



Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts

**Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in
Enhancing the Local Economy**

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Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing
the Local Economy

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DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Except where due acknowledgements have been made, the work is that of the author alone. The thesis has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree.

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ABSTRACT

The abstract is a summary of the thesis, which consists of a brief introduction, problem statement, investigation methods, results and the general conclusion. The abstract should be informative and clear as reference to others. It should be written in a single paragraph and the maximum page number is 2 pages. Font type is Times New Roman and the font size is 12. Line spacing is double-spacing with a maximum of two-page long. Keywords of up to 5 words should be provided. For a thesis written in English, a translated version of the abstract in Malay should be provided and vice versa. The translated version of the abstract should have the thesis title.

The Iban community in Sarawak is renowned for its intricate handicrafts, deeply rooted in cultural heritage and identity, yet the sustainability and economic viability of this traditional craft face significant challenges. This study explores these obstacles from an economic perspective, focusing on marketing constraints, competition from mass-produced imports, limited business acumen, and inadequate government support. Through qualitative research involving interviews and observations, data were gathered from artisans, government officials, and experts in Sarawak, revealing that limited market access, insufficient promotion, and competition from cheaper imports significantly undermine the industry. Additionally, gaps in government assistance such as funding, infrastructure, and training programs exacerbate the problem, while many artisans lack essential business and financial management skills, further hindering their ability to market and sustain their craft. The research highlights promising efforts by organizations like the Sarawak Craft Council to formalize support structures, but these require robust implementation to be effective. This study underscores the need for comprehensive strategies to empower artisans, including

enhanced government policies, targeted training programs, and innovative marketing approaches, to revitalize the Iban handicraft industry and ensure its cultural preservation and contribution to economic development in Sarawak

Keywords: Sustainable, development, challenges, Iban, handicrafts, local economy.

Pembangunan Lestari dan Cabaran Kraf Tangan Iban dalam Memperkasa Ekonomi Tempatan

ABSTRAK

Masyarakat Iban di Sarawak terkenal dengan kraftangan mereka yang rumit, berakar umbi dalam warisan budaya dan identiti, namun kemampunan serta daya maju ekonomi kraf tradisional ini menghadapi cabaran besar. Kajian ini meneroka halangan tersebut dari perspektif ekonomi dengan menumpukan kepada kekangan pemasaran, persaingan daripada import yang dikeluarkan secara besar-besaran, kepintaran perniagaan yang terhad, serta sokongan kerajaan yang tidak mencukupi. Melalui penyelidikan kualitatif yang melibatkan temu bual dan pemerhatian, data dikumpulkan daripada artisan, pegawai kerajaan, dan pakar di Sarawak, yang menunjukkan bahawa akses pasaran yang terhad, promosi yang tidak mencukupi, serta persaingan daripada import yang lebih murah menjejaskan industri secara ketara. Selain itu, jurang dalam bantuan kerajaan seperti pembiayaan, infrastruktur, dan program latihan memburukkan lagi keadaan, sementara ramai artisan kekurangan kemahiran pengurusan perniagaan dan kewangan yang penting, yang menghalang keupayaan mereka untuk memasarkan serta mengekalkan kraf mereka. Penyelidikan ini menyoroti usaha yang menjanjikan oleh organisasi seperti Majlis Kraf Sarawak untuk memperkukuh struktur sokongan, tetapi pelaksanaannya perlu lebih mantap untuk mencapai keberkesanan. Kajian ini menegaskan keperluan strategi menyeluruh bagi memperkasakan artisan, termasuk dasar kerajaan yang dipertingkatkan, program latihan yang disasarkan, serta pendekatan pemasaran yang inovatif, bagi menggiatkan semula industri kraftangan Iban dan memastikan pemuliharaan budayanya serta sumbangannya kepada pembangunan ekonomi di Sarawak.

Kata kunci: Pembangunan mampan, Cabaran, Iban, kraftangan, ekonomi tempatan

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SCC	Sarawak Craft Council
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Background

Handicrafts have always been an essential part of Malaysia's cultural heritage, especially within the indigenous Iban community in Sarawak. These crafts ranging from intricate textiles to beadwork and woodcarvings are not just artistic expressions but also important sources of the livelihood for artisans. However, despite their cultural significance, the Iban handicraft industry faces several challenges that threaten its sustainability. Limited market access, lack of promotional activities, and strong competition from cheaper, mass-produced goods have made it difficult for artisans to expand their businesses and secure stable incomes (Tingi & Tugang, 2021). While some government initiatives aim to support indigenous crafts, many artisans still struggle due to insufficient funding, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of accessible training programs (Gapor et al., 2019). These gaps in support leave many Iban artisans without the resources they need to compete effectively in the market.

A major obstacle is the growing influx of low-cost, mass-produced imports, which significantly impacts the demand for handmade local crafts. This trend is not unique to Malaysia; artisans worldwide are facing similar struggles as mass-produced alternatives flood the market, often offering lower prices that make it harder for traditional crafts to compete (Abdul Hamid, 2016). Additionally, many artisans lack the necessary business and marketing skills to promote their work effectively. Beyond craftsmanship, skills like financial management, branding, and online marketing are crucial for success

in today's marketplace. Unfortunately, many Iban artisans have little to no formal business training, making it difficult for them to adapt to modern consumer trends (Kheung, et al., 2018).

Recognizing these challenges, the Sarawak Craft Council (SCC) has been officially established to provide more structured support for artisans. The council focuses on preserving traditional craft techniques, promoting artisan empowerment, and strengthening the economic growth of the industry (Ling, 2023b). However, despite these efforts, many artisans continue to face difficulties. In rural and underdeveloped regions, artisans often struggle with a shortage of skilled labor, difficulty sourcing raw materials, resistance to adopting modern production techniques, and limited access to financial aid (Sait et al., 2018). Within the Iban community specifically, a lack of training opportunities, minimal government support, and exploitation by intermediaries further hinder the growth of the handicraft sector (Tingi & Tugang, 2021).

This study aims to explore these issues in depth, focusing on the marketing struggles of Iban artisans, the gaps in government support, the impact of mass-produced competition, and the challenges artisans face due to limited business knowledge. By addressing these problems, this research hopes to highlight opportunities for improvement and suggest strategies that can help the Iban handicraft industry thrive in a rapidly changing economy.

1.2 Problem Statement

The sustainability and growth of Iban handicrafts in Sarawak face numerous challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the prosperity of this cultural heritage. The following problem statements outline the critical areas requiring attention:

1.2.1 Competition from Mass-Produced Imports

Artisans face strong competition from inexpensive mass-produced imports, leading to a drop in demand for local handicraft products. The influx of cheap, factory-made alternatives diminishes the market share of traditional Iban crafts, threatening the livelihood of local artisans. A recent analysis of Malaysia's handicraft sector highlights how rising production costs, unstable raw material supply, and fierce competition from low-price imports reduce local artisans' competitiveness, particularly in price-sensitive markets (Leow, 2023). Additionally, informal reports from Malaysian online communities underline consumer tendencies toward cheaper foreign-made goods over local handcrafted items—which further squeezes local producers.

1.2.2 Marketing Challenges for Iban Handicrafts

Marketing Iban handicrafts in Sarawak encounters significant challenges in product promotion. Despite the unique cultural value and intricate craftsmanship of these products, artisans struggle to effectively market their creations. This difficulty in promotion leads to limited market reach and reduced sales opportunities, as highlighted by Tingi & Tugang (2021).

1.2.3 Lack of Business Acumen Among Artisans

Artisans' lack of business acumen hinders their effectiveness in their creations. While Iban artisans possess exceptional crafting skills, many lack the necessary business knowledge and skills to effectively manage and market their

products. This deficiency in business acumen limits their ability to achieve commercial success, as discussed by Hassan et al., (2017).

1.2.4 Insufficient Government Support

There is insufficient government support in Malaysia for craftsmen to promote the comprehensive development of this profession. The existing support mechanisms are inadequate to address the multifaceted needs of artisans, including financial assistance, infrastructure, training, and market access. Hasan et al., (2011) highlight the need for more robust and targeted government interventions to support the handicraft sector.

These problem statements form the foundation of this research, aiming to identify the challenges and opportunities for enhancing the sustainability and development of Iban handicrafts in Sarawak. This research focuses geographically on artisans working in

Kuching City at events and bazaars from different towns in Sarawak such as Kapit, Kanowit, Sri Aman, Bau, Kelabit, Padawan, Betong, and Lubok Antu.

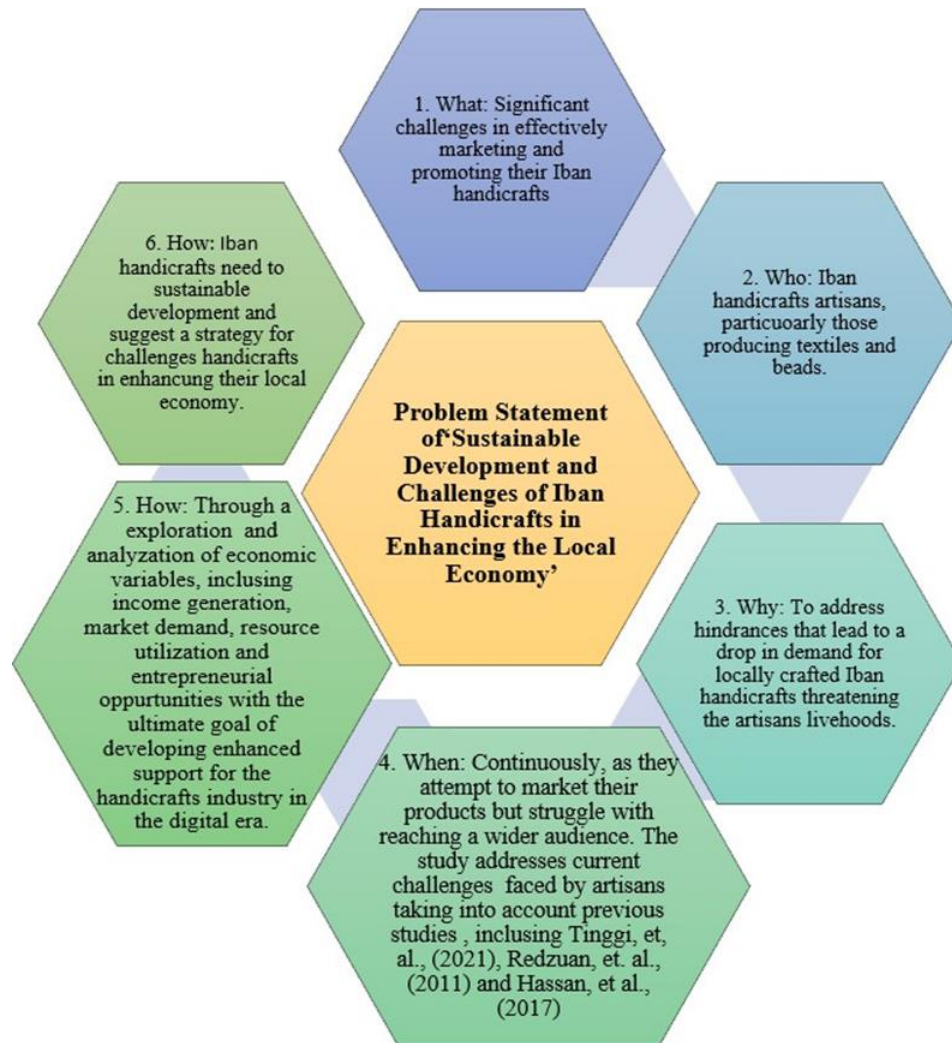


Figure 1-1: Problem statement of 'Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy' (Source: Author)

1.3 Research Questions

- What are the major economic challenges confronting the Iban handicraft industry today?
- Why is the Iban handicraft industry struggling to remain competitive or profitable in the current market?
- How do these economic challenges impact the income, employment, and well-being of the Iban community?

1.4 Research Objectives

- a) To identify the key economic challenges faced by the Iban handicraft industry.
- b) To analyze the reasons behind the decline or stagnation of the Iban handicraft market.
- c) To highlight on how these economic challenges affect the livelihood and economic sustainability of the Iban community.

1.5 The Scopes of Studies

This research focuses on the sustainability and development of Iban handicrafts in Sarawak, specifically examining the challenges and opportunities faced by artisans in this region. The scope of the research includes the following aspects:

1.5.1 Geographical Focus

The study concentrates on artisans from different towns across Sarawak, including Kapit, Kanowit, Sri Aman, Bau, Kelabit, Padawan, Betong, and Lubok Antu, who are working in Kuching or participating in events and bazaars held in Kuching. The researcher met and interviewed these artisans in Kuching, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the local context and the specific challenges faced by Iban artisans in this central location.

1.5.2 Artisans Focus

The research primarily targets Iban handicraft artisans, but also includes some Bidayuh artisans who are involved in producing Iban handicrafts. These artisans represent a significant portion of the handicraft community and provide valuable insights into the traditional crafting techniques and cultural significance of their work.

1.5.3 Challenges in Marketing

The study investigates the significant challenges encountered in the marketing and promotion of Iban handicrafts. It aims to identify the factors that hinder effective product

promotion and propose strategies to enhance market reach and visibility for these traditional handicrafts.

1.5.4 Competition from Imports

The research explores the impact of strong competition from inexpensive massproduced imports on the demand for locally crafted Iban handicrafts. It seeks to understand how these imports affect the livelihoods of Iban artisans and what measures can be taken to mitigate this competition.

1.5.5 Business Acumen

The study examines the lack of business acumen among Iban and Bidayuh artisans and how this deficiency hinders their effectiveness in managing and promoting their creations. It aims to identify the specific business skills gaps and propose training and development programs to enhance artisans' business capabilities.

1.5.6 Government Support

The research evaluates the level of government support available to Iban and Bidayuh artisans in Malaysia. It focuses on identifying areas where government assistance is insufficient and suggests ways to improve support mechanisms to promote the comprehensive development of the handicraft profession.

By addressing these key areas, the research aims to provide a holistic understanding of the current status of Iban handicrafts in Sarawak and offer practical recommendations for enhancing the sustainability and growth of this vital cultural heritage.

1.6 Research Locations

The research is conducted in Sarawak, Malaysia, with a specific focus on Kuching City. Kuching serves as the central location where the researcher meets and interviews

artisans who have taken part in various events and bazaars. These artisans originate from different towns across Sarawak, including Kapit, Kanowit, Sri Aman District, Bau, Kelabit, Padawan, Betong, Lubok Antu.

By concentrating on Kuching city, the research captures a diverse range of perspectives from artisans who travel from these towns to work, showcase, and sell their handicrafts at events and marketplaces in Kuching. This location choice allows for a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by Iban and Bidayuh artisans in a central, vibrant marketplace that is crucial for their economic activities and cultural expression.



Figure 1-2: Sarawak Maps (Source: Sarawak Administrative Map vector, 2019)

1.7 Research Significances

This research holds significant value for various stakeholders, including artisans, policymakers, cultural preservationists, and the broader community. The significance of the research is outlined as follows:

1.7.1 Empowerment of Artisans

The findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by Iban handicraft artisans, particularly in marketing, competition, and business management. By identifying these challenges and proposing actionable solutions, the research aims to empower artisans with the knowledge and tools necessary to enhance their economic viability and sustain their craft.

1.7.2 Policy Development

The research will offer critical data and recommendations for policy makers to develop targeted interventions and support mechanisms. Understanding the gaps in government support and the specific needs of artisans will enable the formulation of effective policies that promote the comprehensive development of the handicraft sector in Malaysia.

1.7.3 Cultural Preservation

The Iban handicrafts are integral to the cultural heritage of Sarawak. This research emphasizes the importance of preserving traditional crafting techniques and cultural expressions. By addressing the threats posed by mass-produced imports and the decline in traditional knowledge, the study contributes to efforts aimed at safeguarding cultural heritage for future generations.

1.7.4 Economic Development

Enhancing the business acumen and market reach of local artisans can contribute to the economic development of Sarawak. By improving the competitiveness of Iban handicrafts in both local and global markets, the research supports broader economic growth and diversification efforts within the region.

1.7.5 Educational Contribution

The research adds to the academic body of knowledge on artisanal crafts, cultural heritage, and economic development. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the current state of Iban handicrafts, which can serve as a valuable resource for future studies and educational programs focused on cultural preservation and artisanal entrepreneurship.

1.7.6 Community Awareness and Engagement

By highlighting the struggles and successes of local artisans, the research aims to raise awareness within the community about the value of supporting traditional crafts. Increased community engagement and support can lead to greater appreciation and demand for locally crafted Iban products.

In summary, this research is significant in its potential to drive positive change for Iban artisans, support cultural preservation efforts, inform policy development, and contribute to the economic and educational landscape of Sarawak.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this research on the sustainability and development of Iban handicrafts in Sarawak explores the interplay between various factors that influence the artisans' success and challenges. The framework integrates key components such as

marketing challenges, competition from imports, business acumen, and government support. Each component is examined to understand its impact on the sustainability of Iban handicrafts and to propose effective strategies for improvement. Below Figure 1.3 are conceptual framework.

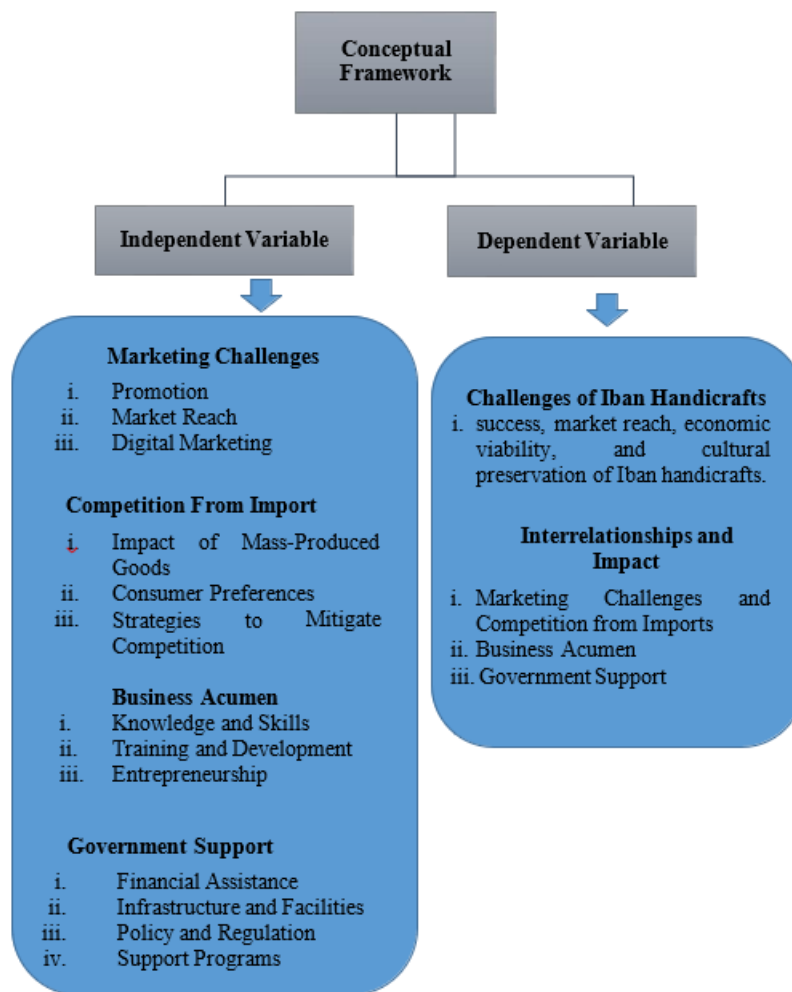


Figure 1-3 Conceptual framework

1.8.1 Components of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework outlines key factors influencing the sustainability of Iban handicrafts. It categorizes these factors into independent variables, which shape market dynamics, and dependent variables, which reflect the overall impact on the industry.

A. Independent Variables:

Which are factors that influence the outcome and are manipulated or categorized to understand their impact on the dependent variable:

i. Marketing Challenges:

- **Promotion and Visibility:** Investigates how Iban artisans promote their crafts and the effectiveness of their marketing strategies.
- **Market Reach:** Examines the limitations in reaching wider markets and attracting customers.
- **Digital Marketing:** Assesses the use of digital platforms and social media by artisans to market their products.

i. Competition from Imports:

- **Impact of Mass-Produced Goods:** Analyze the influence of inexpensive, massproduced imports on the demand for Iban handicrafts.
- **Consumer Preferences:** Studies how consumer preferences for cheaper products affect local artisans.
- **Strategies to Mitigate Competition:** Explores potential strategies that Iban artisans can adopt to compete with imported goods.

ii. Business Acumen:

- **Knowledge and Skills:** Evaluates the level of business knowledge and skills among Iban artisans.
- **Training and Development:** Looks into the availability and effectiveness of training programs aimed at improving business acumen.

- Entrepreneurship: Investigates the entrepreneurial capabilities of artisans and their impact on business success.

iii. Government Support:

- Financial Assistance: Examines the extent and effectiveness of financial support provided by the government.
- Infrastructure and Facilities: Assesses the availability of infrastructure and facilities that support the handicraft industry.
- Policy and Regulation: Analyze existing policies and regulations affecting the development of Iban handicrafts.
- Support Programs: Evaluate the programs and initiatives aimed at supporting Iban artisans.

B. Dependent Variable:

Which is the outcome that is influenced by the independent variables:

i. Challenges of Iban Handicrafts

This includes the overall success, market reach, economic viability, and cultural preservation of Iban handicrafts.

ii. Interrelationships and Impact

The conceptual framework illustrates the interrelationships between these components and their collective impact on the sustainability and development of Iban handicrafts:

- Marketing Challenges and Competition from Imports directly affect the market reach and demand for Iban handicrafts.

