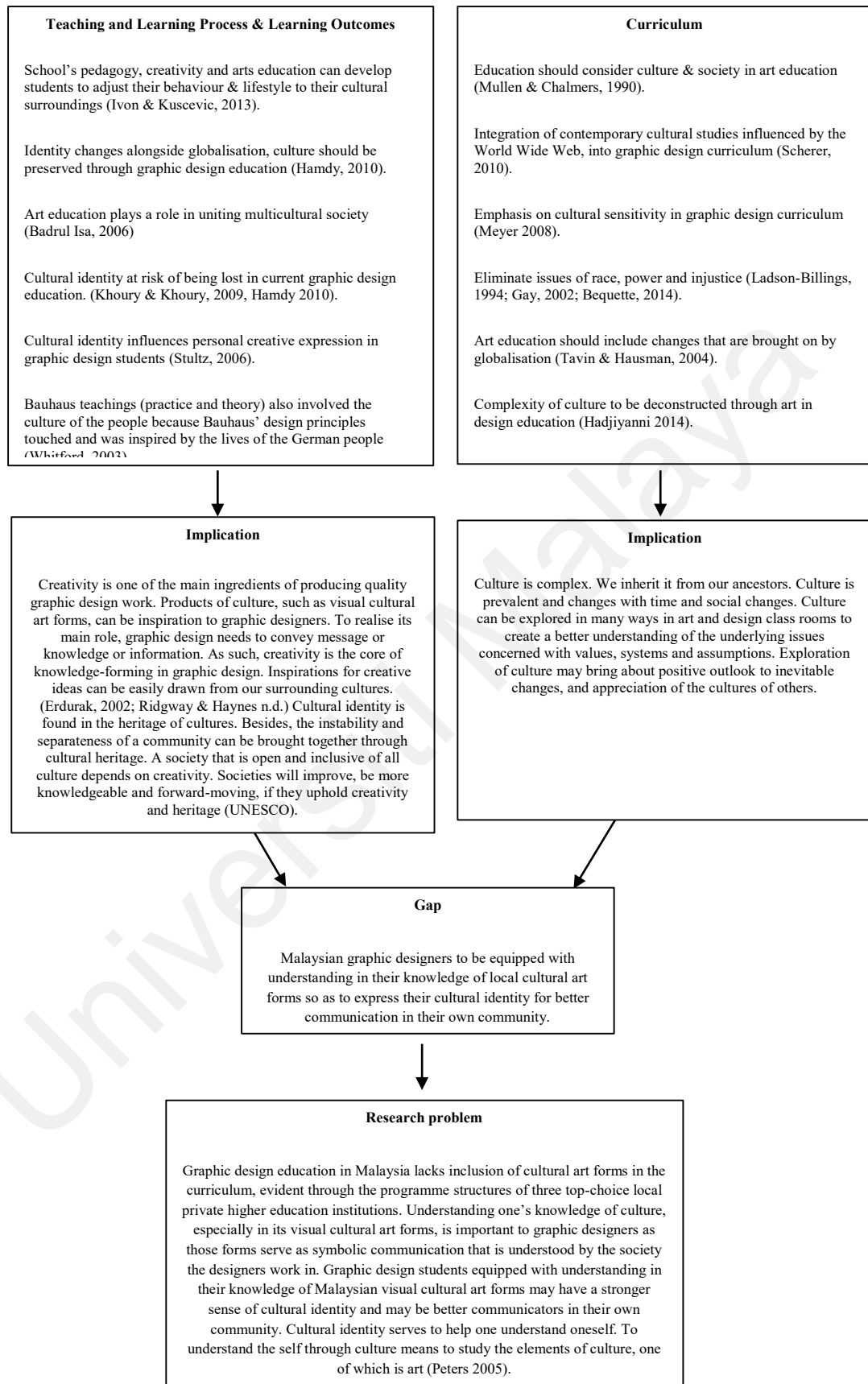
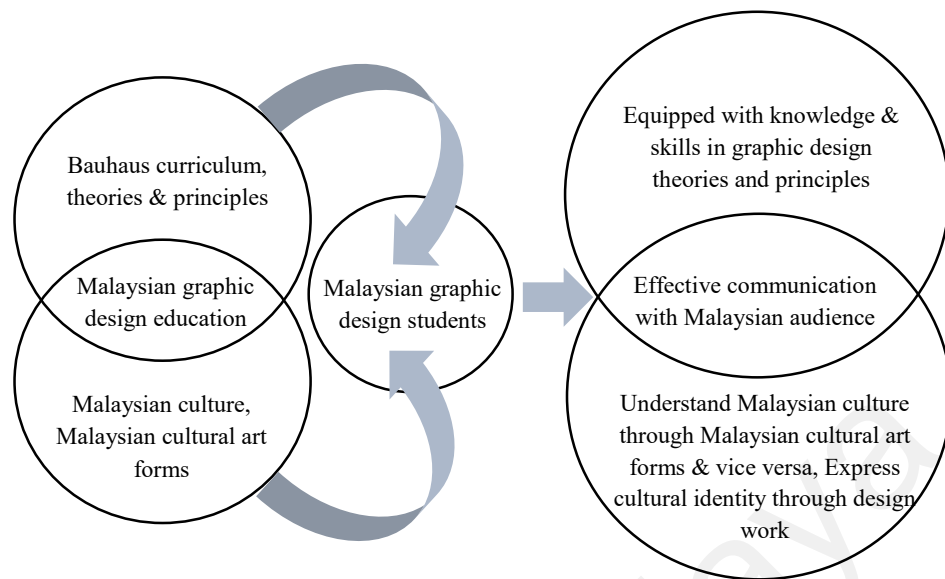


Figure 3.1 Implications of past studies, leading to a research gap and defining the research problem



*Figure 3.2 The conceptual framework of the present study*

The conceptual framework in Figure 3.2 outlines the key concepts found in this present study. Malaysian graphic design education should not only be adopting the curriculum, theories and principles of Bauhaus but also include cultural art forms of the Malaysian culture into the class room. In doing so, the students will produce effective communication with the local audience due to understanding the Malaysian culture, and able to express their cultural identity, besides being well-equipped in knowledge & skills in graphic design theories and principles.

The following section will describe in detail how Bauhaus, Culturally Responsive Teaching and Bruner's Spiral Curriculum underpin the conceptual framework.

## Theoretical Framework

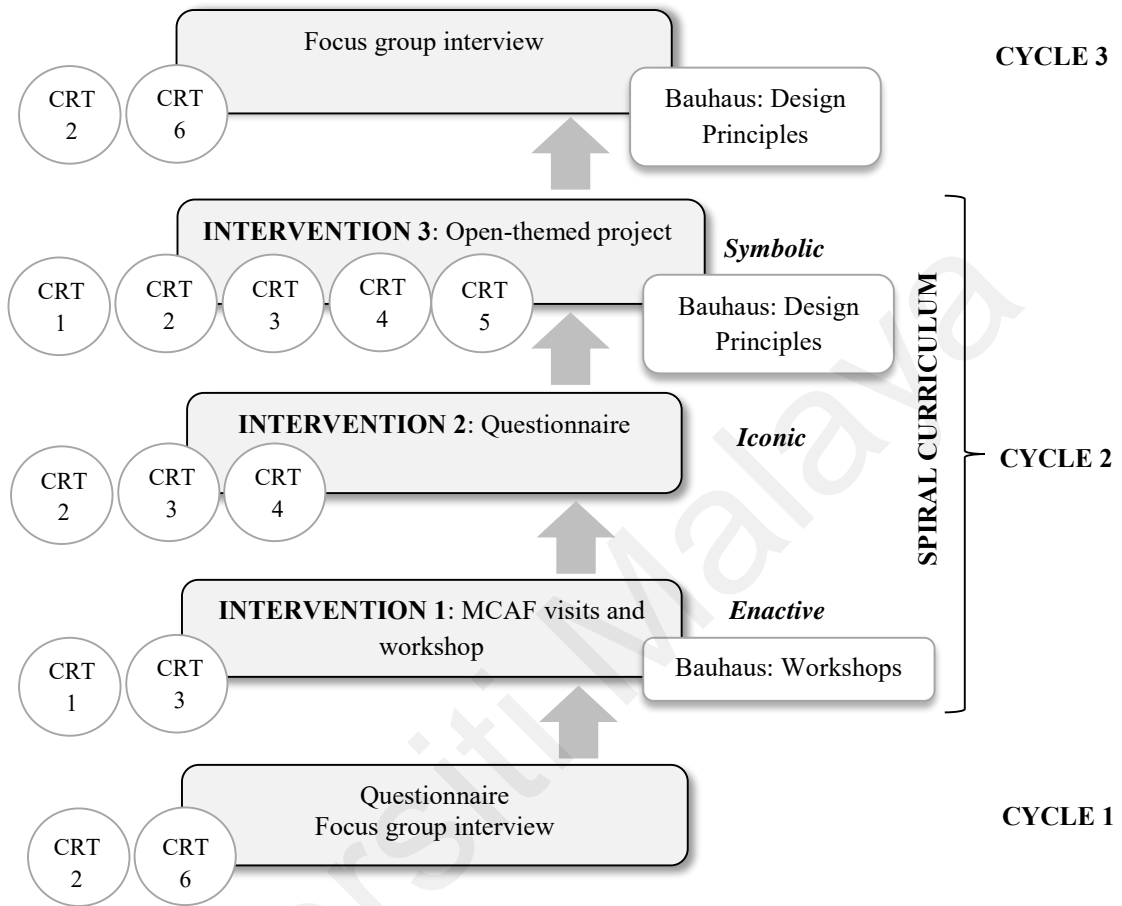


Figure 3.3 Theoretical framework of the study

The theoretical framework in Figure 3.3 shows how the theory of learning, namely Spiral Curriculum, and some principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), as well as Bauhaus' teachings underpin the research path of this study.

CRT was engaged throughout and drove the pedagogy in this study. Six CRT principles were applied to this study and students' learning experience as they support the earlier theories mentioned above. The CRT principles applied in this study were:

- 1) active teaching methods

- 2) teacher as the facilitator
- 3) cultural sensitivity
- 4) culturally mediated instructions
- 5) student-controlled classroom discourse
- 6) small group instruction and academically-related discourse

Bruner's Spiral Curriculum – enactive, iconic and symbolic learning – underpinned the intervention activities at Cycle 2. The Spiral Curriculum theory stresses on the importance of the ability to reinvent previously learned concepts, categories, and problem-solving procedures invented previously by culture. At each of the Spiral Curriculum modes, students' learning was scaffolded through activities that are related to each other from one level to another, building up their knowledge and understanding. Scaffolding builds up students' knowledge step by step through learning from one stage and applying that knowledge into another. "The central principles of this approach are that learners can only make sense of new situations in terms of their existing understanding. Learning involves an active process in which learners construct meaning by linking new ideas with their existing knowledge." (Naylor & Keogh 1999, p. 93).

"Key features of the spiral curriculum based on Bruner's work are: (1) The student revisits a topic, theme or subject through their school career (2) the complexity of the topic or theme increases with each revisit; and (3) new learning has a relationship with old learning and is put in context with the old information. The benefits ascribed to the spiral curriculum by its advocates are: (1) The information is reinforced and solidified each time the student revisits the subject matter; (2) the spiral curriculum also allows a logical progression from simplistic ideas to complicated ideas; and (3)

students are encouraged to apply the early knowledge to later course objectives.” (Johnston, 2012).

At Cycle 1, questionnaire and focus group interviews were conducted to elicit the students’ initial understanding in their knowledge of the four selected MCAF and possible reasons that led to that initial understanding before participating in intervention activities. The focus group interview involved students discussing with the interviewer and among themselves. Learning takes place when there is social interaction. “...The social learning perspective emphasizes the importance of social influences and social interaction.” (Tracey & Morrow, 2006, p.100). The students will learn from each other even at this level before the intervention activities take place, about each other’s understanding in their knowledge of MCAF, from the focus group interaction. The CRT principle of the *teacher as the facilitator* was applied at Cycle 1: Although the focus group interview protocol and semi-structured questionnaire were designed by the lecturer, the discussions and answering was left to the students to complete, with the lecturer prompting them. As such, the lecturer facilitated the session; Another CRT principle – *small group instructions, academically-related discourse* – was also applied at this cycle, where the class was divided into small groups for focus groups interview. The topic of discussion revolved around culture, MCAF and graphic design education. From Cycle 1, the researcher gathered information about the students’ understanding in their knowledge of MCAF and possible reasons that led to that understanding before planning and designing in any intervention activities for Cycle 2.

The interventions took place in Cycle 2, where three different activities that incorporated the four selected MCAF were infused into the class room. The term *intervention* means “the systematic process of assessment and planning employed to

remediate or prevent a social, educational, or developmental problem.” (The Freedictionary.com, 2016).

At Cycle 2’s Intervention 1, enactive mode of the Spiral Curriculum was engaged. A visit was conducted to Petronas Galeri in Suria KLCC, the students partook in a batik workshop in University of Malaya, they visited the Mah Meri cultural village at Pulau Carey and attended a talk in Cultural Centre, University of Malaya about *wayang kulit* and viewed some of the exhibits there. Enactive is the encoding action based information from previously acquired knowledge, stored in memory and represent the knowledge through a variety of motor tasks which the learner finds difficult to describe in words or pictures (Bruner, 1960). Enactive mode of learning at Intervention 1 revolved around students working hands-on at the batik workshop, viewing exhibits of original *wayang kulit* puppets and listening to an expert talking about *wayang kulit*, tried weaving and participated in mock wedding ceremony at the Mah Meri cultural village visit and viewing contemporary Malaysian art exhibits. The CRT principles that were applied at Intervention 1 were *active teaching methods* and *cultural sensitivity*. The teacher (researcher of this study) planned and organised these workshops and visits, which were conducted by relevant expertise in the respective fields. The students participated actively in those activities. When organising these activities, the teacher carefully selected these MCAF based on their cultural background and considered the cultural implications of those activities. In conjunction with Bauhaus’ workshop-teaching, this is very much connected to this level of enactive learning as the students will be exposed to study the materials and forms (Fiedler & Feierabend, 1999) of the four selected MCAF.

Intervention 2 saw to the students completing semi-structured questionnaires pertaining to their visual relation to the activities they partook in Intervention 1. Iconic

mode uses images/visuals to enhance learning (Bruner, 1960). This is particularly useful for graphic design students where visuals, be it text or images, is central to communicating ideas. Relevant images pertaining to the four selected MCAF were utilised to elicit knowledge and understanding of the students about the four MCAF. Iconic learning occurred here as the students were to answer questions that were linked to the visual qualities of each MCAF. The principles of CRT that were engaged at Intervention 2 were *teacher as the facilitator*, *cultural sensitivity* and *culturally-mediated instructions*. The teacher facilitated the students' learning by not directly steering them to specific answers but planned and designed semi-structured questionnaires. When designing the questionnaire, cultural sensitivity was involved, such as consideration of the multicultural background of the various students in this class. The questions in the questionnaire were culturally-mediated as they were in English, the main language for class instructions, a language the students were used to and comfortable with. The questions also geared towards the students' familiarity towards the MCAF after the activities. The teaching of Bauhaus regarding principles of design (Fiedler & Feierabend, 1999) coincided with iconic learning at this level as the students applied their graphic design knowledge when reflecting on the forms and shapes of the MCAF that they came into contact with during the activities.

At Intervention 3, symbolic mode of the Spiral Curriculum underpins the study. In the symbolic mode, information is stored in the form of a code or a symbol (Bruner, 1960). There is flexibility in symbols as they can appear in words, mathematical symbols and other forms of signs (Bruner, 1960). This would include national and cultural symbols and concepts by which are represented by cultural art forms (Bruner, 1960). After participating in the previous two intervention activities, the students were given an open-theme project. The task was to apply their understanding of the four

selected MCAF and express their cultural identity through a work of design. The students were required to write a rationale about their final outcome of the project. The rationale included the students' reflection of their sense of cultural identity before and after participating in the intervention activities. The final outcome of the project was presented to the students' classmates and the researcher's peer observer. The knowledge in the theories and principles of Bauhaus regarding design grids, layout and typography (Lupton & Miller, 1993) synchronised with symbolic learning as the students applied those theories and principles in ways they deemed fit into the open-themed project. Five CRT principles were applied at Intervention 3. The principles were: *active teaching methods* – the open-theme project allowed students to make decisions to a certain extent, which prompts ownership when learning (Chan et al., 2014); *teacher as the facilitator* – the project brief was open for students' own interpretation and application of their knowledge and understanding with the lecturer merely guiding them; *cultural sensitivity* – the outcome of the project featured the students' utilisation and application of their understanding of the MCAF, as well as expression of their cultural identity; *culturally-mediated instructions* – part of the open-themed project brief consisted of MCAF the students were culturally familiar with; *student-controlled classroom discourse* – the outcome of the project was presented by the students, sharing their journey of the whole process of the open-themed project. To produce a final design outcome for the open-themed project, the students applied Bauhaus principles of design when expressing their cultural identity, inspired by the MCAF activities. This marks the symbolic mode of learning.

*“People can represent external influences symbolically and later use such representations to guide their actions; they can solve problems*

*symbolically...These higher mental processes permit both insightful and foresightful behavior.” (Bandura 1971, p.2-3).*

Once the students had completed the intervention activities in Cycle 2, Cycle 3 was carried out, where a focus group interview was conducted to study the understanding of their knowledge in the four MCAF and their expression of cultural identity after participating in the intervention activities. Indirectly, social learning exists in this study that fortifies the graphic design students’ learning because when they observe each other’s response in the focus group interview, they acquire knowledge by examples given by others (Bandura, 1971). The CRT principles that were engaged at Cycle 3 were *teacher as the facilitator* - the teacher (researcher of this study) supported the students’ learning through asking prompting questions, giving suggestions but not final answers as each student’s interpretation is unique; and *small group instructions, academically-related discourse* – the focus group interview was held in small groups, allowing comfortable environment for the students to express themselves and the content of the interview revolves around culture, cultural identity and graphic design knowledge.

In this study, relevant CRT principles were incorporated into Bauhaus teachings, which involved principles of design and workshops, underpinned by the learning theory of Spiral Curriculum, as shown in Figure 3.4, indicating parallels that can be drawn between CRT and Bauhaus teachings, engaging the various modes in the Spiral Curriculum.

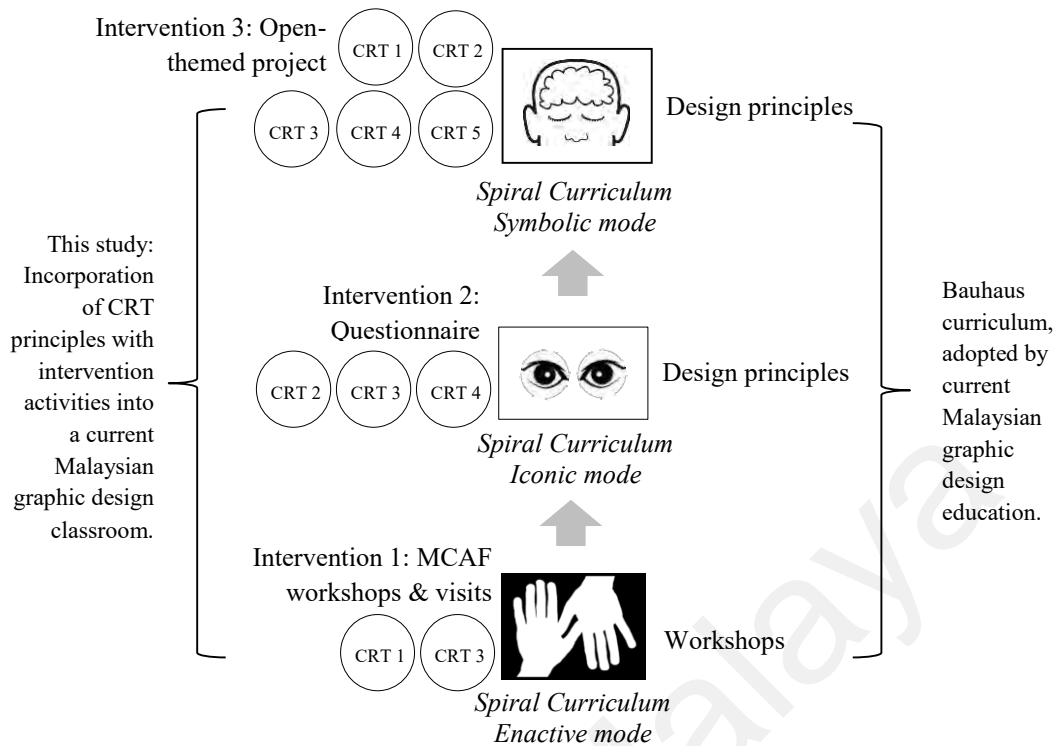


Figure 3.4 Culturally Responsive Teaching principles incorporated into Bauhaus teachings, reflecting the various modes of Spiral Curriculum

Bauhaus teachings of design principles through workshops and studio practices enable learning to take place in enactive, iconic and symbolic modes. The researcher saw that traditional Bauhaus teaching which comprised of workshops such as printmaking, typography, bookbinding and photography involving students' hands-on experience, as the enactive mode. With the knowledge gained from such workshops, students learn about forms, shapes, and other principles of design from the images that were created in those workshops, the researcher equated this to the iconic mode. The symbolic mode is apparent to the researcher when Bauhaus' design principles are applied – students finding visual or conceptual solutions through producing design works, answering to project briefs. The incorporation of CRT principles in the already-existing Bauhaus classroom infused intervention activities saw parallels between CRT

and Bauhaus teachings, and both engaged in the various modes of the Spiral Curriculum.

As explained earlier, at Intervention 1: the workshops and visits were planned and designed with CRT principles. These were in line with Bauhaus' workshop teachings, both involving students' hands-on experience – enactive mode. At Intervention 2, the planning and designing of the questionnaire where CRT principles were applied, required the students to utilise their cultural understanding, visual imagery gained from the workshops and Bauhaus design knowledge to answer the questionnaire, iconic mode was found. At Intervention 3, the open-themed project was planned and designed with the application of CRT principles. The project sought to study students' expression of cultural identity, culmination of their participation in the activities – symbolic mode. At the same time, the students applied their design knowledge as learnt from Bauhaus' principles of design in final design outcome. As such, there is also a parallel between Bauhaus and CRT at the symbolic mode.

On the whole, as well as in each stage of this study, the activities were connected to culture. Our knowledge is only more forged when we are in tune with the culture in our society. Bruner (1996), Derry (1999) and McMahon (1997), emphasised the importance of culture and context in understanding of what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. Knowledge is also a human product, and is socially and culturally constructed (Prawat & Floden, 1994; Gredler, 1997; Ernest, 1999; Kim, 2001). Individuals create meaning through their interactions with each other and with the environment they live in (Kim, 2001).

## **Chapter Summary**

The conceptual framework has demonstrated that research gap for this research have been successfully identified. The design and contribution of the current study closed the gap that was identified. Based on the conceptual framework, implications from the literature review have led to the study of graphic design students' understanding in their knowledge of the Malaysian cultural art forms and their expression of cultural identity before and after participating in intervention activities.

Underpinning this study were the Spiral Curriculum theory, CRT principles and Bauhaus teachings, as shown in Figures 3.2 and 3.3, respectively. The theoretical framework also served to contribute to understanding the intervention activities involving the 4 selected MCAF that were carried out in a graphic design course. The design, research procedure and development of research tools of this research are strategised according to the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that have been deliberated in this chapter. The following chapter will discuss in detail, the research methodology that was engaged in this study.

## **Chapter 4 Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Previous qualitative case studies (Tavin & Hausman, 2004; Stultz, 2006; Meyer, 2008; Khoury & Khoury, 2009; Hamdy, 2010; Scherer, 2010; Hadjiyanni, 2014) have shown that qualitative mode of action research is relevant when it comes to learning about culture in graphic design education. Observation, reflection, critical questioning, developing of ideas are pertinent to improving pedagogical approaches when it comes to deepening students' understanding of their culture and open doors for them to explore their cultural identity.

This present study aimed to explore a group of graphic design students' expression of cultural identity through their final design outcome, visually, conceptually and/or culturally. The research set out to first find out the initial understanding of the selected group of graphic design students in their knowledge of four selected Malaysian cultural art forms (MCAF); what were the possible reasons that led to the students' initial understanding in their knowledge of those MCAF; the types of intervention activities that were required in a graphic design course incorporating the four selected MCAF; the students' understanding in their knowledge of those MCAF after participating in the intervention activities, and finally the students' expression of their cultural identity after these activities. As the study was ongoing, at the third cycle, the researcher was led by emerging findings to initiate another fourth cycle to compare the experiences of students without any intervention.

To research these objectives, the researcher designed a case study action research approach to try and implement the interventions in the study of the case of a

selected graphic design class. According to McManners (2016) this approach (which he termed as action research case study) is suitable for complex challenges in research such as this study which explored expressions of cultural identity. What does the researcher mean by this? The following section on the research design of this study will explain this further.

### **Research Design**

The research design reflects the logic of the inquiry to be conducted, in that, the type of evidence to be collected must be able to answer the research questions put forward. In order to investigate the above objectives, the researcher decided upon a qualitative case study action research methodology. Creswell states case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) over time, through detailed data collection involving multiple sources” (2007, p. 97). The case was a course, in which the researcher teaches in the graphic design programme of a local private university. The selected class is a typical graphic design class in a local private university and the main single unit of analysis. In a typical graphic design class, the main focus is always upon the Western form of design. In the present study, the researcher sought to investigate in depth how this class of local students understood the four Malaysian cultural art forms (MCAF) introduced during planned interventions and the expression of cultural identity that arose out of that understanding. As findings from this first case emerged, another class of students taking the same graphic design course was investigated without the interventions. The data collected from the selected first class above provided an in-depth, and detailed accounting of the joint activity of students learning and doing the various art forms of

the graphic design curriculum, nested in the various intervention activities carried out, helped the researcher to capture the understanding of the students. The students' expression of their cultural identity after participating in the intervention activities revolving the selected MCAF was what the researcher wanted to investigate. The abovementioned case was investigated through action research where interventions were designed. The second class was an emergent idea that came about after the researcher analysed the data from the first class and pondered on the possibility of students' expression of cultural identity without the interventions. Thus, a fourth cycle of research with the second class took place.

Action research was chosen to investigate the interface between the four local art forms and the cultural identity of the students. This is supported by Halsey (1972) who found that "action research is a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world, and a close examination of the effects of such intervention" (p. 186). The intention was to take an action research approach to carrying out a case study into investigating how the exposure to the four local art forms in a graphic design course can possibly lead to expressions of cultural identity. This was followed up by another class for comparison. It can be said that action research has a flexible orientation, whereas a case study is more structured. This is where one supports the other. Therefore, in constructing the process of a case study action research approach, the researcher must ensure that it is sufficiently rigorous, relevant and can be seen as a trustworthy approach (McManners, 2016).

