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A Data Review of Batik Block Makers through the Focus Group Discussion

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Abstract

This study explores the decline of Batik block makers in Malaysia through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) approach. Using qualitative research methods, semi-structured group interviews were conducted to collect data on participants' experiences, perceptions, and opinions within the Batik community. The FGD provided a two-way discussion platform that enabled participants to share valuable insights on the challenges and sustainability of Batik block making. This paper highlights the importance of preserving traditional craftsmanship and examines the implications of the decline in the number of block makers, drawing on rich qualitative data from a Focus Group Discussion.

Keywords: Batik; Block Maker; Batik block; Focus Group Discussion

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1.0 Introduction

In this research, the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method is employed as a qualitative data collection approach, emphasising social interaction and community development. The FGD involves a small group of participants engaging in an in-depth discussion on a specific topic, moderated by a professional facilitator. According to Krueger (1994) and Morgan et al. (1998), FGDs are an efficient qualitative research technique as both the researcher and participants are present simultaneously, reducing logistical challenges. This is particularly advantageous for researchers with limited resources, for whom geographical proximity is crucial.

As highlighted by Hancock, Elizabeth, and Windridge (2009), the FGD method enables researchers to observe participants' attitudes, perceptions, knowledge, and experiences, which are further reflected through social interactions (Eeuwijk & Angehrn, 2017). Within this study, the FGD focuses on the batik block-making community, a traditional handicraft industry in Malaysia. Batik block making is a meticulous craft, executed entirely by hand, using copper plates approximately 0.25 mm thick and 20 mm wide to form intricate patterns. Despite their expertise, the number of skilled craftsmen has declined drastically, with most current practitioners being elderly men who can draw detailed patterns before transforming them into batik stamps (Suryanto et al., 2016). Technically, batik block or batik cap refers to the batik-making process where designs are applied using wax stamps or "chaps" (Elphick, 2014). Abdul Karim (2017) reported that fewer than 7 active batik block makers remain in Terengganu and Kelantan, compared with more than 300 in 1990. This dramatic decline is attributed to the commercialisation of hand-drawn batik, which offers higher profit margins than block printing. Although demand for batik blocks remains high, especially in Kelantan (Abdullah, 2019), the economic downturn and operational

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challenges have led to the closure of approximately 30 block-printing businesses, significantly affecting artisans' livelihoods. In relation to this issue, the FGD serves as a strategic research tool for collecting comprehensive insights from participants on their personal experiences, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes toward batik block making. The group typically comprises around eight participants, including batik experts, community members, and educators, who share similar cultural and professional backgrounds. The discussion technique, rooted in group interviews, is widely recognised for revealing participants' perceptions, ideologies, and values, making it a suitable qualitative method for examining the challenges faced by Malaysia's traditional batik block-making industry.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Batik

In Malaysia, batik also plays a vital cultural role. Malaysian batik tends to emphasize floral and natural motifs and is celebrated not only as traditional attire but also as a national symbol that has been integrated into both everyday fashion and cultural expression. Regional patterns reflect diverse cultural influences and histories within the country. (Unesco, 2025). Beyond its aesthetic value, batik serves as a cultural expression that unites artisans, educators, and entrepreneurs in preserving national heritage (Garber, Hochtritt, & Sharma, 2019). The craft reflects Malaysia's multicultural spirit and acts as a bridge between the past and future (Mignosa & Kotipalli, 2019). Through education and training initiatives, such as those led by the National Craft Institute and the Adiguru Negara program, local artisans continue to sustain and innovate within this traditional art form (Akhir, 2014; Zumahiran et al., 2020).

2.2 Block Makers

Batik crafts serve as a significant economic contributor to Malaysia's creative industry. The batik community comprises diverse participants, including academicians, artisans, and business owners, whose collaboration sustains the continuity of cultural heritage. The involvement of education in craft-making enhances knowledge creation, promotes critical thinking, and unites communities around a shared cultural purpose (Garber et al., 2019). Further describe batik as a technique for applying wax to resist dyeing through dots and lines drawn with a canting or a copper stamp called a cap, typically on cotton or silk fabrics. Thus, batik represents a traditional textile art that merges craftsmanship and cultural expression. The role of crafters is central to the artistic creation process. The Cambridge Dictionary defines a crafter as an individual who creates artistic objects by hand. Garber, Hochtritt, and Sharma (2019) emphasise the importance of crafters, makers, and educators as agents of cultural change through Do It Yourself (DIY) and Do It Together (DIT) practices, highlighting how craft production influences individual behaviour, community identity, and national economic growth. Similarly, Mignosa and Kotipalli (2019) argue that handicrafts serve as a bridge between the past and the future, preserving traditional values while adapting to modern contexts.

