

# EXPERIENCING AND LEARNING MALAYSIAN TRADITIONAL MUSIC: PERSPECTIVES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the views of students in Malaysian public secondary schools on Malaysian traditional music. Using the survey method, this study investigates the students' engagement with Malaysian traditional music, their perspective on the value of Malaysian traditional music, and their suggestions for what schools should teach them about Malaysian traditional music. The findings reveal the importance of integrating traditional music into secondary school curricula, not only to preserve Malaysia's cultural identity but also to foster a sense of belonging and appreciation among the younger generation. Findings highlight the positive perceptions of secondary students towards singing, playing and listening to Malaysian traditional music whereby a majority of the students strongly agreed that traditional music should be included in the school curriculum and taught in school. The students also expressed interest in learning how to sing traditional songs and how to play traditional musical instruments. Findings also highlight the important role music education plays in the cultural preservation of Malaysian musics in that including traditional music into the school curriculum will ensure the young generation will learn and not forget about their origins. Implications for curriculum design, pedagogy, and cultural preservation efforts in Malaysian secondary education are included.

**Keywords:** Malaysian Secondary School Students, Malaysian traditional music, music education, student perspectives, cultural preservation.

## INTRODUCTION

Renowned for its cultural diversity, Malaysia boasts a tapestry of music deeply rooted in its various ethnic communities. Malaysian music encompasses a spectrum of genres, instruments and performance styles, reflecting the country's multi-ethnic composition of Malay, Chinese, Indian and indigenous cultures including the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia and native peoples in the East Malaysia states of Sabah and Sarawak. The musical culture of Malaysia reflects significant influences from foreign elements, particularly Hindu and Islamic cultures from India and the Arab countries, and with colonization, influences from the Western world.

Despite this richness, traditional music as part of music education in secondary schools is often side-lined in favour of Western and popular music. This situation is reflected in the emphasis of the current music syllabi and teaching materials, which devote comparatively more content to Western notation, pop repertoire, and instrumental performance (Tan, 2008; Shahanum & Mohamad Adam, 2016). Moreover, many music teachers are trained primarily in Western musical traditions, and school performances or assessments often privilege choir, band, or popular music genres rather than traditional ensembles. Scholars have emphasized the role of music education in preserving and promoting cultural heritage (Reimer, 2003; Gates, 2000). Although several studies have examined the teaching of traditional music in Malaysian schools, very few focused specifically on students' experiences and perspectives at a secondary level. Most previous research has concentrated on curriculum implementation and teaching approaches rather than on how secondary students themselves engage with and value Malaysian traditional music.

This study focuses specifically on secondary school students because adolescence represents a developmental stage where personal and musical identities become more consciously formed. During this period, students are capable of reflecting on their musical preferences, values, and cultural associations (Campbell & Wiggins, 2013; Christenson & Roberts, 1998). In contrast, primary school students are still in early stages of musical exposure and may not yet articulate their engagement and perceptions in meaningful ways. Investigating secondary students therefore offers richer insights into how young Malaysians understand, appreciate, and engage with traditional music as part of their developing cultural identity.

This paper aims to investigate the perspectives of Malaysian secondary school students regarding traditional music education, thereby highlighting the role of music education in cultural preservation and national identity. Specifically, the study seeks to: 1) Examine students' experiences with Malaysian traditional music in and outside school; 2) Investigate students' perceived value of Malaysian traditional music in relation to cultural heritage and identity; and 3) Identify students' suggestions for how schools could enhance the teaching and learning of Malaysian traditional music.

### Music and adolescents

To better understand how Malaysian secondary school students engage with traditional music, it is essential to consider how music functions in the lives of young people. The following sections outline the conceptual background that frames this study. They examine how adolescents relate to music as a medium for identity formation and social connection, and how traditional music, in particular, can influence young people's sense of belonging, cultural continuity, and creative expression.