In the practice of teaching, reflection is a very important part to be incorporated into daily routine in order to improve or enhance teaching and learning (Hine, 2013). In action research, teachers need to be observant of the classroom scenario, speculate the needs of the students, contemplate on changes that could result in classroom

improvement, and communicate and work with students and peers to continuously progress (Mertler & Charles, 2011; Mertler, 2012). This has made action research a great contribution to the teaching profession. Action research enables teachers to have better understanding about themselves and their students (Hine, 2013). This leads to teachers being empowered in making rational decisions regarding changes, utilise prior knowledge to find new information, learn from their mistakes or successes and to have a systematic method of enquiry (Fueyo & Koorland, 1997; Mills, 2011). According to McNiff (2014), action research, acknowledged universally, is to bring about changes, utilising collaborative and democratic practices for the betterment of human lives. The goals of action research include “the generation of new knowledge, the achievement of action-oriented outcomes, the education of both researcher and participants, results that are relevant to the local setting, and a sound and appropriate research methodology” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 54).

Action research enables an open-ended, reflective and interpretative “conclusions” to be made. According to Mertler (2012), there is no definite conclusion in action research as the results are open for consideration and further improvement, due to the other collection of data and observations made. The strengths and weaknesses identified will be evaluated to determine the next course of action. This is in line with the nature of graphic design education where answers and solutions are subjective to each individual’s perception. Also, the area of study in the present research concerns the cultural dimension and because culture is not stagnant, each individual has various degrees of knowledge, understanding, interpretation and application of it, there is no definite answer. Due to it being about change, synergy, and egalitarian, with the focus on society and the environment, action research is acknowledged commonly. The egalitarianism of action research makes exploring of

concepts of quality and value flexible and not set by predetermined constructs. (McIntosh 2010; McNiff 2014). Table 4.1 features the characteristics of action research as listed by Creswell (2007, p. 38). The researcher of the present study found these characteristics relevant to the case in this study.

Table 4.1

*Characteristics of action research, listed by Creswell (2007, p.38) with relevance to this present study*

<b>Characteristics of action research</b>	<b>Relevance to this study</b>
Natural setting (field focused), a source of data for close interaction	The natural setting in this study is the researcher's graphic design class room.
Research as key instrument of data collection	Data was collected through focus group interview, questionnaire, students' design work.
Multiple data in words or images	Transcripts of interview, questionnaire answers, students' work of design, pictures taken during intervention activities.
Analysis of data inductively, recursively, interactively	Used four-step method: Plan, Act, Develop, Reflect throughout the cycles.
Focus on participants' perspectives, their meanings, their subjective views	Sought to find out students' initial and later understanding in their knowledge of MCAF, and their expression of cultural identity.
Framing of human behaviour and belief in a socio-political/historical context of through a cultural lens	In this case it was the Malaysian culture.
Emergent rather than tightly prefigured design	Researcher looked for emerging themes in the data at the end of each cycle before planning the next cycle.
Fundamentally interpretative inquiry – researcher reflects on his or her role, the role of the reader and the role of the participants in shaping the study	All the stakeholders contributed to this study – the researcher as a graphic design educator, the research supervisors and peer observer provided critical views and advice to improve the research and the participants provided valuable information as data to the research.
Holistic view of social phenomena	Malaysian graphic design students to be more culture aware and be able to express a sense of cultural identity.

An example of action research carried out in art and design education is found in the study of Hadjiyanni (2014). To address the problem of students deriving their design ideas from universal trends which will not meet the needs of clients of various

cultural background, Hadjiyanni (2014) proposed a six-step concept proposal in her interior design class. The activities in the six-step concept proposal course include students studying underlying issues of marginalised cultures through literature review, visits to relevant places, visualise their findings, propose a design concept, present in class for discussion and based on the feedback in class, will finalise the concept for evaluation.

To cite another example of action research, Tavin and Hausman (2004) studied an art education class that seeks to address the need for students to be globally engaged through creative expressions, theoretical knowledge, everyday experiences and social critique. Students were required to conduct a review of the relevant literature on the topic of globalisation, conduct seminars that encourage debate of thoughts on what they had read, select a cultural site to study based on their readings and finally present the outcome of their study in any form they see befitting to express their findings and opinions. Some of the outcomes see that the students were able to interpret, critique, and challenge issues in real life.

The two examples of action research cited from Hadjiyanni (2014) and Tavin and Hausman (2004) show that continuous improvement is made to each unique cases of research due to the open conclusions that often are at hand when it comes to art and design education, revolving around the topic of culture. While Hadjiyanni's (2014) research produced the results that students in an interior design class have individual interpretations of their understanding of 4 different minority cultures, Tavin and Hausman's (2004) research yielded students' individual views and interpretation through earlier readings and observations made to cultural sites. As such, this study, the researcher incorporated 4 MCAF into intervention activities in a graphic design course, which is a similar approach of research methodology – action research. This

was propelled by the need to investigate the students' understanding in their knowledge of the cultural forms and their expression of cultural identity. Understanding and sense have no definite, explicit and specific answers. Therefore, as the action research in each cycle completes, the researcher may only find answers pertaining to that cycle and will not make general assumptions nor conclusions to the findings. The following describes the research design that this study will engage in, in order to find answers to the research questions.

### **The Research Site and Sample (The Case)**

The local private university had been selected as it was the current workplace of the researcher and as one of the local private universities offering graphic design programme. This university is the top 200 in the world that is recognised for art and design subject, and top two in Malaysia, next to a national university that also offers art and design subject (NST, 2017).

*Design Studies 1: Communication Theory*, the course that the researcher teaches, is one of the core courses in the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Graphic Communication Design programme in a local private university in Selangor, Malaysia. The course aims to introduce students to the process of communication in design by exploring broad topics related to visual communication. The course's learning outcomes focus on the students' ability to follow through the process of research, take intellectual stance on a subject matter and communicate it through writing, visual outcomes and presentations. Referring to Creswell (2007), the bounded system (the case) in this study refers to this course.

The study began among a selected group of 20 students of the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Graphic Communication Design programme. The selection of the group is due to the natural setting of the research, which in this case is the class. Most of the students were Malaysians, taking *Design Studies 1* in the selected local private university. The sample group, under the tutelage of the researcher, were in their first semester and first year of their study in the Graphic Communication Design programme of the selected local private university. While the majority of the group had basic knowledge in design learned from the previous Foundation year that they had completed, the remainder came from other non-art related programmes. The action research that was conducted served as a source of continuous improvement to the practice of teaching in *Design Studies 1: Communication Theory*.

This study was conducted over a period of one academic semester which consisted of 14 weeks. Each week, the course is allocated 4 hours of contact between the lecturer and the students in class. This study contained three cycles of data collection, data analysis, data interpretation and reflection. Cycle 1, with two methods and tools of data collection, was completed in the first two weeks of the semester.

As shown in Table 4.2, Cycle 1 consisted of 4 steps. Step 1 (Plan) was the selection of the four MCAF and designing of questionnaire. Step 2 (Act) was conducting the questionnaire, collection and organising of data. The method of data collection was a questionnaire (refer to Appendix IV). The data collection tool was online questionnaire software where data was stored safely and easily retrievable. It was convenient for students to complete the questionnaire as they are familiar with digital technology and each student normally brings his/her laptop to university. The students were given an hour to complete the questionnaire in class. Step 3 (Develop) was where the data was analysed and interpreted, while Step 4 (Reflect) was the act of

reflecting on the analyses and interpretation so that the next course of action could be planned from the data that emerged from the reflection.

Table 4.3 features Cycle 1's second method of data collection, focus group interview, which consisted of 4 steps. Step 1 (Plan) was the designing of focus group interview questions based on the reflection done on the analysis and interpretation, and the emergence of data from the reflection in Cycle 1 questionnaire. Step 2 (Act) was conducting the focus group interviews, collection and organising of data. Since there were 20 students in the class, they were divided into 5 focus groups, with each focus group made up of 4 students. The focus group interview took place in a consultation room where there was privacy so students felt comfortable when being interviewed. Each session was about 45 minutes to an hour. The method of data collection was open-ended and semi-structured verbal questions. The data collection tool was video recording and note-taking. Step 3 (Develop) was when the data was analysed and interpreted, while Step 4 (Reflect) was the act of reflecting on the analyses and interpretation so that the next course of action could be planned from the emergence of data from the reflection done.

Table 4.2  
*Cycle 1 action research design of the questionnaire*

Action research steps	Description	Method of data collection	Tool of data collection	Duration
1. Plan	Selected 4 MCAF, designed questionnaire			
2. Act	Sent out questionnaire Collected and organised data	Questionnaire	Online questionnaire software	1 hour
3. Develop	Data analysis and interpretation done			
4. Reflect	Reflected on analysis & planned the next cycle from the data that emerged			

Table 4.3

*Cycle 1 action research design of the focus group semi-structured interview method*

Action research steps	Description	Method of data collection	Tool of data collection	Duration
1. Plan	Designed focus group questions based on data that emerged from the reflection done after analysing questionnaire answers.			
2. Act	Conducted focus group interview Collected & organised data	Semi-structured & open-ended verbal questions	Video recording & note-taking	1 hour
3. Develop	Data analysis and interpretation done			
4. Reflect	Reflected on analysis and planned the next cycle from the data that emerged			

### **Design of Questionnaire and Focus Group Interview Protocol**

The researcher prepared the questionnaires and protocol and gave it to a panel that consisted of 4 experts in qualitative research, the researcher's peer observer, and the researcher's supervisor to be verified.

### **Cycle 1 – Questionnaire Before Participating in Intervention Activities**

The students were given a set of questions to answer for the researcher to gauge their basic, fundamental knowledge about culture. This enabled the researcher to use the data to estimate the students' initial understanding of the four MCAF. The questions for each MCAF were categorised into 4 pre-determined themes, namely *knowing*, *seeing*, *experiencing* and *understanding*. Each set of questions asking the students'

knowledge of the MCAF ended by asking them the *reason* that led to their understanding. The four themes were selected for the reasons put forward below:

**Knowing:** According to Storkerson (2009), knowledge is defined as “the sense of self evidence or obviousness, recall, or recognition, whether truthful or mistaken.” This category in the question sought to find out students’ recall of the all the four MCAF, regardless if their recollection correctly defined any of the four MCAF. Prior knowledge is important because it helps learners to remember, reason and acquire new knowledge (Bransford, et al., 2001).

**Seeing:** Visual learning is one of the important learning styles when it comes to education. In Paivio’s Dual Coding Theory (2006), he emphasised on the significance of images and pictures as a way to concretise knowledge. In the questionnaire, the category of seeing was embedded in to ascertain and triangulate the data regarding the students’ knowledge of the MCAFs.

**Experiencing:** The great Czech philosopher, Comenius (1896), insisted that students must be given the opportunity to experience things as part of their learning. “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984). Aural, visual, tactile, olfactory and emotional stimuli are all part of experiential learning (Hansen, 2000). Experience in the questionnaire sought to find out students’ experience in ‘making’ or ‘creating’ any of the four MCAFs as the subject matter is art forms. Experience built the students’ learning (Kolb, 1984) of the MCAF, thus contributing to fortifying students’ understanding of their knowledge of the MCAF.

**Understanding:** This category in the questions about students’ knowledge of MCAFs aimed at finding evidence of their learning about those art forms. Understanding is a little more complex than knowledge in that it requires accurate

interpretation of information, the ability to differentiate between congruence or contradiction between concepts or principles, identifying inconsistencies, or information that is illogical and the ability to put together elements of knowledge into an integrated conceptual system (Rycus & Hughes, 2001). In this research, understanding refers to students' ability to think about the knowledge they had acquired and able to use it in various contexts. This is in line with research question 4 of the present study where the students' understanding of their knowledge of the selected MCAF was investigated, after they had participated in the intervention activities.

**Reason:** Although the students, at this stage of the research, did not fully grasp the cause of their understanding, this question served to make them connect and relate their understanding to the previous observation (seeing), knowledge and experience.

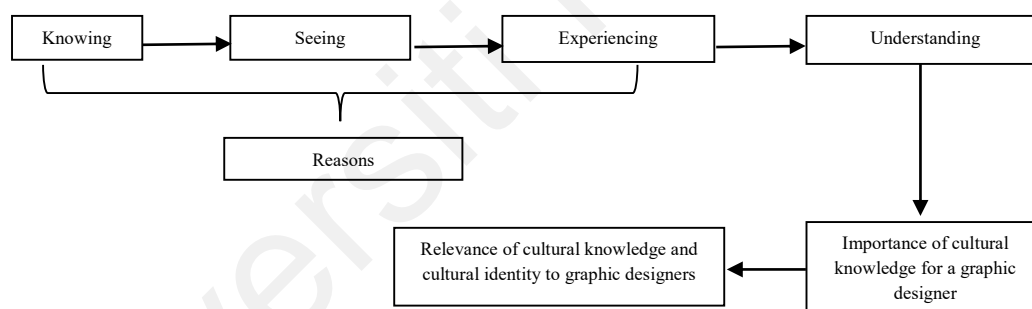


Figure 4.1 Question flow in Cycle 1 questionnaire design

Referring to Figure 4.1, finding out how much and what the students know about each MCAF, their exposure to each MCAF through sight and physical experience were clues that led the researcher to estimate how much the students understood about the cultural meanings behind each MCAF. Students were also required to provide possible answers to reasons (for the researcher to find out if knowing, seeing and experiencing are the reasons) that led them to their understanding of the cultural

meanings of those MCAF. Knowing the possible reasons that created the students' initial understanding of the four MCAF helped the researcher design and plan intervention activities in Cycle 2. Subsequently the students were required to answer if they found having cultural knowledge was important for a graphic designer, as well as what is the relevance cultural knowledge and cultural identity to a graphic designer. These two final questions, as shown in Figure 4.1, were directly related to how much the students understand the cultural meanings of each MCAF.

### **Cycle 1 – Focus Group Interview Before Participating in Intervention Activities**

Focus group interviews were conducted at Cycle 1 on 5 groups of students, after the students had completed the questionnaire, for the researcher to get a clearer and better picture of the students' initial understanding of the four MCAF before any intervention activities took place. Studying the students' body language when they attempted to answer during the focus group interview provided the researcher with information about their tacit knowledge. In addition, when participating in a focus group interview, some answers by other participants jogged the memory of another participant. Moreover, some students provided more articulated answers when they answered verbally, as opposed to written answers. Hence, the questions of the focus group interview were wide and general, as well as a continuation of the questionnaire, so that there was relevance to the previous session. Table 4.4 features the rationale of each question that was asked during the focus group interview. The protocol of the interview is found in Appendix V.

Table 4.4

*Cycle 1's focus group semi-structured interview protocol and rationale*

Focus group semi-structured interview protocol	Rationale
1. To you, cultural meanings is defined as _____	To gain a general idea if the students know what does culture mean.
2. Can you please list the kinds of Malaysian visual cultural art forms that you are familiar with?	To know and ascertain what are the types of MCAF that the students are familiar with.
3. Please share with us how did you learn about these art forms.	To find out the way(s) the students learn of these MCAF.
4. What do you think, as future graphic designers, the understanding in the knowledge of culture and local visual cultural art forms can do for you?	To know what is the importance the students see in having the understanding of their knowledge of local culture as graphic designers.
5. "Understanding Malaysian culture is important to me because I can know myself better as part of the Malaysian society." What is your opinion about this statement?	This indirectly seeks to find out if the students have any cultural sense of identity, and if they can identify with local cultural art forms.

**Cycle 2 – Questionnaire After Participating in Intervention Activities**

After each participation in the visits, talk and workshop, the students were required to answer an open-ended questionnaire that was related to their experience during the visit/talk/workshop, their opinion about the particular MCAF before and after the visit/talk/workshop, their suggestion of ways how each MCAF can be incorporated into design works. They were also asked if they knew any local (Malaysian) design works that were inspired by each of the MCAF, and if yes, to specify what those design works were. Finally, the questionnaire asked the students if they thought that it was important that each MCAF was made more visible with modern design work, and to rationalise their answer. Table 4.45 indicates the rationalisation of each question posed in the questionnaire. This cycle's questionnaire is found in

Appendix VI. The questionnaire was validated by the same panel of 4 experts in qualitative research, the researcher's peer observer, and the researcher's supervisor.

In the questionnaire, students were particularly asked to describe their experience, give opinion and suggestion, and to note their observation. All these are forms of feedback required students to explain and express their thoughts. Feedback is important in education as it allows the teacher to continuously improve teaching and learning quality in a class room (Seldin, 1997; "Using Student Evaluation to Improve Teaching", 1997).

As contemporary Malaysian art consists of many different styles and each artist's different ways of expression (Thomas, 2006), the questionnaire for the students to fill differed from the questionnaire for batik, Mah Meri carvings and *wayang kulit*. The latter three MCAF are traditional, with distinctive styles that are easily recognisable as Southeast Asian form of art (Orr, 1974; Van Roojen, 1993; Soemantri, 1998; Abdul Ghani & Ahmad Ishak, 2012; Legino, 2012; Puvaneswaran Kunasekaran et al., 2013; Joseph, 2014; Siti Sarah Adam Wan et al., 2015; The Batik Guild, 2015). Table 4.6 shows the questionnaire, followed by a rationale, that students had to answer after the visit to Galeri Petronas for the "Crossings: Pushing Boundaries" exhibition of contemporary Malaysian art. This cycle's questionnaire is found in Appendix VII.

Table 4.5

*Cycle 2's open-ended questionnaire and rationale for batik, Mah Meri carvings and wayang kulit*

Open-ended questionnaire	Rationale
1. Describe your experience in the batik workshop/Mah Meri cultural village visit/ <i>wayang kulit</i> talk & exhibition today.	To find out how engaged/disengaged the students are in each activity as this data will help the researcher to plan and/or improve more activities in future.
2. Describe your opinion about batik/Mah Meri carving/ <i>wayang kulit</i> BEFORE the workshop/visit/talk & exhibition today.	To find out the initial opinion of the students so a comparison can be made if there are any changes after the participation.
3. Describe your opinion about batik/Mah Meri carving/ <i>wayang kulit</i> AFTER the workshop/visit/talk & exhibition today.	To find out if there is a change in students' understanding of their knowledge of each of the MCAF.
4. Discuss this: In what ways do you think batik/Mah Meri carving/ <i>wayang kulit</i> can be incorporated into design works?	To encourage students to freely suggest creative ways, in order to find out if they can relate any aspect of their learning of each MCAF to graphic design.
5. Do you know of any local design works that are inspired by batik/Mah Meri carving/ <i>wayang kulit</i> ?	To gauge the awareness of students in the application of any of the 4 MCAF to local designs, as this may be a starting point for them to connect between MCAF and graphic design.
6. If yes, what are those works?	To find out if there are any specific design works the students referred to, as an extension to their answer in the previous question.
7. Do you think it is important that batik/Mah Meri carving/ <i>wayang kulit</i> be made more visible with modern design work?	To know what are the students' thoughts if the application of MCAF in modern design work means there is importance in the MCAF.
8. Why do you think so?	To find out the reason for the students' answer in the previous question.

Table 4.6

*Cycle 2's open-ended questionnaire and rationale for contemporary Malaysian art*

Cycle 2 open-ended questionnaire	Rationale
1. What type of art works did you see in this exhibition?	As a warm-up question for students to first describe what they saw in the exhibition. In a way, to enable them to share their visual experience of the exhibition.
2. What is the nationality of the artists?	To find out if the students take note of the artist's nationality as the background of an artist could be an influence to the kind of works he/she produces.
3. What are the visual characteristics of the art works?	Similar to question 1 but more in-depth so that the data is richer for triangulation, and for the students to pay more attention to details of the art works. The researcher aimed to find out if the students are able to see any significant Malaysian symbolism in any of the art works.
4. Do you think there are meanings behind the art works?	Besides visual characteristics, a work of art normally has some significant meaning behind it. This question is asked to gauge if students view contemporary Malaysian art as more than just its visual outcome.
5. Do you understand the meanings behind the art works? Please give one or two examples to elaborate your answer.	This question is an extension from the previous one so that students can elaborate on their answer. This serves to look into the students' understanding of their knowledge about this MCAF.
6. What kind of identity do you see in the art works? Please give one or two examples to elaborate your answer.	To find out if the students are able to relate the artwork to the artist's cultural identity.
7. How do you associate yourself to all/some of the art works? Elaborate your answer by giving some examples of your experience.	It is pertinent to find out if the students are able to connect with the exhibits of contemporary Malaysian art as the contents in those art work reflect local and assimilated cultures in Malaysia.

**Cycle 2 – Open-themed Project Brief After Participating in Intervention Activities**

This was the third intervention activity in Cycle 2. At this intervention, students were given an open-themed project brief that required them to produce a design outcome as a solution to a design problem, as well as to present their design outcome. The data that emerged from the students' work and presentation served to inform the

researcher if the students had applied the understanding of their knowledge in any of the MCAF and the students' expression of cultural identity after participating in the workshop, visits and talk pertaining to the four MCAF. As graphic design students, to go through the process of design is vital to forming not only a creative mind but an informed one (Razzouk & Shute, 2012). Therefore, it was through requiring the students to produce a design outcome that the researcher ascertained the students' design thinking and was able to see if any understanding of their knowledge in any of the four MCAF and their expression of cultural identity was applied. This cycle's open-themed project is found in Appendix VIII. The project was validated by the same panel of 4 experts in qualitative research, the researcher's peer observer, and the researcher's supervisor.

### **Cycle 3 – Focus Group Interview after Participating in Intervention Activities**

The third cycle of the action research carried out in this study involved focus group interviews, conducted on 4 groups of students, to ascertain if there was a change in the students' understanding of MCAF and their expression of cultural identity after participating in the intervention activities. As per the arrangement of the focus group setting in Cycle 1, Cycle 3 also involved grouping of the students into 4 persons per group. The students were given some open-ended questions so as to allow room for self-expression. Table 4.7 shows the rationalisation of the focus group interview protocol in Cycle 3. This cycle's focus group interview protocol is found in Appendix IX.

Table 4.7

*Cycle 3's focus group interview protocol and rationale*

Cycle 3 focus group interview protocol	Rationale
1. Briefly share about your thoughts and feelings after participating in the workshop, visit, talk and exhibitions revolving around Malaysian cultural art forms.	To understand students' overall thoughts and feelings after participating in the intervention activities. The verbal response in the focus group interview acts as triangulation data.
2. How do you see yourself and what is your identity? Discuss this in relation to the Malaysian culture, after participating in the workshop, visit, talk and exhibitions revolving around Malaysian cultural art forms.	To find out students' sense of cultural identity after participating in the intervention activities.
3. "The workshop, visit, talk and exhibitions revolving around Malaysian visual cultural art forms help me understand Malaysians better in terms of culture and it benefits me as a future designer." Agree? Disagree?	This question aimed to elicit students' understanding of their knowledge of the importance of MCAF so they can communicate better to the locals in terms of design.
4. Do you feel that what you have learnt from Malaysian visual cultural art forms can be added to and used to improve your design knowledge?	To see if the students' understanding of their knowledge of the MCAF had deepened and can be utilised to create more meaning in their design knowledge.

**Cycle 4 – Open-themed Project Without Intervention Activities**

As action research is recursive, although the researcher only intended to carry out 3 cycles at the initial start of the actual study, the emergent findings from the first case of students who were exposed to planned interventions, led to the idea that a similar open-themed project brief should be conducted for another group of students (who were not part of the initial sample of study) as a further extension to investigate in more-depth the cultural identities. The researcher wanted to find out students' understanding of MCAF and their expression of cultural identity in their graphic design work since they had not participated in any intervention activities. The open-themed

project brief for this group of students (refer to Appendix XII) gave a general introduction to a few MCAF and required the students to independently conduct research about MCAF, deciding for themselves which ones are most suited for their design work. The project was discussed and validated by the researcher's peer observer, and the researcher's supervisor.

#### **Cycle 4 – Focus Group Interview After Completing the Open-Themed Project**

After completing the open-themed project without partaking in any intervention activities, a focus group interview was conducted. The focus group interview protocol intended to probe students to find out their expression of cultural identity. The purpose of the probing was to create room for discussion and students would not feel that it was a formal session where there were right or wrong answers. Since there was no intervention activities conducted for this group of students, there were more probing questions in the focus group interview. Table 4.8 features Cycle 4's focus group interview protocol accompanied by rationale. The focus group interview protocol for Cycle 4 is found in Appendix XIII. The interview protocol was validated by the researcher's peer observer, and the researcher's supervisor.

Table 4.8

*Cycle 4's focus group interview protocol and rationale*

Cycle 4 focus group interview protocol	Rationale
1. To you, the term culture means...	To gain a general idea if the students know what culture means.
2. Please list the kinds of Malaysian cultural art forms that you are familiar with.	To know and ascertain the types of MCAF that the students are familiar with.
3. How familiar are you with those art forms?	To know the depth of familiarity the students have on MCAF.
4. Please share with us how did you learn about those art forms.	To find out the way(s) the students learn of these MCAF.
5. Do you understand the cultural meanings that those art forms possess?	To know if the students had any understanding of MCAF without any intervention activities.
6. As future graphic designers, do you see the importance of understanding the knowledge of a culture and its cultural art forms? Why?	To know if students think it is important to have cultural knowledge through MCAF so they can communicate better in terms of design.
7. Do you think that understanding the knowledge of a culture and its cultural art forms will enable you to explore who you are as a member in a particular society? Why?	To see if the students' understanding of their knowledge of the MCAF had deepened and can be utilised to create more meaning in their design knowledge. To investigate the students' expression of cultural identity.
8. In your opinion as a graphic design student, do you think it is important to associate yourself culturally with the society you are in? Why?	To know how the students see themselves culturally in the society. To investigate the students' expression of cultural identity.
9. Have you heard of the term cultural identity?	To find out if the term is familiar to the students.
10. What does that term mean to you?	To know the students' individual understanding of the term, in order to gauge how they perceive themselves and how others perceive them culturally.
11. In the final outcome of your design work for Design Studies 1, it is noticed that you had incorporated some aspects of Malaysian cultural art forms. How would you describe the expression of your cultural identity in that final outcome?	To find out if the students had expressed their cultural identity in the final outcome of their design work.
12. Do you think cultural identity is important to a designer? Why?	To find out if cultural identity is important for the students as future graphic designers.

## Planning and Justification of Cycle 2 Intervention 1 Activities

In Cycle 2, Intervention 1, the researcher infused activities that exposed students to the selected four MCAF, namely batik, *wayang kulit*, Mah Meri masks and contemporary Malaysian art.

