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Students Awareness towards Traditional Cultural Dances in Sarawak, Malaysia

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Abstract

Malaysia has many ethnic groups, and each ethnic group has own custom and tradition that most Malaysians are not aware, especially traditional dances. Among the Malaysian states, Sabah and Sarawak, situated in the Borneo Island have the most diverse ethnic groups in Sarawak. It has more than 30 ethnic groups. Each of the ethnic groups has its own language, cultures and lifestyle. In this regards, this research focuses on the main ethnic groups of Sarawak which are Orang Ulu, Malays, Melanau, Bidayuh, Chinese and Ibans. The aim of this study is to investigate the level of awareness among the Management and Science University (MSU) students regarding their level of awareness and knowledge about traditional dances of Sarawak. The data were gathered by distributing questionnaires among MSU students. The data were then analysed using SPSS system version 18.0. Results concluded that, most of MSU students have limited knowledge about Sarawak traditional dances. Interests, internet, performing arts clubs and family background are the independent variable factors to learn and gain knowledge about Sarawak traditional dances. The level of awareness among MSU students towards Sarawak traditional dances can be enhanced through events and special occasions to increase level of awareness towards Sarawak cultures. The government plays a major role in introducing Sarawak cultures to the whole of Malaysia. Future studies could focus on factors that influence the level of awareness towards Sarawak traditional dances, and the contribution of Sarawak's traditional dances to Malaysia's cultural and heritage tourism.

Keywords: Awareness; Traditional Dance; Sarawak; Malaysia

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Introduction

Culture can be defined as the integrated system that related to values, beliefs, behaviours, norms, artefacts and other works of any society or community. According to Melayu Online (2015) many aspects of Malay culture encompassed within the definition of the universal aspects such as philosophy of life, art, literature and language, means of live hood, food, traditional ceremony, equipment, dress, artefact, building, traditional medical treatment and Malay norms. The largest of Sarawak's ethnic group is *Iban*, form 30% of the state's population of 2.5 million. Sometimes, erroneously referred to as the Sea Dayaks because of their skill with boats, they are actually an upriver tribe from the heart of Kalimantan. Next, is the peace-loving and easy-going, the gentle Bidayuh are famous for their hospitality and 'tuak' or rice wine, making their home in Sarawak's southern regions, they are mostly farmers and hunters. Other than that is Melanau who are 6% of the population in Sarawak. They are believe to be among the original people to settle in Sarawak. Next is Orang Ulu. 27 of the inland tribal groups of Sarawak are collectively called Orang Ulu or upriver people. A total estimated population is around 100,000 people belong to tribes varied in size from 300 to 25,000 individuals. There are also the Malays who make up 23% of the population in Sarawak. Traditionally fishermen, these sea farmers chose to establish settlements on the banks of the many rivers of Sarawak. The last one for main ethics in Sarawak is the Chinese. They are the first people came to Sarawak as traders and explorers in the 6th century. Today, they make up 24% of the population of Sarawak and consist of communities built from the economic migrants of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Sarawak today is a multicultural society consisting of more than thirty ethnic groups (King 1990). These ethnic groups are found almost in every division of Sarawak migration for work, settlement and education. In general, the geographic distributions of these ethnic groups are as follows: the Malays mainly settle in the coastal part of Sarawak in the first division, *Ibans* are found in almost every division except the Fourth and Fifth divisions. The *Bidayuhs* are mostly found in the First division in the western part of Sarawak inland from Kuching, the *Melanau* are cantered around the coastal area (Mukah) of the western part in the Fourth division and the *Orang Ulu* inhabited the Fourth, Fifth and Seventh sections in the northeast of Sarawak, previously recognized as Central Borneo (Rousseau 1978, 1988). The Chinese, whose ancestors were traders and gold miners (Jackson, 1970) are found mostly in the main trading towns. Ever since the pre-colonial period the Chinese traded with the natives at *Marudi*, previously called Claude town in the Fourth division (Fumess 1902, Lee 1976).

Sarawakians, particularly those in the interior, identify themselves by the name of a place or river or mountain, or by the name of a local chief. Traditional dancing can be another form of folk dance, or sometimes even for ceremonial dance. The term 'Traditional' is more frequently used when the emphasis is on the cultural roots of the dance. A Traditional dance will therefore have arisen from a people's cultural

traditions, for example, the folk dances of indigenous populations of Sarawak. However, dances that have a ritual origin or purpose are not usually considered to be Traditional dances. These are known as 'Religious dances' instead. Traditional dancing is generally more of a social activity rather than competitive, but it is normally choreographed. Depending on the dance type itself, Traditional dancing can be performed either partnered or solo, and are mainly danced in formation (Nicolla Manning).