From infancy through adolescence, young individuals express themselves through singing, dancing, and playing music as an essential aspect of their development (Campbell & Wiggins, 2013). They both consume and create music, utilizing it as a means of escape and a

source of comfort. Their engagement with music is supported by various societal factors such as family, community, schools, and media, shaping their identity while also setting them apart from those with different interests. For many young people, music is an important medium. Christenson and Roberts (1998) show that music is a widely listened to medium and that listening to music fulfills important functions for the regulation of moods and for social and personal development. According to them, music fulfills five distinct purposes. Firstly, it serves as a primary mood enhancer, providing stimulation and energy that are integral to social gatherings. Secondly, it serves as a means of alleviating boredom, such as listening to music while doing homework to make tedious tasks more tolerable. Some teenagers also use music as a tool for learning about the world. Additionally, music influences how teenagers perceive themselves, as they resonate with the messages in their favorite songs or emulate the attitudes and behaviors of their favorite artists. Moreover, music serves as a form of personal identification, with musical taste signaling one's identity and group affiliations. Consequently, adolescent music preferences play a crucial role in social identification and the formation of friendships and social groups. As evidenced by various studies (e.g., Arnett, 1991; Bakagiannis & Tarrant, 2006; Bryson, 1996; Frith, 1981; North et al., 2004; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2006; Tarrant et al., 2001), music significantly influences the structure of adolescent cultures, friendship groups, and intimate relationships. In summary, music holds significant importance for teenagers, serving as both an auditory backdrop during their development and a medium through which they construct their identities. Additionally, the enhancement of the environment through music contributes to its enjoyment. Understanding adolescents' multifaceted engagement with music provides a foundation for examining how Malaysian secondary students experience and value traditional music as part of their daily lives and developing identities.

### **The impact of traditional music on young people's lives**

Existing scholarship in world music pedagogy shows that traditional music continues to engage young people because it offers meaningful connections to cultural identity, community heritage, and shared belonging. Authors from diverse world regions consistently highlight that, even within contexts dominated by popular music, traditional genres retain strong appeal for younger generations precisely because they support cultural continuity, foster intergenerational ties, and provide authentic musical experiences. This body of literature collectively demonstrates why traditional music remains significant in contemporary youth culture:

1. Cultural Identity: Traditional music serves as a powerful link to one's cultural heritage and identity. Young people often explore traditional music to better understand their roots and connect with their ancestors' experiences (Mauwa, 2020).
2. Authenticity and Heritage: Many young people are drawn to the authenticity and historical significance embedded in traditional music. They see it as a way to preserve and honour their cultural heritage while also celebrating diversity (Coppola, Hebert and Campbell, 2020).
3. Social Connection: Traditional music often brings communities together, fostering social connections and a sense of belonging among young people. Whether through folk festivals, community events, or informal gatherings, traditional music provides opportunities for shared experiences and camaraderie (Cantarelli Vita & Campbell, 2021).
4. Artistic Expression: Traditional music offers a rich tapestry of melodies, rhythms, and storytelling, providing young musicians with a platform for artistic expression. Many find creative inspiration in traditional tunes, incorporating elements of folk music into their own compositions and performances (Howard & Kelly, 2018).
5. Educational Value: Exploring traditional music can be an educational journey, offering insights into different musical styles, instruments, and cultural practices. Many young people view traditional music as a valuable source of learning and enrichment, whether through formal music education or informal exploration (Miller & Shahriari, 2020).
6. Environmental Awareness: Some traditional music is closely intertwined with nature and the environment, reflecting the relationship between communities and their surroundings. Young

people interested in environmental issues may gravitate towards traditional music that emphasizes themes of nature, sustainability, and conservation (Kertz-Welzel, 2021).

7. Revival Movements: In some regions, there are revival movements dedicated to preserving and promoting traditional music among younger generations. These initiatives often involve workshops, performances, and educational programs aimed at engaging young people and revitalizing interest in traditional musical forms (Isabirye, 2021).

Together, these insights form the conceptual foundation for this study's exploration of Malaysian secondary school students' perspectives on traditional music. How they engage with it, what value they assign to it, and how they believe it should be taught in schools.

### **Exploring Malaysian traditional music and cultural significance**

Over the span of the past two millennia, the cultural landscape of Malaysia has undergone a perpetual process of shaping and adaptation, blending indigenous facets with external influences stemming from both Eastern and Western origins. These influences have permeated the Malay Peninsula through an array of cultural conduits, encompassing contributions from the Middle and Near East, South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. Furthermore, substantial cultural enrichments have been imparted by significant Asian regions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese folk religions, and Islam (Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof, 2004).