For batik, the researcher approached an expert in batik, En. Y, who worked in University of Malaya, to conduct a batik workshop for the researcher's group of students. The workshop consisted of a brief introduction to batik by En. Y. He then further demonstrated to the students the making of batik from the first step of image transfer to fabric to applying colour onto the fabric. Once the demonstration was complete, it was the students' turn to create their own piece of batik. The expertise of En. Y and the central location of University of Malaya were taken into consideration when the researcher planned this activity.

The *wayang kulit* activities involved the students attending a talk by Prof. Dr. GS, an expert in *wayang kulit*, who is currently professionally attached to University of Malaya, and to view *wayang kulit* puppets' exhibition after the talk. The talk gave an introduction to *wayang kulit* in Malaysia, as well as highlighting the threats faced by this form of art, which affected its survival in the contemporary times in Malaysia. The exhibition allowed the students to view *wayang kulit* puppets, personal collections of Prof. Dr. GS, up close to study the details. Similar to the batik workshop, the experience and expertise of Prof. Dr. GS and the centrality of University of Malaya were major considerations when the researcher planned this activity.

The intervention activity involving contemporary Malaysian art was a visit to view an exhibition titled, "Crossings: Pushing Boundaries", in Galeri Petronas, situated in Suria KLCC, Kuala Lumpur. The exhibition was selected because the exhibits were

a culmination of various artists' expression of their life and experience as Malaysians, their view of world issues and events shaped by socio-economic and political development in the 1970s through the 1990s, while exploring the themes of internationalisation and diaspora. It featured the works of 15 Malaysian artists who had been out of Malaysia, with some of them returning home for good. The Petronas Galeri in Suria KLCC was selected because oftentimes the gallery exhibits contemporary Malaysian art and the easy accessibility to the venue by public transport.

Finally, for Mah Meri masks, a visit was made to the Mah Meri cultural village in Pulau Carey, Klang, as the information about this tribe is available there (Mah Meri Cultural Village, 2014). Since the location of the cultural village was quite a far distance from the researcher's workplace (the students' university campus), approximately 46km, the researcher arranged for public transport, a bus, to go with the students to the venue. The researcher contacted the person-in-charge at the cultural village, En. R., to organise and plan this visit. The visit included a tour of the village to view some ritual sites, viewing of wood sculptures and masks, experience in a mock wedding ceremony and trying out some weaving activities. This enabled the students a complete immersion into the culture of the Mah Meri, not only viewing their masks.

### **Critical Partner/Peer Observer**

In Cycle 2 and Cycle 3, the peer observer was involved to observe and critique at the end of the cycles. The role of the peer observer was to provide continuous critical feedback for improvement to be made as the students' learning progresses. More importantly, the critical partner shared his opinion, knowledge and helped evaluate the interpreted and analysed data. This added to the validity of the data.

The peer observer who was involved in this study was the researcher's colleague at the selected private university where the researcher works. The peer was selected due to his experience in the art and design education field and his seniority to the researcher in his position as a Programme Director, as well as his continuous liaison with the professional industry, all of which strongly reflected his ability to give critical response as a peer observer to the researcher's study. A letter of invitation to the peer observer is found in Appendix X.

### **The Preliminary Study**

Prior to engaging in the actual research, the researcher conducted a pilot study to ascertain the feasibility of the research. A selected group of 20 students in the private university that the researcher works in were handed a questionnaire to fill. The sample of the pilot study questionnaire is found in Appendix XI.

From the pilot study, the students' answers reveal that there was a general knowledge about what culture is. All students agreed that culture is important to them, and as a design student, they wish to learn more about the Malaysian culture in terms of its art, design and crafts. This showed feasibility in conducting the current research as the students' answers indicate interest in learning more about MCAF.

18 out of 20 of the students disagreed to the statement "I do not feel it is important to know much of the Malaysian culture in terms of its art, design and crafts because we are living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where cultures are assimilated. Therefore, traditional, local culture is a thing of the past." This brought about the notion that a lesson infusing MCAF in the contents would engage the graphic design students in learning, contributing to the current research's feasibility.

The next question asked about students' levels of exposure to Malaysian culture in categories of art, design and craft. Table 4.9 summarises the number of answers for each level in each category. As seen from the table, the highest number of answers lies in the *somewhat* level, meaning students have a significant enough exposure to Malaysian art, design and crafts, enabling the researcher to set a plausible stage to begin the study.

Table 4.9  
*Summary of answers for students' exposure in each category in the pilot study questionnaire (question 5)*

Level of exposure	Art (e.g. painting)	Design (e.g. packaging)	Craft (e.g. basketry)
Extremely a lot	2	1	1
Much	5	4	4
Somewhat	6	10	9
A little bit	5	5	5
None at all	2	0	1

Table 4.10 features the number of students' exposure to Malaysian art, design and crafts in various ways. The students were allowed to select more than one way of exposure. It is worth to note that item no. 6, "Personal initiative in attending design talks/events" received the lowest number of answers, which brings about the feasibility of intervention activities in this research.

Table 4.10

*Summary of number of students' ways exposure to Malaysian art, design and crafts (pilot study questionnaire question no. 6)*

No.	Ways of exposure	Numbers
1.	Learned from school	14
2.	Learned from college/university	13
3.	Home education	7
4.	Personal visits to Malaysian art galleries	11
5.	Personal visits to Malaysian craft markets	9
6.	Personal initiative in attending design talks/events	4
7.	Reading information from the Internet	14
8.	Reading information from published materials such as books, magazines and journals	10
9.	Watching television programmes	13
10.	Through daily conversations with peers	12

Table 4.11

*Summary of number of students' answers to their courses' outline of contents (pilot study questionnaire question no. 7)*

No.	Outline of Content in the Students' Current Courses	Numbers
1.	Visual materials such as magazines, patterns, photographs in the Malaysian context	9
2.	Traditional Malaysian art forms	2
3.	Local Malaysian discourse	4
4.	Topics that are gathered from Western contents	17
5.	Philosophy and theory from Western thoughts	15
6.	Sources of ideas and research that origin [sic] from the West	15

Table 4.11 features the number of students' answers to the various content outline found in their current graphic design courses. The students were allowed to select more than one outline of content. The high number of answers in items 4 to 6 reinforces the feasibility of this research.

Table 4.12 features the number of students agreeing and disagreeing to two statements. The first is about them gaining of knowledge of Malaysian culture in terms of art, design and crafts in their current graphic design studies. The subsequent statement is a suggestion that Malaysian culture in terms of art, design and crafts should be included more into their graphic design studies. As the number of answers can testify, a majority of the class agreed that there is minimal knowledge learned about MCAF and would like to have graphic design course to be infused with MCAF. This is, again, another indication for the feasibility of the current research.

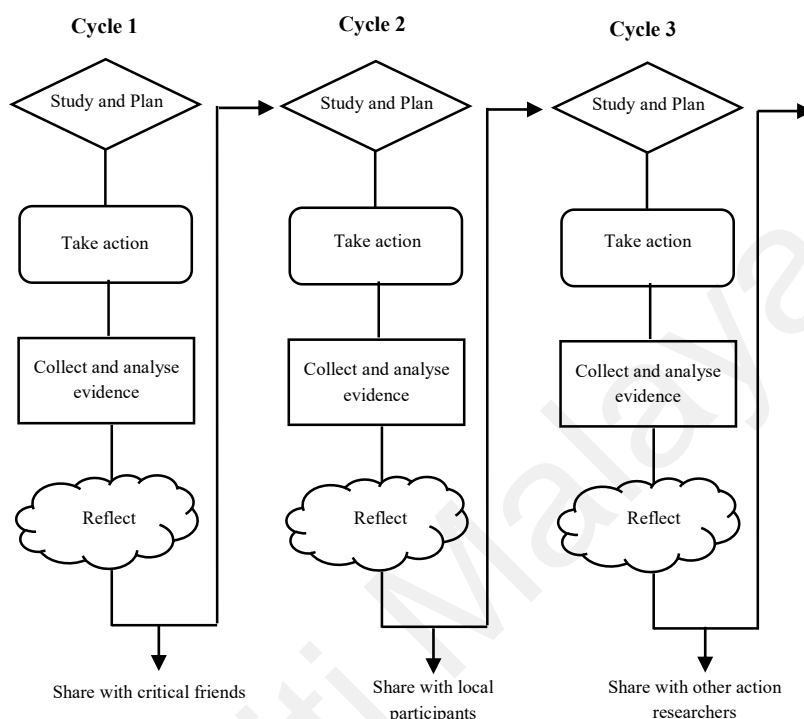
Table 4.12  
*Summary of number of students' answers to questions 8 and 9 in the pilot study questionnaire*

No.	Statements	Agree	Disagree
1.	I can say that the design programme that I am studying in, I gain minimum knowledge of Malaysian culture in terms of art, design and crafts.	15	5
2.	I would like to suggest that the design programme that I am studying in include more Malaysian cultural education from the perspectives of art, design and crafts.	16	4

### The Actual Study

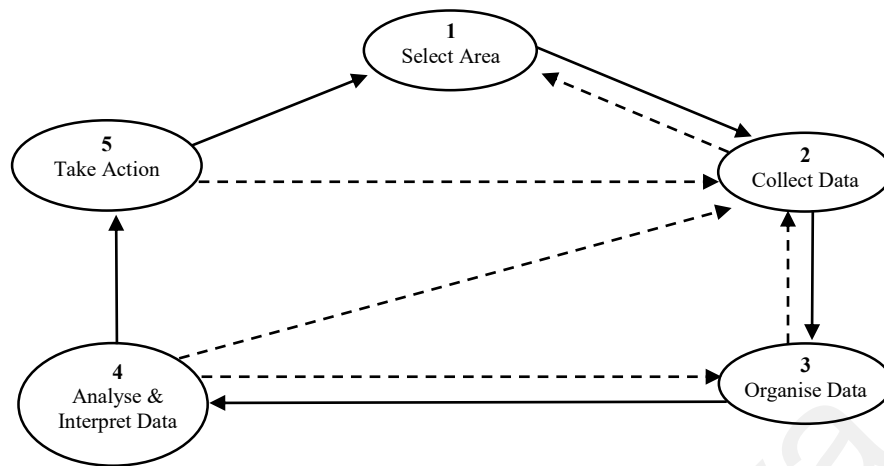
The action research design of this study adapted from both Calhoun's Action Research Cycle (1994) and Riel's Action Research Model (2016). Riel's action research model in Figure 4.2 shows the iterative process of action research. There are three cycles shown in Riel's model. After each cycle, reflection is done with relevant stakeholders of the research, to create improvement for the next cycle. This shows that the practice of research is not a single approach but the interconnectedness of various forces that empower personal, professional and social change (Riel, 2016). Similar to this study, to make a change in the graphic design education involving culture, it is the

collaborative effort among the students, the lecturer and peer observer. The change will in turn produce deeper understanding of the more complex social systems in culture.



*Figure 4.2 Riel's Action Research Model*  
 Source: Mertler, C. A. (2012). *Action Research: Improving Schools and Empowering Educators*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). USA: Sage Publications.

Calhoun's action research cycle as shown in Figure 4.3, although has its own outlook, is not very different from Riel's in that both seek to improve on current practices in the workplace and both indicate research as a reiterative process that contains the 4 basic steps of planning, acting, developing and reflecting. According to Calhoun (2002), action research calls for educators to reflect upon their practice and its context, explore ideas and make comparisons with their current practice, take necessary steps to make improvements and study the changes in themselves, students and colleagues.



*Figure 4.3 Calhoun's Action Research Cycle.*  
 Source: Mertler, C. A. (2012). *Action Research: Improving Schools and Empowering Educators*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). USA: Sage Publications.

In describing the action research model of this present study, the adaptation of Calhoun's and Riel's action research models is further elaborated in the following statement. Calhoun's model shows 5 steps in an action research cycle. The cyclical model was adapted with some replacements made. Step 1 is Select Area, Step 2 is Collect Data, Step 3 is Organise Data, Step 4 is Analyse and Interpret Data and Step 5 is Take Action. These steps were replaced by the researcher to adapt to the 4 steps in action research, namely Plan, Act, Develop and Reflect. Calhoun's Step 1 Select Area was replaced with Plan, Step 2 Collect Data and Step Organise Data were Act, Step 4 Analyse and Interpret Data was Develop and Step 5 Take Action was replaced by Reflect.

The 4 steps in action research: 1) Plan, 2) Act, 3) Develop and 4) Reflect (Mertler & Charles, 2011) can be found in each cycle of the research methodology in this study, which will be further elaborated in the subsequent paragraphs in this chapter.

## Cycle 1

Two different kinds of data collection methods and tools were employed to elicit information that aimed to answer research questions 1 and 2 – students' initial understanding of their knowledge in the four selected MCAF and possible causes that led to the initial understanding, before any intervention activities took place. Cycle 1's data collection method utilised an open-ended questionnaire, and semi-structured focus group interviews.

Step 1 (Planning) in Cycle 1 saw to the design of the questionnaire. A set of open-ended questions related to culture, its importance and relevance, were asked to gauge an overall idea of the students' initial understanding in their knowledge of the selected four selected MCAF and what possible causes led to that initial understanding, before any intervention activities took place. The open-ended questionnaire aimed to leave some space for students to express their thoughts in the area of understanding their knowledge of the four selected MCAF, which can be rather personal and answers may vary from one individual to another (Appendix IV). Setting open-ended questions also enabled the researcher to have alternatives and options on how to move on to the next stage of the interview, depending on the situation and data that emerged (Mertler, 2012).

The questionnaire utilised an online questionnaire software, Google Forms, where the data was automatically collected and saved online after the students had completed the questionnaire. Step 2 (Act) saw to the administration of the questionnaire for students to complete online. The approximate duration given to them to complete the questionnaire was 1 hour. The data that was collected was organised and Step 3 (Develop) was where the collected data was analysed and interpreted. Step 4 (Reflect)

was where the analyses and interpretations were reflected upon by the researcher and the next action was then planned. Questions 7, 12, 17 and 22 of the questionnaire (refer to Appendix IV) yielded a “No” answer due to the minimal exposure the students have from their current studies. Questions 8, 13, 18 and 23 (refer to Appendix IV) were not fully answered as the students did not pinpoint, by writing and thinking on their own, the causes that led to their initial understanding of the four selected MCAF. The results from the questionnaire assisted the researcher to conduct a follow-up focus group interviews with the students to gather more in-depth data.

Still at Cycle I, the focus group interview protocol (refer to Appendix V) were extensions of questions 7, 12, 17 and 22, and questions 8, 13, 18 and 23 as the data from the questionnaire were not clear enough to be relied on alone as data. A general, small number of open-ended focus group interview protocol, where “base” questions were then set, enabling students to have the freedom to express their thoughts, not bound by structured questions that limit their expression (Creswell, 2012). The questions only served to guide them, not steering them to any particular direction. The focus group protocol is found in Appendix V.

The students were divided into a group of four, a typical and comfortable number for focus groups (Creswell, 2012), in 5 focus group interview sessions. The researcher’s role was to facilitate the session by asking semi-structured questions that encouraged the students to elaborate on their own and learn from each other’s answers. Each focus group interview session lasted about 1 hour. The data collection tools were video recording and note-taking, to better capture the students’ answers about their cultural knowledge. According to Swidler (1986), our repeating habits, skills and styles are shaped by cultural influences. Culture is not easily understood as merely a phenomenon that happens in life. There are myriads of cultural symbols that each

individual member of a culture may have varying degrees of interpreting. The video recording enabled the researcher to identify particular students' answers and to replay the recordings to analyse the answers.

An important role of the focus group interviews in this study was that it enabled students to further elaborate the answers they gave in this cycle's questionnaire. Focus group was chosen as the data collection method because students could share more when they are in a group. "...interactions among the focus group participants may be extremely informative due to the tendency for people to feed off each other's comments." (Mertler, 2012, p.126). Furthermore, when participating in answering, the students would learn from each other. This reflects on Social Learning theory where learning takes place when there is social interaction (Tracey & Morrow, 2006).

The questionnaire answers and the transcripts from the focus group interviews in Cycle 1 acted as triangulation so that there was more credibility, trustworthiness and consistency (Mertler, 2012) in the data collected before the next course of action was taken at Cycle 2. "It is important to note that 'triangulation' does not mean that the researcher is using three (as in "tri") sources of data; it simply means that there is more than one source of data." (Mertler, 2012, p.12).

After analysing and interpreting the data from Cycle 1, Cycle 2 was planned to find answers to research question 3 – intervention activities that were required for a graphic design course to incorporate the four selected MCAF. The processes of action research in Cycle 1, as described above, is featured in Figure 4.4.

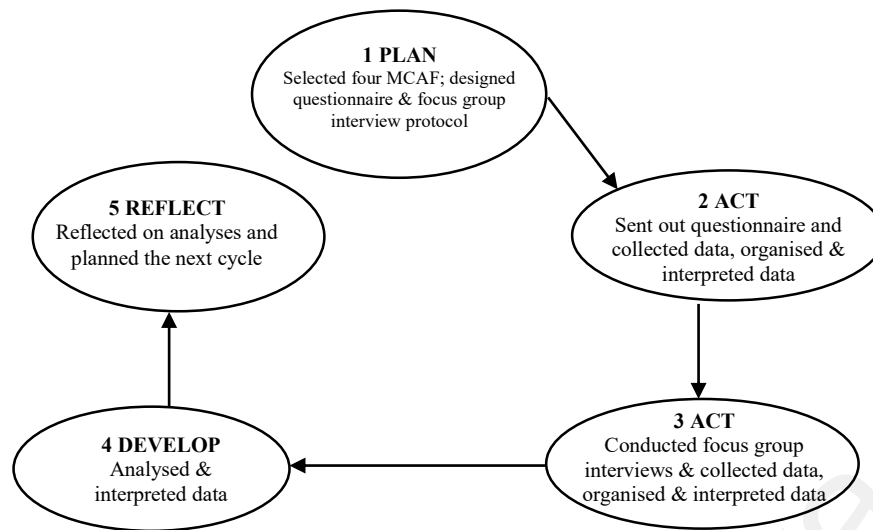


Figure 4.4 Action research Cycle 1

## Cycle 2 - Intervention 1

Cycle 2 in this study consisted of three intervention activities. Intervention 1 were activities that incorporated the four selected MCAF. The activities were to view an exhibition of contemporary Malaysian art; participate in a batik workshop; a visit to Mah Meri cultural village; and finally attended a talk on *wayang kulit*, as well as to view some *wayang kulit* puppets exhibits there. Studies in the similar area, culture in art and design education, have shown that class visits are pertinent to students' gathering of preliminary information for exposure and learning (Tavin & Hausman, 2004; Badrul Isa, 2006; Kokko & Dillon, 2010; Hadjiyanni, 2014). The rationalisation for these activities were explained previously. The students filled out a questionnaire after each of the intervention activity at Cycle 2.

For batik, a workshop was started off by a brief introduction given by En. Y. The students were shown how batik was made from the first step of image transfer to fabric to applying colour onto the fabric. After the demonstration was over, the students created their own batik. They were each given a piece of white cloth, the standard size

of a handkerchief. They could choose from various existing designs that were provided by En. Y. Once the choice was made, they drew the design onto the white cloth. Wax was then applied onto the design through a canting (a delicate holder that channels melted, liquid wax through a fine nozzle onto a surface guided by the hand of the batik maker). When the wax dried, the students applied colour to the cloth and washed off the

As for *wayang kulit*, the students attended a talk by Prof. Dr. GS, an expert in the art form. The talk provided an introduction to *wayang kulit* in Malaysia, as well as highlighting the threats faced by this form of art, which affected its survival in the contemporary times in Malaysia. The students then viewed the *wayang kulit* puppets at an up close range in an exhibition after the talk.

A visit to view an exhibition titled, “Crossings: Pushing Boundaries” was the intervention activity involving contemporary Malaysian art. The students were free to move around on their own in the art gallery to take their time to view and contemplate on the art works, to discuss among themselves their discovery and to record their viewing of the art works through photography and sketches.

Lastly, a visit was made to the Mah Meri cultural village in Pulau Carey, (Carey Island) Klang (a town in the state of Selangor where the study was conducted) for students to learn about Mah Meri culture and their well-known masks. The researcher and students were greeted by the village guide, En. R, who gave an introductory speech about the history and lifestyle of the Mah Meri. Thereafter, En. R. brought the group to tour around the village to view some ritual sites, view wood sculptures and masks, experience in a mock wedding ceremony and try out some weaving activities.

Step 2 (Act) was where the visits and workshop of the abovementioned were conducted. The researcher observed the students' reaction, body language and participation during the course of the activities as a form of data collection and to study the data. Step 3 (Develop) in Intervention 1 activities was where the researcher, after studying the data, develop relevant questions for a second open-ended questionnaire as Intervention 2. This led to Step 4 (Reflect), where reflection was done to set the ground for planning for the next course of action in the research, namely Intervention 2.

## **Cycle 2 - Intervention 2**

Step 1 (Plan) in Intervention 2 was where the researcher designed an open-ended questionnaire to find out the students' experience, thoughts and opinion after every activity they partook in Intervention 1. The students were tasked to answer the questionnaire regarding their experience participating in the activities, their opinion before and after each activity, and to suggest ways in which each MCAF can be incorporated into design works. They were also asked if they knew any local (Malaysian) design works that were inspired by each of the MCAF, and if yes, to specify what those design works were. Finally, the questionnaire asked the students if they thought that it was important that each MCAF is made more visible with modern design work, and to rationalise their answer. These questions were asked to elicit fundamental knowledge of the students regarding the four MCAF. Cycle 2, Intervention 2 open-ended questionnaires are found in Appendix VI and Appendix VII.

Step 2 (Act) saw to the sending out of the questionnaire for the students to answer, and to collect and study the data. Step 3 (Develop) was where the researcher, after studying the students' data in the questionnaire, developed a relevant project brief

for Intervention 3. This led to Step 4 (Reflect), where reflection was done to set the ground for planning for the next course of action in the research, which was Intervention 3.

### **Cycle 2 - Intervention 3**

Step 1 (Plan) in Intervention 3 was where the researcher designed a graphic design two-week project with an open theme to be given to the students to complete. The two weeks were given because in the graphic design process, time is essential for research, conceptualising ideas, developing those ideas, finalising them and to produce an outcome. A general brief about the project was designed for students so they had a rough guideline on what to do in this project. A sample of the brief for this project is found in Appendix VIII.

Step 2 (Act) saw to the delegation of the project for the students to complete. They were to apply their understanding of their knowledge of some or all of the four MCAF, in any way they deem fit and justifiable, as long as there was a visual outcome that justified the students' understanding of their knowledge in any or all of the MCAF. Some students chose to apply their understanding in a direct or symbolic manner, depending on their individual interpretation of the MCAF. "Understanding how the visual both produces and represents culture is the reason attending to the visual forms of representation and communication is important for creativity and education." (Jewitt, 2008, p.9)

In the project brief, the final design outcome could be in any format, such as poster design, interactive design, web interface design, packaging design, signage design and much more, that the students saw matching to their understanding of the

visual cultural art forms. The final outcome were accompanied by a short written rationale that described the final outcome and explained how it was related and influenced by the students' understanding of the cultural art forms. The students were also required to write a reflection of what they had learnt in this class.

The final outcome of the project, which some were in digital while others were in manual formats, depending on the students' choice, served as data that the researcher collected and organised for analyses and interpretation. The students' presentation of the open themed project outcome were to both classmates and the researcher. The softcopy of the presentation slides, containing the rationale and reflection, also served as data that the researcher collected and organised for analyses and interpretation.

Step 3 (Develop) was where the researcher analysed and interpreted the contents of the students' presentation slides, through studying them for further analysis and interpretation. The completion of analysing and interpreting led to Step 4 (Reflect), where reflection was done to set the ground for planning for the next course of action in the research.

The researcher's peer observer studied the proposal and findings of this study. As the focus of action research is to improve on practice to help others, peer observers are helpful as their role will be to observe the researcher conducting research or gather data on the researcher's behalf. The peer observers also play a part in giving feedback to the researcher whether the researcher is influencing students' learning (McNiff, 2014). The peer observer's comments were taken note of for further analysis and interpretation.

The triangulation of data was found in data from Cycle 2's Interventions 1, 2 and 3 for more reliable analysis and interpretation to be done so that more substantial

focus group interview questions for Cycle 3 could be planned and designed. Figure 4.5 shows the action research Cycle 2 of this study.

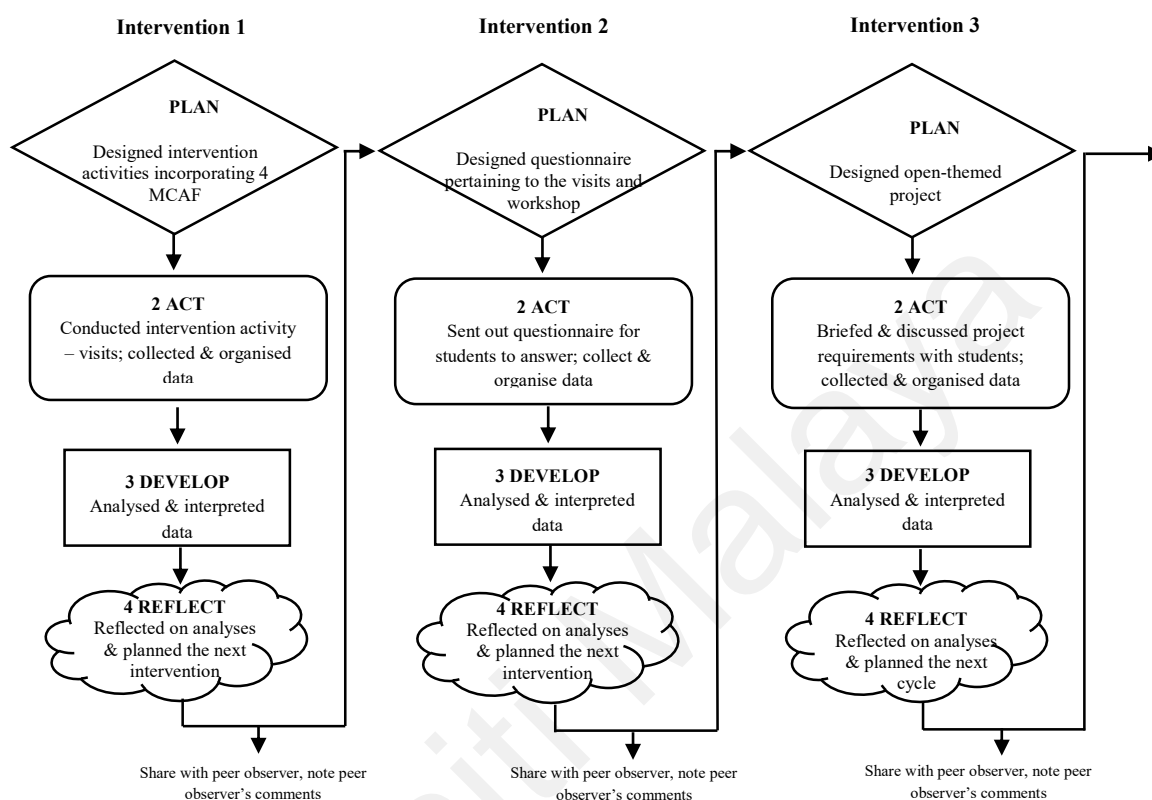


Figure 4.5 Action research Cycle 2

### Cycle 3

Cycle 3 aimed at answering research questions 4 and 5a, studied the students' understanding in their knowledge of the selected four MCAF and their expression of cultural identity after participating in intervention activities in Cycle 2.