Every ethnic group in Sarawak has its own traditional dances which reflect its cultures. Level of awareness towards the traditional dance among dancers should be at a high level. Having the appreciation of traditional dances should in every traditional dancer in Malaysia. Most Malaysians know about Malay traditional dances such as Joget, Zapin and Kuda Kepang. But, most of them don't know the existence of other traditional dances in Malaysia especially from the minor ethnics of Sarawak. So, these traditional dances should be introduced more to the public in order to be one of the amazing culture and heritage attractions in Malaysia.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Traditional Dance

Dances have been playing various roles that are functional in all the major manifestations of human endeavours for effective communication. Indeed, dances have helps in shaping and re-shaping the history of different cultures all over the world. Thus, it is easily regarded as a universal phenomenon, just like spoken language. As one of the potent instruments or tools for communication and nation building, dance has been used as a symbol of oneness which thereby culminates into aiding societal and behavioural changes. Enekwe (2001) cited in Abbe (2003) mentioned that "dance is always serious because it is religious in a self-expressive and communication sense and it is social, because it is an integrated part of life".

Traditional Malay Dance is one of the roots of Malaysian Culture. Almost all festivals, nation-wide programs and celebrations are never complete without these wonder movements. For Malaysia heritage, dances vary widely and are heavily influenced by several cultural practices and traditional components such as martial arts, story-telling and humour. The deep rootedness in Malay culture and heritage can be seen in their choreography that are inspired and elements are drawn from Malay poems, theatres and music.

1.2 Internet

Internet can be one of the resources for Malaysians to learn and know more knowledge about traditional dances. In this modern world, internet is being used widely to gain knowledge and input, such as YouTube, Facebook, and google. In the West it became quite common to receive reference information about potential countries of travel, to search for and book tours, and search for a means of placement

and transportation via the Internet. At present the Internet first of all carries out the function of giving information.

1.3 Performing Arts Club

In MSU, there is the Performing Arts Clubs; the club also organizes traditional dance class to members of the club. The researchers wanted to observe how the activities and classes that being organized by the club help in the level of awareness of dancers in MSU regarding performing arts range from vocal and instrumental music, dance and theatre to pantomime, sung verse and beyond. Traditional theatre performances usually combine acting, singing, dance and music, dialogue, narration or recitation but may also include puppetry or pantomime. These arts, however, are more than simply 'performances' for an audience; they may also play crucial roles in culture and society such as songs sung while carrying out agricultural work or music that is part of a ritual.

1.4 Family Background

Some MSU students might have the knowledge about traditional dances because they are from Sarawak. This will be easier for them because they already familiar with the tradition dance from each ethnic group in Sarawak. The level of awareness regarding Sarawak cultural dances if their parents are dancers and used to learn about the traditional dance. Their parents can help on giving them information to increase their knowledge and input about the dance.

1.5 Interest

Interest is the feeling of wanting to give our attention to something or of wanting to be involved with and to discover more about something. Students who have interest in traditional dances might have more knowledge about the dance compare to the one who love more on modern dance. So they might have their own way on finding the way to increase their knowledge and level of awareness towards the traditional dance. The higher their interest on traditional dance, the higher their level of awareness towards traditional dance.

1.6 Sarawak Traditional Dance

Table1: Sarawak Traditional Dance

No.	Traditional Dance	Description
1.	Sarawak Ngajat	The Warrior Dance is a traditional dance of Sarawak's Iban people. This dance is usually performed during Gawai Kenyalang or 'Hornbill Festival'. Reputedly the most fearsome of Sarawak's head-hunters, the tribe's victorious warriors were traditionally celebrated in this elaborate festival. Wearing an elaborate headdress and holding an

		ornate long shield, the male warrior dancer performs dramatic jumps throughout this spellbinding dance.
2.	Datun Julud	The Hornbill Dance is a traditional dance of Sarawak's Kenyah women. Created by a Kenyah prince called Nyik Selong to symbolize happiness and gratitude, it was once performed during communal celebrations that greeted warriors returning from headhunting raids or during the annual celebrations that marked the end of each rice harvest season. Performed by a solo women dancer to the sounds of the sape, beautiful fans made out of hornbill feathers are used to represent the wings of the sacred bird.
3.	Bamboo Dance	Another highly popular and entertaining traditional dance is Bamboo Dance. Two long bamboo poles are held horizontally above the ground at ankle-height. They are clapped together to a high-tempo drumbeat. Requiring great agility, dancers are required to jump over or between the poles without getting their feet caught.