Matusky and Tan (2017) have observed that there is a conspicuous lack of substantial musical style integration among various ethnic groups in Malaysia. Music genres and styles are still clearly distinguished, especially between Chinese, Indian, and Malay cultures and other indigenous people. Malaysian music falls into several groups, including popular, folk, classical, syncretic, and modern art music. The qualities of these classifications: popular, folk, classical, syncretic, and modern art music, may occasionally overlap; however, these categories are useful for organising and understanding the historical development of Malaysia's musical traditions.

Classical and folk music originated during the pre-Colonial era, with classical music typically associated with urban centers or royal courts and palaces, while folk music is commonly found in rural villages and agricultural areas where oral traditions prevail and literacy rates vary (Matusky and Tan, 2017). Despite distinctions between classical and folk music, some genres exhibit characteristics that straddle both categories. Key genres of Malaysian classical music include joget gamelan, wayang Melayu, nobat, as well as traditions from Karnatak and Hindustani music. Examples of genres that historically transcended rural and aristocratic contexts include makyung, wayang kulit Melayu, tarinai, and zapin.

Syncretic music, originating in the post-colonial period (16th century), is encountered in both urban and rural environments. It encompasses vocal, dance, and theatrical forms such as ghazal (love songs), dondang sayang (repartee singing), lagu Melayu asli (original Malay songs), zapin, inang, and joget (dance music), boria (comic skits and singing), kercong (a vocal and instrumental genre), and bangsawan (Malay opera).

The final musical category comprises popular and contemporary art music. Malaysian popular music and contemporary art music are primarily influenced by Western traditions yet infused with local elements. These genres predominantly thrive in urban areas where exposure to diverse international influences is readily accessible.

Across historical epochs, the performing arts in Malaysia, including Malaysia's musical cultures, have epitomized lively manifestations of dynamic syncretism, an ongoing evolutionary process (Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof, 2004).

## **Malaysian traditional music in Malaysian public schools**

Malaysia possesses a comprehensive educational framework covering preschool through tertiary education (Samuel, Tee & Symaco, 2017). Primary education is mandatory and provided free of charge to all Malaysians. In 1982, the Malaysian school curriculum formally incorporated music, making it compulsory for students in all national primary schools. Subsequently, in 1996, the music curriculum was expanded to include a limited number of secondary schools across Malaysia (Ramona Mohd Tahir & Hogenes, 2024). A significant development in the annals of Malaysian music education occurred in 2007 with the establishment of Sekolah Seni, or Arts Schools, as mandated by the Minister of Education. Sekolah Seni students study the four disciplines of the arts - Music, Visual Arts, Theatre, and Dance. Curricula at the Malaysian primary and secondary public schools as well as the Sekolah Seni embrace a diverse range of musical genres, including pop, music from various cultures, Western classical music, and traditional Malaysian music.

Malaysian public schools integrate Malaysian traditional music into both their academic curriculum and co-curricular pursuits. The Sports, Co-Curricular and Arts Division of the Ministry of Education supervises co-curricular activities, while the Curriculum Development Division sets the curriculum content for all Malaysian public schools, with implementation handled by the State Education departments. State and national competitions for choirs, marching bands, and various music ensembles, including traditional forms like Cak Lempong, Kompong, and Dikir Barat are organized by the Sports, Co-Curricular and Arts Division. In recent years, teachers and school administrators have reported a decline in the frequency of these competitions, largely attributed to financial and logistical constraints.

Malaysian traditional music is integrated into both primary and secondary school music curricula, with a focus on fostering aesthetic appreciation, particularly towards Malaysian music. The primary school music curriculum aims to provide a platform for students to express their creativity through singing, movement, and playing musical instruments. Students engage in music-making activities and songs reflecting Malaysia's diverse cultural groups, facilitating connections between their emotions, surroundings, and heritage. In secondary school, Malaysian traditional music is emphasized in the Musical Experience and Aesthetic Appreciation aspects, with specific attention given to genres such as Dikir Barat, Ghazal, and Dondang Sayang. Traditional music forms a substantial component of the Sekolah Seni curriculum, complemented by co-curricular activities such as traditional dance, Bangsawan, and other art forms. In Sekolah Seni's Form 1-3 curriculum, traditional music is integrated into Arts Application and Arts in Life, while Form 4 and 5 modules prioritize the appreciation of Malaysian music across various traditional music ensembles. Genres like Wayang Kulit, Kerongcong, and Chinese Opera, as well as traditional dances such as Inang and Zapin, along with instruments like Sape, Rebab, Cak Lempong, and Kompong, are included in the Sekolah Seni music curriculum, along with music from neighboring and other countries.