For Step 1 (Plan) in Cycle 3, the researcher designed the focus group interview protocol to elicit information from the students pertaining to their understanding in their knowledge of the selected four MCAF and their expression of cultural identity after participating in intervention activities in Cycle 2.

Step 2 (Act) was where 4 focus group interviews were conducted. The focus group interviews added more validity and reliability to the data as it acted as a stimulated recall session after the students had completed all intervention activities. The recall session aimed to gauge the students' response to their initial answers regarding their understanding of the selected four MCAF and their expression of cultural identity after they had participated in the intervention activities. The stimulated recall was included in one of the questions in this cycle's focus group interview. The researcher utilised the video recording conducted in Cycle 1's data collection. The method to collect the stimulated recall data was video recording for further recalls and study, and note-taking to compare with data collected in Cycle 1. Consent was given by the students for the researcher to utilise the video and other forms that the data was collected (refer to Appendix XVII).

Step 3 (Develop) was where the researcher analysed and interpreted the data. The peer observer's comments were taken note of for further analysis and interpretation. After that was completed, Step 4 (Reflect) was where reflection was done to set the ground for planning for the next action research. Figure 4.6 shows the action research Cycle 3 of this study. Cycle 3's focus group interview protocol is found in Appendix IX.

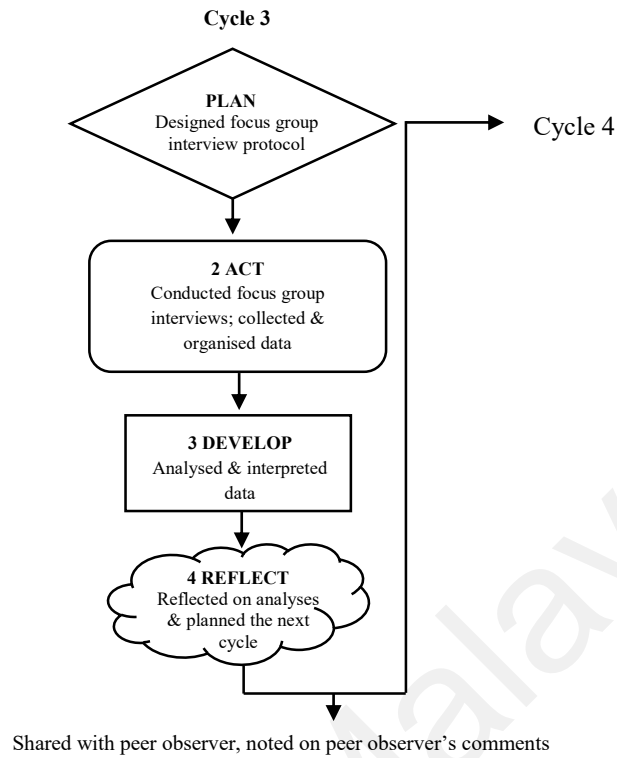
#### **Cycle 4**

Cycle 4 was aimed at answering research question 5b – investigating students' expression of cultural identity without any intervention activities.

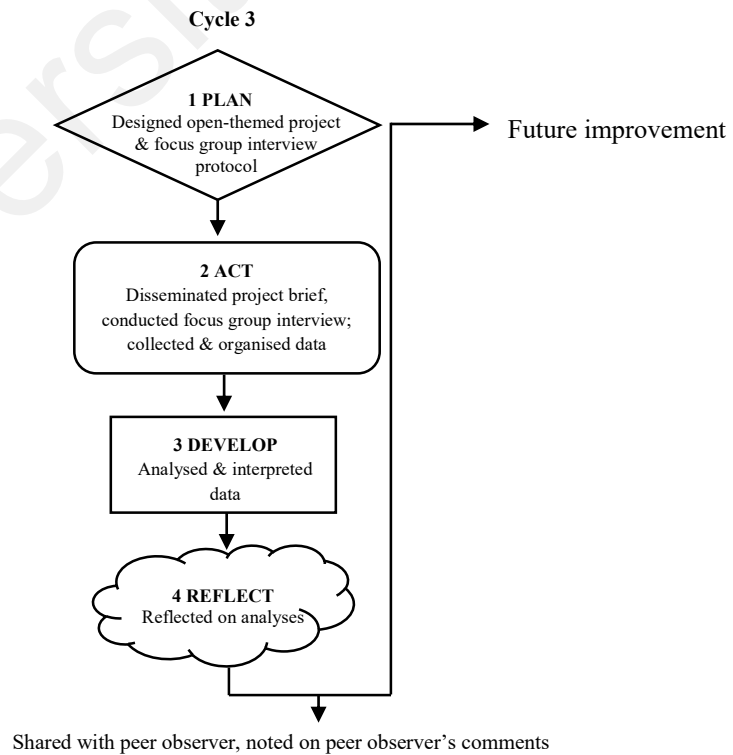
For Step 1 (Plan) in this cycle, the researcher designed an open-themed project brief that is similar to the one in Cycle 3 but without any intervention activities conducted prior to disseminating this brief to the students. The project brief for Cycle 4 is found in Appendix XII. The researcher also designed a focus group protocol (refer to Appendix XIII) for this cycle to elicit information from the students pertaining to their understanding in their knowledge MCAF and their sense of cultural identity without participating in intervention activities.

Step 2 (Act) saw to the dissemination of the open-themed project brief and collection of students' final design work as data. This step also involved one focus group interview being conducted after the final design work had been collected. The interview was video-recorded, with consent given by the students. The transcript of this focus group interview, with the consent, is found in Appendix XVI.

At Step 3 (Develop), the researcher analysed and interpreted the data. At the final step, Step 4 (Reflect) reflection was done for the next action research. Figure 4.7 shows the action research Cycle 4 of this study.



*Figure 4.6 Action research Cycle 3*



*Figure 4.7 Action research Cycle 4*

Figure 4.8 in the following shows the four continuous cycles of action research, found in this study that contained the four necessary steps of Plan, Act, Develop and Reflect. The data that emerged from the Reflect step at the end of every cycle provided information for the next action plan that was carried out.

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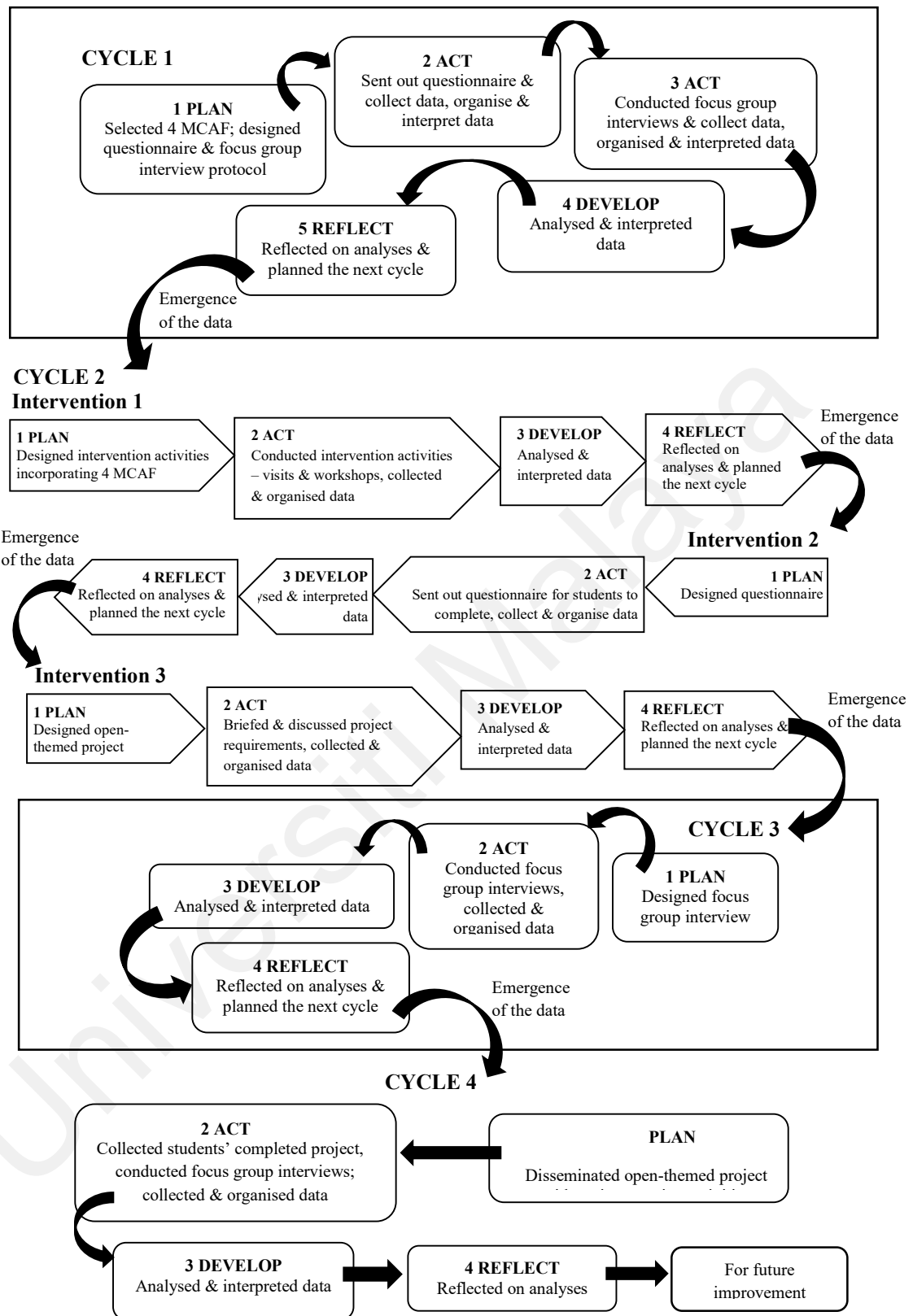


Figure 4.8 Action research model of this study

## Data Analysis

Table 4.13  
*Data Analysis*

Research Question	Data Collection Technique	Analysis of Data
1. What is the initial understanding of graphic design students in a selected local private university in their knowledge of a) batik? b) <i>wayang kulit</i> ? c) Mah Meri masks? d) contemporary Malaysian art?	Questionnaire Conducted focus group interviews Video recording	Qualitative data analysis: Constant comparison method between the transcripts of the interviews and the answers from the questionnaires.
2. What are the possible reasons that could have led to the initial understanding of graphic design students in a selected local private university in their knowledge of a) batik? b) <i>wayang kulit</i> ? c) Mah Meri masks? d) contemporary Malaysian art?	Questionnaire Conducted focus group interviews Video recording	Qualitative data analysis: Constant comparison method between the transcripts of the interviews and the answers from the questionnaires
3. What intervention activities are required for a graphic design course incorporating the Malaysian cultural art forms of batik, <i>wayang kulit</i> , Mah Meri masks and contemporary Malaysian art?	Intervention activities were planned based upon the results from questions 1 and 2	
4. What is the understanding of graphic design students in a selected local private university in their knowledge of four selected MCAF after participating in intervention activities?	Open-ended questionnaire Conducted focus group interviews Project Artifact	Qualitative data analysis: Constant comparison method between the transcripts of the interviews and the answers from the questionnaires Content analysis of the artifacts
5. What are the graphic design students' expression of cultural identity a) with MCAF intervention activities? b) without MCAF intervention activities?	Open-ended questionnaire Conducted focus group interviews Open-themed project artifacts, students' reflection and rationale of their design work.	Qualitative data analysis: Constant comparison method between the transcripts of the interviews and the answers from the questionnaires Content analysis of the artifacts

It is important for the researcher to provide an example of data analysis here in order to emphasise on how data is triangulated to answer to the research questions. As

the present study explored a group of students' expression of cultural identity, the data analysis example will focus on research question 5.

The pre-determined themes of *knowing*, *seeing*, *experiencing* and *understanding* were matched to relevant data found in the questionnaire of Cycle 2 (Intervention 2) and focus group interview of Cycles 1 and 3. These were then triangulated with the data from the open-themed project of Cycle 2 (Intervention 3). The students' expression of cultural identity were explored by the researcher within the contexts of visual, conceptual and cultural. The themes of *seeing*, *knowing* and *experiencing* coincide with visual. This is because *seeing* relates to direct engagement with sighting of shapes, colours and other visual qualities of MCAF. *Knowing* is recognising the visual qualities of the MCAF and *experiencing* refers to the hands-on experience the students had on the MCAF. As for the theme *understanding*, it coincides with conceptual and cultural aspects because understanding is cognizance taking place at a deeper level where students interpret, show appreciation and assimilate their knowledge.

Therefore, the data that refers to *seeing*, *knowing* and *experiencing* were triangulated with students' expression of cultural identity when the researcher explored in the context of visual. When it came to exploring their expressions of cultural identity through conceptual and cultural aspects, the open-themed project artifacts were triangulated with data that referred to *understanding*.

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility of the Research**

As there were 4 cycles of research in this study that yielded a rich pool of data from 4 sets of questionnaire, 3 focus group interviews, 15 students' design work from the open-themed projects, students' rationale and reflection, the constant triangulation by comparison and contrasting of data had rendered this research credible and trustworthy. In addition to that is peer advice and reviews, supervisor's guidance, peer observer's critical observation and feedback from an Associate Professor of research. In action research, triangulation is important for credibility, trustworthiness and consistency of the data (Mertler, 2012). In addition, the peer observer's critical response provided more than one perspective to the intervention activities that were carried out. This, too, added to the credibility of the research.

The research methodology of this study had been validated by the Associate Professor and the researcher's peer observer, with excerpts of their feedback are featured in the following. The feedback in full is found in Appendix XVIII and Appendix XIX, respectively.

*"Through the action research that Ms. Yip has explored with her classes, she is exposing the benefits and effects of looking to one's own culture with the same rigor and discipline but with a more culturally sensitive focus. Her research design offers many possible benefits and outcomes that allow students to incorporate the local since it requires them to become aware and focused on what is around them. It not only values their own culture but offers a context for a wider scope of design thinking and making."* (Associate Professor's feedback, 17 April 2018, SFB).

*“The research design seems to be clearly set up to answer the research questions and the methodology involves multiple sources of evidence giving credence to its reliability. The research design seems to consist of valid topic areas that are contextual to local culture and identity and as such the research designed can be considered relatively valid. No research of this type, action research, can be completely free of unknown contributing factors. Having said that, the steps taken in the methodology seem sufficiently valid to answer the research question. (Peer observer’s feedback, 13 April 2018, VN).*

Through the researcher’s experience as a graphic design educator, the infusion of cultural art forms is not found in the Malaysian graphic design class room. Exposure to cultural art forms could encourage students to derive ideas from their surrounding culture and to explore and express their cultural identity through their design work (Stultz, 2006; Marshall, 2007; Khoury & Khoury, 2009; Berry & Candis, 2013; Munday et al., 2014; Hadjiyanni, 2014). This research is therefore valid as it pertains to real graphic design class room scenario where students, when applying their knowledge in graphic design principles that are adopted from Bauhaus teachings, would be able to learn more about their own culture, and question about their cultural identity (Lin, 1999; Hamdy, 2010). From there, designs that they create in future would not be only a culmination of design principles or a mirror of Western designs but expressions of cultural identity, filled with cultural meanings that would communicate more effectively to the local audience.

## Chapter summary

There were 4 cycles of research in this study. Briefly,

(i) Cycle 1 aimed at finding out students' initial understanding in their knowledge of the selected MCAF, what were the possible reasons that lead to that initial understanding and what was their sense of cultural identity before participating in any intervention activities;

(ii) Cycle 2 began with intervention activities designed according to what Cycle 1 revealed, pertaining to the four selected MCAF and infused into a graphic design course. The data from the intervention activities allowed the researcher to plan for follow-up activities within Cycle 2. At the end of Cycle 2, the data collected was analysed to determine the students' evolving understanding as well as their expression of cultural identity after the activities;

(iii) Based upon the outcomes of Cycle 2's intervention activities in relation to students' understanding and expression of cultural identity, Cycle 3 followed up with a focus group interview. The outcome of this cycle once again investigated how the understanding and their expression of cultural identity had further evolved in relation to the four selected MCAF.

(iv) Cycle 4 was conducted in the form of a similar open-themed project but without intervention activities, and a focus group interview, to find out about students' understanding of MCAF and the expression of their cultural identity.

## **Chapter 5 Findings and Discussion**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the findings through the pre-determined themes discussed in the previous chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to address the research questions identified in Chapter 1. This study aimed to determine the initial understanding of a group of graphic design students in their knowledge of four Malaysian cultural art forms (MCAF), namely batik, *wayang kulit*, Mah Meri masks and contemporary Malaysian art and to find out what were the possible reasons that led to their initial understanding. Subsequently, this research sought to bring about changes in graphic design class room through planning and designing of intervention activities pertaining to the four MCAF. After the students had participated in those activities, the researcher's final objective was to ascertain if there was any change in their understanding, as well as to investigate the students' expression of cultural identity after they had participated in those intervention activities. Finally, the researcher set out to investigate students' expression of cultural identity without any intervention activities.

### **Students' Initial Understanding of MCAF, Reasons that Led to that Understanding and the Need for Intervention Activities.**

The first research question sought to find out the initial understanding of graphic design students in a selected local private university in their knowledge of batik, *wayang kulit*, Mah Meri masks and contemporary Malaysian art. The data collected from Cycle 1, (a focus group interview and triangulated with data from a subsequent questionnaire), provided the researcher with the possible reasons that led

to the students' initial understanding of the said MCAF, which is the second research question. The emerging answers to research questions 1 and 2, led the researcher to plan relevant intervention activities pertaining to the four MCAF, thus answering research question 3.

In addition to the data collected from Cycle 1, relevant data from Cycles 2 and 3 provided ancillary support for the researcher to have a better grasp of the students' initial understanding of the four MCAF, as well as the possible reasons that led to that initial understanding. This triangulation of data was possible because, each questionnaire that was sent to the students after every activity they had participated in Cycle 2 asked about their opinion before and after they participated in those activities. In this regard, relevant data from Cycle 2 was used to triangulate with data from Cycle 1 in order to fortify the researcher's answers to research questions 1 and 2. Having this knowledge guided the researcher to plan and design intervention activities to fill the initial understanding gap. Initial understanding, in the context of this study, refers to the students' current comprehension of the MCAF and how they relate to culture and meanings.

Furthermore, although Cycle 3 was conducted mainly to find out students' understanding of their knowledge in the four MCAF and to determine their expression of cultural identity after participating in the intervention activities, some of the data from Cycle 3 focus group interview also dwelled a little on the students' understanding and their expression of cultural identity before the intervention activities participation. Therefore, relevant data as such from Cycle 3 was also included in answering research questions 1 and 2.

The intervention activities were discussed with the peer observer, VN, who was the Programme Director of the researcher. VN viewed the researcher's

intervention activities as appropriate and suitable in providing opportunities for graphic design students to express their cultural identity when addressing the problem of Bauhaus-centric designs.

*“The methods used seemed rigorous, valid and reliable. Students were interviewed to gauge prior knowledge, then exposed to field trips and workshops and later interviewed to gauge their levels of knowledge acumen. A project was then prescribed to see if students would display evidence of exposure. Another round of interviews were conducted to understand their various approaches.”* (Peer observer’s comments, 12 February 2018, VN)

The discussion of research questions 1 and 2 are categorised into four pre-determined themes – **know**, **seen**, **experience**, and **understanding cultural meanings** based upon the questionnaire that was used to elicit data.

**Knowing** refers to “the sense of self evidence or obviousness, recall, or recognition, whether truthful or mistaken.” (Storkerson, 2009) This theme in the question seeks to find out students’ recall of the all the four MCAF, regardless if their recollection correctly defines any of the four MCAF. Prior knowledge is important because they help learners to remember, reason and acquire new knowledge (Bransford, et al., 2001). As the data emerged, some of the initial knowledge of the MCAF that the students’ possessed, were through hands-on experience learnt in school. This form of knowledge can relate to the Spiral Curriculum’s enactive mode of learning, where learners learn through various motor tasks.

**Seeing**, in the context of visual learning is one of the important learning styles when it comes to education. According to Paivio (1969), images and pictures are significant to learning as it is a way to concretise knowledge. This is supported by

Santoro's (2014) point of view that visuals play a role in graphic design education. In addition, in Bruner's Spiral Curriculum theory, the iconic mode of learning where learners to learn through the help of visuals. In the questionnaire, the category of seeing is embedded in to ascertain and triangulate the data regarding the students' knowledge of the MCAF.

When students are given the opportunity to **experience**, their learning is strengthened (Comenius, 1896). Aural, visual, tactile, olfactory and emotional stimuli are all part of experiential learning, which are involved as a process of learning, created by transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984; Hansen, 2000). The experience emphasised in the questionnaire focused on students' experience in 'making' or 'creating' any of the four MCAF as the subject matter is art forms.

The theme of **understanding** sought to find evidence of students' learning about the MCAF. Understanding is a little more complex than knowledge in that it requires accurate interpretation of information, the ability to differentiate between congruence or contradiction between concepts or principles, identifying inconsistencies, or information that is illogical and the ability to put together elements of knowledge into an integrated conceptual system (Rycus & Hughes, 2001). In the Spiral Curriculum, symbolic mode of learning can be related to this theme of understanding because the students will have to think symbolically and use their knowledge of MCAF to analyse.

In the subsequent section, the students' initial understanding of each of the MCAF will be discussed according to the abovementioned pre-determined themes.

## Batik

As shown in Table 5.1, the data from the questionnaire showed that a majority of the sample, 18 of them, **knew** what these art forms are. Whether they had **seen** batik before, 14 answered “Yes”. As for the **experience** in making batik, 8 answered “Yes”. As for **understanding the cultural meanings** of batik, 5 answered “Yes”.

From the dwindling down of numbers in the questionnaire answering “Yes” in knowing, seeing, experiencing and understanding, the researcher gathered that there was only a general knowledge of what batik is. This can be triangulated by Cycle 1’s focus group interview data, where only 4 participants from the sample of 20 mentioned batik as a form of MCAF they were familiar with (Cycle 1 focus group interview, 05 October 2016, SC, ARD, HA and JY).

From the questionnaire data, the students’ exposure to it in everyday life, such as seeing government staff wearing it on certain days of the week, were reasons that led to their initial knowledge of this MCAF. With regards to the sample’s exposure to batik in everyday life, one of them mentioned in the focus group interview,

*“Art class. We used to have like practicals and make batik. That’s it.”* (Cycle 1 focus group interview, 05 October 2016, JY).

As for the experience in making batik, one factor that led to the students’ initial understanding of this MCAF was that they had done it in school before, as shown in Table 5.1. Triangulating that data is one participant’s answer in Cycle 1’s focus group interview,

*“I personally experienced at school because we have [sic] craft class and other class. So, they ask [sic] us to make batik too, and then draw the patterns and then make it so that’s why I know.”* (Cycle 1 focus group interview, 05 October 2016, HA).

However, as one student had stated in the questionnaire that it was more about doing it as part of the school's requirements,

*“batik is something I do [sic] because the grade was required to fulfill my report book, basically...”* (Cycle 2 questionnaire, 22 October 2016, HA),

the deeper understanding of this art form seemed to not be cultivated the participants.

This can be further supported by the data from the focus group interview,

*“For me, we just know, we know just what our teachers teach us but they, I think our school don't [sic] really go deep into it. Just like briefly and explain to you what is batik, like that only.”* (Cycle 1 focus group interview, 05 October 2016, LCC).

Table 5.1  
*Students' initial understanding of batik before any intervention activities*

Level	Initial understanding	Number of responses	Selected students' comments from questionnaire
1 (Basic)	Know	18	“Reading”, “School”, “Civic studies in primary school.”
2 (Basic)	Seen	14	“I have seen the government workers such as teachers wear batik clothes and dress to work on every Thursday.”, “Batik is widely know [sic] among many people to be part of the Malaysian culture.”
3 (Medium)	Experience	8	“We just want to finish this batik fast and get graded.” (referring to school activity)
4 (High)	Understanding cultural meanings	5	“Dull and outdated due it's old traditional nature.”

The first two themes, **know** and **seen**, can be taken as belonging to a fundamental or basic level of initial understanding. Sensory perception or observation is a category of ways of knowing (Paivio, 1969). **Know** and **seen** themes had been categorised as basic levels of initial understanding because what a learner can learn

depends on what they already know (Cross, 1999). In the case of batik, the number of students' knowing and having seen batik was high but it did not reflect a deeper understanding of this MCAF, as shown in Table 5.1.

**Experience** in this regard would be a medium level of initial knowledge as personal interaction with the material brought about more knowledge as the hands-on experience requires the learner to reflect and interpret (Huitt, 1998). The number of students answering "Yes" to this was lower than **know** and **seen**.

**Understanding cultural meanings** of batik is the culmination of knowing, seeing and experiencing this MCAF because our understanding of a phenomenon happens when we build relationships between facts and concepts (Huitt, 1998). The researcher therefore had listed understanding cultural meanings of batik as the highest level of initial understanding of this MCAF. However, as observed from Table 5.1, as the levels of initial understanding went up, the number of students having that higher level of initial knowledge decreased. As such, this called for the need to plan and design intervention activities involving batik as one of the four MCAF into the graphic design course.

### ***Wayang Kulit***

For *wayang kulit*, as shown in the Table 5.2, the same number of students, 18, **know** what this MCAF is. 13 answered "Yes" to having **seen** *wayang kulit* puppets. Those who had the **experience of watching** a *wayang kulit* performance were 6. Only 3 answered "Yes" to **understanding the cultural meanings** of *wayang kulit*.

The *wayang kulit* data that was collected from the questionnaire and analysed showed that there is similarity with the questionnaire data collected from the batik

research. This could be because these two MCAF are the most common traditional art forms that are available to the Malaysian public, with batik having more attention due to it being a fabric that is more applicable in many ways such as fashion and decorative purpose.

Table 5.2  
*Students' initial understanding of wayang kulit before any intervention activities*

Level	Initial understanding	Number of responses	Selected students' comments from questionnaire
1 (Basic)	Know	18	"I always thought of it as a very old traditional art form that Malaysia had, but never knew that much details about it as I have never studied nor watched a wayang kulit performance before."
2 (Basic)	Seen	13	"I have seen it on some scenes of the traditional Chinese dramas.", "I have been to museums that had this on display."
3 (Medium)	Experience	6	"...but never knew that much details about it as I have never studied nor watched a wayang kulit performance before."
4 (High)	Understanding cultural meanings	3	"I love the traditional and unique design of each wayang kulit and the way it moves with the music and story although I never understand its identity."