- Business Acumen influences how effectively artisans can navigate these challenges and leverage growth opportunities.
- Government Support acts as a crucial enabler, providing the necessary resources, infrastructure, and policy environment to support artisans.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

The following Figure 1.4 represents the conceptual framework which guides the research by focusing on how these key components interact and influence the overall sustainability and growth of Iban handicrafts in Sarawak. Through this comprehensive approach, the research aims to identify effective strategies and recommendations to support and enhance the Iban handicraft industry:

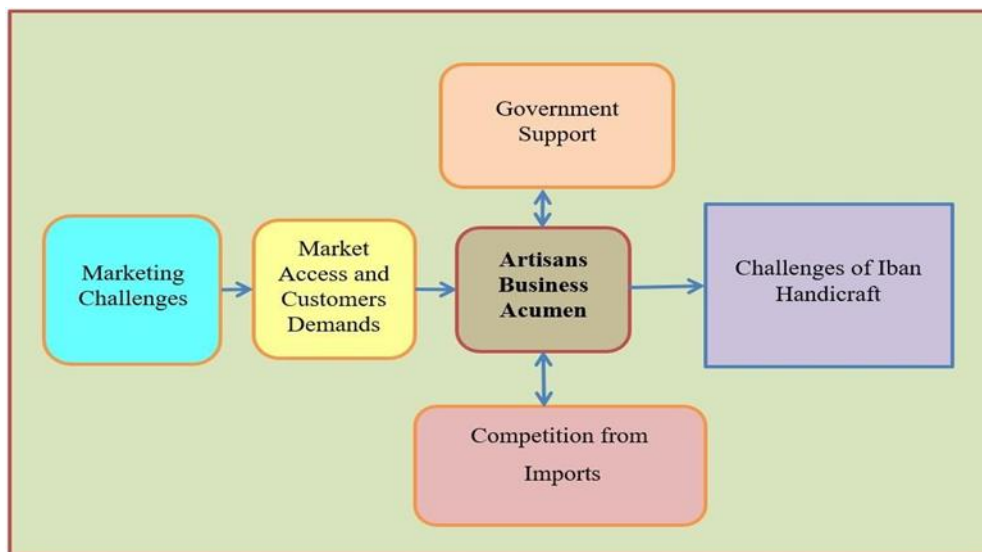


Figure 1-4 Conceptual framework model of Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy

Based on ongoing research, the researcher employed Einarsson's theory of cultural economics (2016) as the theoretical framework. Einarsson's theory provides valuable insights into the economic dynamics of cultural activities, offering a structured approach for analysing the production, distribution, and consumption of cultural goods and services. By

applying economic principles to cultural phenomena, the researcher can delve into topics such as the determinants of cultural consumption, the role of government intervention in cultural policy, and the economic impact of cultural industries on local and national economies. Furthermore, cultural economics theory encourages interdisciplinary collaboration between economists, sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural policymakers, facilitating a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between culture and economics in contemporary society.

The first element in this theoretical framework is Supply and Demand in Cultural Economics. In his book "Cultural Economics," Einarsson (2016) elucidated how concepts of supply and demand serve as cornerstones in understanding market dynamics within the cultural realm. Supply refers to the quantity of cultural products and services that firms are willing and able to offer, while demand represents the quantity that consumers are willing to purchase. In classical economic theory, supply and demand operate as fundamental forces shaping market interactions, with equilibrium achieved when the quantity supplied equals the quantity demanded. This equilibrium reflects the balance between producers' willingness to supply goods and consumers' desire to purchase them. In the context of cultural goods, supply and demand dynamics are influenced by various factors, including consumer preferences, cultural trends, and intellectual property rights. Cultural products are often categorized as "experience products," where consumption involves experiencing a certain pleasure or cultural enrichment, such as attending a concert or watching a play. Consumers allocate their spending on cultural goods based on personal preferences and the perceived value of these experiences (Einarsson, 2016).

The second element is the Role of Government and Cultural Policy. Einarsson (2016) emphasized the role of cultural policy in microeconomic analyze, regional development

strategies, and cultural education initiatives. There is a growing focus on understanding the economic impacts on culture, cultural goods, industries, and policies, with findings from such analyze advocating public support of culture and influencing government behaviour and policy formulation. Government involvement in the culture industry and creative sectors encompasses

both economic and cultural focuses. Economically, governments may support small and medium-sized enterprises, foster innovation through research and market support, and invest in infrastructure and education. Culturally, governments may provide general support for cultural activities, recognizing culture's fundamental role in shaping societal identity and values. However, government support for culture varies across countries, reflecting differing policy priorities and underlying arguments. Nonetheless, public policies surrounding culture often intersect with broader economic and social objectives, underscoring the dynamic nature of cultural discourse and governance (Einarsson, 2016).

The third element is International Trade and Markets. According to Einarsson (2016), international trade serves as arenas where cultural interactions and exchanges occur. While cultures historically influenced each other through trade, contemporary dynamics have intensified this process. Now, individual national and ethnic cultures face unprecedented pressures of assimilation into dominant foreign cultures, accelerated by the pace of globalization. This leaves smaller states, particularly the poorest ones, struggling to maintain their cultural identities amidst the forceful wave of cultural influence, offering less time for adaptation or resistance.

The fourth element is Finance and Management in the Cultural Industry. Einarsson (2016) underscored the pivotal role of finance in the cultural industry, akin to other business sectors. Despite many financial principles being universal, each sector, including culture,

presents its unique challenges and considerations. Financial constraints often act as limiting factors in the operation of cultural institutions, leading to frequent public debates about the allocation of public funds

to support cultural endeavours. Effective organization and management are essential for navigating the diverse landscape of cultural production, where circumstances can vary widely. Managers in the cultural sector must possess a good understanding of the basic principles of culture and their economic links with finance, organization, and management in businesses and institutions (Einarsson, 2016).

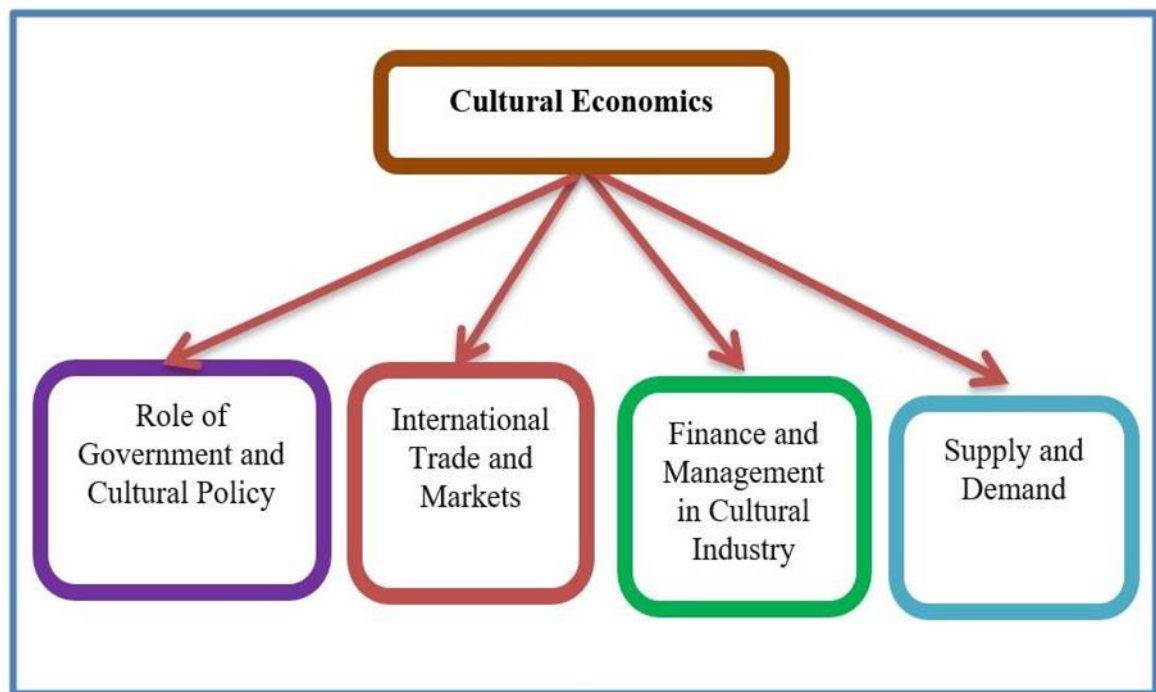


Figure 1-5 Cultural economics theory model (Source: Einarsson, 2016)

1.10 Research Limitations

The existence of limitations in carrying out this research on the topic Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy, has caused difficulties for researchers to obtain complete data. There is no denying that in completing this research, the researcher realizes that it

is difficult to produce this thesis perfectly, therefore the limitations and problems encountered must be taken into account. There are several research limitations faced by researchers, namely.

1.10.1.1 Difficulty Meeting with Informants Who Are Experts in The Field of Research

In carrying out this research, the researcher needs to meet with informants who are experts on the topic Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy . This is because the informants who will be interviewed are made up of the older age (51-Above) and middle-aged generations (36-50).

1.10.1.2 Use of Language in Conducting Research

The use of correct and easy-to-understand language is an important matter for conducting research, especially during the interview sessions with informants who are experts on the topic Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy . In conducting this research, most of the informants in the community Iban, especially the elderly generation are less fluent in English during interview sessions with expert informants. Furthermore, the researcher cannot force the informant to speak English. This is because the researcher has to adhere to research ethics, such as respecting the rights of the interviewees. Therefore, the researcher needs to bring along someone who can do language translation to facilitate the interview session with the informants.

1.10.1.3 Translation of Research Data

In conducting this research, most of the informants used the Iban language when they were interviewed by the researcher. This is because most of the

informants are less fluent in using Malay in their lives. Therefore, all data acquisition for this research is in the Iban language. Furthermore, the use of terms and dialects in the

Iban language varies according to the location in the Sarawak region and it makes the process of language translation very difficult. In addition, the researcher also needs to send all the data obtained in audio form to make the translation process and it takes quite a long time. In this research, the researcher needs to provide a glossary section as a language guide and reference to facilitate reading and understanding of the topic being studied.

1.10.1.4 Time Constraints in Conducting Research

Researchers also face problems in setting a time to conduct interview sessions with informants who are experts in this field of research. This is because of the limited time factor for the researcher to spend time with the informant who wants to be interviewed. Furthermore, not all informants are fully able to provide research information due to time constraints. This is because there are a few informants who are government or private employees. In addition, they are quite busy with daily tasks in the office, meetings, taking courses, external assignments and attending seminars. Whereas, for the informants who are farmers or self-employed, they will go to the rice fields or gardens early in the morning and return at noon depending on the crops obtained. Therefore, researchers have to wait for more time to meet them.

1.10.1.5 Lack of Comprehensive Books on Iban Culture and Economy

One of the significant limitations are the lack of comprehensive books documenting the cultural and economic aspects of the Iban community. The

limited availability of written resources makes it challenging to gather theoretical insights and historical context for this research.

1.10.1.6 Scarcity of Academic Journals on Iban Economic Dimensions

There are very few academic journals specifically addressing the economic dimensions of the Iban community. This scarcity limits access to previous studies, requiring the researcher to rely heavily on primary data collection during fieldwork.

1.10.1.7 Limited Number of Experts on Iban Economy

The researcher faced difficulties in identifying and consulting with experts in the field of Iban economic studies. The limited number of professionals or scholars specializing in this niche topic adds to the challenge of gaining in-depth insights for the research.

1.11 Problems Encountered While Conducting Research

Based on the research on the topic ‘Challenges of Iban Handicrafts Towards the Economy in Iban Community, there are several problems faced by the researcher as follows:

1.11.1 Uncertain Weather Factors

In addition, the unpredictable weather has caused the researcher to change the time and schedule to meet the research informants. Therefore, it has also caused complex issues for the researcher to conduct research. Furthermore, the researcher is also faced with health problems due to sudden weather changes. This is because of unpredictable weather changes, such as the monsoon season, which prevents the researcher from meeting with informants to obtain research data.

1.11.2 Remote Research Location Distance

This ongoing research requires data from informants who are experts on the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. This is because most of the research informants live in longhouse locations that are far away and relatively inland. Therefore, research locations that are far and relatively

inland require individuals who are skilled in the intricacies of an area that the researcher wants to target.

1.11.3 Research Budget Allocation

Based on this ongoing research, it requires planning for adequate budget allocation. For example, researchers who want to go to distant research locations need adequate allocations. Therefore, the researcher needs to make and prepare a budget plan before conducting the field work study phase to obtain research data.

1.12 Structure of Research Thesis

The scholarly research currently being conducted by the researcher is titled ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. Based on this research, the researcher has divided the chapters into sections to facilitate an overall understanding of the thesis flow.

1.12.1.1 Chapter 1: Introductions

Based on chapter one, there are several subtopics that will be used as a guide and reference for researchers to conduct research. The content of the topics found

in this chapter begins with an introduction to the research topic, followed by a problem statement, research objectives, research questions, research location, research scope, research limitations, problems faced in research, research importance, conceptual framework, research theory as well as research systematics. Overall, the subtopics in this first chapter describe the research that will be carried out by the researcher.

1.12.1.2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter two will focus on the literature review. In this chapter, the researcher will use sources and reference materials such as books, dissertations, journals, articles,

newspapers, theses and the internet to review past research by other writers. In addition, it also helps researchers much in getting an overview of the essence of the research being carried out. The researcher will use past research materials as the main ideas and concepts to comment on the research topic. In addition, this chapter is also able to give new ideas to researchers to carry out this research.

1.12.1.3 Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter three in this research focuses on the methodology used for handling the entire research such as data collection methods and data processing. Furthermore, the researcher also needs to choose the right methodology during the fieldwork research phase so that the data obtained can meet the research needs. This is because it aims for the data obtained to complete the entire research carried out by the researcher.

1.12.1.4 Chapter 4: Economic Challenges Facing the Iban Handicraft Industry

Chapter Four presents the findings related to the first research objective, which focuses on identifying the key economic challenges confronting the Iban handicraft industry. The analysis in this chapter is based on data collected through non-participant observation, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with informants who possess in-depth knowledge of the industry.

The chapter discusses issues such as limited access to markets, competition from mass-produced goods, fluctuating raw material availability, lack of modern marketing skills, and inadequate financial support. These findings are supported with direct quotes from informants and observational evidence gathered during fieldwork. Where relevant, the results are compared with similar case studies from other communities or regions to provide a broader context.

By systematically presenting and interpreting the data, this chapter lays the groundwork for subsequent analysis in Chapter Five, which examines the underlying causes of the industry's decline and stagnation.

1.12.1.5 Chapter 5: Underlying Causes of the Decline and Stagnation of the Iban Handicraft Market

Chapter Five builds upon the findings in Chapter Four by analysing the underlying causes behind the decline and stagnation of the Iban handicraft market. Using evidence from interviews, observations, and participant observations, the chapter explores factors such as generational disengagement from handicraft production, changing consumer preferences, limited innovation in product design, and the dominance of cheaper, mass-produced alternatives.

The discussion identifies structural and systemic issues, including gaps in government policy, insufficient promotional initiatives, and the lack of sustainable raw material supply chains. These causes are linked to broader socio-economic trends in Sarawak, helping to explain the challenges outlined in the previous chapter. The analysis provides a foundation for Chapter Six, which examines the consequences of these challenges for the livelihood and long-term economic sustainability of the Iban community.

1.12.1.6 Chapter 6: Highlight economic challenges affect the livelihood and economic sustainability of the iban community, conclusion and recommendation

Chapter Six addresses the third research objective by highlighting how the economic challenges and market decline identified in earlier chapters affect the livelihood and economic sustainability of the Iban community. It synthesises data to show the direct and indirect impacts on artisans' income, employment stability, cultural preservation, and community well-being.

The chapter then presents the overall conclusions of the study, summarising key findings in relation to each research objective. Based on these conclusions, it offers targeted recommendations for artisans, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders. These recommendations aim to strengthen the economic viability of the Iban handicraft industry, promote sustainable development, and safeguard cultural heritage. The chapter closes with reflections on the study's contributions to knowledge and suggestions for future research.

1.12.1.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the research by providing an overview of the challenges faced by the Iban handicraft industry in Sarawak. It highlighted key issues such as limited market access, inadequate promotional strategies, competition from mass-produced imports, and the lack of business acumen among artisans. The discussion emphasized how these factors hinder the sustainability and economic viability of traditional Iban crafts. Additionally, the chapter outlined the role of government support and the gaps that exist in funding, infrastructure, and training programs, which further contribute to the difficulties artisans face.

The research problems, questions, and objectives were clearly defined, focusing on the economic challenges of Iban handicrafts, the barriers in marketing and promotion, and the impact of government policies. The scope of the study was also presented, detailing the geographical focus on Sarawak and the specific target groups, including artisans and stakeholders involved in the craft industry. Furthermore, the significance of the study was discussed, emphasizing its potential contributions to artisan empowerment, policy development, cultural preservation, and economic growth.

Finally, the chapter introduced the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that guide this research, particularly the role of cultural economics in understanding the handicraft

industry. It also addressed research limitations, including difficulties in accessing informants, language barriers, and time constraints. These foundational aspects set the stage for the subsequent chapters, which will explore the literature, research methodology, findings, and recommendations in greater detail.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The sustainability of Iban handicrafts in Sarawak hinges on various factors, including government support, market dynamics, and the artisans' capabilities. This literature review synthesizes the findings from various studies that explore these elements, providing a comprehensive understanding of the economic dimensions influencing the sustainability of Iban handicrafts.

In the chapter 2 of literature review, it is related to the review conducted by the researcher on past research on the topic being studied. This is because it is very important for the researcher to know a topic that he wants to study in a field whether it has not been explored or has been done by others. In this chapter, the concept and idea of the theme related to the research topic will also be explained. The researcher will conduct a review of books, journals, magazines, articles, research theses, dissertations, newspaper clippings and internet sources. This is because it is intended to be studied by the researcher to know the development of previous research on the topic being studied. In the meantime, it is also used as a continuation of past research. In addition, the library research section helps the researcher a lot to know the development of the research topic and aims to find the Research Gap, Knowledge Gap, Evidence Gap, Practical Gap, and Methodological Gap. Therefore, the researcher needs to examine each past research based on these aspects in order to be able to see the overall development of the topic that he wants to study. Through the library research conducted by the researcher, he can also state the evidence of validity of the topic that he wants to study.

The literature review that is conducted is a process of determining the current position or State of Arts, which is the phenomenon to be studied from the aspect of knowledge and understanding (Mail, R. et. al., 2015). Based on this statement, it refers to the current status of knowledge in the field. Furthermore, there is no point in researching something that already has an answer. Therefore, researchers need to focus on efforts on problems that have not been solved. Through the literature review that will be conducted, researchers can find out the development of knowledge about a phenomenon being studied, the level of past research in addition to the issues that need to be studied. In addition, literature review is applied in a research to prove something reasonable in the field being studied. The importance or significance of research from a perspective aspect, it shows the scope of research in absolute or relative terms that have not yet been explored.

Meanwhile, for Creswell (2014) who explained that the review of past research is carried out after the topic of a field is identified. Literature review is carried out with several specific purposes. This is because researchers want to see, understand and know about past research related to the topic being studied. In addition, researchers want to see the filling of gaps in past research so that there is no overlap in the context that is to be reviewed in the next section. Based on research that applies qualitative methods, the writing section usually shows the use of theory, such as ethnography which can detect discussions at the early stages of writing.

In conducting a literature review in a research, Creswell suggests several important parts. The first part, using a literature review through a model illustration search using a question strategy. The second category is the isolation of research models commonly used in quantitative research. In this research that uses qualitative, writing is usually based on theory, such as ethnography, as well as critical theory that can trace the discussion for the

beginning of a writing. The third category is that the researcher will find topics and ideas for the next writing. Researchers can combine the final writing to compare the results that emerge from the research conducted. Typically, this strategy is always used to carry out writing that applies a fully qualitative approach that uses deep theory.

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the writings of past researchers on the field being studied. This study is very important for researchers to see whether the field being studied has been done by researchers or vice versa. When this literature review is completed, and if any gaps are found, then the researcher needs to do further research. Therefore, the type of publication material that is referred to is to write and analyze something that is studied for a scientific writing. Creswell (2003) explains that there are several ways to write a literature review, namely an integrative review, a theoretical review and a methodological review. All three types of literature review will be able to help researchers in writing theses and articles.

Based on an integrative literature review, it requires researchers to summarize the content of all forms of publications related to the topic to be studied. Next, the researcher will make a review of the published materials related to the research topic. For a theoretical review, it requires researchers to focus on existing theories related to the issue to be examined. This form of review can be seen in the form of writing articles and journals, but it is not used in fieldwork studies or case studies. Meanwhile, for a methodological review, researchers need to focus on the definition and research methodology in published materials related to the topic to be studied. In a methodological review, researchers need to review the strengths and weaknesses of the research methodology used by past researchers. Therefore, a literature review is carried out to look at all aspects of research that have been done by past

researchers to make it easier for researchers to make reviews and subsequently produce scientific thesis writing.

2.2 Human and Nature

Winckelmann (2006) stated that nature plays an important role and defined that ‘art imitates, imitates the beauty of nature’. He added that the effect of this beauty can create feelings of softness, calmness, silence and contemplation. When discussing the quality of beauty in art, Winckelmann stated that humans cannot escape the concept of imitating nature. He added that art is an imitation of nature and art necessarily leads to nature to achieve beauty. In addition, art also needs to avoid elements of violence because something beautiful will not create elements of incitement, violence, negative emotions and anxiety. This is because art should be able to create a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere in addition to being able to provide peace of mind to a human individual. Furthermore, art should also worship and show the beauty of nature. Nature is something perfect and has its own various special features and uniqueness. Therefore, through the power of thought and the aspects of appreciation that exist in a human individual, they perfect the process of beauty or aesthetics that are found around nature and work on it in their craft products. Wickelmann stated that the art of imitating nature is an imitation that humans do of the nature that exists around them. For craft enthusiasts, they produce craft products through imitation of nature. Therefore, art enthusiasts who produce art products that are based on the concept of nature, imitate nature and experience the beauty or aesthetics of nature have created beautiful nature in their eyes.

2.3 Identity of Community

Identity is expressed through language, customs, religion, dress, gestures, and symbols. For many communities, certain objects embody this identity— recognized both

internally and externally. In the Iban context, the Parang Ilang (Ilang machete) serves as such a symbol. Not only was it once wielded as a practical tool and weapon, but it also held deep ceremonial and status meaning. Ethnographic research has documented how the Ilang machete functions as a marker of cultural pride, social hierarchy, and ancestral heritage among the Iban (Asri & Tugang, 2024).

Based on the production of a heritage art object by a creator, it not only shows creative skills but also shows the psyche and spirituality of the tradition of a creator in addition to reflecting the cultural identity of his community. Factors on how to shape the identity of a creator of a heritage art object depend on creativity and craftsmanship. Therefore, efforts to manage a heritage art object need to be made so that it can continue to symbolize the identity and culture of a community (Ibrahim, 2005).

Apart from that, identity also refers to superior creations that show the concept of life of an ethnic or tribal community. This is because these creations have been integrated with the ethnicity and community. Furthermore, the superiority of these creations is said to be referred to as signs of superior, strong culture, which is available for viewing by many, and is acknowledged to be very effective in showcasing the greatness of the creations of each cultural group of a nation that is different from the cultures of other nations.