Study Framework

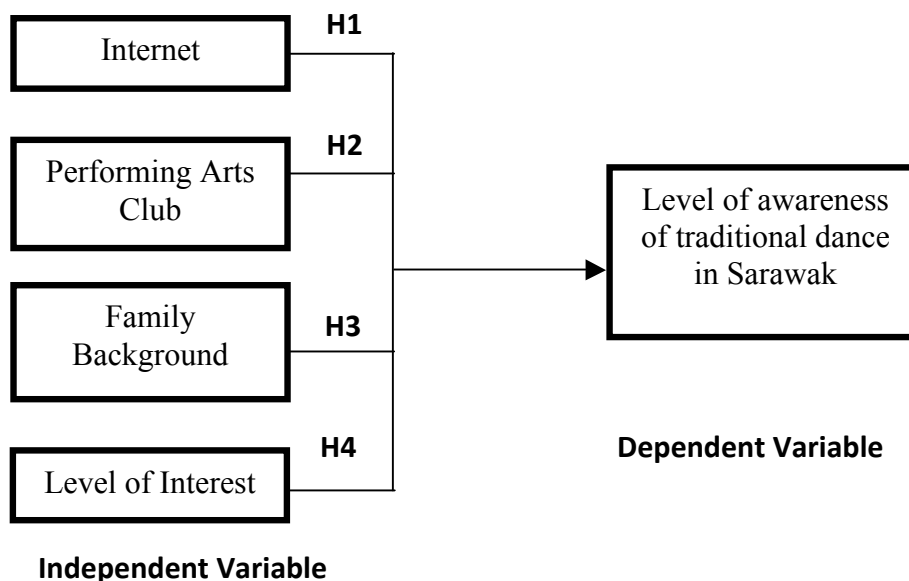


Figure1: Study Framework

2. Method

This section describes the research methods employed for this study. This study employed the quantitative research design with a structured questionnaire as the research instrument, to measure the awareness of MSU students regarding traditional dance in Sarawak. A descriptive research design also has been used. A cross-sectional study used also to analyse data gathered directly from students and dancers in MSU. This approach to ensure that the information obtained would be based upon actual

experience on increasing the awareness regarding the traditional dance. The reliability analysis as mentioned by Sekaran (2003) was used. The consistency and stability of this study are positive. For overall analysis, independent variables are reliable with research hypothesis and the results obtained are also reliable with the objectives and questions.

3. Findings

3.1 Demographic analysis

The demographic characteristics of gender, age, education, faculty, origin and status are shown in table 2.

Table2: Demographic analysis

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	41	41.0
Female	59	59.0
Age		
18-20	26	26.0
21-23	48	48.0
24-26	24	24.0
27>	2	2.0
Education		
Foundation	4	4.0
Diploma	13	13.0
Degree	83	83.0
Faculty		
SHCA	54	54.0
FBMP	15	15.0
FISE	5	5.0
FHLS	11	11.0
CFS	4	4.0
MBBS	3	3.0
Others	8	8.0
Origin		
Peninsular	82	82.0
Sabah	12	12.0
Sarawak	2	2.0
Others	4	4.0
Marital Status		
Single	99	99.0
Married	1	1.0

The demographic profile of the respondents indicated that both genders 41males and 59 females. The majority of the respondents were within the age of 21-23 years old (48%). Twenty six percent of respondents were 18-20 years old. Majority of respondents were from SHCA 54%, followed by FBMP 15%, 5 respondents were from FISE, FHLS, CFS, MBBS were minorities. Most of the respondents, 82%, and 12% were from Sabah and Sarawak.

The internet was the source of information about Sarawak traditional dances. Majority of the respondents (52%) agreed that internet plays a great role in gaining information about traditional dances especially from video in you tube or any online websites that can provide lessons in learning traditional dance. Minority (4%) of the respondents disagree prefer joining a class and have a dance tutor to teach them the dance.

While asking about how internet can help the respondents in increasing the interest of traditional dance among youths, only 36% of the respondents agreed. A possible reason was because modern youths have less interest in traditional dance. Youths prefer modern dances (52%) compare to traditional dance (2%). This is because modern dance is more regarding possibility of picking up on interest to learn more about traditional dance, only 12% strongly agree. The level of interest among dancers can influence to pick up and master traditional dance Was quiet high (60%).

Role of the MSU student clubs in fostering interest in Sarawak traditional dances about the existence of the club in MSU helping students who have interest in learning Sarawak traditional dance. Almost half of the respondents (44%) agreed. This might be because they used to learn Sarawak traditional dances through the clubs or they are members of the club. Other respondents (33%) are undecided and (12%) of the respondents are strongly disagree with the statement. Maybe through the live performance, it can attract MSU students to get involve with the Sarawak traditional dance and want to try to do the dance.

When asked about the intended of the members of the club to perform Sarawak traditional dance can help in influencing other students to gain interest towards Sarawak traditional dance, almost half respondents (47%) agreed, (35%) are undecided, 13% are strongly agree and only 1 respondent is strongly disagree with this statement.

It seems that the influence of family background (55%) contributes positively in influencing the new generation to get involved in Sarawak traditional dances. This means that the support of the family members is important, while nice friends (54%) can give a big influence for persons to learn or an interest on Sarawak traditional dances.