As observed, Malaysia boasts an extensive educational system that incorporates a music education which provides a diverse range of genres and styles that accurately reflect the music of its diverse population. Given Malaysia's multicultural and multiracial backdrop, knowing and appreciating the music of each population is important in fostering rapport between all Malaysians and in preserving the Malaysia cultural heritage. In this context, studying the perspectives of secondary school students toward Malaysian traditional music can provide insights on their viewpoints on their and others' traditional music.

## **Music education and Malaysian traditional music**

Researchers have investigated various aspects of Malaysian traditional music and secondary school students. Shahanum and Mohamad Adam (2016) highlighted the need to consider cultural context and authenticity in the teaching of traditional music in Malaysian schools. In

their study, they discovered that the teaching approaches used to teach gamelan in Malaysian schools and universities may be misrepresenting its authentic practice as well as not giving students the necessary skills to play gamelan correctly. Subjects of their study were ten (10) gamelan instructors who taught gamelan in schools and universities.

Ang & Yeoh (2002) investigated the musical preferences and the effects of familiarity and musical training on their preferences, of 139 Malaysian secondary school students. Results of their study indicated the students' strong preference for non-ethnic (especially pop music) over ethnic Malaysian music. Familiarity was also identified as a significant determinant of preferences for both non-ethnic and ethnic music. Musical training, however, did not show any correlation with musical preferences.

Tan (2008) examined the ways in which certain Malaysian traditional music genres and those taught in Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines have been incorporated into secondary education in Malaysia. Making a case for the multicultural approach, she proposes a comparative approach to teaching traditional music from Southeast Asia countries focusing on active music-making and guided listening.

The musical identities of adolescents in Malaysian secondary schools who are both musically engaged and inactive were examined by Ramona Mohd Tahir and Hogenes (2021). The MY MUSCI questionnaire, based on the Musical Self-Concept Inquiry (MUSCI\_Youth) measurement tool developed by Psychiger (2010; 2017) was completed by 282 subjects from throughout Malaysia. The questionnaire comprised 12 subscales, of which 8 were completed by all subjects and 4 were completed only by those who sing or play an instrument. Findings relevant to the study include: Over 60% of the Malaysian students listen to music for more than 3 hours a day; 53% of Malaysian students actively make music (sing or play an instrument); 72% of the students have been playing their musical instrument for 3 years or less; students listen to a variety of musics, including Malaysian traditional music. 93% listens (among others) to popular music. None of the students reported playing a traditional Malaysian musical instrument. However, 16% of the students who play a musical instrument like to play Malaysian traditional music while 25% of the students who sing likes to sing Malaysian traditional music.

Following previous research on Malaysian traditional music among secondary students on the authenticity of the teaching method, musical preferences, multicultural teaching and learning approach, and musical identities, there appears to be a need to further explore the students' perceptions of, and experiences with Malaysian traditional music. Since appreciation is pivotal in preserving the cultural heritage of Malaysian traditional music, it is essential to understand the perspectives of young people, who represent the next generation of culture bearers. Adolescence is a formative period for shaping attitudes, tastes, and values (Christenson & Roberts, 1998), and the ways in which youth perceive traditional music will influence whether these traditions are sustained or neglected in the future. Exploring their views therefore provides insight into the future trajectory of Malaysia's musical identity and informs how music education can remain culturally relevant to younger generations. The subsequent sections of this article will address the following inquiries: What are Malaysian secondary school students' experiences with, and perceived value of Malaysian traditional music? What suggestions do the students have for what schools should teach them about Malaysian traditional music?

## METHODOLOGY

The quantitative research approach was used in this study, utilizing the survey method to gather data from Malaysian secondary school students from ages 13 till 18 years old. Participants were obtained through random sampling to ensure unbiased data collection and diversity in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and geographical location. However, despite

attempts to reach a wide geographical spread, the sample is not fully balanced across all Malaysian states. A majority of the respondents were from the central region, particularly Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, with limited representation from East Malaysia (Sarawak only) and from certain northern and eastern states such as Pahang, Perlis, Kelantan, and Sabah. This distribution reflects the accessibility of schools and teachers who participated in the survey rather than any intentional sampling bias. A questionnaire was constructed to investigate the students' interest and engagement with Malaysian traditional music as well as their views on Malaysian traditional music and music education.