2.4 State of Sarawak

The state of Sarawak, one of the two Malaysian states on the island of Borneo, is renowned for its cultural diversity and rich history (Winkler, et. al., 2010). The state's population of approximately 2.5 million people spans an area of 124,449 square kilometers, Sarawak's landscape is characterized by its lush rainforests, vast river systems, and significant national parks such as Mount of Mulu and Bako National Park (Winkler et al., 2010). Sarawak boasts a rich history of diverse peoples since Indigenous communities were

spread throughout the island of Borneo; seven Indigenous communities (Malay, Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau, other natives ('Orang Ulu' – upriver peoples), Chinese, others) existed for generations, each with their respective customs, traditions, culture, languages and identities (Colchester, et. al., 2007).



Figure 2-1 Sarawak map

(Source:<https://www.visitselangor.com/information/malaysiamaps/map-of-sarawak-state/>)

Figure 2.1 shows the map of Sarawak with five different colors, each corresponding to a division. Red represents the first division, which includes Kuching, Samarahan, and Serian. Blue indicates the second division, comprising Betong and Sri Aman. Pink signifies the third division, encompassing Sarikei, Sibu, Mukah, Bintulu, and Kapit. The fourth division, including Miri, is represented in green. Lastly, yellow denotes the fifth division, which includes Limbang. Sarawak is a state characterized by its diverse population of

different races, ethnicities, and beliefs. This multicultural coexistence has been a longstanding aspect of life in Sarawak.

Daily activities are carried out harmoniously, transcending racial and religious boundaries.

The main ethnic groups such as Iban, Chinese, Malays, Bidayuh, Melanau, Other Indigenous, and non-indigenous. The category of other indigenous comprises many ethnic groups such as Bisaya, Kedayan, Kayan, Kenyah, Kelabit, Lun Bawang, Penan, and many others (Riget, et. al., 2016). One of the prominent ethnic groups in Sarawak is the Iban. In addition to the Iban, Sarawak is home to various other races and ethnicities, including Malays, Melanau, Bidayuh, Chinese, and Orang Ulu (Ujai, 2018).

The diversity of ethnicities in Sarawak manifests in distinct variations in clothing, language, beliefs, food, handicrafts, and architectural styles of houses across these different communities. This rich cultural tapestry contributes to Sarawak's unique and appealing identity. Both local and foreign visitors are drawn to Sarawak to experience its diverse cultural landscape (Ujai, 2018).

The following Figure 2.2 shows an example of the ethnic groups in Sarawak, represented by ladies wearing the traditional costumes of their respective ethnic groups:



Figure 2-2 Ethnic groups in Sarawak (Source: Foh, 2006)

2.5 Backgrounds of Iban Sarawak Community

The existence of the term “Iban” is believed to have originated from the Kayan language, where it referred to “wanderers” or “immigrants” due to the Iban’s historical patterns of migration (Tingi & Tugang, 2021). The Kayan communities along the Rajang River used this term for the Iban, who had settled in the area over time. Today, the Iban are widely distributed across Sarawak, particularly in Sri Aman, Samarahan, Betong, Sarikei, Sibul, Kapit, Bintulu, and Miri. During the colonial period, the British referred to them as the “Sea Dayaks” due to their mobility via river and sea, often associated with seafaring and piracy (Shin, 2021). Culturally, they are considered part of the Proto-Malay group, sharing linguistic and cultural ties with the Malays of Sumatra and Peninsular Malaysia. Despite increasing modernization, Iban women continue to preserve traditional crafts such as weaving and beadwork, although daily economic pressures sometimes limit their participation. This underscores the need for targeted initiatives that support women’s roles in cultural preservation (Othman et al., 2024).

The Iban have long practiced rice cultivation as a core subsistence strategy. The Gawai Batu ritual, held before planting paddy, embodies communal aspirations for a good harvest through ceremonial offerings and the involvement of women as ritual specialists (Tugang, 2024). Oral history and cultural records confirm that Iban migration into Sarawak began from the Kapuas-Ketungau region, with settlements in Batang Undop and Sri Aman emerging over time (Kedit, 2024). These narratives describe groups under leaders such as Gelungan and Jelian moving downstream along the Merakai and Undop areas before establishing long-term settlements (Kedit, 2024).

Despite socio-economic changes, ceremonial rice farming remains symbolic of identity, even as many Iban households diversify into cash crops or non-agricultural occupations. The preservation of such traditions underscores the significance of targeted cultural programs that support these practices (Othman et al., 2024).

The Iban, also known as Sea Dayaks, are one of the largest ethnic groups in Sarawak, Malaysia, making up a significant portion of the state's population. They belong to the ProtoMalay groups and historically originated from the Kapuas Valley in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. The Iban migrated to Sarawak about fifteen generations ago, around the mid-16th century. Their migration pathways included travelling through the Kumpang Valley to settle in areas like Batang Ai and subsequently spreading to various other parts of Sarawak (Anggo, et. al., 2018).

The Iban people are also strong practitioners and holders of a traditional animistic religion. This religious experience and concept are still practised today as a cultural custom of the Iban community (Karisenan, 2007).

2.6 Iban Culture Practices and Beliefs

The Iban community holds rich symbolic beliefs in deities and spirits such as Sengalang Burung, Simpulang Gana, Selampandai, and Orang Panggau Libau— each representing aspects like war, agriculture, creation, and spiritual mediation. These symbols are foundational to Iban cosmology and ritual practice (Mulok & Osup, 2021). Their spiritual worldview, known as Pengarap Lama, governs life cycles and ceremonial obligations, including pelian (healing rituals), harvest festivals, and longhouse ceremonies (Asri & Tugang, 2025). These rituals serve to fulfill spiritual demands, maintain connection with supernatural forces, and ensure communal well-being. For example, the Sugi Sakit storytelling ritual is performed by priest-bards to invoke cultural heroes like Bujang Sugi, and to restore balance through healing narratives (Sather, 2016).

The Iban are rich in spirituality and faith, which are traditionally conveyed through oral traditions. Spiritual roles such as the Tuai Burung and Manang are essential in Iban rituals and ceremonies. The Manang, for instance, are shamans who possess knowledge of animism and can cure ailments believed to be caused by spirits or magic. They communicate with various spiritual beings, including Petara (Gods), Panggau (mythical heroes), and Antu (spirits), which are believed to influence the human world (Anggo, et. al., 2018).

2.7 Concept of Material Culture

Cultural objects, or what is better known as material culture, is a term originating from the scientific fields of archaeology and ethnology (Prown, 1982). The term is commonly used in research involving material objects present in the art and culture of a society. In recent times, the approach to researching material culture has expanded into various fields such as cultural studies, antiques, and art, due to their relevance to the heritage and identity of a society (Kiyai et al., 2020).

According to Hicks, et. al. (2010), the collection, classification and research of cultural objects became an important component of the discipline of material science in the 19th century. The idea of object typology as a lens for understanding socio-cultural change. In addition, it also paved the way for the emergence of the theory of socio-cultural evolution, which defines and organizes the history of human groups based on parameters in changing object creation technologies. This theory of socio-cultural evolution was proposed by August Henry Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers in 1891. In this model, it shows the cultural changes of human groups through the analysis of archaeological and ethnographic objects originating from the same group.

Thomas (2010) states that cultural objects are used to examine in detail the understanding of objects as items that represent technological change, symbolism or the identity of a social group. Based on Thomas's research on the late Neolithic era in Britain, he proposes to understand the 'being in the world' of Neolithic people. In addition, the use of different objects, such as hats made of horns or knives, is considered as an invention that has connected the groups of people who made and used these cultural objects in the past.

Research related to cultural materials covers various research objects, such as artifacts, landscapes, buildings, monuments and environments including clothing and food. According to Hicks, et. al., (2010), however, under less clear perspectives and approaches, the field of material culture research is still rooted in the anthropological view by stating the purpose of researching the non-human world, namely objects in understanding the meaning of the concept of humans and humanity. Cultural objects have developed over time in the thinking of anthropologists and not only include aspects of form and material, but also visual and digital culture.

Scarpaci (2016) states that cultural objects refer to the environment in daily life to improve well-being, personal items and to meet other needs than functional aspects that usually involve human spirituality. There are various opinions argued by scholars in the fields of cultural anthropology, consumer behavior, international relations, human geography and semiotic studies who consider that objects are something that functions in addition to reflecting the lives of individuals and societies. Furthermore, cultural objects have also indirectly formed manifestations in a society. In addition, the existence of cultural objects in a society is a portal of culture and behavior in the past. In this way, material culture is very significant and useful for understanding a culture and its society.

The results of the field of archaeological science are seen as human exploration for life through the interpretation of symbols and functions of objects, which has paved the way for research on cultural objects in a broad sense. According to Gamble (2015), the view is that the anthropological knowledge and paradigms that are often shared in the field of cultural object research are based on cultural-historical elements, archaeological theory, and anthropology. The approach uses inductive methods that align objects according to appropriate spatial and historical layers. However, if a descriptive approach is made, then it reflects the development of its theory during the expansion and era of European colonization and often takes its interpretation of ancient objects and past experiences.

Askegaard's (2015) research on material culture is an extension of archaeological theory's approach to the meaning of objects and a reminder that the previous field was contemporary and interdisciplinary. For example, the field of anthropology that refers to economic aspects aims to provide an alternative to econometrics or statistical mapping methods in economics for thinking about consumer consumption and behavior. Marketing anthropology, on the other hand, combines insights from the broad field of cultural

anthropology with business administration, an approach that overlaps and is independent of ancient research and literature.

According to Fosnight (2013) based on Kader (2003), cultural objects are a significant part in shaping human civilization. This is because human existence will not be a complement to history without the existence of cultural objects. Objects and art are one of the interactions that are closely related to each other. The creation of objects has allowed humans to appreciate activity in the context of their interactions with each other. The field of material culture refers to materiality as an object that is studied in all aspects of human life. Furthermore, it encompasses all things as long as the object has intrinsic and extrinsic value. In addition, without these values, it is a spatial transition that has no meaning in seeing the evolution of the process of human civilization.

Based on Lavenda, et. al., (2010), the existence of cultural objects is seen as physical evidence to understand the history of humanity and cultural activities in the fields of anthropology and archaeology. According to the technological perspective, research on cultural objects is used as an exploration method and analysis is carried out on the ins and outs of how the objects were used, produced and designed in the past. Furthermore, cultural objects are also associated with patterns of change in terms of use, technological development and innovation. In addition, this matter was also touched upon by Sahari, et. al., (2020) in Prown (1982) who stated that the significance of cultural research based on man-made objects is seen from four elements. Among them, the cognitive level involving human expertise and wisdom, human activity, accessibility of materials and creation technology and value. In object cultural research, it is the main data that connects the human past with materials in symbolizing various aspects of culture and society, belief practices, values and the existing environment.

For Habermas (2001), objects are a material culture that includes parts of the human living environment. The group of material culture can be conceptualized as basic culture, transitional media and changes in the evolution of human technology. Furthermore, objects are able to symbolize the structure and social status of human life in terms of ritual practices and beliefs. Meanwhile, Jais, et. al., (2007) stated that objects are the result of human modification of a material from nature, such as soil, stone, wood, metal and fiber in creating ideas, techniques and skills for life. Furthermore, for Jusoh (2010), every physical change that occurs in the aspect of physical appearance, whether from carving motifs, decorations, material composition, function and creation technology. It will indirectly show the levels of ability and progress that have been achieved by a society that produces the object.

According to Cuno (2014), cultural objects are cultural assets and markers of identity based on the country of origin and old history. In addition, many cultural objects of the past are also linked to asserting glorious power as a way to raise the political image of humans in the modern world and its continuity. Among them, Egypt is very rich in history and culture during the Pharaonic era, Iran with Persian civilization and Italy which is proud of the glorious era of the Roman Empire. This view is also explained by Ghazali (2017), with the existence of cultural objects, it is able to generate the highest level of critical thinking and can create a sense of curiosity about something that happened in the past.

Based on the views of Sahari, et. al., (2020), research on material culture refers to man-made objects that are based on practices and cultures that are practiced. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of these community groups to preserve their culture, rather than relying on external communities. In addition, local communities have been instructed by the ruling class to preserve and document their culture since the colonial era with reference to Western ideology since the Renaissance, Baroque and Rococo periods. They preserve and document

cultural heritage in various forms of preservation or conservation of antiques, visual culture, art history, iconology and iconography. Furthermore, the involvement of indigenous communities in documenting and reorganizing cultural objects is very significant in maintaining the integrity of their identity and strong identity, while also being able to be developed over time in their generations.

Tilley (2006) states that the creation of cultural objects in human activities is not only limited to the exploration of identity and the creation of object functions. However, it looks at human society as formed through the aspects of production, use, exchange and consumption of material culture. In this statement, it is driven by the theory of practice by Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens which states that the relationship between humans and the structure of social institutions, which is an idea of how spaces and objects become ‘structures and structurings’ that are encoded with meaning through certain practices. He argues that in sociological terms, Habitus includes socially instilled attitudes, skills and tendencies. This is the way in which individuals view the social world around them and react to each other to obtain reactions from the surrounding. This disposition is usually shared by individuals who have similar backgrounds. This concept of habitus is constructive and influenced by the structure of societal principles, shaping and being shaped by social and recursive practices. Tilley also illustrates this idea with his classic research conducted on the Kabyle house in the Berber society in Algeria. It can be seen that the organization of the construction of the house in an intrinsic aspect is linked to daily activities and gender understanding in the community group. Based on the results of the research he conducted, it was found that the existence of the house was not created naturally, but rather a manifestation of the Kabyle based on their level of skill and ideology in seeing and building their self-identity.

The concept and definition of cultural objects are closely related to the concept of 'objectification', namely as a tool that is built and created to become a need for humans. According to Hicks (2010) based on Miller (2005), the theory of objectification pioneered by Hegel which seeks to explain the gap that is generally considered between humans and material culture. The existence of this idea which considers cultural objects as human subjects made using images that are created and reflected through actions in producing an aspect of the form and nature of the object as a need for humans. Furthermore, the idea was later developed by Miller by exploring the relationship between humans and cultural objects created through use in everyday life.

The concept of cultural objects is closely tied to the theory of “objectification,” which describes how material artifacts become socially meaningful beyond purely functional roles. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes how objects acquire cultural significance through their relationships with human practices and community values (Brodie, 2020). Brodie (2020) explains that a cultural object’s significance lies in its “cultural worth”—derived from historical, spiritual, artistic, or symbolic associations—rather than inherent material qualities. Similarly, recent conceptual frameworks contrast object-centric and functionalist perspectives: the former focuses on an object’s integrity and preservation, while the latter emphasizes its meaning within community practices and evolving social uses (Loulanski, 2006). A more integrated approach now recognizes that both property- like aspects (history, material, design, function) and operational aspects (identification, evaluation, cultural context, interpretation) are essential to understanding how communities identify, evaluate, and transmit their tangible heritage across generations.

2.8 Development Towards Tangible Cultural Heritage

A development of a cultural heritage in the world can be a threat and an opportunity for the culture practiced by a society. Furthermore, the era of economic globalization in this era has become the main thrust in debating the issue of methods for preserving the cultural identity of a society's heritage in addition to stating the benefits of globalization to all levels of society. In the international trade sector, it often leads to the use of modern materials or goods from a foreign country that replace traditional materials. This is because the use of modern materials for a cultural heritage in the form of material, it will speed up the process of laboratory work with the aim of preserving and conserving the object. In addition, it also provides an opportunity for a society to improve their economic sector through the value and practice of something in the form of traditional art (UNESCO, 2003).

2.9 Traditional Heritage Crafts as Cultural Material

Craft art is a cultural material that shows the abilities and skills possessed by its maker for a specific purpose. For a cultural material, it tends to be decorative or in its artistic appearance and has a specific practical or useful function. A craft art produced by a society can be divided into two parts. The first part is the result of craft work that maintains the conventional understanding of craft, namely craft art as an object for the daily needs of a society. For this part, the craft maker's craftsmanship continues to produce craft items as inherited from their ancestors. In addition, there are also craft makers who produce craft items without any changes, and some who strive to develop them to be better and of high quality. Meanwhile, the second part is craft art as an object that emphasizes personal expression so that the craft maker calls himself a craft artist. Furthermore, there are also craft makers who use both parts to show traditional or local knowledge about the cultural aspects of a society towards the craft items produced (Mughtar, B., 1991).

Crafts in human life are an inseparable necessity. Initially, crafts were seen as having the task of fulfilling human needs in their daily lives and little by little the function has changed. Changes in the function of crafts do not reduce their existence in human life. The development of tangible heritage crafts always have a special place in the context of art and culture by a society. This is because crafts have their own advantages as art objects. The advantages of actual works of art are formed and shown through certain factors, namely special factors and general factors. For special factors, they are crafts that carry the characteristics and character of the original culture of a society. While for general factors, crafts are made with highly skilled hands, most crafts are made very decorative or visually very beautiful and are functional craft items. In the creation of a craft, certain equipment is also used. Furthermore, throughout the creation process, the skills of using these equipment by the craft maker are very necessary (Soedarso SP, 2006). The high level of skill in craft production makes some types of craft products seen as valuable and valuable art. This is because the artistic value of a craft produced has an influence on contemplation which is supported by very complex skills and there are basic conceptual levels that need to be followed and understood by the craft maker (Sedyawati, 2006).

2.10 Iban Handicrafts and Beliefs

Art and religious beliefs are two aspects that are interconnected and important to each other in their daily lives. Indirectly, these two concepts or aspects are closely related to nature which is their source of inspiration. Therefore, due to this source of inspiration, various arts were born, like craft and handicrafts especially wood carving which carries meaning and ritual functions (Karisenan, 2007).

2.11 Concept of Handicrafts

Handicrafts are defined as things that are made by hand. Their production may be entirely manual or with the use or assistance of simple tools. Mechanical tools can also be used as long as the handicraft contribution remains the most important component of the final product. It may be made from raw materials and produced in small or large numbers depending on the need. These products can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, or creative with cultural, functional, traditional, religious, social, or symbolic significance (Mohi Ud Din, 2014).

2.12 Traditional Handicrafts

During the pandemic, Malaysia experienced its most severe tourism crisis in decades. Revenue from multiple tourism-dependent industries sharply declined, with prolonged movement control orders exacerbating the situation. Economic stimuli, including wage subsidies and tourism tax exemptions, offered some relief but were insufficient to counterbalance the widespread losses. Handicrafts, closely tied to tourism, also suffered from reduced visitor spending during this period (Mahavera, 2023). Handicraft production provides employment and income opportunities for rural communities and may reduce poverty in rural areas of Sarawak. It is increasingly active in non-agricultural activities. Its production is sustainable because it tends to be small, uses local resources, and is based on indigenous knowledge (Berma, 2001b). These products play an important role in generating income and contributing to Malaysia's gross domestic product (GDP).

2.13 Traditional Handicraft in Sarawak

Handicrafts are more than just souvenirs; they are an active part of the contemporary world of tourism, coming from lifestyle and production methods. When handicrafts are still in use within the local community, like fishing and hunting, gathering and farming practices,

as well as spiritual beliefs, customs, festivals, ceremonies, folk music, songs, dances, languages, written and spoken architecture and statues, they constitute the ancient complex skills of the handicraft traditions of every ethnic group. These skills have been transmitted over the years from generation to generation and have become a heritage as the world modernizes. Even though the demand for these crafts and products decreases. They remain a source of knowledge and a symbol of human cultural heritage. This heritage of handicrafts and traditional products becomes treasures of cultural heritage searched for by researchers, tourists, and those interested in visiting the areas of these communities. Therefore, the production and marketing of these ethnic handicrafts enhance the continuity of these peoples. Their traditions and their ethnic identity alleviate poverty, support the state's economy, and develop tourism (Tourism and Handicrafts, 2006). Handicraft industries play an essential role in the economies of all Asian countries, including Malaysia. They constitute small business activities and are often the only available means to provide additional employment and raise the living level for rural populations (Hussein et al., 2021). Handicrafts Industry sales are highly dependent on tourists. Moreover, the maintenance of social stability and most development in these areas depends on natural resources and a limited number of industries which slows development and gives limited options in terms of social and economic development (Edirin, 2018). The role of cottage or rural industries can provide alternative or additional livelihoods to the rural community, especially avenues for women to gain self-determination and financial empowerment. Handicraft items are also meaningful cultural and heritage representations of a state or a nation Gapor, Rahman, Echoh, and Rosli (2019). There is no theoretical way to learn these skills; all must learn from practice. The most common skills as hobbies are sewing, weaving, design, pottery, and other handicrafts (De Silver, et. al., 2013).

2.14 Economic Challenges

In the handicraft sector, economic challenges play a significant role in determining the viability and sustainability of traditional artisanship. These challenges are particularly pronounced due to the sector's reliance on small-scale, resource-intensive production methods and limited financial support.

2.14.1 Economic Challenges in the Handicrafts Sector

Economic constraints are a major obstacle for the handicrafts sector, where artisans face intense competition from inexpensive, mass-produced imports. These low-cost alternatives saturate the market, making it difficult for traditional, higher-cost handicrafts to compete on price while maintaining quality and authenticity. In a price-sensitive market, artisans often cannot reduce their prices without compromising the cultural value and quality of their work, which puts them at a disadvantage as consumers tend to prioritize affordability over authenticity (Gapor & Selamat, 2010). This challenge is especially pronounced in rural areas, such as Sarawak, where handicrafts often serve as a supplementary income source. The resulting economic instability makes it increasingly difficult for artisans to sustain production, particularly when the high cost of traditional materials and the labor-intensive nature of the work yield low returns (Leow, 2023).

Another economic challenge lies in limited access to financial resources, which restricts artisans' ability to grow their businesses. Without adequate funding, artisans are unable to invest in improved tools, diversify their products, or adapt to evolving consumer preferences (Ling, 2023a). Financial constraints are especially challenging for women artisans, who typically operate micro-scale production units and face additional barriers to securing formal financial support (Sait et al., 2018). Credit facilities remain (Hussein et al., 2021) insufficient or inaccessible for artisan microenterprises, which hampers efforts to

maintain steady production and scale operations to meet market demands or offset rising material costs (Hussein et al., 2021). The lack of formal credit options further constrains artisan growth and innovation capacity(Sait et al., 2018).

2.14.2 Lack of Business Acumen

A prevalent issue in the handicraft business is the lack of essential business skills among artisans. Many artisans are skilled in their craft but lack knowledge in critical areas such as financial management, strategic planning, and marketing. This deficiency limits their ability to plan for growth, operate efficiently, and effectively reach a broader customer base (Kheung, 2018). The absence of training and development in these areas makes it challenging for artisans to adapt to market demands and achieve economic sustainability (Hassan, 2017).