However, when triangulated with the focus group interview data, although there are also 4 participants who mentioned *wayang kulit* when asked to name one MCAF that they were familiar with (Cycle 1 focus group interview, 05 October 2016, JD, ARD, HA, VLC), no one further elaborated about how they came to know of this MCAF. This was rather different from the various answers about batik in the focus group that were able to support the data in the questionnaire. The lack of elaboration of answer regarding *wayang kulit* in the focus group interview could signify that there is a lack in experiencing *wayang kulit* (making or the performance) and lack of deeper understanding of this MCAF.

Those who knew what *wayang kulit* was commented in the questionnaire that the knowledge is mainly a general concept that this MCAF is a very old traditional art in Malaysia. From the questionnaire data, it shows less than half the class had much experience in watching a *wayang kulit* performance. This is reflected in a focus group interview response,

*“I grew up thinking that the puppets were actually really small and like, I thought they were like a smaller stage like, uhm, the Western ones cuz [sic] the Western ones were [sic] pretty small.”* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, JY)

When it came to understanding the cultural meanings of this art form, the number of response in the questionnaire, as featured in Table 5.2, was even lower compared to experience in watching the performance.

*“...my knowledge towards wayang kulit is very little but I just know that I love the traditional and unique design of each wayang kulit and the way it moves with the music and story although I never understand its identity.”* (Cycle 1 questionnaire, 28 September 2016, GKY)

This is resonated by a response in Cycle 3 focus group interview,

*“It’s one thing to know about wayang kulit existing and stuff but then when you actually go and have hands-on, then you actually have a new perspective of it.”* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, SC)

The possible reason for the low number in understanding the cultural meanings of *wayang kulit* could be due to not having enough experience in watching the performance and being immersed in the whole ensemble of a *wayang kulit*

performance such as speaking to the *dalang* (puppeteer) to learn more about this MCAF and to know more about the musical performers that play the background music for the performance. As mentioned above, experience is important for a learner as reflection and contemplation takes place when one is engaged in the ‘doing’ in learning (Huitt, 1998). Like batik, the participants’ little experience and lack of in-depth understanding in *wayang kulit* indicated the need for intervention activities to be included in the graphic design course.

### **Mah Meri Masks**

Table 5.3 shows that as for Mah Meri masks, only 3 participants **knew** what this form of art is, while 2 had **seen** Mah Meri masks before. Only 1 participant had the **experience** of making Mah Meri masks or watching one being made, and also only 1 participant answered “Yes” to **understanding the cultural meanings** of Mah Meri masks.

Those who answered in Cycle 1’s questionnaire that they knew what this MCAF is, answered that it was only through Googling up this art form that they are aware what it is. This is supported by Cycle 2’s questionnaire, where one participant described her thoughts before participating in the visit to the Mah Meri cultural village,

*“I didn't even know they existed.”* (Cycle 2 questionnaire, 22 November 2016, SC).

Table 5.3

*Students' initial understanding of Mah Meri masks before any intervention activities*

Level	Initial understanding	Number of responses	Selected students' comments from questionnaire
1 (Basic)	Know	3	"No idea what it is until I google [sic] it", "The cultural and art form never been taught or even talked about in my province."
2 (Basic)	Seen	2	"never came in contact with mah meri [sic] masks."
3 (Medium)	Experience	1	"Due to my curiosity, I did a little research online and found out that Mah Meri is one of the rare tribe in Malaysia and they're well known for the skills in wood carving."
4 (High)	Understanding cultural meanings	1	"wasnt [sic] sure if i [sic] would like it coz [sic] as a kid from city going into tribal place I [sic] thought would really annoy me."

Another participant, GKY, mentioned,

*"I didn't know they still preserve [sic] natives here in KL, especially in Selangor. It's very rare for me."* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, GKY).

Not having this MCAF taught in hometown and never came into contact with this MCAF before were among similar answers found in Cycle 1 questionnaire. None of the participants even mentioned this MCAF, when asked to name one MCAF they were familiar with during Cycle 1 focus group interview.

In terms of experience in making this art form, one participant shared that it was through doing some research from the Internet that he/she knew that Mah Meri is a rare Malaysian tribe and is well known for their wood carving art. The data from Cycle 3's focus group interview triangulates with this,

*“I don’t really know anything about traditional Malaysian art work and stuff and like, the Mah Meri, sometimes you just like, you just see like, oh they’re just like people from the village.”* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, CB).

The levels of initial understanding, knowing and seeing (basic level) contribute to understanding but experience (medium level) enhance the understanding and that itself enables students to have a deeper understanding (high level) of this MCAF – Mah Meri masks. However, as the data analysis shows, this highest level of initial understanding has the lowest number too, similar to the first two MCAF. As such, this strongly indicated that intervention activities pertaining to Mah Meri masks and art forms was needed in the graphic design course.

### **Contemporary Malaysian Art**

The data collection of this MCAF, and referring to Table 5.4, saw 9 participants **knowing** what contemporary Malaysian art is, and the same number had **seen** contemporary Malaysian art. 4 from the sample group had the **experience** in producing design works that contain elements of contemporary Malaysian art. 7 of them answered that they **understood the cultural meanings** of contemporary Malaysian art.

From the questionnaire data, it is found that the participants’ knowledge of contemporary Malaysian art came from thoughts that this MCAF was not dissimilar to foreign ones. Some of them never thought that other cultural art forms, such as batik and *wayang kulit*, could influence contemporary Malaysian art. Those who claimed to have seen this art form mentioned that it was through the television that aired art galleries featuring contemporary Malaysian art. During the focus group interview in

Cycle 1, when the participants were asked to name one MCAF that they were familiar with, contemporary Malaysian art was not mentioned at all. This is resonated in the questionnaire answers.

Therefore, this indicated that the participants' understanding of the cultural meanings behind contemporary Malaysian art was not in-depth, as they opined that there lacks the representation of 'Malaysianness' in those works.

This is further emphasised by GKY, during Cycle 3's focus group interview,

*"when I went to the KLCC exhibition [referring to the contemporary Malaysian art exhibition held at Galeri Petronas in Suria KLCC], I was really surprised how they involve [sic] cultural arts into their artwork because it's so different and unique that we don't see."* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, GKY).

Table 5.4  
*Students' initial understanding of contemporary Malaysian art before any intervention activities*

Level	Initial understanding	Number of responses	Selected students' comments from questionnaire
1 (Basic)	Know	9	"I was fairly uninterested about Malaysian contemporary art, mainly because I thought local contemporary art could not differ much from foreign ones.", "I knew about the famous cultural artforms like batik and carving but I wasn't aware of the way they could influence fine art in paintings and drawing."
2 (Basic)	Seen	9	"I thought the Malaysian contemporary arts will be very abstract or geometrically-oriented like Picasso's works. That thought was influenced by the fact that I always see art galleries on TV that only shows art styles like that."
3 (Medium)	Experience	4	"I have made a few design works that implemented some form of Malaysian art but I never really understood or studied it.", "During my foundation

4 (High)	Understanding cultural meanings	7	<p>design courses in Taylor's, we've create and learn a lot of contemporary Malaysian art in various media.”</p> <p>“I've always think [sic] that in Malaysia, there are lack of contemporary arts that truly represent ‘Malaysian’.”, “I have made a few design works that implemented some form of Malaysian art but I never really understood or studied it.”</p>
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Not unlike the first three MCAF, the data from questionnaire and focus group interviews regarding contemporary Malaysian art, showed too, that there should be inclusion of intervention activities of this MCAF in the graphic design course.

#### **Summary of Students’ Initial Understanding of MCAF, Reasons that Led to that Understanding and the Need for Intervention Activities.**

The researcher summarises that at the initial understanding level of the students towards the four MCAF, although a general knowledge existed, there was no in-depth understanding of those MCAF.

In detail, contrasting to the general knowledge that they had on batik and *wayang kulit*, the students had very little of Mah Meri masks and not much about contemporary Malaysian art. Seeing Mah Meri masks was very rare for them. Contemporary Malaysian art faired a little better, compared to Mah Meri masks but still not as frequently seen by these students as batik and *wayang kulit*. The students had very little understanding of the cultural meanings of Mah Meri. Although the number for understanding the cultural meanings of contemporary Malaysian art was higher than Mah Meri’s, it was still considered low because it is less than half the class.

The overall reflection on the answers regarding initial understanding of the four MCAF is that the students had an awareness of what is batik and *wayang kulit*, some awareness of what is contemporary Malaysian art and very little awareness of Mah Meri masks. The most commonly seen visual cultural art forms, of the 4, were batik and *wayang kulit* while the least seen was Mah Meri masks. As for contemporary Malaysian art, it was averagely seen. Experience in making batik was the highest, followed by the experience of watching *wayang kulit* performance, the next was producing works that contain elements of contemporary Malaysian art and the lowest was experience in making a Mah Meri mask or watching one being made. Lastly, less than half the class understood the cultural meanings of each of the MCAF.

Reasons that led to the students' initial understanding of their knowledge in the MCAF mainly came from the lack of exposure to and meaningful experience in making or watching or viewing any of the MCAF. As the study was underpinned by Culturally Responsive Teaching, with specific characteristics employed at Cycle 1: *teacher as the facilitator; small group instructions, and academically-related discourse*, the data that was collected were able to inform about the causes that led to the participants' initial understanding. Teacher being the facilitator allowed the comfort and freedom of speech among the participants where their responses were sought after, no set answers expected. Small group instructions encouraged more discussion as there were more flow and spontaneity, resulting in richer data. Academically-related discourse set a familiar stage for the participants, in this case the field of design, so they were not confused as to what to contribute in the questionnaire and focus group interview.

With the data collected, the medium level (experience) and high level (understanding the cultural meanings) of initial understanding was apparently low in

all four MCAF. Therefore, the researcher initiated the planning and designing of intervention activities pertaining to the four MCAF into a graphic design class room. This was so that the students would gain a better and deeper understanding through experiencing those MCAF because learning takes place through experience (Kolb, 2014).

### **Students' Understanding of Their Knowledge of the MCAF after Intervention Activities.**

The analysis of questionnaire and focus group interview showed that there was an apparent need for students to be exposed to the four MCAF because education should provide a window for students to view and experience the ever changing values, lifestyles and identity in the multicultural setting that they are living in (Robinson, 1999).

From the data that emerged, the researcher proceeded to plan and carry out Cycle 2's Intervention I, a set of activities for the students to partake in, which was a visit to a contemporary Malaysian art exhibition at Galeri Petronas, participating in a batik workshop, followed by a visit to Mah Meri Cultural Village and finally attending a talk on *wayang kulit* and viewing some of the exhibits of *wayang kulit* puppets. This set of intervention activities were planned and designed to increase the students' exposure and create deeper understanding of the four MCAF and to explore the students' expressions of cultural identity. The researcher made observations and captured the intervention activities through photography to be triangulated with the data from the subsequent data collection, questionnaire. After participating in the workshop and visits, the students filled out a questionnaire, namely the second

intervention at Cycle 2. The data that emerged from the questionnaire at Cycle 2 was studied and developed into a graphic design project brief, namely Intervention 3. The data from the project completed by the students will be discussed subsequently. Cycle 2 aimed to answer research question 3 – the required intervention activities; and research question 4 – students’ understanding of the four MCAF after the intervention activities and research question 5 (a) – students’ expression of their cultural identity after the intervention activities. Now, each of the interventions and the findings will be discussed.

### **Batik**

The researcher brought the students for a batik workshop out of campus, to enhance and enrich their experience and understanding of this MCAF. After the workshop, the researcher engaged in using a questionnaire to elicit information from the students regarding the understanding of their knowledge in batik, their expression of cultural identity, as well as how relevant they saw batik was to graphic design.

The questionnaire asked students about their opinion **before and after** they partook in the batik workshop, their **experience** during the workshop and what was their opinion after the participation at the workshop. In asking for the students’ opinion, the researcher was aiming at being open instead of directly asking the

students if they had a deeper understanding of the MCAF. This was so the students could freely give their opinion from more perspectives.



*Figure 5.1* Students creating their own batik artwork at the batik workshop.

The consent to feature them photographically in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).



*Figure 5.2* Students creating their own batik artwork at the batik workshop. The consent to feature them photographically in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).



*Figure 5.3* A group picture after the workshop. The consent to feature them photographically in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

The conducting of workshops in this graphic design classroom was a reflection of Bauhaus teaching. In the early 20th century, Bauhaus' education aimed to merge art, life, architecture, crafts and design together (Ridgway and Hayne, n.d.). "...the Bauhaus brought together artists, architects and designers in a kind of cultural think tank for the times." (Dickerman, 2009) Although this research involved the inclusion of Malaysian cultural elements, which were missing in the curriculum that was borrowed from Bauhaus, the researcher found that the current practice in art and design education to include hands-on workshops into the students' learning a practical way to learn. "The Bauhaus was imagined as an experimental laboratory, with art the product not of inspiration but of research." (Dickerman, 2009). Bauhaus workshops were pertinent to the students' learning about being with the real world, bringing learning out of classrooms. The Bauhaus workshops were conducted by masters of fine arts and applied arts so that the students' technical knowledge was supported by aesthetics (Dickerman, 2009).

From the data that emerged, the researcher categorised the activities into "Hands-on" and "Understanding". Hands-on approach refers to a method of instruction where students' learning is guided by experience. Students are given the opportunity to work with their hands on the subject matter of learning (Ekwueme, et al., 2015). This coincides with the *enactive* mode, which is part of Bruner's Spiral Curriculum, an instructional theory that underpinned this study. In the *enactive* mode, the activity of encoding action-based information and storing it in the memory is involved (Bruner, 1960). This in turn relates to the visual learning of the students regarding batik.

Table 5.5

*Selected students' Cycle 2 questionnaire comments of batik before and after the intervention activities*

Batik	Before workshop participation	After workshop participation
Hands-on experience	"Before this workshop, batik was a 'responsibility' to me. I made it once in high school, it was fun, but no one guided us."	"The batik workshop today was a fun and exciting exercise. I gained knowledge now about the process on how it is made and why the quality is good."
Understanding	"I would have described it as a very old art form done by various cultures for generations and I thought it would be a very old, slow and complex process."	"My appreciation/respect for batik shot up after I discovered how painstakingly crafting traditional batik canting actually is." "I've learnt and seen a wider perspective of batik, that batik can be interpreted in different ways, from fruits to animals. And it amuses me how batik could make these images with the more artistic and beautiful look."

The data in Table 5.5 was gathered from the questionnaire in Intervention 2 conducted at Cycle 2. As seen in Table 5.5, the hands-on learning of the students before the batik workshop was more of a school activity for the students and they were not guided. After the workshop that was conducted by an expert in batik who works for the Cultural Centre in the University of Malaya, the students' remarks about their hands-on experience in batik showed some changes. Some commented that although the process of making batik is tedious, they enjoyed it because they were properly guided.

*"I would say in this workshop I learnt more than the one I did, because there's Mr Y who guided us."* (Cycle 2 questionnaire, 21 October 2016, HA).

This is supported by a fellow participant's comment in the focus group,

*"The first time I experienced batik was like a few years ago in primaries <inaudible> I don't remember it then coming back and doing it again was*

*just nice and then that guy (batik workshop facilitator, En. Y) also used different techniques from what we did before so that was like eye-opening.”*  
(Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, JY).

They found the session educational and interesting. “If the hand and brain learn to speak to each other intimately and harmoniously, something that humans seem to prize greatly, which we call autonomy, begins to take shape.” (Wilson, 1999)

Understanding takes place after hands-on experience. This is because the stored memory from action based activities can be prompted when the students are exposed to similar subject matter. This creates a meaning making process, relating to past experience. The researcher connected this to the Spiral Curriculum’s *iconic* mode of learning, which is the next step after the *enactive* mode, because it was through the visualisation that the students gained better understanding of the MCAF. In short, the *iconic* mode is where learners are able to recognise the visual qualities of the subject matter in study (Bruner, 1960).

The “Understanding” section in Table 5.5 shows students’ comments in Cycle 2’s questionnaire that their understanding before the batik workshop was basic, such as batik is a very old form of art. However, after experiencing the making of the art form itself, one can see that the students found that it was fun and not outdated at all. This is resonated in the focus group interview,

*“It actually has a lot of meaning inside, so you have a new appreciation of it. The same also with the batik.”* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, SC).

Understanding how batik is made, the cultural meanings it has and having an appreciation of this MCAF enriches the students’ knowledge as graphic designers.

“The aim of education ought to be conceived of as the preparation of artists. By the term ‘artists’...we mean individuals who have developed the ideas, the sensibilities, the skills and the imagination to create work that is well proportioned, skillfully executed and imaginative, regardless of the domain in which an individual works.” (Eisner, 2002).

### ***Wayang Kulit***

The next activity at Intervention 1 was the attendance to a *wayang kulit* talk by the expert, Prof. Dr. GS at Cultural Centre, University of Malaya. Subsequent to the talk, the students viewed *wayang kulit* puppet exhibits, which were the private collection of Prof. Dr. GS. Data was gathered from the questionnaire (Intervention 2 at Cycle 2), as well as from Cycle 3’s focus group interview.



*Figure 5.4* Students viewing the *wayang kulit* puppets, personal collection of Prof. Dr. GS. The consent to feature them photographically in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).



Figure 5.5 A group picture taken after the talk and exhibition. The consent to feature them photographically in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

Although the students did not get to make a *wayang kulit* puppet or watch a *wayang kulit* performance, their witnessing the actual artefact at close proximity was considered as “hands-on experience” because they were able to see and feel the puppets, getting to know actual materials that the puppets were made from. This experience had changed their mindset about this MCAF. The sample comments found in Table 5.6 shows a difference in students’ comments before and after they gained hands-on experience. The patterns and details of the *wayang kulit* puppets, which reflect an apparently high craftsmanship, were noticed by the students during the exhibition. Before participating this intervention activity, the students voiced that not much about this art form was known to them. *Enactive* learning, where action-based learning is involved, is connected to the opportunity the students’ had in viewing and feeling the products of *wayang kulit*.

As for the understanding in their knowledge of this MCAF, before attending the talk and exhibition, the students commented that they never knew much about this

art form and had merely known it to be a very old and traditional one. However, after attending the talk and exhibition, the students' understanding of *wayang kulit* was shown to have deepened when they commented that they now knew that this form of art was unique but dying. As the younger generation and graphic designers, they voiced that they need to preserve it. The exposure of the students to the forms and details of *wayang kulit* that deepened their understanding refers to the *iconic* stage of the Spiral Curriculum, where image-based learning took place. When triangulated with Cycle 3's focus group interview, the students' response reiterates the above.

*"Never really thought it would be actually that fun, and really learn a lot more about the facts behind all the traditional stuff. Especially for the wayang kulit. I never really, like, knew how serious it was, that this art form was actually diminishing and it really boosted that thought in my head about preserving all these."* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, ML)

*"It's one thing to know about wayang kulit existing and stuff but then when you actually go and have hands-on, then you actually have a new perspective of it and oh, it's not just puppet telling stories and everything. It actually has a lot of meaning inside, so you have a new appreciation of it."* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, SC)

As the *wayang kulit* talk and exhibition had created an awareness and deepened understanding in the students, apparent through their responses in both questionnaire and focus group interview, this only strengthens the fact that when

intervention activities incorporating MCAF are conducted in graphic design lessons, they make learning about cultural art forms more relevant.

Table 5.6

*Selected students' Cycle 2 questionnaire comments of wayang kulit before and after the intervention activities.*

<i>Wayang kulit</i>	<b>Before the talk and exhibition</b>	<b>After the talk and exhibition</b>
Hands-on experience	"...never knew that much details about it as I have never studied nor watched a wayang kulit performance before."	"I get to see the patterns details of wayang kulit clearly in a close distance. The wayang kulit artwork is very interesting, it is colourful even though it is shown in shadow form that is only black and white."
Understanding	"I always thought of it as a very old traditional art form that Malaysia had, but never knew that much details about it."	"Wayang kulit is actually a dying art. Modern renditions are popping up but the traditional ways are dying. It's quite sad to hear that. We should embrace our past and wayang kulit is a unique artforms [sic]."

### **Mah Meri Masks**

For Mah Meri masks, the students' learning experience had been a very interesting one, even for the researcher. In this intervention (Intervention 1, Cycle 2) it was a class trip to visit the Mah Meri cultural village in a rather distant area, Pulau Carey, an island in Selangor. Pulau Carey is situated at the south of Port Klang and north of Banting town. As such, the journey was quite a long one, starting from the private higher education institute where the researcher and the students gathered. Although the main purpose of the visit was for the students to be exposed to Mah Meri masks, a form of art that the Mah Meri tribe is well known for, there were other important aspects of this tribe that enriched the students experience in this visit.

The facilitator and main person who manages the village, En. R., was the guide for the visit. He gave a clear introduction to the class regarding the tribe, its history

and brought the class for a tour around the village, even to a ritualistic area. In this village, not only the masks, which were worn for ritualistic purposes, were forms of art but all other artefacts too, such as architecture, wood carving of animals with symbolic meaning, clothing design (made of tree bark), and weaving as decoration.



*Figure 5.6* En. R. explaining about Mah Meri wood work to some of the students. The consent to feature them photographically in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

The students were intrigued by the last event of the visit, which was a mock wedding ceremony. Both “groom” and “bride” of this mock ceremony were to wear the traditional costume (tree bark dress) and weaved headgear, while the wedding priest wore a wood carved mask heavily adorned by woven leaves that form a huge lock of hair. Dances and singing were the main activities of this ceremony, with explanation of this tribe’s view on the significance of marriage given by the guide.

As one student put it,

*“...so it’s surprising for me to know that umm Malaysians, like the Mah Meri tribe still, perhaps still maintaining their culture especially wedding ceremony and their art.” (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, JO)*



*Figure 5.7* Some of the students participating in the Mah Meri mock wedding ceremony. The consent to feature them photographically in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

For the Mah Meri, the priority of marriage, like other societies, is to create companionship and to extend the family unit. However, an interesting aspect of the Mah Meri marriage is that if the wife is offended by her husband, she may choose to spend the night with another man in the village. Although this may be appalling and maybe even shocking to outsiders, En. R. explained that it differs from other cultures that uphold the male ego (Mah Meri Cultural Village visit, 20 November 2016). To some, this is some form of advance thinking.



*Figure 5.8* The students viewing the weaving at the ritualistic hut of the Mah Meri. The consent to feature them photographically in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).



*Figure 5.9* A group picture with the guide and the head of the Mah Meri tribe (seated in the middle of the foreground, wearing a mask). The consent to feature them photographically in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

This visit not only enabled the students to be exposed to Mah Meri masks alone but also to other important aspects of this tribe, which greatly helped the students' learning of this unique culture in Malaysia, as shown in Table 5.7. The data was gathered from the questionnaire in Intervention 2 conducted at Cycle 2, as well as from Cycle 3's focus group interview.

The hands-on knowledge in this intervention activity was equated to the *enactive* stage in the Spiral Curriculum because it required the students to involve in action-based activities. In this visit, the activities that were action-based were the weaving and mock wedding ceremony that the students partook in. Before this trip, some students commented that they had never even heard of the name Mah Meri, while some said that only through doing some online research that they found out that Mah Meri is known for woodcarving art work. After participating in the weaving and mock wedding ceremony, however, there is a change in the students' comments. Beautiful, amazing and unbelievable use of only manual tools to create such art forms were some of the comments that signify that this intervention activity had an impact on the students' learning.

The researcher has observed that there was also the deepening of students' understanding of their knowledge in this MCAF after the visit to the cultural village. The rich visual experience gained in this visit reflected the *iconic* stage of Spiral Curriculum, where image-based learning occurs. The visit opened the students' learning about how the wood carved art of the Mah Meri did not only serve as a visual form but also had spiritual meanings. Before the visit, one student commented that he or she was not sure that going to a "tribal place" may annoy him or her, as this student claimed to be from the city.

*"wasnt [sic] sure if i would like it coz [sic] as a kid from city going into tribal place i thought would really annoy me."* (Questionnaire, 21 November 2016, MI).

From this, the researcher gathered that the student's idea of a "tribal place" could be somewhere away from the city and there could be some form of discomfort

adjusting to that difference for a city person. However, there is a positive change in the students' understanding after the visit. An interesting comment was that a student felt that in fact being away from the city made him/her feel more in tune with nature. This could be due to the visual artefacts at the cultural village that were mostly made out of products from the forest, such as leaf-woven decorations, wooden huts, tree bark costumes and wood carved sculptures.

*"The villagers [are] very smart to use the plants around them. They use rough surface leaves as a natural sand paper to smoothen out the wooden sculpture made by themselves. The traditional dressing is made out of layers of dried tree skin and dried leaves, it is heavy to wear on."* (Questionnaire, 26 November 2016, NYX.)

*"I think the one I like the best was the Mah Meri village. You know, I have been to villages like that before but this time we actually explored it and got to walk around and talk [sic] to people and learn [sic] about their culture and how they live. So that was interesting. And their beliefs, like they don't really believe in gods, that kind of thing, way they live."* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, JY)

The visit to Mah Meri cultural village had been an exciting activity for the students, as JY had opined in the focus group interview at Cycle 3. Learning about the culture through exploring the place, doing some weaving work and studying their woodwork through immersion in the culture, brought about a sense of appreciation for not only the arts but also the Mah Meri tribe, as seen in the Cycle 3 focus group interview response by GKY.

*"I never know [sic] there's still, actually still, what do you say, Orang Asli [Indigenous People]? I didn't know they still preserve [sic] natives here in KL, especially in Selangor. It's very rare for me... how they preserve their things, they just appreciate everything in arts and like what we see in Mah Meri - the weaving, the woodcarving, everything."* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, GKY)

Table 5.7  
Selected students' Cycle 2 questionnaire comments of Mah Meri masks before and after the intervention activities

Mah Meri masks	Before the visit to cultural village	After the visit to cultural village
Hands-on experience	"Honestly, I had never heard of Mah Meri or even aware of it. Due to my curiosity, I did a little research online and found out that Mah Meri is one of the rare tribe in Malaysia and they're well known for the skills in wood carving."	"Mah Meri is so beautiful and unique. I am amazed by the cultures of it and the strong art they got, and how they managed to make it despite the tools and the process." "Of course, the crafts they produce are also jaw-dropping. Almost everything there were handmade."
Understanding	"wasnt sure if i would like it coz as a kid from city going into tribal place i thought would really annoy me."	"I found that they are actually very open-minded and modern. I feel like we are the one who are behind them. I like their wooden crafts and the meaning behind them. Being in the place of where this belief existed was a great experience I can never forget." "The surroundings gave me an earthy feeling, away from the busy traffic and technology-oriented life."