3.2 Descriptive Statistic

Table3: Descriptive Statistic

ANSWER	PERCENTAGE (%)
Which dance are you aware of: modern dance or traditional dance?	
1) Traditional Dance	40%
2) Modern Dance	30%

3) Both	5%
4) Not Interested	25%
Which dance do you think is easier for you to learn? Traditional dance or modern dance?	
1) Traditional Dance	20%
2) Modern Dance	10%
3) Both	20%
4) Not Interested	50%
Are you familiar with any Sarawak traditional dance?	
1) Yes	30%
2) No	20%
3) Not Sure	50%
List down 5 Sarawak traditional dance that you know.	
1) Right Answer	45%
2) Wrong Answer	15%
3) Don't Know	40%
List down ethnics in Sarawak that you know.	
1) Correct Answer	55%
2) Wrong Answer	10%
3) Don't Know	35%
Which ethnics in Sarawak that you are familiar with their traditional dance?	
1) Bidayuh	6%
2) Iban	30%
3) Dayak	4%
4) Don't Know or Wrong Answer	60%
According to the picture (Plate1), what is the name of the dance?	
1) Ngajat	25%
2) Don't Know	50%
3) Not Aware	25%
Which ethnics perform this dance?	
1) Iban	35%
2) Don't Know	50%
3) Not Aware	15%
Which ethnics perform this dance?	
4) Iban	35%
5) Don't Know	50%
6) Not Aware	15%
For which festivals they perform this dance?	
1) Hari Gawai	40%
2) Don't Know	35%
3) Not Aware	25%
Give a brief explanation about the meaning of the dance.	
1) Harvest Day	3%
2) Don't Know	90%
3) Not Aware	7%

Are you interested in learning any Sarawak traditional dance?	
1) Yes	60%
2) No	35%
3) Maybe	15%
Will you join or support any traditional dance competition in MSU?	
1) Yes	60%
2) No	30%
3) Maybe	10%
Between interest, internet, performing arts club and family background, which one do you think give a big influence for students in gaining their interest on traditional dance.	
1) Interest	35%
2) Internet	10%
3) Performing Arts Club	20%
4) Family Background	25%
5) Not Aware	10%
What is your suggestion to improve the awareness about Sarawak traditional dance?	
1) Relevant Answer	45%
2) Not Relevant Answer	15%
3) Blank	40%

Respondent's awareness and interest in learning Sarawak traditional dances, (40%) of the respondents are aware of Sarawak traditional dances, with 20% of them think that it is easy to learn both traditional and modern dances. (55%) were aware about ethnic groups in Sarawak. (10%) gave a give wrong answer, while (35%) leave this part blank. Some Sarawakian ethnic groups are usually promoted by Ministry of Tourism in peninsular Malaysia, but other ethnic groups are not, that's why some respondents gave the wrong answers.



Picture1: Sarawakian Traditional Dance

Many respondents could not positively identify the specific dance type (Plate1), only (25 %) of them gave the correct answer which is 'ngajat'. Half of the respondents gave wrong answers, while 25% did not respond. Based on the analysis, (35%) of respondents who answered correctly recognized the traditional costumes that dancers

wear. However, only (40%) of the respondents could associate 'ngajat' with Hari Gawai festival.

About the willingness to learn Sarawak traditional dances, Sixty percent of the respondents answer positively in wanting to learn about the Sarawak traditional dances, while 35% are not interested, and 15% are un sure whether they would like to learn or not. A majority of the respondents agreed to support or join any traditional dance competition organized by MSU. While 10% might join and support depending on what the occasion.

When asked about what influenced them to have an interest about Sarawak traditional dances, 35% of respondents said 'interested', and 25% said 'family background'. Performing art club and the internet were not considered as a major source of triggering interest in learning the Sarawak traditional dances.

Conclusion

This research was motivated by Sarawak's culture as one of the unique cultures in Malaysia. Sarawak is very rich with different cultures and ethnic groups which could be used to attract tourists. Among all cultures, this research focused on Sarawak traditional dances, as a unique dance and presents the uniqueness of each ethnic group with the mean and the stories behind its origin, and why they are celebrating. Results concluded that, most of MSU students are not aware of Sarawak traditional dances and general knowledge about Sarawak ethnic cultures. Respondents get to know and about Sarawak traditional dances by virtue of the family background and their personal interest to learn the dances. Traditional and cultural events should include ethnic dances from Sarawak and other Malaysian states to increase awareness and knowledge about it. Recommendations were made to increase the level of awareness towards Sarawak cultures, emphasizing the role of government in introducing Sarawak culture dances to the other Malaysian states. Future studies could be focused on factors that influence the level of awareness towards Sarawak traditional dances in a prouder level, and analyse the contribution of Sarawak culture dances to Malaysia's tourism industry.

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