The survey consisted of two parts namely Part A: Demographics, and Part B: Engagement with, and Perceived Value of Malaysian traditional music. The items were a combination of closed and open-ended questions. Some items used a dichotomous yes and no type, others used item selection whereby respondents selected the most suited item. Respondents were also able to respond to open ended questions with their own respective narratives.

The survey in the form of a google form with instructions was distributed via Whatsapp to public secondary school teachers with the request for them to forward to their students and also to other public secondary school music teachers to likewise pass on to their students. The data collection process took place over a period of two weeks. The data was analyzed using descriptive analysis, namely frequency distributions.

## RESULTS

A total of 203 completed surveys were returned. Table 1 lists the demographics where all respondents attend public secondary schools from all over the country, with ages ranging from 13 years old to 18 years old. The respondents comprise 119 (58.6%) female students and 84 (41.4%) male students. A majority of the respondents are of Malay origin (180, 88.7%) while only 8 (3.9%) are Chinese and 4 (2.0%) are Indian. A majority of the respondents are from the central part of the country, Kuala Lumpur (94, 46.3%) and Selangor (3, 1.5%). There are also respondents from the north such as Penang (1, .5%) and Perak (17, 8.4%), south such as Johor (18, 8.9%) and east of the peninsular such as Kelantan (5, 2.5%) and Terengganu (38, 18.7%). East Malaysia is represented by (27, 13.3%) respondents from Sarawak.

Although this distribution provides a useful overview of student perspectives across several Malaysian regions, the absence of respondents from certain states (e.g., Pahang, Perlis, and Sabah) limits the ability to generalize the findings to all Malaysian secondary schools.

In terms of their musical experience, most students said they learned music from music class in school (177, 87.2%) while a few said their musical experience came from being involved in music co-curriculum in school (for example, in the cak lempong ensemble, marching band, choir, and wind orchestra (20, 9.9%). A few learned music from having private music classes at home or from attending a private music school (for example Yamaha Music) (6, 3.0%).

**Table 1: Background of the respondents**

		Frequency	Percent
Age	13	67	33.0
	14	70	34.5
	15	45	22.2
	16	11	5.4
	17	9	4.4
	18	1	.5
Gender	Female	119	58.6
	Male	84	41.4
Race	I am Malaysian-Chinese	8	3.9
	I am Malaysian-Indian	4	2.0
	I am Malaysian-Malay	180	88.7
	Others	11	5.4
Location of respondents	Federal Territory Kuala Lumpur	94	46.3
	Johor	18	8.9
	Kelantan	5	2.5
	Penang	1	.5
	Perak	17	8.4
	Sarawak	27	13.3
	Selangor	3	1.5
	Terengganu	38	18.7
	Music class in school	177	87.2
Musical experience	Music co-curriculum in school (for example the cak lempong ensemble, marching band, choir and wind orchestra)	20	9.9
	Private music class at home or at a private music school (for example Yamaha Music School)	6	3.0

**What are Malaysian secondary school students' experiences with, and perceived value of Malaysian traditional music?**

The respondents answered questions on their experiences with, and their perception of the value of Malaysian traditional music. As shown in Table 2, 175 (86.2%) of the respondents said they like to listen to Malaysian traditional music, while 28 (13.8%) said no. When asked to identify the type of Malaysian traditional music that they like, 176 (86.7%) responded that they like Malay traditional music, followed by 9 (4.4%) who prefer Chinese traditional music, 3 (1.5%) prefer Indian traditional music, 2 (1.0%) like Indigenous music, and 13 (6.4%) who prefer other types of music. Since the majority of the respondents are of Malay origin, it might follow suit that the majority likes to listen to Malay traditional music. When asked if they sing or play

Malaysian traditional music, 119 (58.6%) said they do while the remaining 84 (41.2%) said that they do not. When asked for their opinion on whether it is important that traditional music be preserved for future generations, the majority said yes (197, 97.0%) while a small number responded negatively (6, 3.0%).