Immersing in the Mah Meri culture had deepened the learning of the students where through participating and observing the activities in the village enabled them to be reflective of those processes. As such, intervention activities related to MCAF, when involving experiencing the way of life of a people or society, would enrich students' understanding of culture (Lan, 2011).

## **Contemporary Malaysian art**

A visit to the Galeri Petronas in Suria KLCC for the “Crossings: Pushing Boundaries” exhibition was one of the activities at Intervention 1, Cycle 2. The exhibition, exploring the themes of internationalisation and diaspora, showcased the works of 15 Malaysian artists who had been overseas and some had returned to settle down in Malaysia. The contents of the works, in general, depict each artist’s experience or view of world issues and events shaped by socio-economic and political development in the 1970s through the 1990s. Table 5.8 shows data that was gathered from the questionnaire in Intervention 2 conducted at Cycle 2, as well as from Cycle 3’s focus group interview.

Hands-on experience that the students had in relation to contemporary Malaysian art before they visited the exhibition was confined to superficial class room works and they never really understood or studied this MCAF. However, after visiting the exhibition, the students commented that they see a uniqueness in each art work despite the sameness in concept, all somehow related to Malaysian culture, while connecting to global issues. They were able to describe how colours, materials and methods engaged in creating those artworks evoke a cultural differentiation. Again, although during the visit, the students did not literally partake in any hands-on activity,

their previous hands-on experience helped them understand the on-site viewing experience at Galeri Petronas.



*Figure 5.10* One of the students viewing a piece of contemporary Malaysian art. The consent to feature them photographically in this thesis has been given by the students (Refer to Appendix XVII).



*Figure 5.11* A student reading the description of a piece of contemporary Malaysian art.

*Iconic* learning contributed much to the students' understanding of contemporary Malaysian art as there were comments such as while they understand that each work has its roots in Malaysian culture, they are also tied to a global issue. This possibly mean that the students understood that contemporary Malaysian art has a combination of local and global influences. Before the visit, a student commented that there was no interest in this MCAF because he or she thought that contemporary Malaysian art is no different from international ones. The change in understanding shows that the visit had enabled the students to see that contemporary Malaysian art is deeper than only the visual aspect. This is further found in the students' response in Cycle 3's focus group interview.



*Figure 5.12* A group picture taken outside Galeri Petronas after the viewing of Crossings: Pushing Boundaries exhibition. The consent to feature them photographically in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

*“When I went to the KLCC exhibition, I was really surprised how they err involve cultural arts into their artwork because it’s so different and unique that we don’t see. Nowadays [sic] we all see just Western, you know, very contemporary, and it’s really unique for them to actually put like culture things inside an art.”* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, GKY).

The students’ understanding of Malaysian culture is seen as having more appreciation and probably deepened from the discovery they made at the gallery visit. Probably this was due to the fusion, multimedia and multilingual kind of art forms that were exhibited at “Crossings: Pushing Boundaries” that captured the students’ attention and made them think about other perspectives about Malaysian culture.

*“And then the art gallery was actually, it was pretty fun, because, like, it’s very hipster-y with a traditional twist because it’s, all the paintings there are [sic] nice, which is like, it’s very hipster-y where it’s all like new modern takes on old classics, which is something that I personally love. I love fusing things together.”* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, VLC)

Table 5.8

*Selected students' Cycle 2 questionnaire comments of contemporary Malaysian art before and after the intervention activities*

Contemporary Malaysian art	Before the visit to Galeri Petronas	After the visit to Galeri Petronas
Hands-on experience	"I have made a few design works that implemented some form of Malaysian art but I never really understood or studied it."	"Each of the artworks are unique but shared the same concept which is about the culture in Malaysia (thou [sic] some is about other country) The artworks bring out the culture difference by using colours, materials, and also the method the artworks are created"
Understanding	"Prior to the excursion, I was fairly uninterested about Malaysian contemporary art, mainly because I thought local contemporary art could not differ much from foreign ones."	"The truth is, the works there all have their own stories. Connected with Malaysia's roots in arts, the works there are also influenced by the advance of the world globally."

### **Summary of Students' Understanding of Their Knowledge of the MCAF after Intervention Activities.**

Through Intervention 1 and Intervention 2 at Cycle 2, the researcher found changes in students' understanding of their knowledge in the MCAF, and how they make relevance of each MCAF to graphic design.

At Intervention 1, the students participated in a batik workshop, attended a *wayang kulit* talk and exhibition, viewed contemporary Malaysian art in an art gallery and participated in various activities in a visit to the Mah Meri cultural village. Intervention 2 saw to the students answering a questionnaire after every activity of Intervention 1. Each questionnaire asked the students to describe their experience they had at each MCAF workshop, and their opinions about each MCAF before and after the activities.

Before participating in each MCAF's activity, the students' comments geared towards more negative connotation such as that they did not know the existence of some of the MCAF, had little knowledge, those MCAF were old and irrelevant, they were not interesting enough to grab the attention of the students. This could be due to the lack of experience and exposure of the students in learning and understanding more of these MCAF. Upon completing the MCAF activities, the researcher noticed a change in the students' comments that showed better understanding and appreciation of the MCAF in terms their forms, cultural meanings and making processes. Relating to Bruner's Spiral Curriculum, enactive learning occurred at Cycle 2's Intervention 1, where students worked hands-on at the batik workshop, viewed exhibits of original *wayang kulit* puppets and listened to an expert talking about *wayang kulit*, tried weaving and participated in mock wedding ceremony at the Mah Meri cultural village visit and viewed contemporary Malaysian art exhibits. Enactive is the encoding action based information from previously acquired knowledge, stored in memory and represent the knowledge through a variety of motor tasks which the learner finds difficult to describe in words or pictures (Bruner, 1960).

At Intervention 2, the students answered questionnaires after participating each activity in Intervention 1. This was where iconic mode of learning occurred. Iconic mode uses images/visuals to enhance learning (Bruner, 1960). Relevant images pertaining to the four selected MCAF were utilised to elicit knowledge and understanding of the students about the four MCAF. Iconic learning occurred here as the students answered questions that were linked to the visual qualities of each MCAF.

The outcome after participating in the MCAF activities were quite different from before the participation. The students spoke and commented at such length that they had fun, some of them in awe or even in disbelief of their discovery of each

MCAF and that each MCAF had its own uniqueness. There was more understanding in not only the cultural meanings of those MCAF but also the making processes, appreciation for the delicate beauty and details in those MCAF and a break from seeing those MCAF as merely old and traditional. Table 5.9 features the researcher's summary of selected students' comments derived from the questionnaires conducted at Intervention 2, before and after participating in the activities.

Table 5.9

*Summary of selected students' Intervention 2 questionnaire comments before and after the intervention activities*

MCAF	Before	After
Batik	Batik was seen as a chore to be completed at school, an old art form that is slow and complex in its making process.	The workshop was fun, exciting. The slow making process explained the good quality, and therefore appreciation for batik had increased. The various batik patterns inspired by fruits and animals were artistic and beautiful.
<i>Wayang kulit</i>	Never knew about such details due to lack of study, never watched <i>wayang kulit</i> performances and the impression that it is a very old, traditional art form.	The exhibition allowed close study of the detailed patterns on <i>wayang kulit</i> puppets. Saw the puppets as a form of art, realised that <i>wayang kulit</i> is a unique but dying art and that we should embrace it more.
Mah Meri masks	Never heard of nor aware that Mah Meri exists. Had the preconceived notion that the cultural village visit would be annoying as the students deemed themselves as city people.	Found that Mah Meri is an open-minded and unique culture, their art forms strongly reflect their beliefs. Amazed by the beauty and quality of the Mah Meri handmade crafts. The visit gave the students a break from busy traffic and technology-oriented life.
Contemporary Malaysian art	Had some experience in credating some form of Malaysian art but no understanding of deeper meanings. There was little interest in contemporary Malaysian art as there was an impression that it was the same as foreign ones.	Uniqueness was in every artwork viewed at the exhibition, each told their own story yet they shared a common concept – Malaysian culture. There concept connected all those works to Malaysian roots and at the same time related to global advancement.

The next section discusses the students' application of the understanding of their knowledge in the MCAF into graphic design works, and their expression of

cultural identity after participating in the first two intervention activities in Cycle 2. This is linked to the symbolic mode of learning in Bruner's Spiral Curriculum. In the symbolic mode, information is stored in the form of a code or a symbol (Bruner, 1960). There is flexibility in symbols as they can appear in words, mathematical symbols and other forms of signs (Bruner, 1960). This would include national and cultural symbols and concepts by which are represented by cultural art forms (Bruner, 1960).

### **Students' Expression of Cultural Identity into Graphic Design Works After Participating in Intervention Activities**

At the third intervention in Cycle 2, the researcher gave an open-themed project brief to participants in order for them to produce a design outcome in response to a design problem. Upon completion of the project, the participants presented the final design in a visual outcome. According to Lamoreaux and Morling (2012), shared, tangible representations of culture such as text, architectural structures, images, design, and such, are ways cultural differences and similarities can be documented. Material culture such as everyday objects and visual culture such as movies, magazines and websites serve to inform us about how we are influenced by culture subconsciously (Burkhart, 2006). As such, the project brief is open-themed so there is flexibility and freedom for participants to relate their understanding of the knowledge of the MCAF as well as to express their cultural identity in their final visual outcome.

Besides handing in the visual outcome to the researcher, the participants were also required to write a rationale about their design and a reflection about their learning process. The data that emerged from the visual outcome, presentation, rationale and reflection, when triangulated with Cycle 2's questionnaire and Cycle 3's focus group

interview data, informed the researcher whether the participants had applied the understanding of their knowledge of any of the MCAF (visually, conceptually and/or culturally, as set in the scope of this research) and expressed their cultural identity into a graphic design outcome after participating in the intervention activities. This sought to answer research question 5a.

In this open-themed project, the students were prompted to relate their experience in the activities that they had participated in and the understanding they had gained to finding a visual solution for the open-themed project. This is connected to Spiral Curriculum's *symbolic* mode, where this part of learning develops last, after the progression from the first two earlier modes, *enactive* and *iconic*. The symbolic mode is where the learner is able to classify and conceptualise ideas (Bruner, 1966).

It is an interesting find for the researcher in this data collection because there is some sort of contradiction between the participants' final visual outcome and the reflections they wrote about what they had learnt throughout the semester in relation to the intervention activities involving the four MCAF. Simply put, more than half of the class' final visual outcome did not visually contain any relation or inspiration from any of the four MCAF although in their reflection they did elaborate how much they had learnt from the intervention activities, as shown in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10

*Chosen students' final visual outcome and reflection after completing the open themed project*

Student	Final visual outcome	Reflection
AW	Final visual outcome contained a very minute aspect of batik – an organic, swirly design.	“ I also gained a general knowledge about Malaysia’s culture to its visual art...Not only Malaysia’s culture and art forms, I also learnt basic to deeper knowledge of design studies...this helped and guided me to be more aware while doing design works in the present and the upcoming projects.”
CB	Final visual outcome contained a vague application of batik – the gradual fading of colour.	“It was actually pretty interesting to see Malaysia’s traditions and would benefit us all from looking and learning from it. The field trips allowed me to learn new things and change my views on some traditional artworks.”
CCY	Final visual outcome contained an obvious application of batik as background to a logo design.	“During the semester, the most happiness things in this module is going out for exploring the different Malaysia traditional cultural art. At first, I though it will be boring things, but then after the batik workshop I felt that it is interesting. I was excited of making a batik art on a textile, it is a great experienced of depicting a batik.”
GKY	Final visual outcome was inspired by the shadow aspect of <i>wayang kulit</i> .	“The experience in making the traditional art Batik, a visit the cultural art exhibition in Kuala Lumpur Convention Center, a field trip to Mah Meri Village, an opportunity to see the Wayang Kulit Kelantan, all these amazed me and make me learned more about Malaysian culture art which had forgotten by the modern generation... As art evolve from the olden days to the modern days, I realize the importance to keep the traditional art alive because without traditional art, there will be no contemporary art. It is also important for me to convey the culture art in my artwork to the show the modern generation that art is not only about western or asian, is about the local art, which most of us have left behind and ignored.”

Table 5.10: (ctd).

Student	Final visual outcome	Reflection
JY	Final visual outcome was inspired by the shadow aspect and shapes of <i>wayang kulit</i> .	“This module didn’t only take place in a classroom but outside it too so it was very eye opening. For the final assignment we had to attend many different workshops and talks. These talks were very helpful because they were very informative and interesting at the same time. I got to learn about the Mah Meri tribe, Batik, Malaysian artists and Wayang Kulit. My favourite activities were the Batik workshop and the Mah Meri tribe field trip. From the Batik workshop, I had the opportunity to create an artwork using the batik technique. This was very enjoyable. I also saw some very unique textures that I could use for future designs. I got to see and participate in the culture of the Mah Meri tribe and correct the misconception that they were uncivilised. The tribespeople actually have a very cultured way of life with many traditions and rules.”
NYX	Final visual outcome shows some batik rendering style at the background.	“I have attend [sic] the Malaysia cultural art workshop such as visual cultural art forms, batik, Mah Meri masks and wayang kulit. After attending the workshop, I get to have a good experience and know more information of the traditional artwork in Malaysia by listening, looking and making it.”
VLC	Final visual outcome was inspired by the Tree of Life, a significant element of <i>wayang kulit</i> .	“I have learned not only about communicating to other through design works, but also how culture has a huge involvement in design and how it plays a huge factor in the design process, and how ideas form also how to combine culture with modern day design.”

11 participants from the sample of 20 had written with much clarity, their reflection on what they had learnt from the intervention activities. Reflection is a form of evidence in learning and critical thinking. Reflection is essential as it documents the process of transformation of experience (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999; Vassenden, 2013). “Reflection text is seen as an articulation tool that can enable both the artist and the reader to relate to and evaluate the project.” (Vassenden, 2013). These reflections were part of the researcher’s discussion of the students’ expression of their cultural identity from the aspects of visual, conceptual and cultural.

Of the 11 participants who wrote those reflections, 7 of their final visual outcomes showed some form of inspiration or influence from mainly batik and *wayang kulit* MCAF (Table 5.10). This data triangulates with the data from Cycle 3's focus group interview regarding the intricacy of MCAF when expressed in graphic design work,

*"...you realise the cultural arts we saw [sic] is so colourful, it looks just so interesting but when you yourself want to immerse in it, start to put everything in your art work, it's not easy. Takes time and research and knowledge."* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, GKY).

As this study focuses on exploring students' expression of cultural identity, these 7 final visual outcomes will be studied with regards to the specified aspects of visual, conceptual and cultural, in order to answer the relevant research questions. Although the remainder 4 students' reflections were written in detail, their final design work did not contain any link to the MCAF (refer to Table 5.11). Therefore, these 4 students' work will not be discussed as they are not related to the study's focus – exploration of the students' expression of their cultural identity - and there is no relevant data in these works for analysis to be conducted for discussion.

Table 5.11

*Unchosen students' final visual outcome and reflection after completing the open themed project*

Student	Final visual outcome	Reflection
CTJ	Final visual outcome did not contain any visual elements of any of the MCAF.	"Some people may not understand why do we go to the trip but actually I did learn something from the trip. First, went to Petronas Gallery exhibition, then gone to UM for batik, and go to Mah Meri Cultural Village to learn their culture then lastly, go to UM again for Wayang Kulit exhibition. Sometimes I may not understand what but I will remember everything so that I can reflect on what I see."
LSE	Final visual outcome did not contain any visual elements of any of the MCAF.	"I have also learnt the importance of preserving and applying Malaysian cultural art into our designs through the various field trips that we attended in order to not only sustain traditional Malaysian art but also to embrace and share the unique cultural art and heritage our country has."
MI	Final visual outcome did not contain any visual elements of any of the MCAF.	"Learning the culture of Malaysia should not just stay with a room looking at a whiteboard for an hour but more of self exploration, outside exposure and taking risks... Mah Meri and Batik workshop to help me understand more why it's important we must hold on to these traditions."
SC	Final visual outcome did not contain any visual elements of any of the MCAF.	"...it really helped in broadening my knowledge of Malaysian/Southeast Asian art. Prior to taking this module, I did not have much exposure to local and traditional art. I knew they existed but never really got to study about them or participate in workshops that taught how to do them. It was only when I started this module that my understanding of, and subsequently my appreciation for, these art forms and the local traditional cultures increased (eg: I never knew how much work went into making a piece of batik cloth or how detailed Wayang Kulit puppets could be)."

The following sections feature the 7 final visual outcomes, along with relevant parts of the rationale and reflection that act as triangulation of data to answer research question 4. To reiterate the scope of the study, the researcher aimed to explore the students' expression of cultural identity through their final design outcome, whether that expression is played out visually, conceptually or culturally.

## Visual Outcome by AW

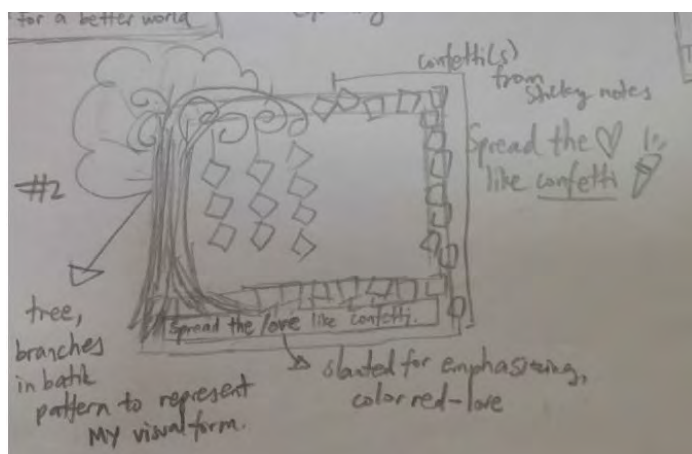


Figure 5.13 AW's sketch of the final idea. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).



Figure 5.14 AW's final visual outcome, front view. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

## Visual

AW chose bullying as a topic for the open-themed project. She designed a photo board as her final visual outcome (Fig. 5.14). The photo board's function is to hold pictures that are memorable to a person. Relating to the topic of bullying chosen by AW, any victim of bullying can remind him- or herself that he or she has friends and family who are supportive, should there be times bullying happens. In her final sketch (Fig. 5.13), AW decided to include a minute feature of batik in her design.

According to her rationale, the tree symbolises protection and unity, suited for her topic and aim of the photo board. She only briefly mentioned that the twirly branches of the tree are representation of Malaysian batik but did not give a reason why she chose batik.

*“As shown and presented, this photo board in overall has the tree to symbolize the unity and protection, with its branches to represent one of Malaysia’s visual art, which is Batik.”* (Final design’s rationale, 06 December 2016, AW).

### Conceptual

The researcher gathered that AW’s featuring of the tree in her final design could be inspired by the Tree of Life in *wayang kulit*, although the student did not explain that in detail. The researcher’s assumption is due to the exposure of the student to the *wayang kulit* exhibition and having attended the talk, creating latent learning. Latent learning is defined as learning which is not apparent in a learner at the time of learning but when motivated suitably or when there was a need, the learning manifests itself (Tolman & Honzik, 1930; Gutstein et al., 2011).

The final visual outcome, supported by the participant’s rationale, when triangulated with the reflection, shows that understanding of the knowledge of MCAF, its application and its relevance to graphic design is present.

*“I also **gained a general knowledge** about Malaysia’s culture to its visual art...Not only Malaysia’s culture and art forms, I also learnt basic to **deeper knowledge of design studies**...this helped and guided me to be **more aware** while doing design works in the present and the upcoming projects.”* (Reflection, 06 December 2016, AW).

## Cultural

The student's expression of cultural identity can be seen visually through her combination of one of the MCAF, batik, and her exposure to contemporary social media culture, which is evident in the student's choice to use a photo board. Conceptually, her expression represents that in today's world, social media such as Instagram and Facebook have influence much the way we store pictures (Sawyer, 2011; Peters, 2013; Miguel, 2016). No more in conventional hard copy photo albums, photos are now mostly stored digitally in social media photo albums (Miguel, 2016). Culturally, although she is not Malaysian, AW had gained a general knowledge about Malaysian culture through participating in the intervention activities. Also, as she is Indonesian, a neighbor to Malaysia that have many similarities with Malaysia in art forms such as batik and *wayang kulit* and to a certain extent, language as well, there is some sort of familiarity with Malaysian art forms. As a result it can be said that AW's expression of her cultural identity is one that shows her relatedness of her own background to the Malaysian culture. Her comment that she has deeper knowledge and being more aware now of design principles further strengthens the researcher's claim that there is a parallel between CRT and Bauhaus teachings in the theoretical framework. All these reflect the symbolic mode of the Spiral Curriculum where the student is able to analyse, conceptualise and apply her learning in a symbolic manner (Bruner, 1966).

## Visual Outcome by CCY



*Figure 5.15* Logo design by CCY. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).



*Figure 5.16* CCY's logo design serves as a label for a towel. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

## Visual

CCY designed a logo (Fig. 5.15) that is used as a label for towels (Fig. 5.16). The logo and towel are to remind users to give warmth, love and kindness to stray dogs and cats, a topic chosen by CCY in this open-themed project. It is obvious that

batik design is featured as part of the logo design. CCY's rationale showed that her use of batik in her design has a more purposeful approach.

*"In the logo, I had designed a dog's paw and a cat's paw which are in the center of the logo. The **background design** that I used is from Malaysia cultural art 'Batik'" (Final design's rationale, 06 December 2016, CCY).*

### **Conceptual**

Also from her rationale, it is apparent that CCY had applied the visual aspects of batik in her work as a deliberate echo to her claim that the Malaysian government is endorsing Malaysian batik as a national costume.

*"The Malaysian government is also now endorsing Malaysian batik as a **national dress** to every level of the general population, by having local designers to **create new** batik designs which reflect the Malaysia idea. Thus, the reason I designed for the logo and shown the produced [sic] is **came from Malaysia**." (Final design's rationale, 06 December 2016, CCY).*

Perhaps in her own way, she implied that designers could do their bit too in this effort to promote this MCAF. In this way, the researcher saw that CCY had a better conceptual understanding of batik after the intervention activities in that she now knew more of the value and beauty of this art form.

Besides her final visual outcome and rationale, CCY's reflection also shows that her understanding in her knowledge of MCAF, its relevance and application in graphic design works has increased. In this sense, Bauhaus teaching through workshops (Bayer et al., 1938; Fiedler & Feierabend, 1999; Whitford, 2003) that, in

this study, have been intervened by the incorporation of CRT principles, had thus strengthened the student's learning.

*“During the semester, the (most happiness things) [sic] in this module is going out for **exploring** the different Malaysia traditional cultural art. At first, I (thought it will be boring things) [sic], but then after the batik workshop I felt that it is **interesting**. I was **excited** (of making) [sic] a batik art on a textile, it is a great experienced of depicting a batik.”* (Reflection, 06 December 2016, CCY).

### **Cultural**

The cultural identity that is expressed in CCY's work resonates one that is influenced by the society around her, where strays are common (Chen, 2017). As the age range of the students in this class was between 19 and 21, they belong to Generation Z, known in short as Gen Z. Among the main characteristics of Gen Z are loyal, compassionate, thoughtful and open-minded (Seemiller, 2016). As a Gen Z living in Malaysia, the expression of cultural identity by CCY in her work reflects her concern for stray animals while the depiction of batik patterns in her work to showed her cultural understanding of MCAF application. The student had chosen to represent her idea visually through the batik patterns and used them as a way to promote MCAF. Conceptually, her work reflects the side-to-side importance she placed on both batik and caring for strays. Culturally, her work reflects her cultural identity as a Gen Z student living in Malaysia, influenced by societal concerns, and in her case, caring for strays. From the student's reflection, stating that she was excited to make batik art herself, and found that the exploration of MCAF was interesting, and the outcome of

her work which was designed with knowledge in design principles, it is apparent that the Bauhaus teaching through workshops, incorporated with CRT's principles had contributed to the symbolic learning of the student, in which she brought together previous knowledge gained and conceptualise them (Bruner, 1966) into a final design outcome.

### Visual outcome by CB



*Figure 5.17* CB's final visual outcome. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

### Visual

CB's chosen topic for the open-themed project was suicide. Her main idea was to create a stationery set where her design can be applied on. The users of the stationery set will then be constantly reminded that they have support from others in any difficult moments. Therefore, CB's final design came with tagline, "You are not

alone.” (Fig. 5.17) The participant was influenced by batik’s gradual fading of colours and tried to replicate that in her final design. The purple colour of the design is soft and the light emitting from the centre of the design represents hope for those who are suicidal.

*“I tried copying the batik style into my artwork but didn’t turn out so well.*

*Batik has a nice gradual change of colors.”* (Final design’s rationale, 06 December 2016, CB).

Copying is one way to learn, especially when a learner is new to the material that is being taught (Rendell et al., 2010). CB’s rationale shows she tried to repeat what she had learnt about batik in her final art work although it did not come through obviously. Supporting her final visual outcome and rationale is CB’s reflection of her understanding in the knowledge of MCAF that has widened after the intervention activities,

*“It was actually pretty interesting to see Malaysia’s traditions and would benefit us all from looking and learning from it. The field trips allowed me to learn new things and change my views on some traditional artworks.”*

(Reflection, 06 December 2016, CB).

### **Conceptual**

Visually, CB’s work did not display any similarity to batik but through her rationale, it is apparent to the researcher that the student attempted to bring in the concept of gradation of colours into her final design. Although the final outcome did not contain any batik patterns, the student’s knowledge, gained from the workshop that some batik designs have colour gradation, was applied in her work. This could be

seen as a conceptual understanding of batik application that the student has, applied in her own way guided by design principles.

### **Cultural**

The cultural identity expressed by CB is one that shows her awareness of the rise of teenage suicide, a current societal issue. In the recent years, suicide among Malaysian youth has risen (Khoo, 2016; Pillay, 2017). With the characteristics of Gen Z which shows concern towards societal and environmental issues surrounding them (Seemiller, 2016), CB's cultural identity was expressed in a way that is found in her work – one that combines her newly-acquired knowledge about MCAF and using it to spread the awareness of teen suicide.

### **Visual Outcome by GKY**

#### **Visual**

For the open-themed project, GKY selected the topic of freedom to practise one's religion. Her final idea was inspired by *wayang kulit* (Fig. 5.18, Fig 5.19 and Fig. 5.20). The design depicts a puppet shadow play made out of images of various religions' symbols and a mini stage that features the play.



*Figure 5.18* The puppets of GKY's final visual outcome. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).



*Figure 5.19* GKY's version of *wayang kulit*. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).