2.14.3 Resource Limitations and Marketing Barriers

Resource availability is another major challenge facing the handicraft sector. Traditional materials, such as rattan, bamboo, and cotton yarn, have become increasingly scarce due to environmental degradation and deforestation, pushing artisans to rely on synthetic materials that lack the same cultural significance or durability (Faridah, 2012). This scarcity not only increases production costs but also affects the marketability of the crafts, as the high production costs can render the products less competitive (Teo, et, al., 2020).

Moreover, many artisans lack a well-developed marketing strategy, often relying on local visitors or tourists as their primary customers. This limited promotional reach restricts their ability to attract a wider audience, resulting in reduced demand and revenue (Gapor & Selamat, 2010). Additionally, the presence of middlemen in the supply chain often leads to

exploitation of artisans, further cutting into their profits and financial stability (Eva et al., 2017).

2.14.4 Generational Disinterest

A critical threat to the long-term sustainability of the handicraft industry is the declining interest among younger generations. Many young people view traditional craftmaking as financially unsustainable, choosing to pursue modern careers instead. This shift leads to an erosion of traditional knowledge and skills, as older artisans find fewer apprentices willing to learn and continue their craft. This generational gap poses a severe risk to the preservation of cultural heritage, as the unique techniques and stories embedded in these crafts are at risk of being lost over time (Faridah, et. al., 2016).

2.15 Sustainability

Sustainability broadly encompasses practices that meet current needs without compromising the capacity of future generations. It has three primary pillars environmental, economic, and cultural (or social) sustainability that are interconnected and essential for fostering a resilient society (Hawkes, 2001).

2.15.1 Economic Sustainability

Economic sustainability focuses on fostering long-term economic growth that does not negatively impact environmental, social, or cultural factors. Policies promoting innovation and efficient resource use can enhance economic sustainability by supporting growth without exhausting resources. This approach aims to allow future generations to enjoy economic prosperity and access to necessary resources (Emas, 2015).

2.15.2 Cultural Sustainability

Often considered a "fourth pillar" of sustainability, cultural sustainability emphasizes the preservation and enrichment of cultural identities, traditions, and values. It enhances community cohesion and individual well-being by providing a foundation for societal values, aspirations, and ways of life. Integrating culture into sustainability planning highlights the role of shared heritage and cultural expression in creating resilient communities (Hawkes, 2001).

2.15.3 Interconnections Among the Pillars

These pillars are deeply interconnected. Economic and cultural sustainability, for instance, are interdependent because local economies frequently rely on cultural resources like traditional crafts and heritage tourism. Sustainable economic practices help maintain resources essential to cultural heritage, while cultural values can influence ethical economic decisions (Emas, 2015). Additionally, environmental and cultural considerations in economic planning empower communities to make informed choices that support natural ecosystems and cultural preservation (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, pp. 41–49).

Ultimately, a comprehensive approach that integrates economic, cultural, and environmental considerations is crucial for achieving truly sustainable development (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, pp. 41–49).

2.16 Iban Handicrafts Business

The handicrafts industry is considered a small-scale activity but remains highly competitive. For instance, it is not possible to purchase the required raw materials in bulk due to the low demand, as labor skills often focus on the skill of one person who is often the

owner instead of workers specialized in specific production steps. In addition to the fact that the handicraft industry often relies on old production methods and techniques, which leads to high costs and low quality, we must not forget that most entrepreneurs are indifferent to the dictates of the market due to their strong influence on culture and the environment, which forces the workers to manufacture the product according to the desires, skills, and standards of the entrepreneurs instead of the market's standards and needs being different from other industries that follow the market's example to survive and develop as market needs evolve (Tingi & Tugang, 2021).

2.17 Iban Handicrafts Marketing in Sarawak

The survival and success of Iban handicraft marketing depend mainly on promotional strategies for sellers to make the buyers aware and attract and retain buyers for handicrafts. Thus, successful results are achieved through the most effective promotion strategies and attractive financial gains. Handicraft marketing is one of the businesses that need to catch up due to the lack of proper promotion strategies to attract buyers to increase the contribution of the handicraft industry in the market because it has little impact due to its lack of full recognition (Tingi et al., 2021).

2.17.1 Gaps in Iban Handicrafts Marketing in Sarawak

Existing research primarily emphasizes traditional marketing strategies for Iban handicrafts, such as physical craft fairs, local bazaars, and tourism-driven sales (Tingi & Tugang, 2021). While these avenues remain significant, there is a noticeable gap in exploring the integration of digital marketing and e-commerce platforms. The lack of focus on digital transformation limits artisans' ability to reach wider audiences beyond local and regional markets. For instance, global platforms like Etsy or social media channels such as Instagram and Facebook offer untapped potential for promoting handicrafts, yet they are underutilized

by artisans due to skill gaps and resource limitations (Gapor & Selamat, 2010). Addressing this gap is critical for enhancing the visibility and competitiveness of Iban handicrafts in an increasingly digital economy.

2.17.2 Government Support and Policies

Recent studies highlight how Malaysia's rural development programs aim to boost productivity and income for artisans, though implementation challenges persist due to bureaucratic fragmentation (Ahmad et al., 2020). This aligns with the broader need for targeted handicraft policies, as noted by Samsudin et al. (2021), who stress that legal frameworks are essential for effective coordination. Institutional innovations like the Sarawak Craft Council (SCC) demonstrate this principle in action, providing a centralized structure to preserve traditional crafts while empowering local communities (Ling, 2023b).

2.18 Gaps in Government Support and Policies

Research on government support for handicrafts has highlighted various initiatives, such as events like Hari Kraftangan Kebangsaan (HKK) and craft councils (Othman, Ibrahim, Mat, & Shafie, 2024). However, there is a lack of critical analysis on the fragmented nature of these efforts. Studies rarely discuss the need for a cohesive framework that aligns financial assistance, infrastructure development, and market access initiatives under one umbrella. Additionally, while government programs provide platforms for showcasing handicrafts, they often fail to address long-term needs such as consistent funding, advanced equipment access, and comprehensive skill-building opportunities for artisans (Ling, 2023c).

2.19 Marketing Challenges and Strategies

Marketing and promotion are significant hurdles for Iban handicraft entrepreneurs.

Tingi & Tugang (2021) identify several critical challenges, including government negligence, lack of training, and financial support, which impede the effective promotion of handicrafts. The study recommends government policies to create a supportive environment for stakeholders, including financial institutions and NGOs to enhance skills development and promotion strategies (Tingi & Tugang, 2021). Gapor et al. (2019) further explore the factors affecting the buying decisions of customers, emphasizing the need for effective marketing strategies tailored to consumer preferences. According to Abdul Hamid (2016), tourist perceptions towards Sarawak pottery as souvenirs play a crucial role in the marketing strategy. Understanding these perceptions helps in identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the craft industry.

2.20 Economic Impact and Rural Development

Handicrafts contribute significantly to rural development by providing employment and preserving cultural heritage. Berma (2001) discusses the role of commercial handicraft production in Sarawak, emphasizing its potential to alleviate poverty and promote rural industrialization. However, the study also notes the constraints faced by the industry, such as the unavailability of skilled labor and difficulty in obtaining raw materials (Berma, 2001).

Edirin (2018) discusses the broader economic development opportunities and challenges in Malaysia's rural areas, highlighting the importance of integrating handicraft production into these development plans. Additionally, the role of the Sarawak Craft Council (SCC) in promoting local crafts and providing training and support to artisans are vital in boosting the local economy (Jugo et al., 2019).

2.20.1 Gaps in Exploring Economic Impact and Rural Development

Handicrafts have always been an essential part of Malaysia's cultural heritage, especially within the indigenous Iban community in Sarawak. These crafts—ranging from intricate textiles such as pua kumbu, beadwork, to wood carvings—are not just artistic expressions but important sources of livelihood for artisans. However, despite their cultural significance, the Iban handicraft industry faces several challenges that threaten its sustainability. Limited market access, lack of promotional activities, and strong competition from cheaper, mass-produced goods have made it difficult for artisans to expand their businesses and secure stable incomes (Tingi & Tugang, 2021). There is insufficient investigation into alternative market avenues, particularly global e-commerce platforms that could significantly expand market reach (Hussein et al., 2021). This reliance on traditional markets restricts artisans' ability to scale and diversify their income sources, highlighting a critical area for further exploration.

2.21 Cultural and Social Factors

The cultural significance of handicrafts in the Iban community cannot be overstated. Magiman et al., (2017) highlight how traditional practices are integral to the community's identity and social structure. The sustainability of these crafts is closely linked to cultural preservation and the artisans' ability to adapt to contemporary market demands. For example, Wahed et al., (2018) explore the aesthetic features of the traditional female Iban costume Ngepan Indu Iban, emphasizing its cultural and artistic value. The use of handicrafts in tourism also enhances cultural appreciation and economic benefits for local communities (Hassan et al., 2017).

2.21.1 The Role of Women in Iban Handicrafts

Women have long been the primary custodians of traditional handicrafts in the Iban community. Their role extends beyond mere craftsmanship to encompass the preservation of cultural practices and social structures. Maddocks (2017) highlights that in many indigenous communities, including the Iban, women are central to craft production. They play a vital role in the preservation and innovation of traditional crafts, such as weaving, which is often seen as a cultural cornerstone. This role is crucial for maintaining the cultural integrity of these crafts while adapting them to meet contemporary demands.

Similar patterns are observed among the Dayak Desa women of West Kalimantan as an example where traditional weaving is preserved through maternal teaching (Harianti et al., 2019). These women are not only preserving cultural practices but also maintaining their communities' social and economic structures. The knowledge and skills required to produce these handicrafts are often passed down from mother to daughter, ensuring the continuity of these traditions across generations.

In the broader context of Borneo, the role of women in maintaining traditional art forms, such as weaving and beadwork, is crucial. These crafts are not just economic activities but are deeply tied to cultural identity (Kwirinus & Peri, 2023). Despite the challenges posed by modernization, many women continue to uphold these traditions, although the pressures of contemporary life sometimes limit the time and resources they can devote to their handicraft (Othman, Ibrahim, Mat, & Shafie, 2024). This situation highlights the need for supportive initiatives that recognize and bolster the role of women in cultural preservation.

The connection between the handicraft industry and tourism provides women with an economic lifeline, enabling them to sustain their traditional practices while contributing to the broader economy (Abdul Hamid, 2016). This economic aspect underscores the

importance of women's participation in the craft sector, as it not only preserves cultural heritage but also supports livelihoods in their communities.

2.21.2 Gaps in Addressing Gender-specific Challenges in Iban Handicrafts

Women play a central role in preserving and producing Iban handicrafts, yet they face unique challenges that are often overlooked in existing research (Karisenan, 2007). Balancing household responsibilities with craft production limits their time and access to resources. Furthermore, there is little discussion on targeted interventions to empower female artisans, such as training in digital marketing, access to funding, or programs that address their specific needs (Eva et al., 2017). Addressing this gap could enhance women's contributions to the handicraft sector and strengthen its overall sustainability.

2.21.3 The Future of Iban Handicrafts: Challenges and Prospects for the Next Generation

The sustainability of Iban handicrafts is increasingly threatened by the disengagement of the younger generation. This trend is not unique to the Iban but is reflected across various communities in Borneo (Sait et al., 2018). Younger people often prioritize formal education and modern employment opportunities over learning traditional handicrafts, which are perceived as less economically viable (Gapor et al., 2019). Maddocks (2017) emphasizes the importance of engaging the younger generation in innovative craft practices through targeted interventions, such as workshops and community projects. These initiatives can bridge the gap between traditional practices and modern expectations, fostering a sense of ownership and pride among the youth, and ensuring the continuity of these handicrafts.

Moreover, as younger generations move away from traditional practices, the intricate techniques involved in creating handicrafts, such as the Iban's weaving, are at risk of being

lost (Tingi & Tugang, 2021). The potential for these crafts to be integrated into the tourism industry offers a pathway for revitalization. By creating economic opportunities linked to tourism, younger people might be more inclined to learn and continue these traditions, ensuring their survival (Hassan, et. al., 2017).

The pressures of modern life, including the demands of formal education and alternative employment opportunities, have started to erode the time and resources that younger people can devote to traditional practices. However, with targeted efforts to reconnect the youth with their cultural heritage, and by demonstrating that these traditional crafts can provide a sustainable livelihood, the future of Iban handicrafts can be secured.

2.21.4 Gaps in Sustaining the Future of Iban Handicrafts

Research on the future of Iban handicrafts often highlights the challenges posed by modernization and market dynamics but overlooks a critical factor: the declining interest of younger generations in engaging with traditional crafts (Faridah et al., 2016). Younger individuals often perceive handicraft production as financially unsustainable and less appealing than modern career options. Studies have yet to explore effective strategies for involving youth, such as integrating modern design elements, offering digital tools for crafting, or establishing mentorship programs (Eva, et. al., 2017). These initiatives could help bridge the generational gap and ensure the sustainability of this cultural heritage.

2.22 Challenges in Raw Material and Production

Access to raw materials is a persistent issue for handicraft producers. Small- scale producers in rural Sarawak face constraints such as rising raw material costs and inconsistent supply, which limit their ability to scale production. Traditional, labor-intensive production methods further exacerbate these challenges, making it difficult to meet market demands

effectively (Berma, 2001b). These factors—combined with lack of skilled labor and limited institutional support—pose significant barriers to growth and commercialization of indigenous crafts.. Gapor et al. (2019) delve into the issues and challenges in the production of Iban handicrafts, highlighting the difficulties in sourcing high-quality raw materials. Similarly, Sahari, Durin, and Sanggin (2016) examine the sustainability challenges facing Orang Ulu crafts, focusing on how the depletion of natural resources—due to logging, land-use change, and development projects—has disrupted traditional access to materials like rattan and bamboo.

2.22.1 Gaps in Raw Material and Sustainable Production

Most studies acknowledge the challenges artisans face in sourcing traditional materials like rattan and bamboo, which are becoming increasingly scarce (Sulaiman et al., 2023). However, there is minimal exploration of how artisans can adopt sustainable and eco-friendly alternatives without compromising cultural authenticity. For instance, the use of recycled or locally abundant materials could be a viable solution, but research on its feasibility and market acceptance is limited (Faridah et al., 2012). This gap underscores the need for innovative approaches to sustainable production in the handicraft sector.

2.23 Training and Skill Development

The lack of training and skill development opportunities is a critical barrier to the growth of the handicraft industry. Maddocks (2017) discusses the importance of developing technical skills and knowledge among artisans to enhance the quality and marketability of their products. This requires concerted efforts from both governmental and nongovernmental organizations to provide adequate training programs (Maddocks, 2017). Hussein et al. (2021) emphasize the role of entrepreneurial training in fostering innovation and sustainability in

the handicraft sector. Training programs organized by the Sarawak Craft Council (SCC) are crucial for skill development and innovation in the handicraft industry (Jugo, et. al., 2019).

2.23.1 Gaps in Training and Skill Development

While current training programs focus on traditional techniques, they do not adequately address the entrepreneurial aspects required for artisans to thrive in a competitive market. Past studies often overlook the importance of equipping artisans with business acumen, such as financial planning, marketing, and customer engagement (Hassan et al., 2017). Moreover, there is insufficient emphasis on teaching artisans how to leverage digital tools for sales and promotion. This gap in entrepreneurial development limits artisans' ability to scale their businesses and reach broader audiences, thereby reducing the economic potential of their craft (Kheung et. al., 2018).

2.24 Market Dynamics and Competition

The competition from mass-produced imports significantly affects the demand for locally crafted products. Tanakinjal et al. (2016) explore how market dynamics and consumer preferences impact the sustainability of traditional handicrafts. They suggest that enhancing the market competitiveness of Iban handicrafts through better marketing and quality control is essential for their survival (Tanakinjal et al., 2016). Mohi Ud Din (2014) also examines the production processes and market strategies that can enhance the competitiveness of handicrafts in the global market. Furthermore, Hassan et al. (2017) discusses the importance of preserving Malaysian handicrafts to support tourism development, highlighting the role of cultural tourism in sustaining local crafts.

2.25 Literature Search Process and Sources

This study employed a systematic literature search process to gather comprehensive information relevant to the topic of Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy. The search process was guided by The Literature Review model proposed by Machi et al. (2009), which involves six key steps: selecting a topic, searching the literature, developing arguments, surveying the literature, critiquing the literature, and writing the review.

Reference materials were obtained from books, journal articles, theses, dissertations, research reports, newspapers, and online resources. Sources were accessed through the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak Library, Pustaka Negeri Sarawak, Tun Jugah Foundation Library, Sarawak Museum Journal, and the Sarawak State Archives.

The literature search revealed that existing studies on Iban handicrafts have predominantly focused on artistic creation, commercialization, and community perceptions. There is comparatively less research detailing the economic sustainability challenges facing the Iban handicraft industry. This gap informed the scope and direction of the present study.

Secondary sources included works such as *Iban Studies: Their Contribution to Social Theory and the Ethnography of Other Borneo Societies* (Appell, 2021), *Ritual Adat Kematian dalam Masyarakat Iban di Sarawak: Artifak Iringan Tukang Sabak* (Kiyai, 2019), and *The Study of Material Culture of the Iban Community in Sarawak: Ngepan* (Kiyai & Tugang, 2021). In addition, concepts from cultural economics theory, including the role of cultural capital in economic outcomes (Guiso, Sapienza, & Zingales, 2006), were incorporated to provide a theoretical basis for the analysis.

This structured literature review process enabled the researcher to identify knowledge gaps, refine research objectives, and develop a conceptual framework that

integrates both cultural and economic dimensions of the Iban handicraft industry. Figure 2.3 illustrates the literature review process undertaken in this study.

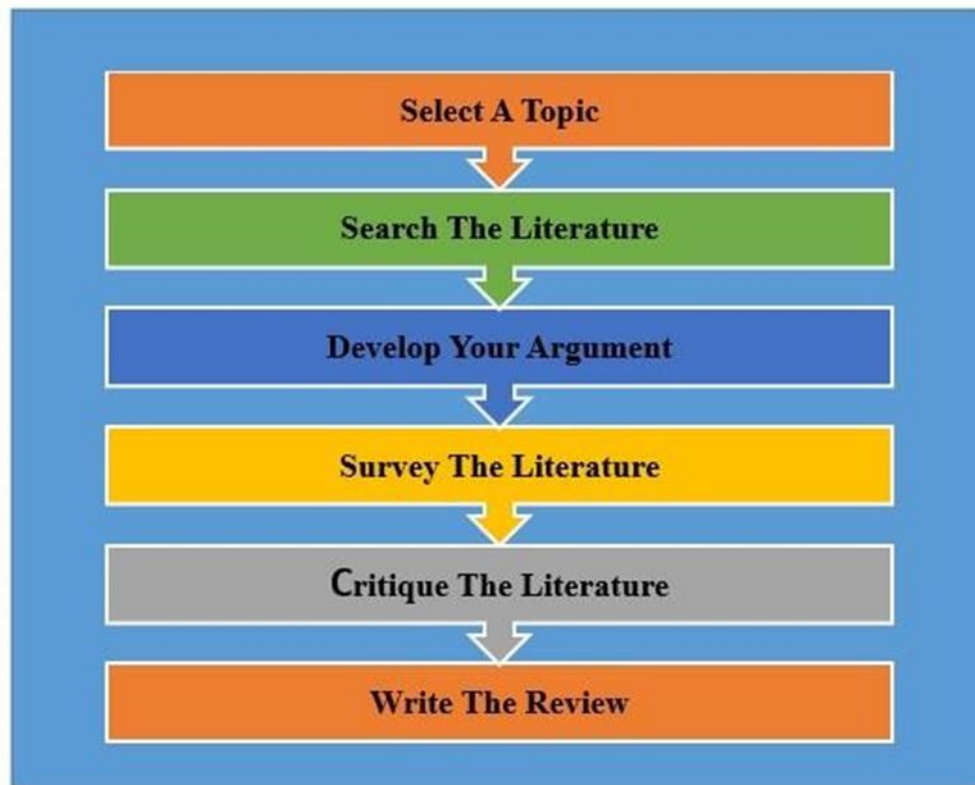


Figure 2-3 The process of conducting a literature review on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ (Source: The Literature Review by Machi, et., al., 2009).

Figure 2.3 illustrates the six-step model for conducting a systematic literature review as proposed by Machi et al. (2009). The process begins with selecting a topic that aligns with the study’s objectives, followed by searching the literature to gather relevant sources from books, journals, reports, and other materials. In the developing the argument stage, the researcher synthesises information to form a coherent theoretical position. Surveying the literature involves mapping the scope of existing studies to identify patterns and knowledge gaps. Critiquing the literature enables the evaluation of previous research for strengths,

weaknesses, and areas requiring further exploration. The final step, writing the review, integrates all findings into a structured narrative that informs the research framework.

In this study, the model was applied to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy, thereby identifying gaps in previous research and refining the conceptual framework used for analysis.

2.26 Chapter Summary

The sustainability of Iban handicrafts in Sarawak. Addressing the challenges in marketing, raw material procurement, and skill development, along with robust government support, is crucial for the industry's growth and sustainability. Future research should focus on developing integrated strategies that combine cultural preservation with modern market demands to ensure the long-term viability of Iban handicrafts.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Based on chapter three, which focuses on methodology and research, the researcher will explain about the methodology throughout conducting research, data processing, analysis and writing complete data on the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. This chapter describes the qualitative data collection and analysis methods used to study the sustainability of Iban handicrafts in Sarawak. By focusing on qualitative methods, the research aims to capture the complex details of traditional practices, the social and economic impact on artisans, and the cultural significance of these crafts. It presents data collection and analysis processes to explore the sustainability of Iban handicrafts in Sarawak. This chapter explains the methods used to collect data, provides a detailed description of the data collection procedures and describes the analytical techniques applied to interpret the results.

In this chapter, the researcher will explain the methodology through conducting research, data processing, analysis and writing complete data on the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. Overall, this research uses the qualitative approach. Research that uses the qualitative approach is a systematic method to explain, observe, understand and research lifestyles, norms, social, culture, individual and group practices, values and beliefs that exist in the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. Therefore, the qualitative approach is fully used in this ongoing research.