**Table 2: Malaysian secondary school students' experiences with, and perceived value of Malaysian traditional music**

		Frequency	Percent
Do you like to listen to Malaysian traditional music?	No	28	13.8
	Yes	175	86.2
Which type of Malaysian traditional music do you like to listen to?	Chinese	9	4.4
	Indian	3	1.5
	Indigenous	2	1.0
	Malay	176	86.7
	Other	13	6.4
Do you sing or play Malaysian traditional music?	No	84	41.2
	Yes	119	58.6
Do you think it is important that our traditional music be preserved for future generations?	No	6	3.0
	Yes	197	97.0

Respondents were also asked to identify which Malaysian traditional music that they like to sing or play. Not all respondents answered this open-ended question, thus the overall does not total to 203 (100%). Respondents' answers can be categorized by musical instrument (according to the name of the musical instrument which they like to play), by musical style (according to the style of traditional music which they like to sing or play), by name of singer (according to the name of the singer most popularly known for singing the song that they like to sing or play), by song title (according to the title of the Malaysian traditional song that they like to sing or play), and by ethnicity (according to the ethnic group from which the song had originated). Table 3 depicts that 38 (18.7%) had responded by musical instrument, 37 (18.2%) by musical style, 23(11.3%) by name of singer, and 17 (8.4%) by song title. The least, 3 (1.5%), responded by ethnicity.

**Table 3: Respondents' responses to the Malaysian traditional music that they like to sing or play**

	Frequency	Percent
By Song Title	17	8.4
By Name of Singer	23	11.3
By Musical Instrument	38	18.7
By Ethnicity (including location)	3	1.5
By Musical Style	37	18.2

### Should Malaysian secondary schools teach students about Malaysian traditional music?

As shown in Table 4, most respondents gave encouraging answers to support the idea that

Malaysian traditional music should be taught in the schools (171, 84.2%). Only a few voiced the opinion that it should be taught outside of schools (32, 15.8%).

**Table 4: Students' view on whether Malaysian traditional music should be taught in schools.**

	Frequency	Percent
Malaysian traditional music should be taught in the schools	171	84.2
Malaysian traditional music should be taught outside of schools	32	15.8
Total	203	100.0

***If Malaysian traditional musics are to be taught in the schools - what could or should schools teach you about traditional music from Malaysia?***

**Table 5: What could or should schools teach students about traditional music from Malaysia?**

	Frequency	Percent
Singing, playing instruments, music performance	128	63.1
Music Appreciation, Cultural Heritage	62	30.5
Music Composition	2	1.0
Dance	12	5.9
Extra-Curricular	2	1.0

For the open-ended question “What could or should schools teach you about traditional music from Malaysia?” respondents can provide more than one answer, thus the percentages are based on tabulation of answers based on similar categories and do not total to 203. It should also be noted that a few students did not respond to the question. When asked about what they think schools should teach them about traditional music from Malaysia, many respondents said they would like to learn how to sing, play instruments, and perform Malaysian traditional music (128, 63.1%). Interestingly the students also mentioned music appreciation and (preservation of Malaysian) cultural heritage (62, 30.5%). A few noted other aspects of Malaysian traditional music that they would like to learn in school such as composition (2, 1.0%), dance (12, 5.9%) as well as extra-curricular activities (2, 1.0%). The different kinds of responses given by respondents show an encouraging indication that the younger generation are interested in learning about their cultural inheritance. This is in contrast to the general assumption that young people favor popular music more than traditional ones, reducing the importance of teaching it in the school curriculum.

## CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The overall results of the current study present a comprehensive overview of Malaysian traditional music, its cultural significance, as well as its integration into the Malaysian educational system, and the perspectives of secondary school students on traditional music

education. Upon careful examination of the discourse presented herein, a number of salient observations surface, warranting further analysis.

First, *cultural diversity and significance of Malaysian traditional music*: Malaysia's rich cultural diversity is reflected in its traditional music, which encompasses various ethnic communities such as Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous peoples. Traditional music serves as a powerful link to cultural identity, heritage, and community bonding. A majority of the respondents in this study (97%) believe it important that traditional music be preserved for future generations.