Craft, as defined by Koplos and Metcalf (2010), encompasses a wide range of hand-based practices, grounded in respect for materials and techniques, and inherently reliant on manual skill and cultural tradition. In Malay art, local artisans demonstrate their expertise through creative and technical mastery. Arney (1987) notes that batik artisans have developed distinctive techniques that enable them to sustain relevance in a technologically advancing society. The concept of design, understood as the art and science of making, is inherently linked to creativity, which involves the ability to innovate and produce (Gross & Ellen, 2007). The Malaysian government has recognised the significance of this creative sector through institutional support and educational initiatives. Research and Development (R&D) programs led by Public (IPTA) and Private Higher Learning Institutions (IPTS) aim to promote growth in the batik industry. The establishment of the National Craft Institute in 2001 marked a significant step toward the professionalisation of craft education (Akhir, 2014). The institute appoints Adiguru Negara or Master Artisans, along with foreign experts, to train local artisans in various traditional crafts, including batik painting, weaving, ceramics, woodwork, metal, and rattan. The title of Master Craftsman, conferred by the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation (Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraf Malaysia, PKKM), acknowledges artisans who demonstrate exceptional mastery, design skill, and dedication to preserving heritage crafts (Zumahiran et al., 2020). These artisans not only uphold fine workmanship and traditional excellence but also serve as mentors and custodians of Malaysia's craft heritage, ensuring that cultural knowledge is transmitted to future generations.

2.3 Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) are often compared to interviews, particularly semi-structured "one-on-one" or "group interviews", as both are widely used qualitative methods for gathering information. While these approaches share a common goal of uncovering individuals' perceptions and ideologies, their similarities end there (Nyumba et al., 2018). Rooted in third-generation theory, this study employed the FGD approach to bring together batik experts, community members, and educators with shared backgrounds to discuss issues related to batik block making. Through this method, participants' perceptions, knowledge, experiences, and practices were explored in depth. Semi-structured interviews were incorporated in this study, as they are often considered synonymous with qualitative interviewing (Parker & Tritter, 2006). This flexible form of structured interviewing allows researchers to probe participants' responses more deeply, offering richer insights (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Such interviews facilitate a deeper exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives on cultural sustainability, and creative ideas related to the batik industry. Sayrs (1998) notes that interviews are highly effective in generating narrative data and capturing individual perspectives in detail. Similarly, Cohen et al. (2007) emphasise that interviews provide a neutral environment for participants to articulate their thoughts openly, while Berg (2007) highlights their capacity to produce holistic, detailed, and authentic representations of informants' voices. In this research, a respondent moderator was utilised during the FGD sessions. As suggested by Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005), assigning one participant as a temporary moderator can

positively influence group dynamics, encouraging openness and diversity of responses. This approach increased the likelihood of obtaining authentic, diverse, and honest perspectives from participants engaged in discussions about batik block making.

3.0 Methodology

The general purpose of this research is to describe the descriptive research procedure and outline how data are gathered through the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method. This approach enables the researcher to explore the cultural activities and experiences of the batik block-making reformation through the perspectives of block makers and participants. Both the researcher and participants are actively engaged in the research process, fostering meaningful knowledge exchange. Participants share their experiences and insights gathered from identified artisans and Adiguru. This study uses observation techniques to collect in-depth information from artisans in the batik industry, particularly those on the east coast of Malaysia.