3.2 Procedures in Conducting Research

Before commencing this research, the researcher must identify the topics and areas to be studied within the master's program in Arts Management. In the process of selecting research topics and areas, it is imperative for researchers to engage in discussions with their primary supervisor to ensure appropriateness. This is crucial because an inappropriate choice of research topic and field can disrupt the smooth progress of the research and hinder completion within the university's set time frame. The research conducted by the researcher on the topic 'Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy' is based on a strictly qualitative approach. Below is Figure 3.1 prepared by the researcher to illustrate the important procedures when conducting this research, which are:

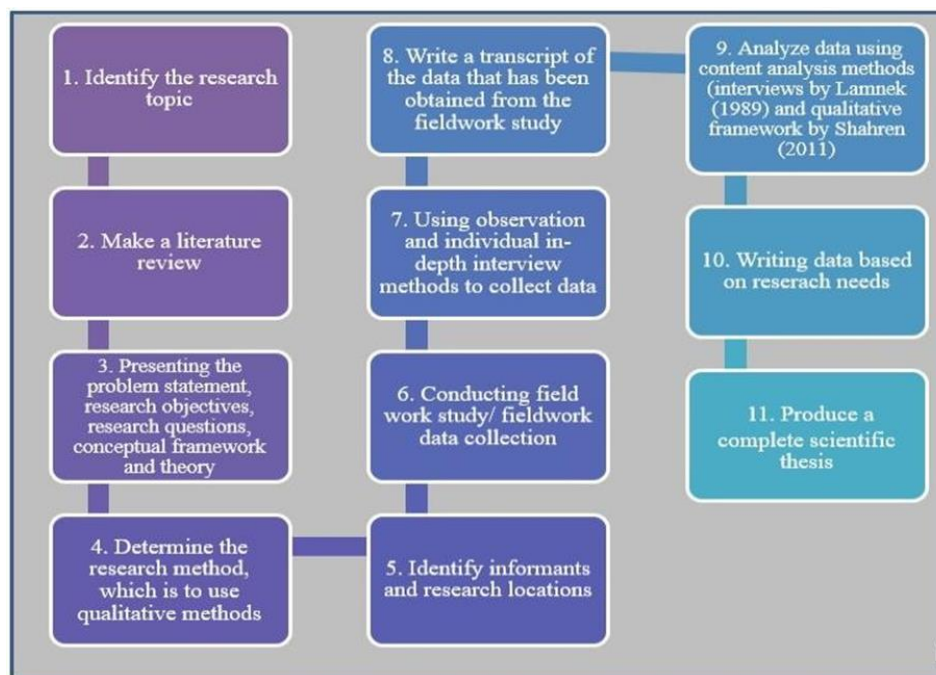


Figure 3-1 Procedure in conducting research on a topic 'Sustainable Development and challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy' (Source: Author)

Before conducting this research, the researcher needs to identify the topics and areas to be studied for the Master of Arts degree in the Arts Management program. In the selection of topics and areas of research, the researcher needs to discuss with the main supervisor to determine the matter. This is because if the chosen research topic and field are not appropriate, it will cause the research to be carried out may not run smoothly or be completed within the period set by the university. Appointments are made with the supervisor to discuss the selection of topics and areas to be studied throughout the study period. After much discussion, it was decided that the research topic will be named ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’.

After determining the research topic and field that will be studied throughout this study period, the researcher needs to conduct a literature review. This is because it is very important for researchers to research the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, and the details of the development of the scope that has been covered in previous writings.

In doing the library research, the researcher looks at the development of the topic ‘Challenges of Iban Handicrafts Towards the Economy in the Iban Community’ and the scope of the research to determine whether it has been done or not done by past researchers through the writing of articles, journals, theses, books, dissertations and some newspaper clippings as important references. The library research section helps researchers to find out about the development of the topic ‘Challenges of Iban Handicraft Towards the Economy in the Iban Community’ from the aspects of Research Gap, Knowledge Gap, Practical Gap and Methodological Gap. Therefore, researchers need to examine each past research based on these aspects in order to be able to see the overall development of the topic to be studied.

The literature review also helps to strengthen the evidence on the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, which the researcher wants to study.

After examining several important aspects, such as the Research Gap, Knowledge Gap, Practical Gap, Evidence Gap and Methodological Gap, then the researcher can see the issue that has not been studied in detail by previous researchers on the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. Based on the literature review section examined through several specific aspects, the issues to be studied, objectives, research questions, conceptual frameworks and theories used to complete this research are formed. If you look at past research sources on ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, it focuses on the commercialization of handicrafts, the production of handicrafts, the community's perception of handicrafts and several other topics. Therefore, the current research topic, which is ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ is made as the main research topic that will be carried out by the current researcher.

The next section is the methodology for conducting this research or methodology. In the research on the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, the researcher uses qualitative methods entirely for the research. In order to determine a method used to collect data, the issues to be solved in the research need analysis. Furthermore, the use of a method to collect data can also affect discovery and the overall research. Therefore, the researcher needs to examine the methods that will be used so that the data obtained can meet the research requirements.

After determining the methodology in carrying out research on the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, the researcher will identify the informants and specific locations to carry out the data collection procedure. Informants who are experts in the field being studied need to be identified so that the data obtained will meet the needs of the research. Based on the topic ‘Challenges of Iban Handicrafts Towards the Economy in the Iban Community’, the location selection for data collection is in Kapit, Kanowit, Sri Aman District, Bau, Kelabit, Padawan Betong, Lubok Antu. The next part is to carry out the fieldwork study phase. This is because it aims to obtain data to solve the issues studied in the field of research. Before conducting a fieldwork study, the researcher needs to make a detailed plan so that it can run smoothly.

Based on the research on the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, the researcher used the method of observation (participatory and non-participatory observation) document analysis, and interview (Individual In-Depth Interview) to collect data. In the observation method, researchers study the sustainability of Iban handicrafts in Sarawak based on their economic dimensions. Document analysis is done to obtain important evidence related to the topic being studied. In addition, it is also important to support the data obtained from interview and observation methods. The interview method is conducted with informants who are experts on the research topic, namely ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’.

After obtaining data from the fieldwork study, the researcher begins writing a transcript of the data on the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. All the data obtained from the informants will be collected and a transcript of the data will be made for the purpose of analysing the

research data. In this research, data analysis from a qualitative approach on the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ requires a long period of time. This is because the data needs to be adapted to the issues, objectives and questions being studied in addition to looking at the appropriateness of the conceptual and theoretical framework and subsequently producing a research model. Therefore, the researcher needs to be sensitive and careful when writing data in order to meet the main requirements for the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’.

In analysing research data for the topic “Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy”, the researcher employed content analysis, drawing on two complementary approaches: the comprehensive qualitative research framework described by Merriam and Tisdell (2015) and interview analysis techniques outlined by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015). This combined approach was selected to ensure that the data were thoroughly examined and interpreted in alignment with the study’s focus on sustainable development and the economic challenges faced by Iban artisans.

The subsequent stage involved developing a detailed write-up of the qualitative data, closely aligned with the research objectives, questions, conceptual framework, and theoretical foundation. Throughout this process, the researcher maintained a high level of sensitivity and precision to ensure the analysis remained firmly anchored to the study’s central theme.

Ultimately, these systematic procedures resulted in the production of a complete scientific thesis on “Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy”. By progressing through the key phases of qualitative

inquiry and integrating methodological rigor, the researcher successfully met the primary requirements of the study.

Based on the final part is the eventual results of producing a complete scientific thesis on the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. After going through several important research phases, the researcher can produce a complete scientific thesis to meet the main requirements in the study.

3.3 Research Design

Research design provides information on the framework, strategies to determine the type of research approach, data collection, sampling, data processing, analysing data, writing data leading to the production of a scientific thesis. Based on the research on the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, the researcher uses a comprehensive qualitative approach.

According to Creswell (2009) research has three main forms, which are qualitative, quantitative and a combination of both methods (qualitative and quantitative). For this research that uses a qualitative approach, the researcher describes the problem statement to understand something by ‘Exploring a Concept of Phenomena’. This is because of the lack of research information on the research topic being studied by the researcher, which is ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. Furthermore, the researcher wants to uncover and explore the sustainability of the Iban community in their handicrafts based on the economic dimension.

In this research which uses a qualitative approach, especially based on Exploratory Research, the aim is to add information about the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, which is being studied.

Based on the qualitative approach used to conduct this research, the aim is to ensure that the data obtained will meet the essence of the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. In addition, most past writings related to the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, cover a lot of the commercialization of handicrafts, the production of handicrafts and the function of handicrafts in the daily activities of the Iban community. Therefore, this research is based on the context of the research topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. In relation to that, it can be stated that there is a difference in the scope of research studied by researchers related to the topic being studied.

Based on the research design in this research, which is Exploratory Research, the study is about the handicrafts of the Iban community to be preserved in their local economic dimension in Sarawak. The purpose of Exploratory Research in this research is to understand the issues being studied from the perspective of the Iban community and their cultural practices. In addition, it can also add knowledge about the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ which is being studied.

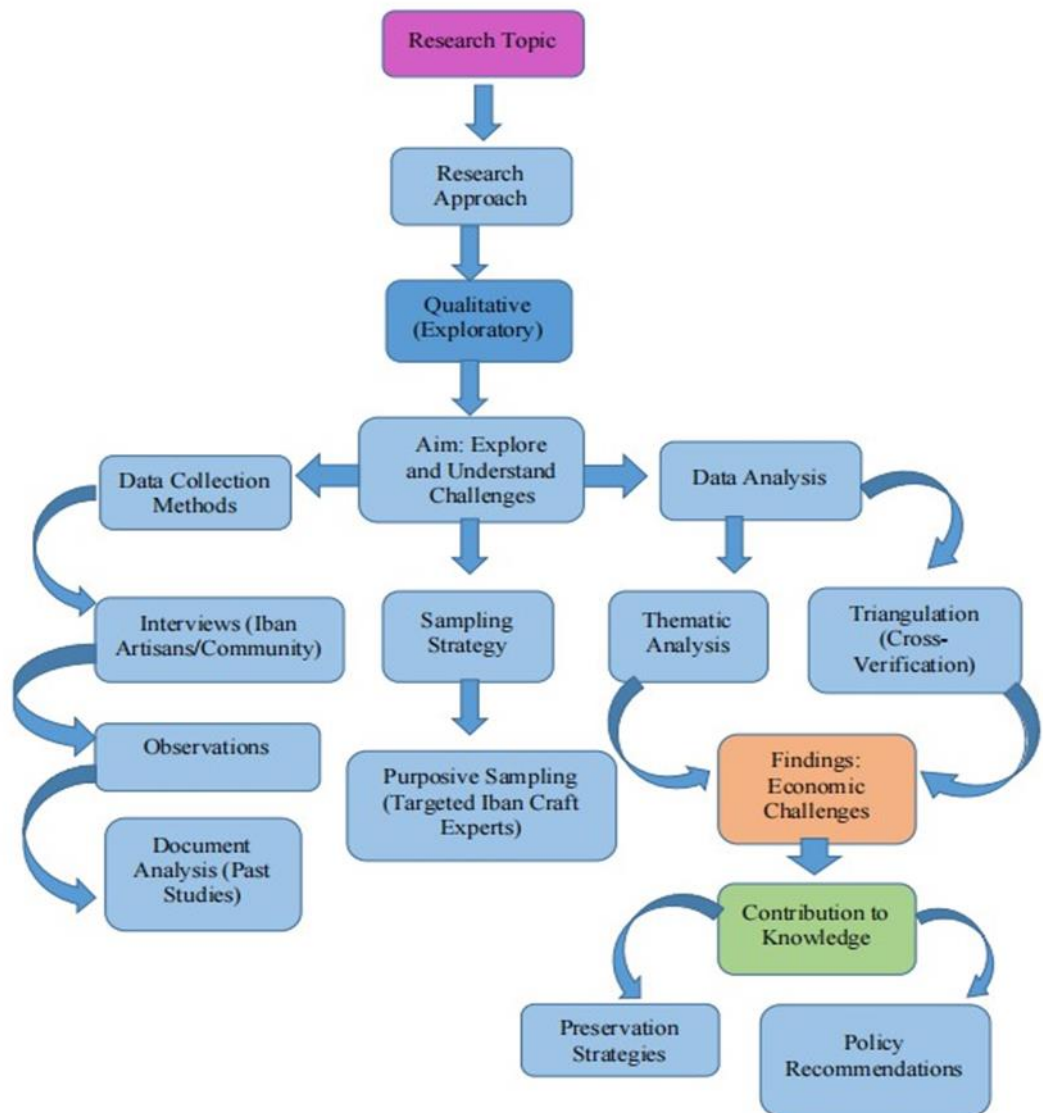


Figure 3-2 Research Design Framework: Qualitative Exploratory Approach
(Source: Author)

3.3.1 Key Components Explained

A. Research Approach:

- Qualitative (Exploratory): Focused on understanding phenomena (Creswell, 2009).
- Justification: Limited prior research on Iban handicrafts' economic challenges.

B. Data Collection:

- Interviews: Insights from Iban artisans.
- Observations: Craft-making processes.
- Document Analysis: Review of previous studies on commercialization or production.

C. Sampling:

- Purposive Sampling: Targeting knowledgeable Iban community members.

D. Analysis:

- Thematic Analysis: Identifying patterns (e.g., economic barriers).
- Triangulation: Validating data across sources.

E. Outcomes:

- New knowledge on sustainability.
- Recommendations for cultural preservation and economic policies.

F. Visual Style:

- Colors: Purple (topic), Blue (methods), Orange (findings), Green (impact).
- Flow: Linear — shows progression from design to outcomes.

3.3.2 Implications of Research Design of Exploratory Research

The researcher spent his research period in the field of study, actively engaging and exploring with the community of artisans in the bazaars of Kuching and Kota Samarahan, as well as with organizations invested in handicrafts in Malaysia, such as Malaysia Handicraft and Sarawak Craft Council (SCC). There is also collaboration with organizations dedicated to documenting the indigenous communities (Bumiputra) and their handicrafts, such as the Tun Jugah Foundation. Additionally, he devoted several months to immersing himself in the livelihoods of the Iban community in Kuching, conducting interviews and observations as necessary.

As highlighted by Hammersley and Atkinson (2019), the time spent in the field was instrumental in enabling the researcher to grasp the perspectives of the informants, anticipate challenges, and discern the most appropriate data collection methods, thereby mitigating the risk of misjudgement inherent in ethnographic research. Moreover, it was crucial for the researcher to elucidate the fundamental aspects of their research to the informants and establish necessary agreements, if requested.

We mention here that observing participants is demanding work. It may require several days to compile notes following fieldwork, along with dedicated time for reflection, analysis, and thorough reading. This process allows the researcher to derive insights from their observations and interviews, thus understanding the subsequent steps and limits regarding whom they interact with. This awareness enables the researcher to discern their successes and failures in comprehension and guides the actions they need to take (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011)

3.4 Research Approaches and Methods

According to Talib (2013), the qualitative approach used to conduct research is aimed at explaining a phenomenon in detail and depth. In the research on the topic, 'Challenges of Iban Handicrafts Towards the Economy in the Iban Community', the researcher used an overall qualitative approach. Based on the use of a qualitative approach in this research, it can reveal research comprehensively through sources of data or information from the fieldwork research phase. In this research, the researcher used qualitative methods to obtain data from informants on the 'Challenges of Iban Handicraft Towards the Economy in the Iban Community'.

The qualitative approach in this research is suitable for the material culture of the Iban community which is based on the topic of 'Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy'. This is because qualitative research aims to see the real approach to the environment being studied for the purpose of understanding the internal perspective without being influenced by the researcher's view (Govindasamy, 2015). Research that uses a qualitative approach does not require fixed research questions, except in the form of research objectives. In addition, research finding that applies a qualitative approach can also influence the objectives that have been set beforehand. This qualitative approach through fieldwork research (Fieldwork Data Collections) requires certain methods, such as observation (regular or participatory), interviews with expert informants and document analysis.

According to Kumar (2011), qualitative research is valuable for understanding, explaining, exploring, and clarifying the attitudes, feelings, values, beliefs, and experiences of a particular group of people. In the study focusing on 'Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy'. The researcher strives to

accurately present the attitudes, experiences, perceptions, ideas, and conclusions in a manner that gains the consent of the participants (Kumar, 2011). This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research through data and information collected during the fieldwork phase. Consequently, the researcher used qualitative methods to gather data from informants on the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’.

Research that employs a qualitative approach on the topic ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, necessitates clarity in language, questions, and issues. When striving to collect data within an appropriate design and analyze it, the resulting data can vary based on the type of design used. Nonetheless, they generally adhere to the same principles of analysis. Data analysis is indeed a dynamic process that involves the identification of emerging themes, key ideas or units of meaning, and materials obtained from the literature (Mohajan, 2018).

In this research, our focus is on ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, which serves as the primary source of income and holds significant cultural and artistic value. These handicrafts play a vital role in the community's natural resource management and cultural expression. Researchers need to comprehend the perspectives and requirements of the artisans on the one hand and the governmental and nongovernmental organizations present in Sarawak on the other. These organizations are closely linked to the craft industries within the community under study.

When collecting qualitative data on the topic the ‘Challenges of Iban Handicrafts Towards the Economy in the Iban Community’, several key considerations come into play. Among these, the researcher conducts a survey of library research materials, gathers research materials via photographs, printed or non-printed resources, and audio recordings, and

conducts on-site observations regarding the state of Iban handicrafts through interactions with informants and research sites.

3.4.1 Qualitative Research Approaches

Research that applies a qualitative approach in the topic 'Challenges of Iban Handicraft Towards the Economy in Iban Community ' requires clarity of language to explain a phenomenon found in a complex situation. In an effort to collect and analyze data, the use of qualitative data are intended to ensure that the level of data processing is obtained more regularly. The qualitative approach applied in empirical research refers to a type of study that focuses or studies meaning and phenomena related to natural situations (Mok, 2008).

Based on research that uses a qualitative approach, the researcher is required to give meaning to the data collected (Creswell, 2005). In relation to that, the interpretation of the data carried out on the topic 'Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy', is dependent on the wisdom and experience of the researcher in the field being studied. Since the researcher is a 'human being', carelessness or incompetence is likely to occur when choosing data or giving meaning to the data collected while conducting research on the 'Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy'. Therefore, researchers need to use certain measures to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected. This is because it aims to show the consistency and reliability of the research findings on the topic 'Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy'.

Based on Rusli et al., (2011), one of the advantages of using qualitative research is that it emphasizes the description of a phenomenon rather than explaining the relationship between variables. Furthermore, qualitative research will also be able to help researchers

understand the feelings, values and perceptions that influence the informant's behaviour (Chua, 2011).

For Chua (2011), the weakness of qualitative research is that when the researcher does not examine in carrying out content analysis about something stated by the informant, then the data obtained are not credible. Therefore, in the research on the topic 'Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy', the researcher should try his best to have an open mind and avoid any self-evaluation. According to Chua (2011), Othman (2013), Rusli et. al., (2011), in order to obtain sources of data or information, qualitative research is usually conducted by using the open interview method in depth (individual indepth interview). The purpose of the researcher using the interview method is to obtain as much information as possible from the informant.

Based on the research approach and method in the topic, 'Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy', materials or resources are obtained to complete the ongoing research. In addition, the method used for the entire research is very important to the appropriateness and accuracy of the data obtained. For the research on the topic 'Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy', the researcher uses a qualitative method. This is because the qualitative method emphasizes the involvement of the researcher in conducting direct research, which includes observation and interview sessions. In relation to that, there are two methods in this research, which are literature review and fieldwork data collections.

3.4.2 Desk Research Component

Desk research formed an integral part of the study's qualitative exploratory approach. Secondary data were gathered from published and unpublished sources, including books, journal articles, reports, theses, and archival materials. This stage complemented field

research by providing historical, cultural, and economic context for interpreting primary data.

The desk research process followed the The Literature Review model by Machi et al. (2009), ensuring systematic topic selection, targeted literature searches, and evidence-based synthesis. This process supported the identification of relevant theoretical perspectives and informed the design of interview protocols for fieldwork.

By integrating findings from desk research with data collected through interviews and observations, the study achieved a more robust and triangulated understanding of the sustainability challenges facing the Iban handicraft industry.

3.4.3 Fieldworks Data Collections

Fieldwork data collection is a method in research that requires the researcher to go down to a location that has been identified to collect data. Before conducting a fieldworks study, the researcher needs to identify the location or social group of the Iban community to be studied. For the fieldwork study in this research, the researcher used a qualitative method approach. Therefore, the strategy for collecting data includes observation methods (regular and participatory), document analysis and interview sessions with informants who are experts in the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. Based on the normal observation method (Non-Participant Observation), the researcher would live with the social group of the Iban community being studied to see the daily life patterns. In addition, the method of participant observation (Participant Observation) will also be used to look at the ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. The method of observation used by researchers on the art of Iban handicraft is to look at some specific aspects that refer to the main focus of the research being carried out. It includes aspects that

underlie the Iban sustainability of the Iban community on handicraft which is based on economic dimensions.

3.4.3.1 Research Objective, Methods and Expected Outcome

Table 3-1 Research Objective, Methods and Expected Outcome (Souce: Mukresh, 2025)

Research Objective	Methods	Expected Outcome
To identify the key economic challenges faced by the Iban handicraft industry.	- Qualitative Approach - Exploratory Research - Method: Observation Non Participant, Observation Participant, Indepth Interview	Key Economic Challenges Identified: Limited Market Access and Competition - Difficulty in reaching broader markets due to remote locations. - Competition from cheaper, mass-produced alternatives (imported crafts). Low Profitability & Pricing Issues - High production costs (raw materials, labor-intensive processes). - Inconsistent pricing strategies and undervaluation of handmade crafts. Lack of Financial Support and Investment - Limited access to government grants, loans, or private investments. - Insufficient funding for innovation, marketing, and business scaling. Dependence on Middlemen and Exploitation Artisans receive low earnings due to intermediaries taking a large share of profits. - Unfair trade practices affecting sustainability. Declining Interest Among Younger Generations - Younger Iban individuals prefer urban jobs over traditional handicraft-making. - Risk of losing traditional skills and cultural heritage. Inadequate Infrastructure and Technology - Poor transportation and logistics hinder market expansion. - Limited use of digital platforms (e- commerce, social media marketing). Seasonal Demand and Unstable Income - Reliance on tourism, which fluctuates seasonally. - Lack of steady demand leads to income instability for artisans.