*Figure 5.20* GKY's version of *wayang kulit*. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

## Conceptual

No doubt that the visual outcome of GKY's final design may be seen as a direct adaptation of *wayang kulit*'s visual tools for the performance – light, stage and

“puppets” – but one should look deeper into this student’s reason of doing so, for she had managed to capture the conceptual quality of this MCAF – shadow – and aptly utilised it in her work to convey a message of human equality. GKY opined that humans’ shadows are all the same, therefore we are all equal. The final design shows GKY’s message that religious practices in Malaysia should be given equal attention to and opportunities.

*“Our shadow is the same, and we’re all human [sic]. Gestures of sharing blessing in shadows were also played [in her presentation] to show that we don’t have to be specific religion to give or receive blessing.”* (Final design’s rationale, 06 December 2016, GKY).

GKY felt that an interesting performance like *wayang kulit* that could effectively teach the young about freedom to practise one’s religion. This is because stories can be told through moving visuals and that makes learning more exciting. Moving images tend to capture more attention in learners due to the motion they create and the narratives that they encapsulate in the movements (Hollins et al., 2000). Although the researcher did not know if GKY had done any research about educating others through moving images, the researcher found that the student had conceptualised her learning because apparently aim in producing the final outcome was more than just the visual, it was functional. GKY’s reflection shows her increased understanding of her knowledge in MCAF after participating in the intervention activities,

*“As art evolve from the olden days to the modern days, I realize the importance to keep the traditional art alive because without traditional art, there will be no contemporary art. It is also important for me to convey the*

*culture art in my artwork to the show the modern generation that art is not only about Western or Asian, is about the local art, which most of us have left behind and ignored.” (Reflection, 06 December 2016, GKY).*

### **Cultural**

From her reflection, it is clear that GKY felt strongly about cultural representation in art. The cultural identity that she had expressed is one which is proud of local cultural art form and this implies that the younger generation should be proud of their local arts. Not only that, GKY’s firm belief that all religions should be equal and everyone should have the freedom to practise their religion reflects her cultural awareness of the multicultural setting of Malaysia. Using type and shapes, and suitable materials to construct the final outcome was part of the design knowledge that GKY had applied in her work. This, again, shows that CRT incorporation into a graphic design course would bring about better understanding of culture, and an avenue to express one’s cultural identity, arranged well together with attention paid to design principles. Symbolic mode where a student refers to previous knowledge to form a more conceptual idea is thus engaged (Bruner, 1966).

## Visual Outcome by JY

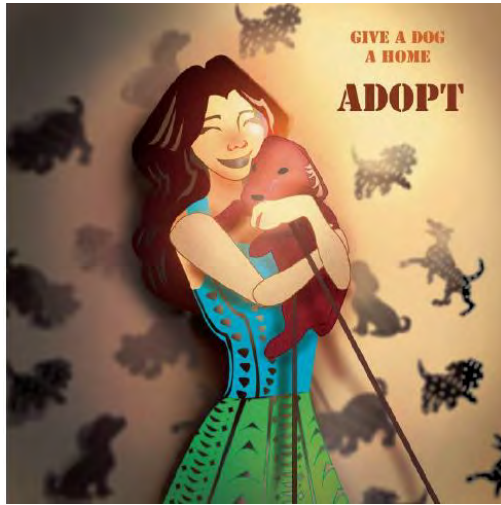


Figure 5.21 JY's final visual outcome. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

### Visual

Similar topic to CCY's, JY also chose stray cats and dogs as her topic in this open-themed project. However, the similarity ends there. JY's approach is different in terms of the MCAF she chose, her concept and her final visual outcome (Fig. 5.21). Inspired mainly by *wayang kulit*'s light and shadow, and stories of trials and tribulations, JY used that as a basis to rationalise her final visual outcome.

*"I wanted to do this piece **inspired** by Wayang Kulit because this **cultured** art form tells a tale of love, trial and good over evil. These themes have a **connection** to what I want my piece to express and I was also very interested in the matter of light and shadow. How there cannot be light without shadow and how there is good and bad in the world. This is very relatable to my piece because many people choose to turn a blind eye towards this problem [strays] and only care or are aware of the pets that are well taken care of and not the ones that are injured or lonely. This piece is meant to bring this problem to*

*attention and to remind people that it is there and shouldn't be overlooked."*

(Final design's rationale, 06 December 2016, JY).

Visually, JY's final design outcome shows some attributes of *wayang kulit* such as the repeated little patterns on the female figure's dress that resemble those on *wayang kulit* puppets. Another attribute is the puppet sticks at the base of the female character and the puppy she is carrying. There is a slight play of lighting effect in JY's work. Perhaps her intention was to make it more obvious for the viewer to see that her work was influenced by *wayang kulit*. All these show learning through participating in the intervention activities, the *wayang kulit* exhibition and talk in particular. Again, Bauhaus' teaching through workshops (Bayer et al., 1938; Fiedler & Feierabend, 1999; Whitford, 2003), when incorporated with relevant CRT principles, can be seen having a positive effect to this learner in that she had captured the fine details of *wayang kulit* puppets. The student can be said to have engaged in learning in the iconic mode (Bruner, 1966).

### **Conceptual**

Conceptually, the student was able to make a connection between the tragic love stories played out in *wayang kulit* performances with the kind of tragedy faced by abandoned animals. The idea of light and shadow from *wayang kulit* had fascinated JY and she had used it conceptually as a way to draw attention to the problem of abandoned animals. The student had carefully applied her design knowledge in the work, such as suitable colour combination, an important tagline to emphasise the message, with the overall layout having some form of visual balance.

## Cultural

JY had shown that her final visual outcome and rationale represent her better understanding in her knowledge of MCAF and this is supported by her reflection,

*“This module didn’t only take place in a classroom but outside it too so it was very **eye opening**. For the final assignment we had to attend many different workshops and talks. These talks were **very helpful** because they were very **informative and interesting** at the same time. I got to learn about the Mah Meri tribe, Batik, Malaysian artists and Wayang Kulit.”* (Reflection, 06 December 2016, JY).

CRT principles incorporated into this graphic design course saw to this student finding the cultural exposure enabling her to learn something that was not taught in the course. From her reflection, the researcher found that she had personalised the lessons she had learnt from the intervention activities, through sharing her passion for abandoned animals. Personalisation of learning emphasises that each learner learns individually, as each person has different learning aptitude, different family backgrounds, different habits and other factors (Kostolányová et al., n.d.). The personalisation of JY’s learning could have helped her in producing the final design. The researcher saw JY’s expression of cultural identity as one that relates herself to local issues in the community, such as abandoned animals. In this regard, JY’s cultural identity is resonated by a statement by Ovando & Collier (1985), which is “Who we are and how we interact with the world is an intriguing intersection of language, values, beliefs, and behaviors that pervade every aspect of life.” In that sense, her close association with the community enabled JY to utilise the visual language

familiar to that community to create awareness to the local public regarding abandoned animals.

## Visual Outcome by NYX

### Visual

Malaysia's endangered leatherback sea turtle was the topic chosen by NYX for the open-themed project. NYX's final visual outcome was a series of four button badges (Fig. 5.22) that the public can use on their bags or t-shirts as a reminder that everyone plays a role in protecting this endangered species. Visually, the design of the button badges clearly reflects Malaysian batik design.



*Figure 5.22* NYX's final visual outcome. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

Although in her rationale NYX did not explain about batik's influence on her design, her reflection indicated that she had learned from the intervention activities,

*“I can **apply** the style and patterns of traditional art in Malaysia that I have learn to my art work in the future. This can let me have **more idea** of design, **conserve** the culture and promote the local traditional art.”* (Reflection, 06 December 2016, NYX).

NYX’s final design outcome mainly drew inspiration from the visual characteristics of batik. Although similar to CB’s attempt to copy some batik patterns, NYX’s work rendered some visual representation of those patterns, where CB’s did not. Learning through copying is therefore also found in NYX’s work. However, NYX did not merely reproduce batik patterns into her work, she had skillfully combined her design knowledge both technically and visually (effective combination of colours that show emphasis on the leatherback turtle) to achieve a batik design of her own, made into button badges.

Although NYX’s approach to solve the issue of the leatherback turtle endangerment is mainly through the visual qualities of batik, her work shows that she had gained some knowledge acquired from the workshop. Possessing visual, conceptual and cultural understanding in MCAF will provide opportunities for the students to explore and express their cultural identity (Lin, 1999; Stultz, 2006; Marshall, 2007; Khoury & Khoury, 2009; Hamdy, 2010; Berry & Candis, 2013; Munday et al., 2014; Hadjiyanni, 2014).

## **Cultural**

For NYX, it is apparent to the researcher that the student’s expression of cultural identity revolves around how she relates herself as a designer to the Malaysian society to preserve or even propagate the richness of local art forms.

NYX's further reflection continues to show that the intervention activities had helped her in the understanding of her knowledge in MCAF,

*"I have attend the Malaysia cultural art workshop such as visual cultural art forms, batik, Mah Meri masks and wayang kulit. After attending the workshop, I get to have a good experience and know more information of the traditional artwork in Malaysia by **listening, looking and making it.**"* (Reflection, 06 December 2016, NYX).

To this student, learning is fostered through verbal instructions, and examples given through images and actions. Verbal instructions, images and actions are all pertinent to forming fundamental knowledge for students (Dunlosky et al., 2013). Clearly the intervention activities played a big role in the student's learning, in line with Bauhaus' teaching through workshops (Bayer et al., 1938; Fiedler & Feierabend, 1999; Whitford, 2003). To the researcher, this is yet another instance where incorporating CRT principles into a graphic design course will create more opportunities for students to learn about their culture and along with their design knowledge, will produce meaningful designs (Meyer, 2008; Hamdy, 2010; Scherer, 2010).

## Visual Outcome by VLC



*Figure 5.23* VLC's final visual outcome. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).



*Figure 5.24* The application of VLC's logo to notebook cover, t-shirt, cap and sticker. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

## Visual

For the open-themed project, VLC chose autism as her topic. Her idea was to create a friendly and comfortable environment at a camp site that enables autism children to learn comfortably. She designed a logo (Fig. 5.23) and a set of merchandise

items (Fig. 5.24) where her logo can be applied to give a strong impression to the objective of the camp. She had chosen the Tree of Life, which is an important and symbolic feature in *wayang kulit*, as the main look of her logo. Although her rationale did not explain her use of the Tree of Life, her reflection indicated that from the intervention activities, she had gained better understanding in the MCAF,

*“I think this lesson really opened up my eyes with what is around us, to be aware of everything that is around us, and how to see the culture within from every country, and nation also how to incorporate that into our design works.”*

(Reflection, 06 December 2016, VLC).

The final design outcome by VLC stressed mainly on the visual attributes, in this case the Tree of Life adopted from *wayang kulit*. Since there was no explanation as to why the student had used this art form, the researcher had two thoughts about this. Firstly, it could be that the student was merely captivated by the visual quality of the *wayang kulit*, which is part of the scope of the researcher exploring the student’s expression of cultural identity. Given the decorative element found in most MCAF (Orr, 1974; Van Roojen, 1993; Soemantri, 1998; Legino 2012; Siti Sarah Adam Wan et al., 2015; Lin, 2016), it is not surprising that the student was attracted to the ornamental quality of *wayang kulit* puppets, in this case the Tree of Life. Secondly, it might be because the student interpreted the open-themed project brief as they *had to* feature one or some of the MCAF in their final design although that was not indicated in the brief. Interpretation in learning requires knowledge-accumulation, summarisation, note-taking and logical-analysis strategies (Li, 2014). In this regard, the student could have interpreted of the project brief through her summarisation of her knowledge accumulated from the intervention activities and her analysis of the requirements in the project brief.

## Cultural

Further reflection by the student strengthened the fact that VLC had better understanding in her knowledge of MCAF and how she started applying it in her work,

*“I have learned not only about communicating to other through design works, but also how culture has a huge involvement in design and how it plays a huge factor in the design process, and how ideas form also how to combine culture with modern day design.”* (Reflection, 06 December 2016, VLC).

From her reflection, the cultural identity that is expressed by VLC is one that is connected to a bigger picture, not only within one own's culture. As a designer, to be able to see in wider perspectives is commendable as many times designers have to work beyond their own cultural limitations and learn about the culture of their client and this is reflected by McMullen (2016), “However, it is oftentimes more appropriate for designers to move beyond the Modernist assumption that design can be universal and instead utilise local visual languages.”

### **Summary of Students' Expression of Cultural Identity into Graphic Design Works after Participating in Intervention Activities**

It is an interesting observation by the researcher that the MCAF that are found in this study's sample of students' graphic design work mainly based on *wayang kulit* and batik. This could be because of the strong visual and conceptual qualities that are found in these two MCAF (Orr, 1974; Van Roojen, 1993; Soemantri, 1998; Legino 2012; Siti Sarah Adam Wan et al., 2015; Lin, 2016). Another more plausible reason could be that the students' exposure to the MCAF from the intervention activities had more direct involvement in *wayang kulit* and batik. They were able to see the actual

*wayang kulit* puppets and attended a talk about them; and they had hands-on experience making batik in the workshop. In that regard, direct contact through touch and actions made these students' learning more engaging (Dunlosky et al., 2013). This also refers to enactive mode of learning (Bruner, 1966) where making and creating - kinesthetic actions – retains lessons learnt. The intervention activities revolving around contemporary Malaysian art and Mah Meri masks were more general, visiting an art gallery and the cultural village, respectively. The myriad forms of art found in these two venues may have been too diverse for the students to identify specific visual patterns that they could incorporate into their graphic design work.

There was a difference before and after they had participated in the intervention activities. Before participating in the MCAF intervention activities, the participants' answer in questionnaire and focus group interview showed that they had a general understanding of what culture is but not a personal association towards it.

*“Culture is like celebration, like family, relative [sic] gather together and chitchat and have fun together”* (Cycle 1 focus group interview, 5 October 2016, CCY).

CCY's understanding of culture was limited to traditional celebrations while another participant, ARD, saw from a more personal angle,

*“I didn't know myself. I was lost and I'm the person who hates numbers and I was always thinking that what is it in me that is useful for the world, you know?”* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, ARD)

The students felt more ownership towards batik, as a cultural reflection of who they are. The participation in the workshop made them realise that this MCAF is

unique to Southeast Asia and as a Malaysian, they feel proud of this heritage, which is expressed as part of their cultural identity.

*“To create more design for modern work, can conserve the culture and have knowledge of batik, design work will provide identity of the designer such as nationality, to promote our national traditional art, and others.”* (Cycle 2 questionnaire, 23 October 2016, NYX).

In Cycle 3’s focus group interview, one participant’s comment resonated this, putting emphasis on the importance to knowing one’s origins as part of one’s cultural identity.

*“I feel that it’s important to know our roots as a Malaysian.”* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, ARD).

From the *wayang kulit* intervention activities, the students felt knowing and learning about *wayang kulit* as an art form will form a bridge between artists of the past and now. This implies that there is an awareness of their cultural identity. Cultural identity is not only about relating ourselves to our cultural heritage, it is also changing according to the times, social changes and one’s life experiences (Lustig & Koester, 2012). *“Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation.”* (Hall, 1990).

*“If wayang kulit be made more visible with modern design work, there will be high connection with the artists both ‘old’ and ‘new’ art background.”* (Cycle 2 questionnaire, 30 November 2016, ARD).

Knowing our past (traditions) would make us know more about ourselves now. This view is similar to yet another comment found in the focus group interview in Cycle 3,

*“...we thought that Malaysia is made out of Malay [sic], Chinese and Indian [sic] – that’s [sic] the three main race [sic] – but then there’s like many many more minor races that we don’t know about.”* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, JD).

After the visit to the Mah Meri cultural village and experiencing the culture there, the participants were able to see the importance of going back to one’s roots to find inspiration and adapt it to graphic design works. The researcher saw this as a positive outcome as they were able to see how cultural art forms can give more meaning to graphic design work (Burkhart, 2006; Hadjiyanni, 2014). As one participant’s answer in Cycle 2 questionnaire,

*“I think design is about not forgetting the roots of your culture, we just have to find a way to fuse it with modern day design”* (Cycle 2 questionnaire, 20 November 2016, VLC).

Also, their expression of cultural identity is more than just their own ethnicity (Lustig & Koester, 2012). A fellow participant’s comment in Cycle 3 focus group interview supports this view,

*“...proud in a sense that we have so many sorts of backgrounds and we are able to sort of like use all of it, you know, to speak or spread the uniqueness of our country.”* (Cycle 3 focus group interview, 07 December 2016, LSE).

As for contemporary Malaysian art intervention activity, the participants' expression of cultural identity was one that saw themselves as Malaysians, not from any specific ethnic group. This could be largely due to the works that they viewed at the gallery which featured a collection of expressions, concerns that are familiar to Malaysians as a whole.

*"I am Malaysian and some of the work depicts imagery that I have seen and experienced throughout my life as a Malaysian citizen."* (Cycle 2 questionnaire, 09 October 2016, JY).

This is supported by another comment,

*"I see myself as actually part of an interesting culture rather than, you know, oh it's just that one hybrid fusion."* (Cycle 3 Focus group interview, 07 December 2016, SC).

The peer observer, VN, had noted on the changes that took place in the students' learning after they participated in the intervention activities, as featured in the following comment:

*"The changes displayed in the students' outputs were visible and remarkably elegant in its fusion. In my conversations with the researcher as her Programme Director, I have been aware of her attempts in exposing students to Malaysian cultural arts even before these documented interventions for her PhD thesis. In my view, the barometer of success can be gauged when a student carries forward the processes and knowledge learned in one module, into another. I can recall one such instance when a student, CYH, who infused cultural elements and practices unique to Malaysia, seamlessly into her Brand*

*Strategies project. The work was even selected in the semi finals of the Adobe Design Achievement Awards 2017.*

*“Based on my observations of the interventions made, it is a fair assessment to say that the experiences and learning obtained by the researcher’s students, have largely been positive. In some cases, the learning was immediately visible, in others, a little more gestation, reflection or continued exposure may be required. In line with the constructivist viewpoint in education, it is through enriched experiences like the interventions prescribed by the researcher, that will allow for a higher likelihood of a learner to produce distinctive graphic designs that reflect the regional, cultural and or ethnic identities in their graphic design solutions when appropriate.”* (Peer observer’s comment, 12 February 2018, VN)

The researcher understood the peer observer’s review as one that indicates that this research path has yielded positive outcome, and is valid to the researcher’s practice. Not only that, it has obviously enriched the students’ learning, referring to the example given by VN in his review.

### **Students’ Expression Cultural Identity to Graphic Design Works (Without Intervention Activities)**

The findings from Cycle 4, conducted on a second class where no intervention activities were conducted, and only a project brief was given, it appeared that the expression of cultural identity and understanding of MCAF had more diversity. This cycle aimed to answer research question 5b – students’ expression of cultural identity without intervention activities. Figures 5.28, 5.29, 5.30 and 5.31 feature four students’

final visual outcome at Cycle 4. The particularly four final visual outcomes had been selected because they were different from the final outcomes of rest of the second class (samples Fig. 5.25, Fig. 5.26 and Fig. 5.27) who referred to the same MCAF as those at Cycle 3, such as *wayang kulit* and batik.



Figure 5.25 Final outcome by FK, whose chosen topic was littering, and the work was inspired by batik design. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).



Figure 5.26 The final outcome of NS's work, related to the chosen topic of poverty, influenced by *wayang kulit*. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

Figure 5.27 KW's final design that focused on education for children of the poor, influenced by *wayang kulit*. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).



## Visual Outcome by MH

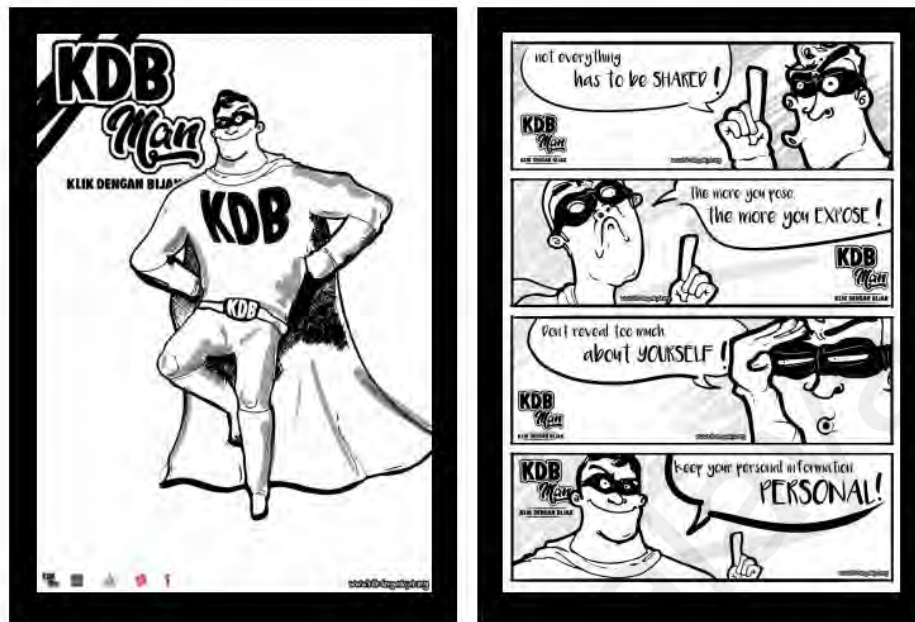


Figure 5.28 MH's character, KDM Man and comic strip, inspired by Lat's comics.

The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

## Visual

MH selected cyberbullying as a social issue he wanted to resolve. The MCAF he had selected to inspire his own idea was Lat comics. According to MH, he found that Lat's comics feature a lot of Malaysian social and political scenes, portraying them in a comedic light cartoon without bias. Although short, compact dialogues are found in Lat's comics, the focus on facial expressions and actions, and the fact that comics reach out faster in funny yet effective and memorable ways was why MH found it to be a suitable inspiration for his own idea (Rationale, 14 November 2017, MH).

The visual quality and impact of comics attracted MH to use comics to convey his message to the public. Visuals play a huge role in learning as they could be

manipulated through shapes, colours and other ways, creating attractive qualities that enhance learning (Shabiralyani et al., 2015). Visually, MH created his own character, KDB Man in a comical manner, inspired by Lat comics. KDB stands for “Klik Dengan Bijak” based on the current, existing effort by the government to educate the public regarding being safe and avoid cyberbullying or any other cyber crimes (Fig. 5.28).

### **Conceptual**

MH’s KDB Man serves as a “teacher” to those who read the comic strips, designed by MH, aiming at teenagers, to inform and teach them how to be safe when surfing the Internet. This is where the conceptualisation of MH’s chosen MCAF took place beyond the visual qualities. The content of the comic reflects the fact that the student was well-informed of the current crime scene in Malaysia. Through his interest in Lat comics, he had based his idea to use comics to inform and educate the local public through a familiar visual language. This reflects the importance of cultural knowledge when designing for a specific target audience (Meyer, 2008; Scherer, 2010). Iconic (visual representation of the comic character, influenced by Lat comics) and symbolic (conceptualisation of the comic to suit a purpose) modes have shown to be present in this student’s design outcome (Bruner, 1966).

When not exposed to any intervention activities, this student was able to freely choose a MCAF close to his childhood memory and creatively manipulated his knowledge in design to work alongside the visual qualities of the MCAF. The researcher equates this to personalisation of learning, which results in one taking ownership of one’s learning (Kostolányová et al., n.d.). Although there was no direct instructions or intervention activities pertaining to any MCAF, CRT principles were

engaged in this second class' learning through the open-themed project instructions that gave some examples of MCAF, and the teacher (the researcher) facilitated the students' learning by engaging in culturally-driven conversations in individual tutorials.

### **Cultural**

MH's expression of his cultural identity was one that is proud of his roots and is responsible to promote Malaysian culture to a wider audience, through his work as a designer. This is evident in his response in Cycle 4's focus group interview,

*"Ok, because currently we don't have outstanding (designers) from Asian, from Malaysian designers so I think if I understand more about my culture, not all, but maybe I can focus on doodling and cartoons, maybe I can bring out more...What I mean is for the Datuk Lat, his journey is actually quite distinct, so maybe I'm inspired by that. I feel that if I use my culture, we can show more to the world that this is what Malaysia is."* (Focus group interview, 05 December 2017, MH)

In that regard, MH's expression of cultural identity is understood by the researcher as one that associates himself with his cultural heritage, and to the larger community and he viewed his professional role as a designer of the future as an important agent in sharing cultural knowledge to others (Moalosi et al., 2007).

## Visual Outcome by CM



Figure 5.29 CM's final visual outcome, a mini leatherback turtle *wau*. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

## Visual

Endangered leatherback turtles from the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia is the issue selected by CM for this project (Fig. 5.26). The student found parallels between the *wau*, a traditional art form also found in the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia, and the leatherback turtle in that both of them are old in age, close to extinction, resemble each other in shape, have intricate details (visual patterns) and symbolise freedom (Rationale, 14 November 2017, CM).

Her final visual outcome is of a mini leatherback turtle *wau*, with patterns designed by herself in the middle of the *wau*.

*“The central flower is a sunflower which represents longevity and this applies to both the **dying artform** and turtle as our ultimate wish is for them to live a longer life. A turtle-like pattern below the sunflower represents a hatchling*

*and its surroundings are obstacles that they are most likely to encounter due to several factors caused by humans and the climate.”* (Rationale, 14 November 2017, CM)

The student’s final visual outcome not only has the visual qualities of the *wau*, but also her personal best wishes for preservation of the art form, as well as the leatherback turtle.

### **Conceptual**

The student’s understanding of this MCAF went beyond the visual aspects as conceptually, she could see the similarities between the dying art form and endangered animal, which are both local to Malaysia. CRT principles that were infused into this open-themed project had introduced briefly about MCAF in general and her choice of *wau* showed her using her conceptualisation skills to bring the two concepts together in a visually interesting final outcome. The student had also applied her design skills in the final outcome, creating a contrasting piece of work that demands attention from the viewer. All these showed independence, personalisation and ownership in learning when left to interpret the project brief (Kostolányová et al., n.d.; Li, 2014). Although enactive mode was not engaged in the learning of this student regarding MCAF due to no intervention activities for this second class, it is apparent that iconic mode and symbolic mode had taken place. The student had studied the shape and patterns of the *wau* (iconic) and conceptually put together her knowledge and understanding in design and *wau* to produce a piece of work that conveys a deeper message (symbolic) (Bruner, 1966). This resonates that cultural art forms, when used contextually in graphic design, could produce outcomes that are significant to a particular culture

(Marshall, 2007; Khoury & Khoury, 2009; Berry & Candis, 2013; Munday et al., 2014).

## **Cultural**

CM expressed her cultural identity as one that is learning about herself and relating to others in society through lessons that are learnt not only from the class room but from experience. According to Usborne and Sablonnière (2014), understanding oneself deepens as there is understanding of culture and that in turn clarifies one's cultural identity.