3.1 The Informants

In general, the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted in this study involved nine selected informants, chosen for their expertise, knowledge, and experience in their respective fields. The primary objective of this study is to address questions concerning the cultural sustainability of batik block making. The researcher believes that the selected informants represent the most suitable candidates to provide relevant insights and to further elaborate on emerging themes (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14). The nine informants who agreed to participate include batik entrepreneurs, senior academicians, a batik stamper, a block maker, and two expert block makers. The inclusion of these batik craft specialists offers valuable information and perspectives regarding the scarcity of block makers. Their contributions encompass views on user needs, market demand, design trends, materials, technology, and manufacturing processes. This interview aims to demonstrate the significance of employing the Focus Group Discussion method. From the analysis, several critical issues have been identified and warrant further examination in future research. The respondents' data are presented in Table

3.2 The Batik Stakeholder Background

No.	Details	
1.	Hamdan Bin Lias Profession	Senior Lecturer in Textile Department, Faculty of Art and Design, University Technology MARA, Kelantan.
	Achievements & Activities	Piala Seri Endon, first runner-up in 2015 Piala Seri Endon, second runner-up in 2014 Piala Seri Endon, first runner-up in 2011 Piala Seri Endon, second runner-up in 2010
2.	Rahman Bin Rosman Profession	Senior Lecturer in Textile Department, Faculty of Art and Design, University Technology MARA, Kelantan.
3.	Junaidi Bin Awang Profession	Senior Lecturer in Textile Department, Faculty of Art and Design, University Technology MARA, Kelantan.
	Achievements & Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> He has been heavily involved in new Batik design research organised by two (2) major organisations - Malaysian Batik, namely Yayasan Budi Penyayang Malaysia (PENYAYANG). His products have also been marketed at Harrods UK supermarkets by PENYAYANG to promote Malaysian Batik abroad. His success has been widely shared through the publication of the annual Batik Guild Malaysia magazine published by Yayasan Budi Penyayang -.
		and foreign newspapers, including The Island, Sri Lanka, Etihad in-flight magazine, UK, Batik Guild UK, and also Capital Magazine, Canberra
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representing the country in Batik exhibitions and shows as well as winning several major awards at home and abroad.
4.	Zakaria Bin Che Ahmad Profession	Block-maker and Batik stamper
	Achievements & Activities	30 years' experience in the Batik industry
5.	Md. Ghani Bin Mat Profession	Adiguru
	Achievements & Activities	Recognition by Malaysian Handicraft Development in 2011
6.	Zakaria Ismail (Pok Ya) Profession	Expert batik block-maker
	Achievements & Activities	From the age of 12 with 40 years' experience in Batik block-making.
7.	Amir Harith Bin Mat Kashim (Bujin) Profession	A well-known fashion designer,
	Achievements & Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Owns a company by the brand name Bujin's Batik and Academy of Batik. He sits on a panel of academic assessor in Batik industry
8.	Khairul Azahan Bin Mohammad Kamal Profession	Batik entrepreneur
	Achievements & Activities	Sells batik products
9.	Khairul Aznan Bin Mohammad Kamal Profession	Batik entrepreneur
	Achievements & Activities	

3.3 The implementation of FGD

The researcher initiated the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to facilitate the clear identification of speakers during transcription and analysis. All participants were encouraged to express their views while actively minimising overlap in speech. Before the session, essential "ground rules" were established to ensure effective communication and smooth discussion flow. When proceedings are not recorded, the presence of an observer is recommended to monitor and document interactions (Hancock, Elizabeth, & Windridge, 2009). The session was audio-recorded and lasted approximately three hours. An interview protocol was developed to guide the discussion and included structured questions that each informant was required to address during the session. The interviews aimed to capture participants' lived experiences and perspectives concerning batik block making within its cultural and industrial context. As presented in Table 3.2,1 the key themes served as a framework for developing the guiding interview questions.

3.4 Interview structure

In this focus group discussion, the researcher acting as facilitator, in order to encourage the recognition of speakers for the purposes of transcription and analysis, all participants should express themselves and must comply with the added problem of trying to avoid more than one person speaking at a time. There's something that should be requested when the "ground rules" are laid out. It is a good idea to have an observer if the proceedings are not being videoed. Hancock, B. Elizabeth Ockleford, E. and Windridge, K (2009). Each session was audio-taped and generally took from 3 hours. Every session the interview protocol highlights questions that need to be addressed to the informant. The interviews were designed to extract the information generated from the experiences and voices of interview participants on the batik block in the particular setting. Five key themes provided a framework for the guiding interview questions as shown in table below:

	Theme	Content
First	Background of the interviewee	-Experience of service -Area of expertise
Second	Malaysian Batik Industry	-Trend -Consumer needs -Sustainability -Cost -importance / need to continue batik efforts
Third	The importance of batik block	
Fourth	Batik Block	-The number of block makers still sustain. -Market demand for batik block -The process on block making technique -Price/time -Motifs selection -Market
Fifth	Innovation in Batik Block	-How innovation is required -What should be changed in batik block -What can't be changed -What is a good feature of batik block -What is education batik block should be developed for future generations.