To analyze the reasons behind the decline or stagnation of the Iban handicraft market.	• Qualitative Approach • Exploratory Research • Method: Observation Non Participant, Observation Participant, Indepth Interview	8. Economic and Market Related Factors • Competition from Mass-Produced Goods: Cheaper, factory-made alternatives have reduced demand for traditional Iban handicrafts. • Limited Market Access: Many Iban artisans lack access to broader markets due to poor infrastructure, digital divide, and weak distribution networks. • Low Profitability: High production costs (time, materials) and low pricing power discourage younger generations from continuing the craft. 9. Socio-Cultural Challenges • Declining Interest Among Youth: Younger Iban individuals prefer modern jobs over traditional crafts, leading to a loss of skills and knowledge. • Cultural Erosion: Weakening transmission of traditional techniques due to urbanization and shifting cultural values. 10. Policy and Institutional Barriers Insufficient Government Support: Lack of funding, training programs, and policies to protect and promote Iban handicrafts. • Weak Intellectual Property Protection: Risk of cultural appropriation and lack of branding for authentic Iban crafts. 11. Sustainability and Production Issues • Scarcity of Natural Materials: Deforestation and environmental changes reduce the availability of raw materials like rattan, bamboo, and natural dyes. • Lack of Innovation: Difficulty in adapting traditional designs to contemporary consumer preferences while maintaining cultural authenticity. 12. Tourism and Global Influences • Fluctuating Tourism Demand: Dependency on tourism means market instability (e.g., post-pandemic declines). • Globalization Pressures: Difficulty competing in international markets without proper branding and certification.
To propose or highlight on how these economic challenges affect the livelihood and economic	• Qualitative Approach • Exploratory Research • Method: Observation Non Participant, Observation	Key Research Outcomes: 13. Decline in Traditional Craftsmanship • Economic challenges (e.g., competition from mass-produced goods, lack of market access) lead to reduced income for Iban artisans, discouraging younger generations from continuing the craft.

sustainability of the Iban community.	Participant, Indepth Interview	• Loss of cultural heritage and traditional skills threatens long-term sustainability. 14. Reduced Household Income and Livelihood Vulnerability • Many Iban families rely on handicraft sales as a primary or supplementary income source. Economic pressures (e.g., inflation, tourism fluctuations) decrease earnings, increasing financial instability. • Shift to alternative, often less sustainable, livelihoods (e.g., logging, menial labor) further erodes cultural economic practices. 15. Market Access and Globalization Challenges • Difficulty in accessing wider markets due to poor infrastructure, digital divide, and lack of e-commerce adoption limits income potential. • Cheaper, imported handicrafts outcompete authentic Iban products, reducing demand and profitability. 16. Impact on Women Artisans • Since women are primary producers of Ibanhandicrafts, economic challenges disproportionately affect their economic empowerment and social status. • Reduced income may lead to increased domestic financial strain and gender inequality. 17. Environmental Sustainability Concerns • Economic pressures may push artisans to use cheaper, non- sustainable materials, harming biodiversity (e.g., overharvesting rattan). • Loss of eco-friendly traditional practices due to cost-cutting measures. 18. Policy and Institutional Support Gaps • Lack of government subsidies, training programs, and fair-trade policies exacerbates economic struggles. • Weak intellectual property protections lead to exploitation and cultural appropriation of Iban designs.
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3.5 Research Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

Based on Yin (2003), in conducting research, there are research protocols including instruments, procedures and general rules that must be followed. A research protocol is a guide for researchers when managing and implementing research and is one of the main

methods to increase the reliability of research (Yin, 2003). This ongoing research uses a qualitative approach in the form of Exploratory Research. This research was done to show the sustainability aspect of handicrafts by the Iban community which is based on their economic dimension. In this research, the researcher used several instruments to collect data, such as video recorders, interview schedules with informants, research interview questions in the form of open ended questions, cameras and notes. The instruments are intended to prevent the loss of critical data sources and ensure smoothness during the fieldwork study phase of this research.

Based on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, the researcher is required to conduct observation and interview methods with informants who are experts on the topic. In this research, the researcher used the observation method to see and examine the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. Meanwhile, for the interview method, the researcher would conduct an individual in-depth interview with face- to-face to informants who are experts on the sustainability of Iban handicraft in economic dimensions.

Before carrying out the fieldwork data collections, the researcher would conduct a literature review to increase understanding on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. This is because the researcher needs to know the ins and outs of the social group being studied in order to be able to be prepared physically and mentally before doing the fieldwork research phase. Furthermore, the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, which is being carried out by the researcher includes cultural and social knowledge in a research location. In relation to that, the researcher needs

to do a lot of preparation before doing the fieldwork research phase to collect data sources on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’.

3.5.1 Role of Researchers

The researcher is the main instrument in carrying out qualitative research on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. This is because the researcher needs to manage all the activities and needs of the topic in the process of data collection, data processing, data analysis and data exhibition to successfully complete a scientific research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The qualitative research conducted is dependent on the efficiency and wisdom of the researcher to collect data sources from informants who are experts in the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. Furthermore, it also includes the knowledge and information in the researcher's mind that cannot be found through observation or documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Although researchers can refer to guidance from experts or the experience of researchers in certain fields when conducting qualitative research, there is no single best guideline that can be followed. This is because in carrying out qualitative research, researchers need to have knowledge and experience in the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ in order to obtain meaningful data, analyze and interpret the data skillfully. Therefore, researchers need to master themselves in understanding and recognizing the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’.

The researcher's role in the research on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ is to act as an observer

without involvement, to visit the fieldwork area to observe, make notes and record videos to avoid the loss of important and meaningful data. (Creswell, 2005). The researcher's experience in researching the topic of 'Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy' is very important to facilitate the researcher in understanding in depth about the informant's explanation of this research (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). For the topic of 'Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy', the researcher has previously conducted research based on the community. Therefore, through the knowledge and experience that has been gathered in the field of the Iban community's culture, it is quite helpful for the researcher to carry out the topic of 'Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy'.

3.5.2 Data Collection Methods

This section describes the data collection methods used to investigate the sustainability of Iban handicrafts in Sarawak. A combination of interviews and observations was employed to develop a deeper understanding of the community's practices, challenges, and economic realities. The researcher used snowball sampling to identify key participants, leveraging existing connections within the artisan community to reach a wider network of informants.

Observation played a critical role in gathering rich qualitative data. Non-participant observation allowed the researcher to remain discreet while documenting authentic behavior and cultural activities without interfering with the subjects. This approach, sometimes known as disguised observation, was applied to observe everyday practices in communities across Kuching and Kapit. These activities are deeply embedded in the Iban cultural context, and the researcher observed both traditional and commercial handicraft production within

longhouse communities and at public exhibitions. Figure 3.4 illustrates the classification of observation methods applied in this study.

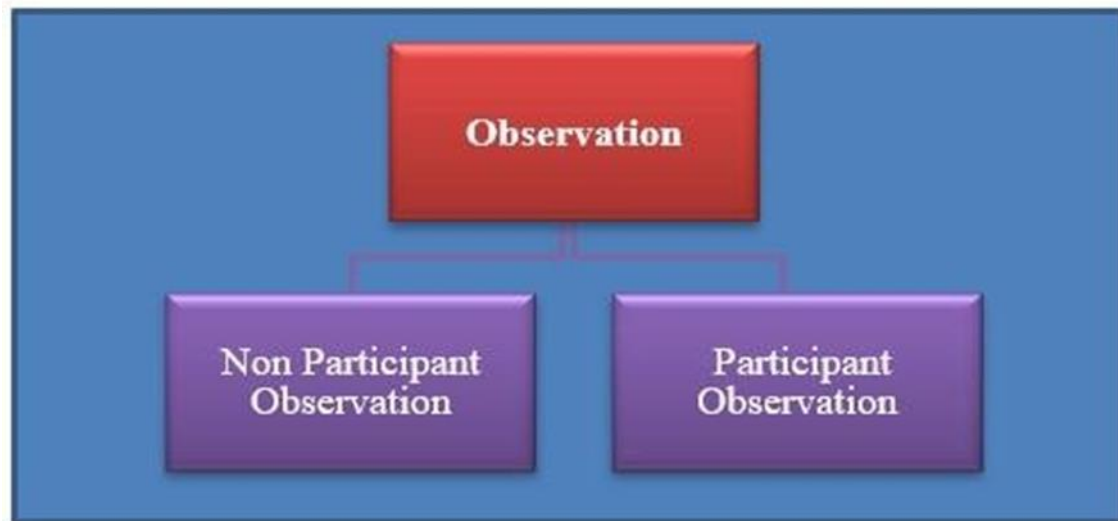


Figure 3-3 Classification of observation methods in research on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’
(Source: Author)

The observation method employed in this research holds significant importance as one of the oldest and most recognized techniques in data collection, frequently utilized by scholars and social scientists (Kumar, 2011). Specifically applied to the study of Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy, this research incorporated both non- participant and participant observation methods. Non-participant observation allowed the researcher to discreetly examine the daily activities of the Iban community in Kuching and Kapit districts, ensuring minimal disturbance while closely observing their cultural practices, handicraft production, and economic engagements. This method, also referred to as disguised observation (Kumar, 2011), provided an objective lens to scrutinize the Iban community’s lifestyle, craft sustainability, and economic challenges. Additionally, participant observation was utilized, where the researcher actively immersed themselves in the Iban community by residing in their vicinity, participating in

cultural events, and engaging in handicraft exhibitions. This approach facilitated an in-depth understanding of the artisans' lived experiences, market interactions, and socio-economic dynamics. Key locations for participant observation included the Festival Kraf Tekstil Borneo 2023 (Regatta), Sarawak Craft Council (SCC), Tun Jugah Foundation, Bazar Gawai Dayak Sarawak (Batu Kawa), Aeroville Kuching Gawai Bazaar, Pungu Borneo, City One Megamall (Nipek Craft/Helena Craft), Louis Weslly Enterprise, and Serikin Market. These observations provided rich insights into the cultural significance of Iban handicrafts, market challenges, and government-supported initiatives. Non-participant observations complemented this by offering a detached perspective on artisans' daily routines, customer interactions, and business strategies.

To further enrich the study, interview sessions were conducted as a primary qualitative method, capturing detailed personal insights from artisans, traders, and cultural experts. The interview approach was chosen for its ability to provide in-depth, culturally sensitive, and nuanced data on the economic and sustainability challenges faced by the Iban community. Both structured and unstructured interviews were employed—structured interviews were used with organizational representatives (e.g., Tun Jugah Foundation, Sarawak Craft Council), while unstructured interviews allowed for open-ended discussions with local artisans. In-depth individual interviews explored personal experiences, whereas group interviews with elderly women artisans facilitated collective insights into shared challenges. Before conducting interviews, key informants were carefully selected based on their expertise, and questions were designed to align with research objectives. The researcher ensured ethical considerations by obtaining informed consent, explaining the study's purpose, and allowing participants to withdraw at any stage. Interviews were recorded (with

permission) using digital devices to ensure accuracy, and data were later analyzed to identify recurring themes.

The combination of observation and interviews provided a comprehensive understanding of the Iban handicraft industry, highlighting its cultural roots, economic struggles, and potential pathways for sustainable development. The findings underscored the need for policy interventions, market access improvements, and cultural preservation efforts to enhance the economic viability of Iban handicrafts in Sarawak. This methodological approach not only validated data through triangulation but also ensured that the voices of the Iban community were central to the research outcomes.

3.5.3 Tools for Data Collections

For this study on the topic of 'Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy', the researcher used various tools including audio recording devices, cameras, and open-ended questions to ensure data retention and fieldwork efficiency. Given the complex nature of the research topic, a combination of observational and interview methods was employed to gain comprehensive insights. The research involved two distinct categories of informants: Iban handicraft artisans and experts in Iban culture and handicrafts.

The first category comprised Iban handicraft artisans interviewed at various events and galleries in Kuching, as detailed in the following table:

Table 3-2 Places of interviewing the Artisans (Source: Author)

Events	Artisans / Enterprises
Festival Kraf Tekstil Borneo 2023 (Regatta 2023 – Waterfront Kuching)	Doris Craft, Engga Craft
Aerovile Bazaar 2024 (Aerovile Mall, Kuching)	Cathrine Charile (Suzana Enterprise), Maria (Sayau Maria Craft)
Bazaar Gawai Sarawak 2024 (Batu Kawa, Kuching)	Dickson (Kodek Collection), Helena (Helena Craft Borneo – family work: mother & daughter), Angelia (Ant Beads), Lengidi (Sadok Borneo Craft – family work: husband & wife), Oshin (Youth), Jaqline (Youth), Ita Pintau (independent ladies group represented by the mentioned lady)
Galleries	Pungu Borneo (Waterfront – husband & wife), Louis Weslly Enterprise (Batu Kawa), Traditional Dayak Attire Nipek (City One Megamall)

The second category included experts and researchers with specialized knowledge of Iban culture and handicrafts, as shown in the following table:

Table 3-3 Places of Interviewing the Experts (Source: Author)

Institutions / Organizations	Interviewees
Sarawak Craft Council	Mr. Tandang, Mr. Reynald
Handicraft Malaysia (Festival Kraf Tekstil Borneo 2023 – Regatta 2023)	Mr. Naquidin (Din)
Tun Jugah Foundation	Madam Janet Rata Noel

Before conducting fieldwork, the researcher performed an extensive literature review to better understand the challenges facing Iban handicrafts and their economic impact on the

community. This preparatory work was essential for developing appropriate research methods and ensuring the researcher was fully prepared to investigate the cultural and socio-economic aspects of Iban handicraft production and sustainability. The combination of observational data, in-depth interviews, and secondary research provided a robust foundation for analyzing both the challenges and opportunities for Iban handicrafts in enhancing the local economy.

3.5.4 Interviews Technique Through Data Triangulation for Informants

The technique of data triangulation against informants was used to ensure credibility in the research findings in the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. The interview technique in this research requires data triangulation techniques to ensure that the data obtained are true and reliable. Furthermore, it can help researchers to identify expert informants to be interviewed to obtain data sources for this research. Creswell (2005) explained that the triangulation technique is a process to obtain data from various methods and individuals. For this, qualitative research methods in the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ such as observation (participatory and non participatory), interviews and document analysis are used to obtain data from various sources on the field being studied. Based on the number of informants who are experts in the topic ‘Challenges of Iban Handicraft Towards the Economy in the Iban Community’, there are many among them who have expertise in this field of research. However, it depends on the main needs of the research being conducted. Data sources obtained from informants can be proven through various methods used. The triangulation can also enrich the internal validity of the part that can be researched later (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

3.5.5 Pilot Study

A analyze is a small study to help shape the next part of the research (Lancaster et al., 2010). Typically, a pilot study involves testing the methodology of data collection and it is a very important procedure. This is because it aims to identify problems that may occur when researchers carry out research on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. Pilot studies usually involve the process of collecting real data on a small scale to find out positive or negative feedback about the research instrument used by the researcher. A pilot study is very important for the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ because the probability of the researcher obtaining data that is not related to the topic under study can be reduced and avoided.

A pilot study on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ was conducted through an interview method with only one informant whose expertise was dominant. After the interview was conducted with the informant, then the structured interview questions would be revised according to the feedback given by him. The feedback received may be from the aspect of the clarity of the question and the sensitivity of the question asked.

In addition, validity and reliability tests were also ensured through a pilot study process conducted through an interviews method with an informant. Any feedback or comments regarding the interview questions would be taken into account and would be revised if necessary to see if it fits the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. In addition, the researcher would also ask the informants for clarification regarding the questions if they did not understand the questions asked. After fixing the questions, the researcher showed them again to the

informants who wanted to be interviewed. Through the process of this pilot study, the clarity of the question sentences could also be improved so that the informants were clear with the questions asked and could answer the interview questions well.

3.5.6 Clarity of Questions for Interviewing Informants

In conducting the process of interviewing the research informants on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, the researcher needs to prepare a set of question frames. The questions asked would be repeated at least twice so that the informants are clear with the questions and they would be asked to ask questions if there were terms that are not understood. The questions asked also used sentences that were easy to understand. In addition, the interviewer also asked the informant to further explain the answers given if the interviewer was not clear with the answer. This was to avoid misunderstandings from both sides. Furthermore, it was also very important for researchers to understand the data situation that would be built based on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’.

3.5.7 Procedure of Interviews

The interviews conducting by the researcher in this research topic are to gain in-depth qualitative insights into traditional crafting techniques, economic impact of handicrafts, market demand, challenges faced by artisans, and cultural significance of Iban handicrafts. The procedure of the interview is based on participant selection. Initial participants were selected using purposive sampling.

Snowball sampling was then used, whereby these participants referred other potential informants within their networks.

The researcher began with a field visit to galleries and shops in the Kuching waterfront area at the beginning of 2023, which informed the researcher about some of the details of the craft and the boat racing event that would be held soon. These included the Sarawak Handicrafts Council and the Tun Jugah Foundation, and the Festival Kraf Tekstil Borneo 2023 (Regatta) Bazaar organized by Malaysian craftsmen, and through them the snowball began. Furthermore, Malaysia Handicraft led the researcher to identify the artisans and facilitate the process at the Festival Kraf Tekstil Borneo 2023 (Regatta) event. The Sarawak Craft Council and Tun Jugah Foundation suggested a number of professional artisans and upcoming events.

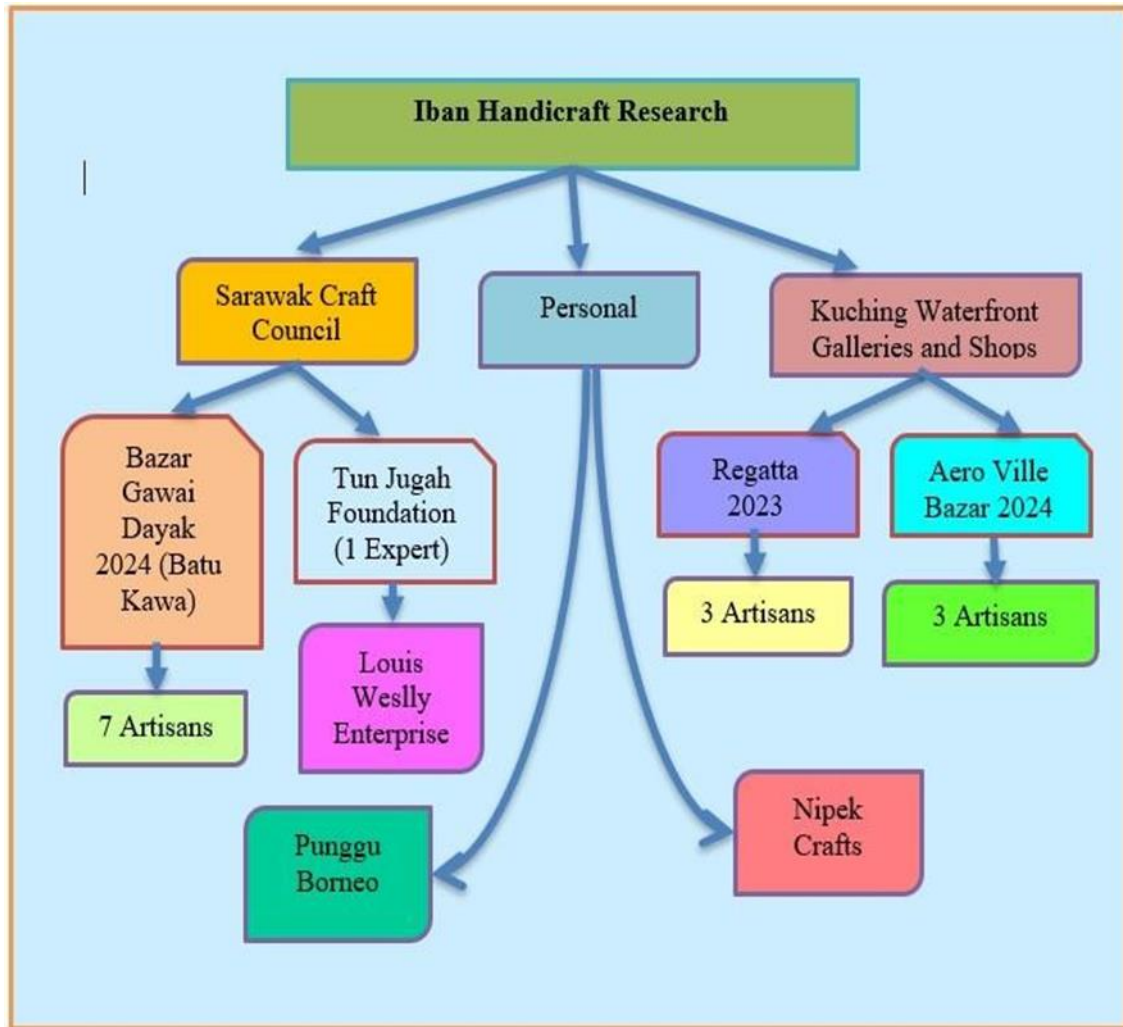


Figure 3-4 The flow of interviews (Snowball Sampling) (Source: Author)

Figure 3.4 shows the flow of interviews by snowball sampling technique to get the other informants or experts in this research field. The researcher has an interview guide with open-ended questions intended to encourage participants' detailed answers and narratives. The interviews conducted by the researcher are face to face in person, recorded with consent, and transcribed. The interviews covered various topics, including traditional manufacturing methods, economic and cultural impacts, market dynamics, and sustainability challenges, market dynamics, and challenges.

For the sample size of this research, a total of 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse group of participants. The target sample was 15 interviews and 4 additional interviews to ensure reaching the saturation stage. The interviews included Iban handicraft Artisans and experts from three different age groups, four experts and one from Tun Jugah Foundation and two from Sarawak Craft Council and one from Malaysia Kraftangan in Iban culture and handicraft.

3.5.8 The Process of Recording Interviews of Informants

The validity and reliability of research data on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ could also be ensured by recording interviews through mobile phone recorders, digital camera recorders as well as notes made by the researcher himself while doing the method. The researcher also asked for permission from the informant to record the interview process because it was also part of the research ethics that had to be followed. Records would be well kept in a formal form (transcript) so that the information obtained was valid and reliable for the purpose of data analysis to meet the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’.

3.5.9 Document Analysis

Document analysis is one of the data sources for qualitative research apart from observation and interview methods conducted on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. In this document analysis method, written, visual and physical materials that are available and relevant to the field of research are included (Merriam, 1998). These documents are used as supporting data and additional evidence for data obtained from other sources (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, data that

cannot be explored through observation and interview methods on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, may be found through the analysis of documents related to the field under study. The types of documents selected to collect research data that constitute qualitative content need to provide important information to answer the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. In addition, the researcher also needs to request permission from the relevant informant in order to look at their personal document collection. However, the researcher also needs to understand if there are some informants who cannot show their personal document collection due to certain factors.

In research on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, document analysis is used to add data information, such as written materials that include books, journals, articles and some other materials. This is because it aims to complete the necessary data gaps. Furthermore, not all data are obtained completely through other methods. Therefore, the existing document analysis method is important in completing the entire research on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’.