*“Not everything can be learnt from books, you know. You have to like, depend on experience...Yea, you're not only discovering about new things, you're (also) discovering about yourself.”* (Focus group interview, 05 December 2017, CM)

In turn, a better understanding of culture empowers a designer to create works of design that speak volume to a target audience through the use of familiar visual language and symbols (Meggs, 1998; Scherer, 2010; Preble et al., 2013; Santoro, 2014). With knowledge of design principles learnt from Bauhaus teachings, enriched with cultural knowledge, a designer could therefore express his/her cultural identity in a comprehensive manner.

## Visual Outcome by HA



*Figure 5.30* Beadwork of Sumatran rhinoceros by HA. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

## Visual

HA chose the extinction of the Sumatran rhinoceros as her topic for this project. Her final visual outcome features a direct representation of the rhinoceros but with a red horn (Fig. 5.27). From the research she had conducted, rhinoceros horns are highly prized by humans and is the main reason they are poached for. As such, she had used red to symbolise danger and warning to those who view her design (Rationale, 14 November 2017, HA). Colour studies in the design principles of Bauhaus' teachings include colour psychology, where students learn the effects and meanings of colours when used in various contexts (Fiedler & Feierabend, 1999; Whitford, 2003; Preble et al., 2013; Santoro, 2014). The rational use of red in context showed that the student had put into use her knowledge of colour significance in design.

## **Conceptual**

The entirety of HA's design is made of little beads, influenced by Baba and Nyonya beadwork, yet another MCAF that was not explored by the first class due to the intervention activities. HA had incorporated this MCAF in her final design due to three reasons (Presentation, 14 November 2017, HA). Firstly, the rareness of this art form equates to the rarity of the near-extinction Sumatran rhinoceros. HA explained that the intricacy and delicateness of the beadwork is similar to the life of this endangered animal. Secondly, it took the student a lot of time and effort to put each bead together to form the rhinoceros, which HA saw as representation in real life efforts protecting the species. Lastly, the beading itself is a form of art that HA was familiar with. Learning is made easy when composed with familiar elements (Reder et al., 2015).

As explained above, the student demonstrated her ability to put ideas together, and this signifies that HA had conceptualised her understanding and knowledge in the MCAF she had chosen for the open-themed project. This again, reflects iconic mode of learning moving into the symbolic mode, as seen in the student working with the imagery and visuals of beads to produce a meaningful work of design that communicates a message (Bruner, 1966).

## **Cultural**

It is the familiarity and similarity in art form that HA considered as her cultural identity. Hailing from Yemen, HA responded in the focus group interview when asked about her cultural identity,

*“The beads are actually quite **similar** to Yemen. When I was a kid, we used to bead a lot of bracelets and necklaces. When I saw it (Baba and Nyonya beads), I was like, “This is similar so I could use this.” (Focus group interview, 05 December 2017, HA)*

Strangers in a foreign place often find familiarity and able to culturally identify themselves in the foreign place when there are generic elements that they can relate to (Muhr, 2012). HA’s reminiscing of her childhood beading work that created familiarity in her when she discovered Malaysia’s Baba Nyonya beadwork, had contributed to her expression of her cultural identity.

## **Visual Outcome by AP**

### **Visual**

Racism is the topic selected by AP. She found that the best way to promote unity is to through art in public (Rationale, 14 November 2017, AP). AP was inspired by Malaysian mural art, which in recent years have been quite popular, especially in Penang (Rationale, 14 November 2017, AP). Although her final visual outcome (Fig. 5.28) does not resemble Penang mural art at all, the concept of it underpins her idea. Her final design depicts the frontal display of face made up of various skin colours and facial features, indicating the togetherness of various ethnic groups.

Visually, AP’s final design contains her own mural art style with the inspiration coming from Malaysian mural art. Her idea was derived from mural art’s function of being a public art and medium of communication in a public space (Rationale, 14 November 2017, AP). In that, she had recognised how impactful mural

art can be, especially to create awareness to the public regarding such issues as racial equality (Day, 2012).



Figure 5.31 AP's design for mural art. The consent to feature the students' work in this thesis had been given by the students (refer to Appendix XVII).

### Conceptual

To the researcher, the student's ability to conceptualise ideas was shown through her identification with the relevance of mural art's function to her purpose of conveying a message to others regarding diversity and equality among all ethnic groups. In line with iconic mode (recognising mural images and visuals) and symbolic mode (conceptualising previously knowledge about mural art to suit her objective in the open-themed project) (Bruner, 1966), the student had displayed her skills and knowledge in graphic design principles through the legible handwritten type that matches the free-flowing style of her design. Limiting the final design to a few colours, the student had also demonstrated her understanding of how principles of designs

should be utilised to create visual balance and focal point for the viewer (Fiedler & Feierabend, 1999; Whitford, 2003; Preble et al., 2013; Santoro, 2014).

## **Cultural**

When it came to her expression of cultural identity, there is similarity with HA because AP is also not Malaysian – she is an Indonesian. For Indonesians, the familiarity in Malaysian culture are normally found in some areas such as art, costume, language, variety in ethnicities and food (Zulkarnain Lubis, 2017). It is the diversity in Malaysian ethnicities that created a familiarity for AP to express her identity in culture. Familiarity creates easy cultural identification of oneself towards a particular community where one is situated at (Reder et al., 2015). AP observed that there is more cultural equality in Malaysia where different ethnic groups can practice their individuality, unlike in Indonesia. She hoped that the equality can happen in Indonesia too, as the message in her art work expressed.

*“My art work is about racial issues, right, and yea, it’s related too. For me, back in Indonesia and here, I see a lot of differences. The difference is Malaysia is more diverse than in Indonesia. Back in Indonesia, all the pribumi rule the city but here, everyone is like equal. That’s what I think.”* (Focus group interview, 05 December 2017, AP)

## **Summary of Students’ Expression Cultural Identity to Graphic Design Works (Without Intervention Activities)**

The researcher finds it rather intriguing that without any intervention activities but with a detailed, semi-guided project brief, students have gone beyond referring to

only traditional MCAF, as seen in MH's and AP's work that are inspired by Malaysian comic and street art, respectively. Those who have been inspired by more traditional MCAF, such as CM's and HA's work, which are based on the *wau* and Baba and Nyonya bead work, are just as interesting because the students had gone beyond the common, expected MCAF and delved into ones that are lesser known or utilised.

This further reinforces that graphic design when practised in a local setting, should and could derive visual and conceptual ideas from local visual cultural art forms. More importantly, it provides opportunities for students' expression of cultural identity. At Cycle 4, although the guidance was not literal in terms of crafting specific MCAF intervention activities for this group of students, the researcher found that when the students were given the freedom to discover and select MCAF that they find interesting and possibly personally related to them in some ways, the results were that there was diversity in not only the final visual outcome but also in the expression of cultural identity.

The researcher's method of excluding any intervention activities and encouraging the students to explore, discover and select was underpinned by CRT's principles of *teacher as the facilitator* – the lecturer supported the students' learning through asking prompting questions, giving suggestions but not final answers as each student's interpretation is unique; *culturally mediated instructions* – although the students were not given specific MCAF to work on so there was room for their exploration, the project brief was thorough, and gave an overview on the importance of culture in relation to designers, and *student-controlled classroom discourse* – saw to the students taking ownership of their learning through taking charge of some parts of the lesson. The students not only selected their own MCAF, they also decided how

they would apply their understanding of their own selected MCAF and expressed their cultural identity into their final design work.

The learning theory of Spiral Curriculum also underpins Cycle 4. “The benefits ascribed to the spiral curriculum by its advocates are: (1) The information is reinforced and solidified each time the student revisits the subject matter; (2) the spiral curriculum also allows a logical progression from simplistic ideas to complicated ideas; and (3) students are encouraged to apply the early knowledge to later course objectives.” (Johnston, 2012).

At the enactive stage of Cycle 4, the students, on their own, a MCAF and conducted research by revisiting the subject a few times to get better knowledge and understanding. At the iconic stage, from the research, the students explored with various ideas, through visual sketches, to produce a visual outcome that was influenced by their selected MCAF and express their cultural identity. Finally, the symbolic stage was where the students expressed complex ideas and concepts through the final outcome of their work.

In Cycle 4, although there were no intervention activities, the focus group interview and the outcome of the students’ work showed that they had expressed their cultural identity. This could show that although these students may not be aware of their cultural identity, when prompted in a focus group interview or required to complete a work of design, they were able to express their cultural identity. For one of the students, MH, it was his birth into this globalised era that had many facets of culture, be it traditionally Malaysian or non-Malaysian.

*“It’s because of technology, we’re exposed, advanced technology, we are exposed to the world. Ok, so it’s like we’re mixed up. So this is like culture but we’re like, for example like CM, who likes K-Pop, even though she’s Malaysian, she*

*can't...Like for me, even though I'm Malaysian, I really value Malaysian culture but at the same time I watch American cartoon [sic]."* (Focus group interview, 05 December 2017, MH.

According to Hauser (2009), cultural identity is the way by which one recognises, defines and connects one's culture. Cultural identity represents the identification with the community one is from, that shares common values. As Malaysian graphic design students, it was interesting for the researcher to find out the students' sense of cultural identity so as to ascertain if connecting themselves with the community they came from affect their graphic design works.

As Hadjiyanni (2014) had posited, culture can be a complex issue but if we understand it in terms of concepts and accepting that it is dynamic and changes, the contradictions which is involved (such as a globalising, modern Malaysia that also has her traditional side), we will come to know that there are many ways of belonging. This could be the reason there are many ways to describe one's cultural identity when it comes to being a Malaysian. With the variety of sources that can connote Malaysian's cultural identity, such as celebrations, food, games, decorations, costumes, language, visual patterns - cultural identity is pertinent to a graphic designer in allowing the designer to express the specificity of one's local culture when working within the set, hard principles of graphic design. This is resonated by Stultz (2006), whose study propagates the freedom to express one's cultural identity through design.

## **Comparison of Students' Expression of Cultural Identity With and Without Intervention Activities**

For the students who had participated in the intervention activities, their exposure to various MCAF has shown that they were left with some kind of impression that influenced their graphic design work. Although not all have expressed their understanding of their knowledge in any of the MCAF, their reflections and comments have shown that they were aware of the importance of MCAF. As for the students' expression of cultural identity, the first class had expressed that they see themselves as Malaysians, while others' comments gear towards understanding that Malaysia has individual cultures that blend with each other and the students are part of it. Visually, their work displayed qualities that were derived from the MCAF. Conceptually, the works represent the students' symbolic understanding of the MCAF and were able to connect that to their chosen social/environmental issue. Culturally, each of the student had some form of expression of cultural identity, as a result of the intervention activities.

As for students of the second class who did not participate in any intervention activities, their work, too, were influenced by MCAF but with more diversity in terms of the types of MCAF they had the freedom to choose themselves. This could be due to the open-themed project brief that gave the students the liberty to explore with various MCAF of their choice. Visually, the selected students' final design showed the diversity in the types of MCAF, not only confined to traditional forms but also contemporary forms like comics and mural art. Conceptually, they were able to form a connection between their chosen MCAF to the social/environment issue of their choice, not only in terms of how similar the two might be but also how the nature of the MCAF can be of help to spread an awareness to the issue. As for the cultural

aspect, the expression of their cultural identity, shows a wider perspective – globalised, mixed between Malaysian and non-Malaysian cultures – and this could perhaps, in the researcher’s opinion, due to the freedom given for the students to explore with the various MCAF, leading to them being more contemplative in their cultural identity expression.

Table 5.12 summarises the students’ expressions of cultural identity by comparing between works of students who participated in intervention activities to those who did not.

Table 5.12

*Summary of students’ expressions of cultural identity, comparing works of students who participated in intervention activities to those who did not.*

Expressions of cultural identity	Design work of students who participated in intervention activities	Design work of students who did not participate in intervention activities
Visually	Featured some visual qualities of the specific MCAF (mainly batik and <i>wayang kulit</i> ) in their work	Went beyond the 4 prescribed MCAF (batik, <i>wayang kulit</i> , Mah Meri masks & contemporary Malaysian art), e.g. <i>wau</i> , Malaysian comics, Baba & Nyonya beadwork, Malaysian street mural.
Conceptually	The works represented the students’ symbolic understanding of the MCAF and were able to connect that to their chosen social/environmental issue.	The students were able to form a connection between their self-chosen MCAF to the social/environment issue of their choice, not only in terms of how similar the two might be but also how the nature (shape, cultural meanings) of the MCAF can be of help to spread an awareness to the issue.
Culturally	Expressed some cultural identity that was related to their choice of one of the four MCAF, as a result of the intervention activities.	Show a wider perspective – globalised, mixed between Malaysian and non-Malaysian cultures, more contemplative in their cultural identity expression, due to the freedom of MCAF options.

The intervention activities had been an important catalyst to kickstart the practice of incorporating MCAF into a Malaysian graphic design classroom. The

MCAF in the intervention activities were limited to 4 types so that students could begin learning more about MCAF through the intervention activities. However, when compared to the work of students who did not participate in the intervention activities but were guided by a detailed brief, the researcher found that there was a difference in, first of all, the types of MCAF that the second group of students chose. Those MCAF were beyond traditional forms, with some of them rather contemporary, such as street mural and comics. From this, the researcher gathered that both with and without intervention activities are important when incorporating MCAF in a graphic design classroom. Intervention activities could serve to introduce students to a few MCAF. This acts as a scaffold and a guide for them to do further research about other MCAF, contemplate and reflect on their participation in those activities, in relation to their cultural identity. After that, without any intervention activities, they are free to choose any MCAF which they find most relevant to express their cultural identity. As the findings in this research show, intervention activities are important to help build a bridge for the students to cross over to start understanding Malaysian culture and exploring their cultural identity through MCAF. As the research findings further reveal, without intervention activities (but being provided with some scaffolds or guidance) is just as important because when the students get to select their own MCAF, they could go beyond the ordinary MCAF and this could enrich their learning of MCAF and help them to be independent-thinking designers, and in expressing their cultural identity. Perhaps combining with and without intervention activities pertaining to MCAF in a graphic design classroom would be good for future.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the findings from the data has been discussed to address the research questions. Before participating in any intervention activities, the students partook in a focus group interview where the researcher collected data to determine if any intervention activities should be included in the class room. The data revealed that students' understanding of their knowledge in the MCAF required the inclusion of intervention activities into the class room. Students were brought out for a batik workshop, a *wayang kulit* talk and exhibition, a visit to Mah Meri cultural village and a visit to Galeri Petronas to view contemporary Malaysian art. After the intervention activities, the data obtained from the students' verbal and written feedback in the focus group interview and questionnaire, respectively, showed that they have better understanding and awareness of their knowledge in MCAF. Not only that, this is then triangulated by some of the open-themed project visual outcome, which clearly expressed some influence from those MCAF. Besides that, the students' expression of cultural identity before and after participating in the intervention activities has shown some difference. Before participating in the intervention activities, there was little mention of what they felt and think of themselves as Malaysian graphic design students. After the participation, many commented that they had a stronger sense of who they are as Malaysians.

As for students who did not participate in the intervention activities, there is a difference in terms of diversity in MCAF explored and also the expression of cultural identity. These students' selected MCAF went beyond the given ones for those who participated in intervention activities. As for their cultural identity, they had expressed a more global view of themselves.

The difference in cultural identity expression between the two classes of students could be, as the researcher viewed, due to the facilitation of the instructor in the open-themed project. With intervention activities, the students had a given range of MCAF to learn from, while without intervention activities, the students had to explore on their own. Although the latter had more diversity than the former, both ways elicited the students' expression of their cultural identity. CRT had been applied throughout the study and the researcher found that it had helped in promoting change in graphic design education in terms of being more sensitive to culture, particularly in a multicultural setting like in Malaysia.

As a graphic design educator herself, the researcher had two decades of experiencing teaching where almost every semester she would face some challenges in teaching and learning. Her own observations were made and notes were taken on these challenges, as well as comments made by the Programme Director who is tasked to make class observations to all teaching staff's classes. Students' evaluation of the course is also taken into consideration. During the semester break, the researcher would pore over her own notes and observations, the Programme Director's comments and the students' evaluation. She would then have discussions with her colleagues where ideas were brainstormed, stemming from colleagues' "tried-and-tested" methods of successful teaching and learning, to literature recommended by colleagues and/or searched by the researcher herself, all in the name of continuous improvement to teaching and learning. As such, action research is a method of research that the researcher, as a graphic design educator herself, saw as real-world problem solving method due to its practicality, continuity, interpretative and rigorous qualities. This will greatly benefit her in continuous improvement within the field of graphic design education.

## **Chapter 6 Summary, Implications and Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will summarise the findings of the research. Discussion of the implications of the findings are found here, as well as suggestions for future studies. Lastly, a conclusion is put forward.

### **Summary of Research Findings**

The uniqueness of this study is that its systematic planning and analysing of intervention activities revolving around Malaysian cultural art forms (MCAF) for a graphic design course, at every cycle before moving to the next, has never been done before, particularly in the Malaysian context. Comparing to past studies, this study focuses on students' expression of cultural identity. Scherer's (2010) research of cultural dimensions, social context, image meaning and content, colour and symbolism is limited to comparing American and Asian advertisements. In Khoury and Khoury's (2009) paper, they propose that cultural change can come through design programmes, faculty and student learning. They suggested that culturally significant projects should be integrated into graphic design modules to engage students learning about Lebanese culture. This would encourage students to critically study cultural issues, analyse them and relate to the students' own design work. Tavin and Hausman's (2004) research touches on how with the wave of globalisation, cultures change and along with that, visual art education must play a role in order to move on with the globalising world.

In this present study, the data that emerged from a questionnaire and focus group interview has strongly indicated that a selected group of 20 graphic design students' initial understanding of their knowledge of MCAF is general and only on the

surface. The reason was probably due to their lack of in-depth exposure to and experience MCAF. The findings have informed the researcher of the need to plan and design intervention activities pertaining to four selected MCAF, namely batik, *wayang kulit*, contemporary Malaysian art and Mah Meri masks. The selected group of students were required to partake in those activities. After each activity, they were to fill out a questionnaire. The answers in the questionnaire in turn informed the researcher of the students' opinion and views regarding each MCAF before and after the intervention activities.

The findings from the data collected revealed that it is suitable to include MCAF into a graphic design course to improve a selected group of graphic design students' understanding of their knowledge in MCAF and to foster their expressions of cultural identity.

From the results of this study, intervention activities that the selected group of graphic design students participated in – workshops, visits to art galleries and cultural villages, attending talks, sharing about one's learning experience through questionnaire and focus group interviews, and completing an open-themed design project – had created some changes in the students' understanding of their knowledge in MCAF and their expressions of cultural identity.

From their initial understanding of their knowledge in MCAF, the researcher found out possible reasons that led to that initial understanding. Besides that, prior to partaking in the intervention activities, the students did not share much about their expressions of cultural identity. From the data that emerged from the questionnaire and focus group interview, the researcher planned and designed suitable and relevant intervention activities, revolving around the four selected MCAF. The students shared about their learning experience in each of those intervention activities, which revealed

that there was a change in their understanding and expressions of cultural identity. They had more views, were more opinionated and were able to describe more about their expressions of cultural identity. They were able to see that they are part of the Malaysian society, as one, rather than being separated from each other.

The open-themed design project was aimed at studying students' application of the understanding of their knowledge in the four MCAF, expressing their interpretation of those MCAF in graphic design visual outcomes. Besides producing a final visual outcome, the students wrote a rationale to explain about their design, as well as a reflection to share about their learning experience in the semester. From the 20 students, 11 had written their reflections very clearly about how much they had learned from the intervention activities although not all of them had expressed their understanding of their knowledge of the four MCAF in the final visual outcome. Out of 11 of those students, only 7 had expressed their understanding and cultural identity in the final outcome. From Cycle 3's focus group interview, the final cycle of this study's research, the data analysis revealed that the students have found that there is benefit for them to learn in a graphic design course where MCAF is incorporated into their learning. The better understanding of their knowledge in MCAFs provides them more inspiration for creative design work. They voiced that it makes them prouder to be Malaysians when they understand more about their own visual cultural arts forms. In addition, they feel that they can show the world how unique Malaysia is with the variety of cultural art forms found.

### **Implications of the Study**

The findings in this study have a few implications. Firstly, on their own, MCAF do not play a significant role in graphic design students' learning experience. This is

because most MCAF, such as batik, *wayang kulit*, wood carving, weaving are seen as traditional form of arts. If not contextualised, they seem unrelated to the universality of graphic design that is stripped off all cultural elements. Although other forms such as contemporary Malaysian art are more relatable to the graphic students due to being more modern, the majority of MCAF are more inclined towards traditional arts. As graphic design education is underpinned by principles of design taught by Bauhaus, Malaysian graphic design educators must contextualise the content of their lessons should they want to include MCAF in a graphic design course. This study has contributed to graphic design education in Malaysia in that cultural identity is important to be explored and engaging in cultural responsive teaching would derive various perspectives about culture from where students can learn more about themselves.

There is an apparent need to educate Malaysian graphic design students, to preserve the value of MCAF, and to use MCAF as a creative influence to design outcomes, as the study has found similar efforts in studies in various parts of the world – Lebanon (Khoury & Khoury, 2009), Korea (Kim, 2004), Australia (Munday et al, 2014), United Arab Emirates (Hamdy, 2010; Asfour 2006), United States of America (Lai, 2012), Finland (Kokko & Dillon, 2010) and Taiwan (Lin, 1999).

However, there are other perspectives to be considered when including MCAF in a Malaysian graphic design course. This involves stakeholders such as graphic design students, graphic design educators, local private universities that offer graphic design education and the government.

As mentioned earlier, graphic design educators should take into consideration graphic design students' current knowledge and interests when planning to include

MCAF in a graphic design course. These students are learning in a continuously globalising Malaysia. “It is an accepted truism that we live in a world of change. People nod approvingly at generalisations about the inevitability of change and its impact upon our lives.” (Tavin & Hausman, 2004) Tavin’s and Hausman’s words may be 13 years old but the fact still rings true. With changes constantly occurring, it is unavoidable that each new generation is caught on with the novelty of change. For graphic design students, to be in the know of the latest trend brought in by outside cultures is almost necessary as graphic design’s main role is to communicate and solve design problems posed by clients (Hollis, 2001). Nevertheless, to understand the cultural meanings of MCAF and demonstrate expressions of cultural identity grounds a Malaysian graphic design student. “Designers not only produce useful products and images, but they also produce and reproduce cultural meanings through those products and images. The social context within which they operate circumscribes the choices designers can make in creating and marketing ideas. Only through understanding social and cultural contexts can designers comprehend fully their own roles in society.” (Grant & Fox, 1992)

As such, Malaysian graphic design educators’ challenge is to create a balance between imparting the necessary knowledge of principles of graphic design as has always been taught by the Bauhaus, and the infusion of local MCAF into the class room. Resonating Tavin and Hausman (2004), Yazdiha’s (2010) study, too, voices that contemporary culture is a mixture of “cross-cultural influences, blended, patched-work and layered upon one another.” This is not unfamiliar in the Malaysian setting. Therefore, graphic design educators would have to infuse and contextualise MCAF into the class room (Mullen & Chalmers, 1990; Lin, 1999; Gay, 2002; Kim, 2004;

Asfour 2006; Meyer, 2008; Khoury & Khoury, 2009; Hamdy, 2010; Munday et al, 2014).

Next, graphic design programmes need to include more local, Malaysian contexts in the curriculum. As found in the top three private higher education institutions' programme structure (refer to Appendices I, II and III), modules found in the graphic design programmes' curriculum are all generic and lack local content. This is due to many local, private universities have their programmes affiliated with overseas universities. In order to prepare students for the transfer to overseas partner universities, the contents of those programmes are therefore made more universal. There is a change, however. In the private university that the researcher currently works in, the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) design programmes are now fully homegrown, not affiliated to overseas partner universities. This means that there is a great opportunity for educators to start infusing local art and design elements into their courses.

The final implication is that there should be more avenues for learners and educators to acquire more knowledge of MCAF. Easy accessibility to these places must also be taken into consideration (Kapsalis, 2016; Why people visit museums and galleries, and what can be done to attract them, 2007).

### **Suggestions for Future Studies**

The beauty of action research is that it is recursive and constantly engages researchers in finding new solutions to current problems.

The researcher of this study focused on a selected group of graphic design students in a private university in Malaysia and on selected four MCAF only. The following are suggestions by the researcher for future studies:

- i. To conduct a similar study but include more MCAF, besides the four that had been selected for this study, into a graphic design course.
- ii. The future study could involve a larger group of Malaysian graphic design students for richer data collection.
- iii. The future study could be conducted for a longer duration of time, to enable the researcher to run more cycles of the action research for richer data collection.
- iv. To conduct a study on graphic design educators' teaching approaches and pedagogy when including MCAF in a graphic design course.
- v. To conduct a study to understand graphic design educators' views and challenges when including MCAF in a graphic design course.

With the above suggestions, it is apparent that there are many questions that can be explored in future studies. It would be interesting to find out the impact and influence of other MCAF in a bigger group of Malaysian graphic design students' learning. To discover and understand the process of the inclusion of MCAF in a graphic design course from the perspective of graphic design educators would be beneficial to enrich Malaysian graphic design pedagogy. In the next section, the researcher will conclude the present study.

### **Conclusion**

Graphic design is a way of communication to solve problems through visual and textual elements. Having said so, the designer is therefore a sender of a message to an audience, the receiver. In order for the message to be understood as intended by the designer, the designer will have to encode the message with cultural signs that create a

shared meaning with the audience. In that regard, the designer would need to have a good understanding of the culture in which the designer finds himself or herself in.

From this research, the researcher had learnt that there were benefits with and without MCAF intervention activities in the graphic design course. With the experience from the intervention activities, the researcher could continue incorporating intervention activities with MCAF in the graphic design class room, as an introductory stage for students to learn about Malaysian culture and explore their cultural identity. Without intervention activities in this study but with explicit guidance, had made the researcher see that more diversity in the types of MCAF could be incorporated into a graphic design classroom, with the students making their own choices. Intervention activities are important to scaffold students' learning of MCAF. Of equal importance is without intervention activities because when students have the freedom to select their own MCAF, they have many options to choose from. This also hones their independent thinking in making a link regarding their cultural identity towards their selected MCAF, and vice versa. Due to the strength in both approaches, to combine with and without intervention activities pertaining to MCAF may be the best way forward in a graphic design classroom of the future.

Strong and clear expressions of cultural identity is what sets a local graphic designer apart from others. Expressions of cultural identity by designers can only further motivate their creativity to continue the search for local flavours to be expressed in or to inspire their work. In turn, these efforts could educate or introduce to those who are not local or even to reintroduce to locals the beauty, intricacy and the complexity of Malaysian visual cultural art forms.

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