4.0 Findings

This qualitative study is grounded in interviews conducted through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). To achieve the objectives of this research, interviews were held with batik entrepreneurs, block makers, and academicians, each possessing more than 20 years of experience in the batik industry, as shown in Table 3.1.1. These interviews were designed to validate and complement the evidence collected from stakeholders involved in batik block production. The analysis revealed several critical issues that warrant further investigation in future research. Consequently, the most effective approach to addressing the scarcity of primary data, particularly from block makers, is through FGDs, as they offer deeper insights and a more comprehensive understanding of the accumulated body of knowledge. The responses were transcribed and systematically coded into several categories, as illustrated in the diagram below.

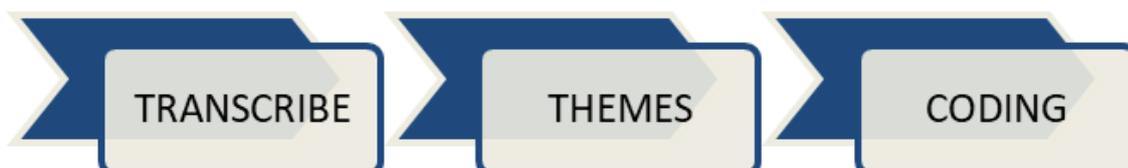


Diagram 4.1 The flow chart of Transcribe data from the interview through Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

5.0 Discussion

The interview focus group discussion (FGD) with batik stakeholders revealed that the informants raised several issues regarding the question structure. The researchers divided the issues into four themes: Trends, Sustainability, Needs, and Cost of the Batik Block. The themes can be simplified into several codes based on the issues, structured as shown below (Table 5.1)

5.1 Theme structure from Focus Group Discussion

TREND	CONSUMER NEEDS	SUSTAINABILITY	COST OF BLOCK
Learning practice knowledge in the workshop is totally different from learning through books or theory	In educating young people about our cultural heritage. The government should emphasise the importance of promoting our cultural heritage.	Production gradually decreased.	The price of raw materials has increased.
Children do not have an interest. Our modern younger generation Do not want to spend and focus	It is a must. Batik now badly needs reform; there should be a new style of batik design that reflects the current situation, trends, and era.	Only two or three Block Makers are left.	Iron blocks are more accurate and easier to use.
Only the senior stampers, who are 50 years old and above, who are interested in Batik Block	Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation is an essential organisation for promoting batik.	Batik demand had declined tremendously.	Material constraint and time consumed in production. It took 1 month to complete, and it was costly for one block; the materials are too expensive.
Our local batik artisans and entrepreneurs still cannot accept the changes.	Indonesian batik products are more advanced.	Those that exist are mostly from old generations.	At present, the cost to make a block is around RM 300.00.
Still opt for the conventional Malaysian block.	Identify new talent and apprentices, share my thoughts with them, and be passionate about it.	BM will extinct, and so will the batik printers. Everything will extinct, and our heritage will vanish.	Make the process of stamping easier.
Hard to find new talent and apprentices	Knowledge and training about our art and craft heritage should start in primary school.	If we do not preserve our heritage, the younger generation will never know what we had.	Batik producers can expect the price.

[INFORMANT, LINE,FGD2/ 2019]

INTERVIEW TYPE	FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PHASE 2
FOCUS	RQ 3:
INFORMANT	Azman : Entrepreneur 1 Amir (Bujin) : Entrepreneur 2 Azhan: Entrepreneur 3 Zakaria Ismail: Block maker (BM) Ghani Mat : Adiguru Zakaria Ahmad : Block Maker (BM) Junaidi Awang : Academic 1 Hamdan Lias : Academic 2 Rahman Rosman : Academic 3
PLACE	Holiday Villa Hotel & Suites Kota Bharu
DATE	2 August 2019
TIME	2.00 pm- 4.00pm

CONVERSATION WITH BATIK BLOCKS ENTREPRENEUR

(MINUTES 86:33)