3.6 Profile of Informants

This section presents the demographic background of the informants who participated in this study. It provides context for interpreting the findings presented in Chapters 4–6. The data were obtained during the initial phase of fieldwork and includes gender, age, place of origin, years of experience in handicraft production, and type of handicraft produced.

The following table shows basic information about the informants in terms of name, place of meeting, town where they live, years of experience, race, and age group:

Table 3-4 Informants information (Source: Author)

No.	Name	Place / Event	Organization / Town	Experience (Years)	Race	Age
1	Doris	Festival Kraf Tekstil Borneo 2023 (Regatta)	Kapit	5	Iban	51 Above
2	Engga	Festival Kraf Tekstil Borneo 2023 (Regatta)	Kapit	10	Iban	51 Above
3	Mr. Naquidin	Festival Kraf Tekstil Borneo 2023 (Regatta)	Malaysia Kraftangan	–	–	36–50
4	Mr. Tandan	Sarawak Craft Council	Kanowit	22	Iban	51 Above
5	Mr. Reynald	Sarawak Craft Council	Sri Aman	22	Iban	51 Above
6	Cathrine	Aeroville Bazaar 2024	Kapit	10	Iban	51 Above
7	Suzana	Aeroville Bazaar 2024	Serian	16	Iban	36–50
8	Maria	Aeroville Bazaar 2024	Mukah	10	Iban	36–50
9	Madam Janet	Tun Jugah Foundation	Sri Aman	35	Iban	51 Above
10	Lucile	Punggu Borneo	Bau	14	Bidayuh	36–50
11	Oshin	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Kelabit	2	Iban	18–35
12	Dickson (Kodek Crafts)	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Bau	6	Bidayuh	51 Above (1959)
13	Louis Weslly	Louis Weslly Enterprise	Kanowit	18	Iban	36–50 (1987)
14	Nipek	Nipek Craft	Padawan	10	Bidayuh	51 Above
15	Helena	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Betong	8	Iban	36–50 (48)
16	Jaqline	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Betong	4	Iban	18–35
17	Angelia	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Sri Aman	9	Iban	36–50 (1979)
18	Ita Pantau (Group)	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Lubok Antu	20	Iban	51 Above
19	Lengidi	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Betong	8	Iban	51 Above

3.6.1 Details of Informants Information

The informants in this study represent a diverse cross-section of artisans and experts involved in the handicraft industry in Sarawak, Malaysia. The demographic data reveals a wide range of races, ages, experiences, and backgrounds. The majority of the informants belong to the Iban ethnic group, with a few from the Bidayuh community, although they are also engaged in Iban handicrafts, highlighting the ethnic diversity within the handicraft sector.

3.6.2 Race of Informants

The artisans primarily belong to the Iban ethnic group (15 informants), which is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and traditional handicraft skills. Additionally, three informants are from the Bidayuh community but are involved in producing Iban handicrafts and one informant did not mention his race. This mix of ethnic backgrounds within the handicraft sector underscores the cultural diversity and the sharing of traditional knowledge among different communities in Sarawak.

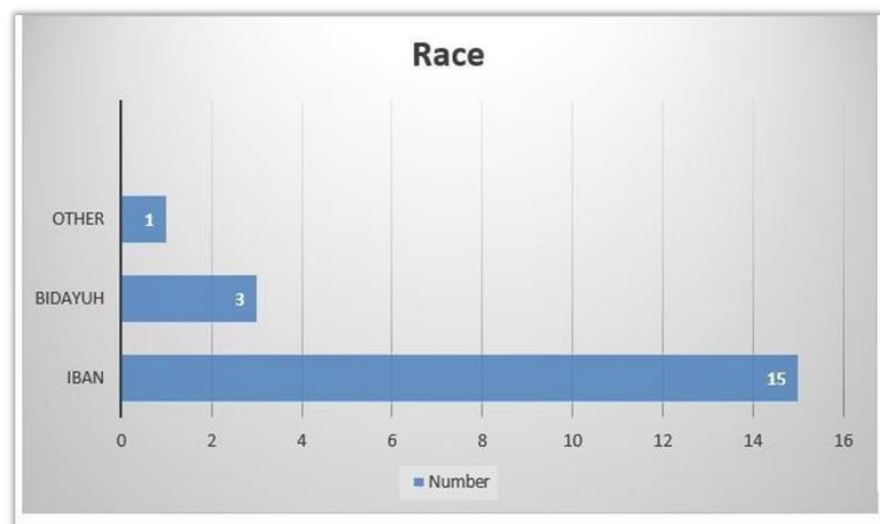


Figure 3-5 Distribution of informants by race. (Source: Author)

3.6.3 Geographical Distribution Map Chart

The informants in this study represent a diverse cross-section of artisans involved in the handicraft industry in Sarawak, Malaysia. The demographic data reveals a wide range of ages, experiences, and backgrounds. The majority of the informants belong to the Iban ethnic group, with a few from the Bidayuh communities who also engage in Iban handicrafts, highlighting the ethnic diversity within the handicraft sector. The geographical distribution map chart visually represents the origins of these informants across various regions of Sarawak, showcasing the widespread nature of the handicraft industry within the state and the unique cultural contributions from different areas. Despite their diverse geographical origins, all interviews were conducted in the Kuching area, providing a centralized location for data collection and facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the regional variations and the distribution of handicraft skills across Sarawak.



Figure 3-6 Geographical distribution of the informant's origin (Source: Author)

3.6.4 Ages Group

The age distribution of the informants spans several decades, providing insights from both younger artisans and older age artisans in the handicraft. They were categorized into three age groups Older Artisans (51-Above), Middle-Aged Artisans (36-50) and Younger Age (18-35). This wide age range allows for a comprehensive understanding of how different generations approach the craft, incorporating both traditional methods and modern innovations. The perspectives of younger artisans bring fresh ideas and new techniques, while the older artisans contribute with their extensive knowledge and experience.



Figure 3-7 Ages of the informants (X-axis: Number of respondents ; Y-axis: Age groups)

3.6.5 Gender

Gender representation among the informants shows a significant majority of female artisans, with 14 women and 5 men participating in the study. This highlights the prominent role that women play in the handicraft industry in Sarawak, where they are key contributors to the creation and promotion of traditional handicrafts. The diverse gender representation

also reflects the inclusive nature of the industry, demonstrating that handicraft skills are valued and preserved within families and communities, regardless of gender which is represented in the following figure:

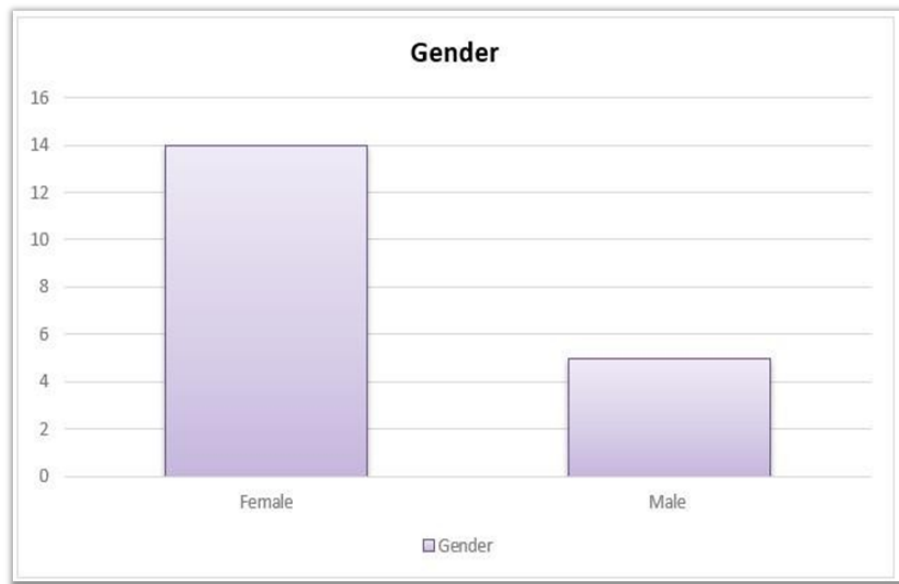


Figure 3-8 Gender of the informants (X-axis: Gender categories; Y-axis: Number of respondents) (Source: Author)

3.6.6 Origins

The origins of the artisans are geographically diverse, with individuals hailing from various regions across Sarawak. Specifically, the 14 informants come from Kapit (4), Sri Aman (3), Betong (3), Kanowit (2), Bau (2), Serian (1),

Padawan (1), Mukah (1), Kelabit (1), and Samarahan (1). This geographical spread underscore the widespread nature of the handicraft industry in the state and the unique cultural influences that each region brings to the craft. Artisans from different areas contribute distinct styles and techniques, enriching the overall diversity and creativity of Sarawak's handicraft industry as its shown in the following figure:

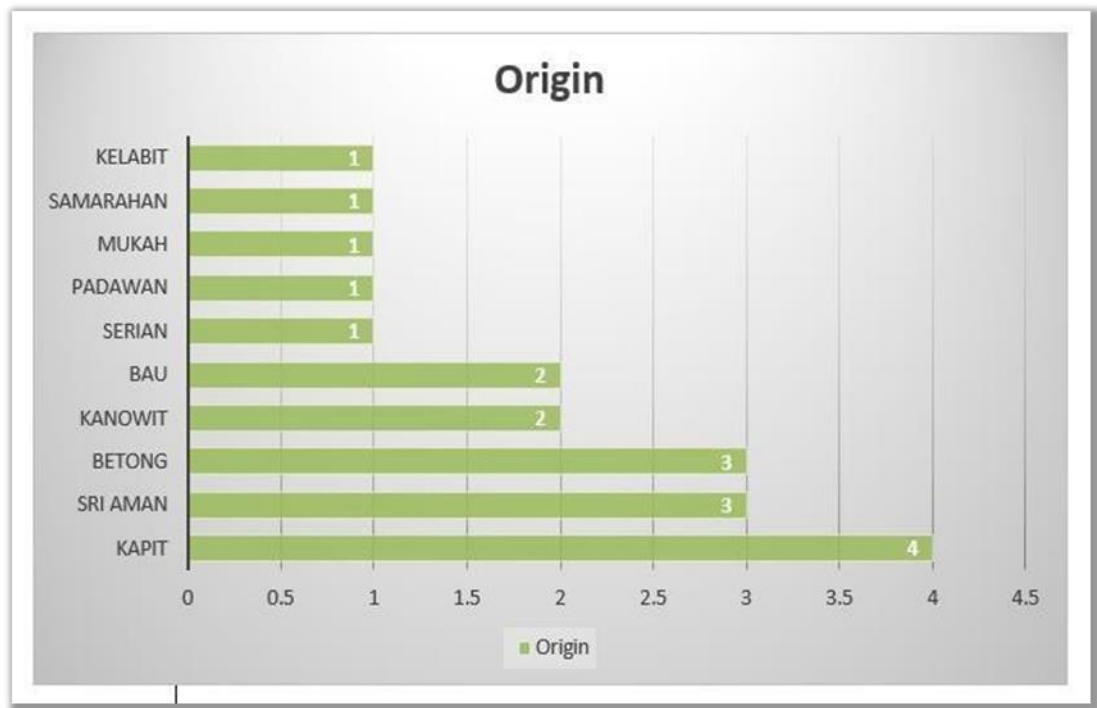


Figure 3-9 Origins of the informants (X-axis: Number of respondents; Y-axis: Place of origin) (Source: Author)

3.6.7 Experience

The years of experience in the handicraft industry vary significantly among the informants. Some are newcomers with less than five years of experience, while others are highly experienced artisans who have been practicing for decades. This variation in experience levels provides a rich source of data on how the industry evolves over time and the different challenges and opportunities faced by artisans at various stages of their careers.



Figure 3-10 Experience rate of the informants (X-axis: Number of respondents; Y-axis: Years of experience) (Source: Author)

3.7 Qualitative Data Collections Procedure

The data collection procedure, whether qualitative, quantitative or both, begins by conducting a literature review related to the issues under study, objectives and research questions and adapted to the conceptual and theoretical framework. This is because the researcher wants to obtain information and facilitate the process of preparing structured and unstructured interview questions in addition to looking at something that has been studied or not by previous researchers on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. Interview questions were then produced and an informant who was an expert on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ was selected based on the most dominant experience. Next, it is adapted to the researched issues, objectives and research questions to be used as a pilot study. The researcher needs to have an initial meeting

with the informant, which is a week before the actual meeting. This is because according to Englander (2012), it is better if the researcher holds an initial meeting with the informant before the actual interview is conducted. Furthermore, this initial meeting gave the informants a period of time to appreciate their experiences regarding the issues studied in the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. In this research, the researcher used two forms of interview, namely structured and unstructured. Therefore, the researcher held a meeting with the informant who would be interviewed later.

After the pilot study is conducted, the structured and unstructured interview questions will be revised and improved according to the feedback given and shown by the informants directly involved in this research. In this reorganization process, the clarity of the interview question sentences is improved and there is also a process of adding and dropping questions depending on the feedback of an informant interviewed, whether structured or unstructured, on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. The actual meeting for the interview process conducted may also experience data saturation depending on the feedback and data obtained through informants (Onwuegbuzie, et. al., 2010). Before being interviewed, the informants would be given an informed consent form through an informed-consent form and they were required to sign the form if they agreed to be involved in the research conducted, which is the ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’.

The researcher would again explain the purpose and objectives of the research conducted and ask for permission from the informant to record the interview process through the use of mobile phone recorders, digital camera recorders and also personally record important information obtained during the interview. If all these processes have been

completed and a consensus has been reached, then the actual data collection will be carried out on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. Throughout the interview, the informants were asked to ask if they did not understand or were unclear about the questions asked on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. Furthermore, the interviewer asked for clarification from the informant if the answer was not clear to avoid misunderstandings and misunderstandings in the process of collecting data sources or important information in the research conducted. Once the data collection process was complete, the data would be transferred into transcript form to be processed according to the research requirements on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’

3.8 Qualitative Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis is not limited to recording and forming themes and ideas for the collected data, but rather it involves the use of techniques, such as asking questions, making comparisons with the data obtained and other methods to form concepts based on the data (Corbin, et. al., 2008).

The activity of data collection and analysis is a process that occurs simultaneously in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In the research on the topic of Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy, the researcher carried out these activities concurrently to avoid data dropouts. The analysis began with the first interview, the first observation, and the first document review. In other words, data analysis commenced as soon as the first data were obtained. Furthermore, researchers need to manage and filter data immediately after the collection process. This enables the preparation of targeted questions or observations for subsequent interviews,

observations, and document analysis. Without analyzing data during the research process, the findings may lack focus and contain unnecessary repetition. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), there is no single prescribed method for qualitative data analysis; rather, multiple approaches may be applied depending on the researcher's perspective and the objectives of the study.

In this research, the researcher analyzed the data using the Interview Data Analysis Model By Seidman (2019). There are three steps in analyzing the data obtained through interviews, namely understanding the data, identifying the research questions answered in the research data, and categorizing the data or data coding (Taylor-Powell, et. al., 2003). By using content analysis methods that are based on interview analysis and qualitative data framework, the researcher will evaluate and examine each transcript whose code has been set which consists of codes in the form of numbers, words or in the form of specific characteristics found in the transcript (Rusli, et. al., 2011). This means that the data on the topic of 'Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy' in the form of transcription will go through the coding process and be listed according to the categories that have been set, which is based on the needs and context of the research being conducted. With this process, data relevant to the objectives and research questions will be easier to analyze. In the last process, the researcher will select important and relevant data for the purpose of analysis and only after that the research findings can be identified and formulated.

3.9 Research Data Collections Procedure

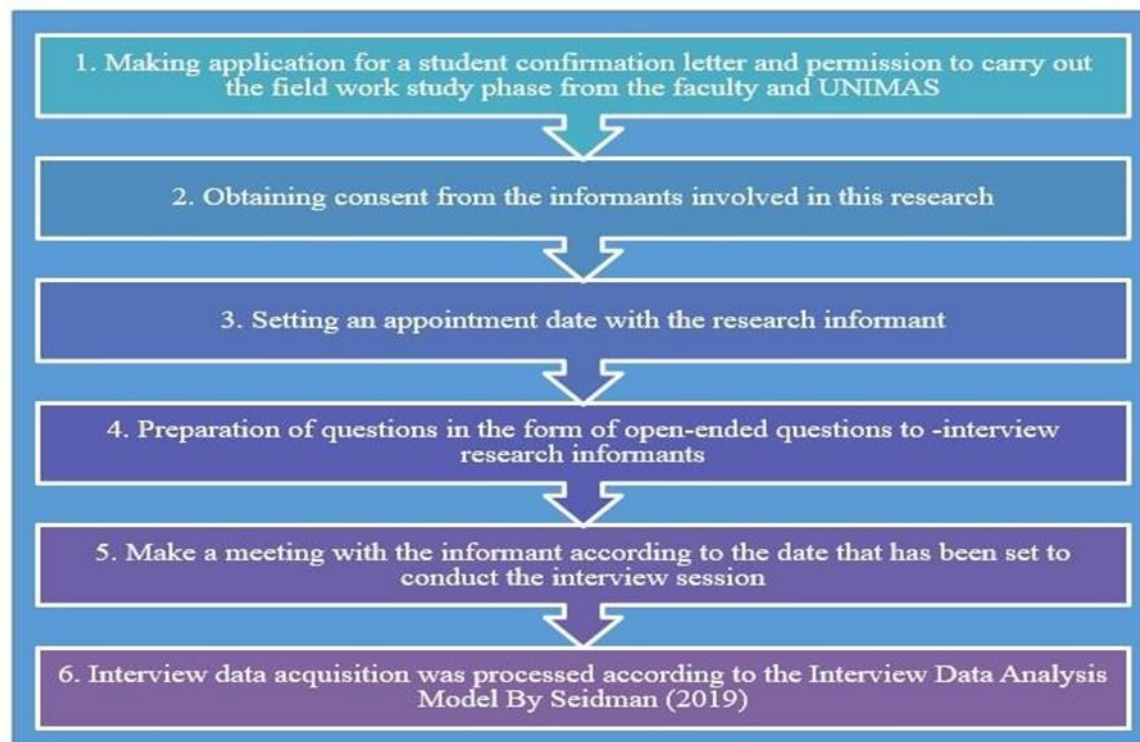


Figure 3-11 Research data collections procedure (Source: Author)

Based on Figure 3.5, the researcher conducted a data collection procedure on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, through interview sessions with informants who are artisans, Iban experts, and handicrafts expert in the field of research being conducted. Before commencing the data collection session, the researcher needed to obtain a student confirmation letter and permission to conduct research on the topic. This step was crucial to provide reference to all relevant parties, fostering their confidence to share valuable information or data pertinent to the ongoing research. Additionally, preparing letters to the relevant parties facilitated the data collection session during the interview sessions conducted by researchers.

Following the application for a student confirmation letter and permission to conduct a fieldwork study session for interviews, the researcher contacted parties related to the topic

to obtain consent from the relevant parties as informants involved in the research. Respecting the rights of informants is imperative as it aligns with research ethics. During the interview session, the researcher needed to schedule interviews with the research informants. Therefore, discussions with the relevant parties as research informants were necessary to agree on a suitable date for the interview session. Any changes in the interview schedule required mutual agreement to ensure the researcher respected the informant's time.

Considering the busy schedules of informants, who are predominantly artisans (self-employed) and employees, the researcher needed to manage their time efficiently to avoid disrupting the informants' commitments. Structured and unstructured questions (open-ended questions) were prepared to interview informants on the topic. Two categories of questions were devised: structured questions for informants working in the private sector and semi-structured questions for self-employed informants.

The subsequent step involved meeting with the informant according to the scheduled date to conduct the interview session, tailored to the informant's career. In this research, the structured interview session commenced with informants from the private sector, while self-employed informants were interviewed in a semi-structured manner. In this research, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with all informants, utilizing face-to-face interaction.

3.10 Research Data Analysis

Once the data collection phase is complete, the focus shifts to analyzing the gathered information. In this stage, the collected qualitative data undergoes systematic examination to identify patterns, themes, and insights relevant to the research objectives. The analysis process involves organizing, coding, and interpreting the data to uncover underlying meanings and relationships. The researcher employs thematic analysis, stating the nature of

the data and the research objectives. The goal is to transform raw data into meaningful findings that contribute to a deeper understanding of the research topic. Moreover, attention is given to ensuring the rigor and trustworthiness of the analysis through techniques such as inter-coder reliability checks, member checking, and triangulation. Ultimately, the insights derived from the data analysis phase form the basis for drawing conclusions and making recommendations in the research study.

3.10.1 Qualitative Data Framework Analysis Method by Braun and Clarke (2006)

To analyze the collected data, the researcher employs thematic content analysis, following the six stages outlined in the thematic analysis framework by Braun and Clarke (2006).. However, it's important to note that these stages are not necessarily sequential, as the researcher may transition between steps or revisit certain stages, such as reviewing topics multiple times to ensure research quality. The following figure outlines the steps involved in this analysis:



Figure 3-12 Six Phases of thematic analysis (Source: Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to identify patterns or themes within a dataset. The researcher will follow an analysis method by Braun and Clarke (2006) which have six phases such as familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, generating or searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing up or producing the report.

Based on phase one of familiarization with data, the researcher will review all interview transcripts, observational notes, and any other relevant data with some prior knowledge of the data, immersing themselves in the content to understand its depth and breadth. Immersion usually involves 'repeated reading' of the data, actively searching for

meanings, patterns, and so on (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, they will develop an understanding of the content and context related to each research objective.

According to phase two of generating initial codes, in this phase, the researcher will produce initial codes from the data, coding segments relevant to each research objective. They will use descriptive codes to label specific topics or concepts and code iteratively, revising and refining as needed. The data will be organized into meaningful groups, and relevant extracts will be collected in separate electronic files (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using Nvivo Software.

For phase three of searching for themes, the researcher will identify patterns or recurring ideas within the coded data, looking for similarities and differences related to each research objective. Then he will group related codes to form potential themes, sorting them into themes and collating relevant data extracts within each theme and the researcher will use visual representations such as tables or mind-maps to aid in sorting the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Meanwhile phase four is reviewing themes. After devising a set of candidate themes, the researcher will review and refine them, ensuring they accurately capture the essence of the data. They will look for overlaps or connections between themes related to different research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase five is defining and naming themes. In this phase, the researcher will define each theme clearly, describing its key characteristics and relevance to the research objectives. They will use concise and descriptive names for each theme, ensuring they capture important aspects of the research findings. Having a satisfactory thematic map of the data are crucial

(Braun & Clarke, 2006).