Second, *challenges in traditional music education*: Despite the cultural significance of traditional music, it faces challenges in the Malaysian educational system. Traditional music as part of music education in the secondary schools is often side-lined in favour of Western and popular music. This neglect may hinder the preservation and promotion of Malaysia's cultural heritage. Respondents in this study (84.2%) support that Malaysian traditional music should be taught in the schools. The weight of this finding can be better understood with another finding whereby 87.2% of the respondents had identified music class in school as their main source of musical experience. The implication here is that there is a strong likelihood that Malaysian youth will not learn or know traditional musics of Malaysia unless it is taught in the schools.

Third, *adolescent engagement with music*: Adolescents utilize music for self-expression, social identification, and cultural exploration, thereby shaping their identities and social relationships significantly. A diverse array of musical genres and styles serves as a valuable resource for adolescents in their quest for self-discovery and the establishment of interpersonal connections. In addition, adolescents can also learn to manage their stress through music appreciation since music has been used as a way to relieve stress such as in meditation and relaxation techniques. Engaging with music can also distract adolescents from involving in negative and unproductive behaviors when facing problems in life. A majority of the respondents of this study (86.2%) like to listen to Malaysian traditional music and to sing or play Malaysian traditional music (58.6%).

Fourth, *perceived value of traditional music*: The current study indicates that Malaysian secondary school students generally have a positive attitude towards Malaysian traditional music. As indicated, a majority expresses interest in listening to and learning about traditional music, highlighting its perceived importance in preserving cultural heritage. The responses found in this study were in contrast to the popular notion that teenagers favor only popular music and reject traditional ones. A majority of the students mentioned liking to sing and play Malaysian traditional music and were able to name the musical instruments, singer, style, and title of the traditional music that they like. Indeed, the findings provide support that young people still appreciate traditional music and want to know more about how to sing traditional songs, how to dance traditional dances, or play traditional musical instruments.

Fifth, *educational implications*: There is a consensus among students (84.2%) that traditional music should be incorporated into school curricula. Students express a desire to learn not only to perform traditional music but also to appreciate its cultural significance and heritage. It is encouraging that students still demonstrate interest in learning about their traditional music. In addition to being a source of entertainment, this type of music can provide a significant role in music education because students can learn about their origins and the different cultures. Consequently, teaching traditional music and instruments in school will connect the younger generations to their heritage, letting them appreciate their cultural values and historical ways of life. Towards this end, the important role of music education in the preservation and sustainability of Malaysian traditional music is exemplified.

Last but not least, sixth, *implications for curriculum development*: Our findings suggest a need for curriculum designers to prioritize traditional music education in secondary schools,

offering opportunities for students to engage with and appreciate Malaysia's diverse musical heritage through singing, playing musical instruments, performing, music appreciation, cultural heritage, music composition, dance and extra-curricular activities. The secondary school music curriculum should provide more hands-on learning of Malaysian traditional music and make traditional music accessible to all students. This, seeing the results of this study in which only 58.6% of students reported being able to sing or play Malaysian traditional music even though 86.2% like to listen to traditional music. Another item of interest in this study is 86.7% respondents identifying Malay traditional music as the type of Malaysian traditional music that they like to listen to. If this result is directly related to 88.7% of the respondents being Malaysian-Malays, more careful thought is required in the selection of repertoire used in teaching to ensure students are able to appreciate music from outside of their culture and not just their own. The teaching and learning of Malaysian traditional music in secondary schools should also consider strategies involving musical instruments, style, singer and title of the piece. Lastly, the interest shown by the students in this study revives the need for curriculum designers to rethink the reduction of music lesson time in both primary and secondary schools since the implementation of the KSSR (Primary School Standard Curriculum) in 2011 and KSSM (Secondary School Standard Curriculum) in 2017.

A limitation is apparent in this study in that the sample size of students was restricted and not evenly distributed across all Malaysian states. The sample was dominated by respondents from Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, while East Malaysia was represented only by Sarawak. Including participants from other states such as Pahang, Perlis, Kelantan, and Sabah might have revealed additional regional variations in students' experiences and perceptions. Future studies could therefore adopt stratified sampling to achieve more balanced geographical representation. Despite this constraint, the insights concerning traditional music within Malaysian secondary schools are sufficiently compelling to justify further investigation and prompt a re-evaluation of music education content across secondary school contexts throughout Malaysia.

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