Dr. Fauzi	Well, let's start with our second session and Insyallah we will try to finish this at around 5pm. As what as	1
Moderator	everyone here can see. I have told you earlier, in this second session, I will straight away go into the discussion	2
	about block. There is only one thing I want to start with, I would like to ask a question before we get into the	3
	discussion about block. My question is, do the Malaysian batik company should work towards the innovation of	4
	batik? That means, do we need to do the innovation? Let's have some comments for a start. Should we do the	5
	innovation and what kind of innovation that we need? Go ahead. Nan?	6
Encik Aznan	If innovation only involves lower costs, why not? We can make a try.	7
Dr. Fauzi	Otherwise?	8
Encik Aznan	Otherwise, if it were expensive, the block maker would be facing trouble, and we as a batik maker, we will have	9
	a problem too.	10
Dr. Fauzi	Meaning that innovation is necessary but it relates to the cost? Relate to the economy? Okay. What else?	11

Data analysis describes data collection, as shown in the diagram above. This strategy is used after data has been gathered from informant interviews. This procedure will begin with the collection of raw data, which will be restructured to be updated, and will be followed by thorough readings of all the data to ensure that the analysis is completed in accordance with the data gathered. Following that, the data analysis process is carried out using coding. Figure 3.1 shows the systematic process used by the researcher during the data analysis process. Once data has been discovered through interview findings, this strategy is used. To facilitate reporting, a short list of codes for each data is determined in advance. The goal is to make writing the report easier by avoiding repetition of informants, interview sessions, and data collected. For example, on October 20, 2018, phase 1 interviews with Mr. Zakaria bin Ismail was coded as (Zakaria, I: BM 2, L, 3,201018). The informant's name, BM 2, is an abbreviation for BLOCK MAKER followed by the number 2, which represents the informant's position in the interview session. L indicates the LINE for each sentence in the transcript, and 201018 indicates the date of the interview session (refer to table 3.4). The same method was used to code the data for focus group discussions (FGD), for example, Khairul Aznan bin Mohammad (Khairul Aznan, FGD2, L,17,020819). FGD2 is an abbreviation for focus group discussion phase 2, L is the line for each sentence in the transcripts, and 020819 is the date of the session. The Batik entrepreneur, academic, Batik stamper, and block maker are the chosen artisans to participate in FGD. These individuals have commonalities in the subject of this research. During these interview sessions, the informant not only gives excellent data but also expresses their perspective with regard to the preservation of cultural traditions. The outcome was subjected to theme analysis, which allowed for the generation of design concepts that were tailored to meet their requirements. The researcher has developed the notions of modularity and tessellation as a result of the findings from the second intervention on the subtopic of batik block design.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was employed within a case study methodology for data collection and analysis. The outcomes from participants in the batik community identified four key factors essential to addressing the decline in the practice of batik block making: trends, consumer needs, sustainability, and production costs. Sustaining the cultural heritage of batik block making in Malaysia requires deliberate attention to these elements. Malaysians must enhance their knowledge and skills in adapting to new design and market trends to educate future generations and ensure the continuity of this craft. The government also plays a critical role in preserving this heritage by integrating educational initiatives and promoting batik culture both domestically and to international tourists visiting the east coast region. Sustainability remains a vital component of cultural preservation. The batik block industry could flourish through innovation in materials and production techniques, inspiring batik artisans to create contemporary designs that attract new generations to appreciate and participate in the craft. However, these efforts will only succeed if Malaysian society collectively recognises and values its cultural heritage, particularly its traditional batik-making. It is crucial that all generations, especially millennials, be encouraged to help sustain this art form. The challenges currently faced by the batik sector must be addressed urgently to prevent the loss of this valuable tradition. Without such intervention, Malaysia risks losing one of its most treasured cultural assets in the pursuit of modernisation. The decline of batik block-making would not only affect the country's cultural identity but also diminish its appeal as a cultural tourism destination, depriving future generations of the opportunity to understand and appreciate their nation's artistic history.

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Paper Contribution to the Related Field of Study

This paper contributes to cultural and creative arts studies by examining batik block making as a declining traditional craft in Malaysia. Through Focus Group Discussions (FGD), it captures the perspectives and challenges of artisans, entrepreneurs, and academicians in sustaining the batik industry. The findings inform discussions on cultural sustainability, heritage preservation, and creative industry development, highlighting the roles of knowledge transmission, innovation, and government support in maintaining Malaysia's cultural identity and creative economy.

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