According to phase six of writing the analysis, once a set of fully worked- out themes is established, the researcher will provide sufficient evidence of the themes within the data. They will write a narrative summarizing the main themes for each research objective, providing examples and quotes to illustrate each theme. The implications of the themes will be discussed in relation to the research objectives and broader research context (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These steps will systematically analyze the data, uncovering meaningful themes related to marketing challenges, competition effects, and artisans' business.

3.10.2 Interviews Data Analysis Model by Seidman (2019)

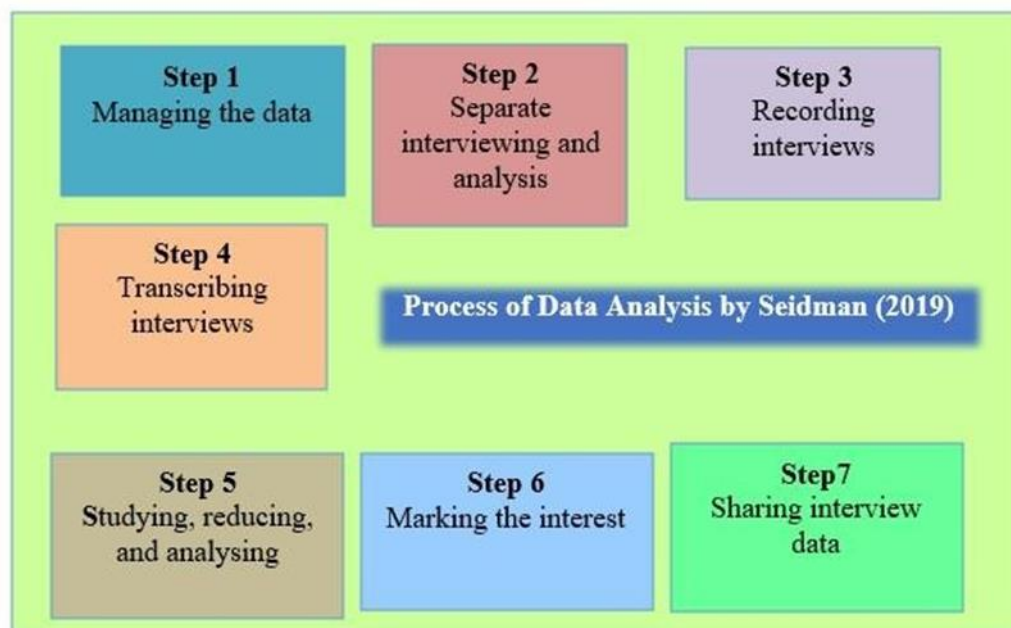


Figure 3-13 Seven-step process in framework interview analysis (Source: Seidman, 2019)

Seidman (2019), a method developed to support the needs of applied research. The process of analysis follows seven steps such as managing the data, separating interviewing and analysis, recording interviews, transcribing interviews, studying, reducing and analysing, marking the interest and sharing the interview data.

Based on step one of managing the data, working with the material that interviewing generates, the researcher first has to make it accessible by organizing it. This involves keeping track of participants through participant information forms, ensuring written consent documents are copied and filed safely, accurately labelling audio recordings of interviews, and managing the extensive files that develop while working with interview transcripts.

For step two of separate interviewing and analysis, at the beginning of interviews, the researcher anticipates results based on their reading and preparation for the study. During the interview, the researcher processes what the participant is saying to keep the interview moving forward. Afterward, they review each interview in anticipation of the next one. If working as part of a research team, the team may gather to discuss what they are learning from the interview process.

Meanwhile step three is referring to recorded interviews. In interview sessions with informant, the researcher uses in-depth face to face interviews and these interviews should be recorded to reliably work with participants' words. Transforming spoken words into written text is essential for study. The primary method is recording and transcribing interviews, ensuring the participants' thoughts are accurately captured.

Step four that refers to transcribing interviews, and this part is time- consuming and potentially costly. However, having interviews in text-based files later proves highly efficient and labor-saving when sorting and organizing material.

For step five studying, reducing, and analysing takes place. The researcher must approach transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and interesting, and identifying their interest in the subject, ensuring it is free from anger, bias, or prejudice. The vast array of words must be reduced, focusing on key passages.

Based on step six the work involves marking the passages of interest. Reducing the material involves reading and highlighting passages of interest, analysing, interpreting, and making meaning of them. The researcher may later check with participants to ensure marked passages align with their perceptions.

Step seven involves sharing interview data. There are two basic ways to share interview data. First, by developing profiles of individual participants and grouping them into categories. And second, by marking individual passages, grouping them into categories and studying thematic connections within and among them.

3.10.3 Qualitative Data Analysis Using Thematic Analysis



Figure 3-14 Qualitative data analysis using thematic analysis (Source: Braun & Clarke, 2006)

The Figure 3.9 shows the qualitative data analysis in this research carried out using a systematic approach to derive meaningful insights from the collected qualitative data. The

process involved several stages such as transcription and familiarization, coding and categorization, contextual analysis and thematic analysis.

Based on qualitative data analysis using thematic analysis which refers to transcription and familiarization, the audio recordings from interviews were transcribed. The researcher familiarized himself with the data by repeatedly reading the transcripts and field notes to gain a deep understanding of the content.

The second phase is coding and categorization. An open coding approach was initially used, where significant phrases, sentences, or paragraphs were identified and labelled. Codes were then grouped into broader categories or themes that aligned with the research objectives. Key themes included marketing challenges, government support, competition from imports, business acumen, family and community involvement, and generational issues.

Phase three refers to contextual analysis. Contextual factors, such as the backgrounds of the artisans as they come from different towns, the cultural importance of their handicrafts and their market environments were considered to provide a deeper understanding of the data. This helped interpret the results within the broader social, economic, and cultural context of the working artisan community. Comparisons were made between different participants' experiences to identify common challenges and unique situations. This involved contrasting the experiences of artisans who had access to government support with those who did not, as well as examining differences between those who utilized traditional marketing methods versus digital platforms and insights from different themes were integrated to provide a comprehensive view of the artisans' experiences and challenges.

Phase four is a thematic analysis that includes transcription, coding, themes and synthesis and reporting. For transcription, interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness. Coding refers to data coded using NVivo software, to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the challenges of Iban Handicrafts. The themes in the thematic analysis are the key themes identified, including traditional crafting techniques and material, economic impact, market dynamics, cultural significance, and challenges. Meanwhile for synthesis and reporting, the final stage involved synthesizing the analyzed data into coherent narratives that addressed the research objectives. Findings were presented in a structured format, highlighting key themes and supporting them with direct quotes from participants to illustrate their points. Through this detailed approach to data analysis, the research aimed to uncover insights into the experiences and challenges faced by Iban handicraft artisans, providing a solid foundation for the study's conclusions and recommendations.

3.11 Methods of Research Writing

The topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ requires the understanding of the methodology and the written communication skills and clarity of thoughts (Kumar 2011). The researcher is a writer who uses an impersonal point of view, conveying a ‘scientific’ and ‘objective’ perspective (Creswell, 2013). For ‘Challenges of Iban Handicraft Towards the Economy in the Iban Community’, the researcher used a writing method that uses a qualitative approach adapted to the application of the theoretical model framework of the economic dimensions of Iban handicraft challenges this research uses the three components of a good qualitative inquiry that are a centerpiece of good exploration writing as well as steps in data analysis which is an interpretation of description analysis (Creswell, 2013).

The three components in the writing method are illustration, analysis, interpretation and evaluation in writing on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. The application of the theoretical model framework to the field of writing in this topic is one of the strategies to strengthen the writing results to be more organized and of high quality. Therefore, the writing method used in the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ includes the phases of description, analysis and interpretation.

3.11.1 Description

Based on the description phase, it refers to the analysis carried out on the researched topic, namely ‘Challenges of Iban Handicraft Towards the Economy in the Iban Community.’ Analysis is done on the process of identifying the form of format used and where it is applied. In addition, it also shows the process which is based on the aspect of the question about the affirmation of a matter studied in the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’.

The existence of a complete description is created and applied into a scientific discipline that is termed as a technique in explaining, stating and explaining the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. Therefore, for the qualitative approach in this research, it includes the stages of data collection, description, analysis and conclusion are included.

3.11.2 Data Analysis

After describing the culture using one of these approaches, the researcher “analyzes” the data. Analysis includes highlighting findings, displaying findings, reporting fieldwork procedures, identifying patterned regularities in the data, comparing the case with a known

case, evaluating the information, contextualizing the information within a broader analytic framework, critiquing the research process, and proposing the design of the study. All of these analytic techniques, the identification of “patterns” or themes is central to ethnographic writing (Creswell, 2013). After describing the data, the researcher moved to the second component which the analysis climax refers to the analysis phase. The analytical phase in the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ refers to more in-depth research of the data in the form of a theoretical framework.

3.11.3 Interpretation

Interpretation is involved in rhetorical structure. This means that the researcher can extend the analysis, make inferences from the information, turn to theory and the approach of interpreting the findings both within the context of the researcher’s experiences and within the larger body of scholarly research on the topic (Creswell, 2013).

Based on the interpretation phase, the researcher attempts to make assumptions, impressions and reflections on the rational findings of the topic under study, namely of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. Furthermore, this phase is also the level of application of the theoretical model framework used to show the compatibility of data based on the current situation. The findings made through the field work study phase are interpreted from the aspect of writing and documenting information. Based on the information obtained, data sources are broken down into several categories that underline the needs and themes of the research on this topic. In addition, the explanation is made in detail to meet the needs of the research to be conducted.

3.12 Research Ethics

Ethical issues are very important in research on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ as the researcher needs to be responsible in complying with them. Among the ethics that are taken into account throughout the research is to use language that is easy to understand and does not burden the informants interviewed to obtain data sources. The informants were also given an appropriate period of time in giving their feedback regarding the interview questions asked (Englander, 2012).

The aim of the overall research on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ and its methodology was also explained to the informants through the informant's consent form (Informed-Consent Forms). This is because it aims for the informants to understand and know the importance of research that requires their involvement and cooperation. In addition, research informants are also given the right if they wish to withdraw from being involved in this research by the researcher. This is because researchers cannot force informants to provide data sources. Therefore, the researcher needs to respect the decision desired by the informant.

Orb, et. al., (2001) explained that informants have the right to autonomy where they have the right to voluntarily engage in research or refuse it. The informed consent form is referred to as trust negotiation and it requires ongoing negotiation. In addition, there is also the issue of maintaining the confidentiality of the informant, that is, all information about the informant will not be disclosed in order to preserve their personal rights. Issues of privacy and confidentiality are important aspects in the process of obtaining research data through interviews (Allmark, et. al., 2009). In conducting research on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’,

researchers must adhere to the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) Graduate Research Ethics Guidelines. The components in the guidelines will be followed throughout the duration of this research. Examples of these guidelines include respecting the culture of other communities, informing the informant or the Iban community being studied about the research field, safeguarding and protecting the identity of the informant or respondent and there is no element of coercion against them in providing research information.

In addition, the informants involved in the research on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ will be informed in advance before conducting the interview session. It is intended to avoid misunderstandings about the use of important information in this research. Furthermore, the researcher will take precautions to maintain the confidentiality of the informant's identity if they do not want to be known to the public. This principle of protection involves procedures to avoid injury or exposing individuals to risk in research on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ is important. In conducting this research, the researcher needs to respect the right to justice, that is, the informant needs to be treated fairly. This is because not all informants have the ability and abilities at the same time. Therefore, it can be stated that the researcher must comply with all ethics while conducting this research.

3.12.1 Consent

Based on the research on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’, the researcher needs to request consent from all informants interviewed to record the conversation using a video camera and audio recorder. In addition, the researcher also requested permission to place the informant's name and photo in the research. Furthermore, the researcher will ask for consent to take pictures

of activities related to the research topic. Overall, all informants involved in this research have given consent for every permission requested by the researcher. This is because the consent of all informants involved in this research needs to be requested to avoid misunderstandings.

3.12.2 Informed Consent Form

Before the researcher conducted the interview session with the research informants, they were first given a consent form regarding the information and the research on the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’. The form includes the objectives and importance of the research as well as the methods used to conduct this research. For informants who work in the government or private sector, the researcher will inform them through a phone call and the provision of a confirmation letter through an email message to inform them about the research being conducted. With this, the informant will know clearly about the topic of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ during the interview session. In addition, the practice can also prevent informants from giving feedback that deviates from the topics and issues being studied.

The informant's consent form can build trust in the informant and it is also related to research ethics (Englander, 2012). Furthermore, the of ‘Sustainable Development and Challenges of Iban Handicrafts in Enhancing the Local Economy’ will be explained once again to the informants before the interview takes place. The sample members will be informed of the study's nature and objectives to ensure that they agree to conduct the interview and voice recording with complete conviction and obtain verbal consent. This ensures that participants can withdraw at any stage without consequences because

participating in a research project must be based on being informed, not persuaded only (Seidman, 2019).

3.12.3 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is remembering the commitment to not making the participants vulnerable through our use of their words (Seidman, 2019). To ensure greater freedom and flow in the collected data, the researcher will promise to keep the identity secret by not mentioning the names or characteristics of the sample members and this maintains confidentiality and develops an atmosphere of mutual trust (Corbin, et. al., 2015).

3.12.4 Individuality

Interviews conducted separately for each informant to ensure that the answers of the sample members are not influenced by each other and to bypass professional sensitivities. Interview questions, the use of diaries, or the collection of visual data because when studying aspects of people's lives are personal and sensitive, therefore it is preferable to use individual interviews that allow for more confidentiality and often make it easier for the interviewer to create an atmosphere of trust and discretion (Leavy, 2014).

3.12.5 Flexibility

There are times when it is necessary to alter procedures to meet the demands of the research situation. However, the researcher can't choose which parts of a methodology to use because the different parts of a method are meant to work together and must be taken as a whole to produce the best results (Corbin et al., 2015). However, the flexibility in the research must be for the good of the interviewee to not cause disclosure of behaviours or attitudes, which would normally be kept private and personal, as they might result in offense or lead to social censure or disapproval (Leavy, 2014).

3.12.6 Cultural Sensitivity

Acknowledging and respecting Iban cultural practices is paramount. Collaborating with community members ensures cultural appropriateness and sensitivity throughout the research process. Additionally, understanding the boundaries of privacy within the cultural context enables the researcher to navigate discussions respectfully and ethically (Leavy, 2014).

3.13 Chapter Summary

In the exploration of ‘Challenges of Iban Handicrafts Towards the Economy in the Iban Community’, the researcher adopted a comprehensive qualitative approach. This choice stemmed from the necessity to elucidate the economic factors influencing the challenges of Iban handicrafts business, focusing on the cultural nuances of the Iban community in Sarawak. Employing an exploratory research methodology, the study delved into the depths of knowledge surrounding the topic. The qualitative approach was deemed essential, given the need for thoroughness and depth in understanding the subject matter and showcasing proficiency in the research process.

CHAPTER 4

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FACING THE IBAN HANDICRAFT INDUSTRY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses Research Objective 1 (RO1), which is to identify the key economic challenges faced by the Iban handicraft industry in Sarawak. It presents the major issues revealed through participant and non-participant observation, in-depth interviews with artisans, and document analysis. The discussion is organised thematically, focusing on marketing limitations, insufficient government support, competition from low-cost mass-produced imports, scarcity of raw materials, and gaps in artisans' business and financial skills. Each challenge is examined in relation to existing literature to provide contextual understanding, while maintaining emphasis on the lived realities of Iban artisans. The chapter concludes with a synthesis that consolidates these challenges into a clear profile of the sector's current economic constraints.

4.2 Overview of Data Sources and Context

The demographic and socio-economic profiles of the informants were detailed in Chapter 3. Data for this chapter was collected through direct engagement with artisans in both rural and semi-urban areas of Sarawak, complemented by document analysis from reports and policy documents. Field observations provided insight into production environments, sales practices, and the artisans' interaction with customers.

4.3 Thematic Findings: Identified Economic Challenge

This chapter provides an in-depth discussion and analysis of the findings related to the research objectives. The data collected has been carefully organized and analyzed to

highlight the challenges and dynamics of preserving Iban handicrafts in Sarawak from an economic perspective.

4.3.1 Identify the challenges facing marketing handicrafts in Iban

The following sections delve into the primary barriers Iban artisans encounter, highlighting gaps in marketing knowledge and skills, and the need for targeted support and resources to empower artisans in promoting their work effectively.

4.3.2 Lack of knowledge and skills

The data reveal a significant gap in the knowledge and skills required for effective marketing among Iban artisans. Many artisans struggle to understand market trends, consumer preferences, and effective marketing strategies. This shortage hinders their ability to reach wider markets and attract more customers. Interviews with experts revealed that many artisans lack the knowledge and skills necessary to market their products effectively. This gap is evident in their struggle to reach wider markets and attract more customers. Some artisans supported this point of view.

Madam Janet highlighted the need for artisans to understand social media marketing and the importance of selling on the best platforms. She pointed out that artisans often rely on intermediaries to sell their products, which reduces their profit margins. In addition, this fact emphasized varying levels of knowledge among artisans, indicating the need for comprehensive training. Mr. Dean also pointed to the lack of digital literacy among artisans, many of whom do not even

know how to use basic online tools such as WhatsApp. This digital divide greatly limits their ability to market their products effectively online.

Mr. Reynald noted that many artisans lack formal business education, making them highly dependent on government support for promotion. He stressed the importance of training programs but pointed out that these programs need new and effective trainers. He also stated that artisans sometimes overestimate their production capacity, leading to failed deals when they are unable to fulfil large orders. Doris discussed the challenges of using digital platforms due to poor internet connections in her hometown. Although she has social media accounts, she finds it difficult to constantly engage online. The following table categorizes the issues raised by informants:

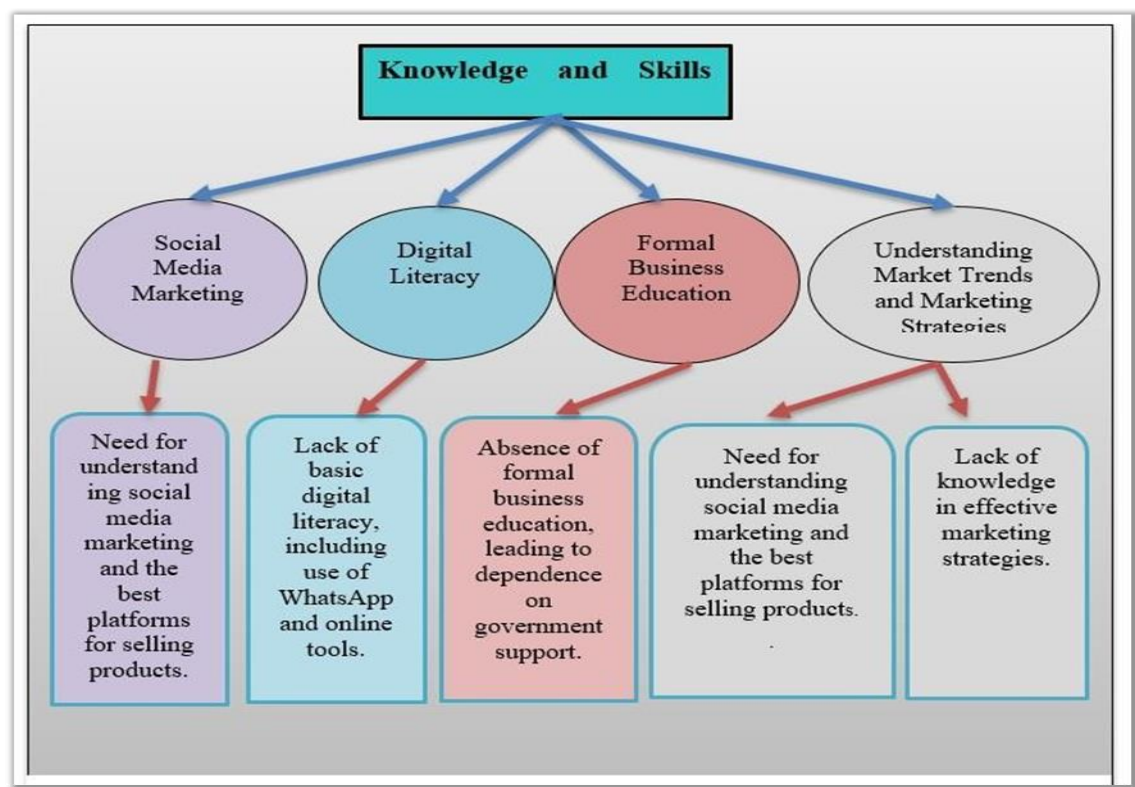


Figure 4-1 Knowledge and skills gap in marketing among Iban artisans (Source: Author)

4.3.3 Desire for Training

The desire for training among Iban artisans is evident from the interviews. Madam Janet emphasized the need for artisans to acquire more marketing skills, suggesting that the

government or other organizations should provide this training. She highlighted that while basic skills are taught, continuous improvement over time is crucial for producing better products. Louis Weslly shared a similar

sentiment, expressing the importance of teaching others and the continuous learning process to ensure that traditional knowledge is not lost.

Dickson expressed a strong desire for mentorship and additional training sessions, valuing the opportunity to learn from experienced artisans and gain new ideas and techniques. He also showed interest in motivational talks and workshops, particularly those focusing on online marketing. Doris, motivated by the need to promote products online, attended a workshop on using social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok. This indicates a proactive approach to learning new marketing strategies. Engga expressed a desire to collaborate with international organizations and attend courses or workshops, highlighting a gap in access to training opportunities. Jaqline also wished for more education on marketing and business, particularly on digital platforms like TikTok and Facebook, and starting a business from a website.

Oshin, while not having taken specific courses recently, expressed a willingness to learn as long as it does not interfere with daily responsibilities. Mr. Naquidin mentioned that Malaysia Handicraft provides training for the community, from making products to selling them, emphasizing the basic level of training provided. Reynald from Sarawak Craft Council acknowledged the lack of formal business education among artisans and the dependency on government support for promotion. He stressed the need for new trainers and planned to introduce business and entrepreneurship courses to create a sustainable system involving collaboration with successful entrepreneurs. Angelia and Lengidi both mentioned

participating in classes and courses offered by NGOs and Malaysia Handicraft, highlighting the role of these organizations in providing necessary

training. Lengidi expressed a desire to learn more and improve strategies for selling products. Overall, the desire for training among Iban artisans is strong, with a clear need for enhanced and accessible training programs focused on marketing, business management, and digital literacy to help them sustain and grow their business. The following figure illustrates the key points discussed:

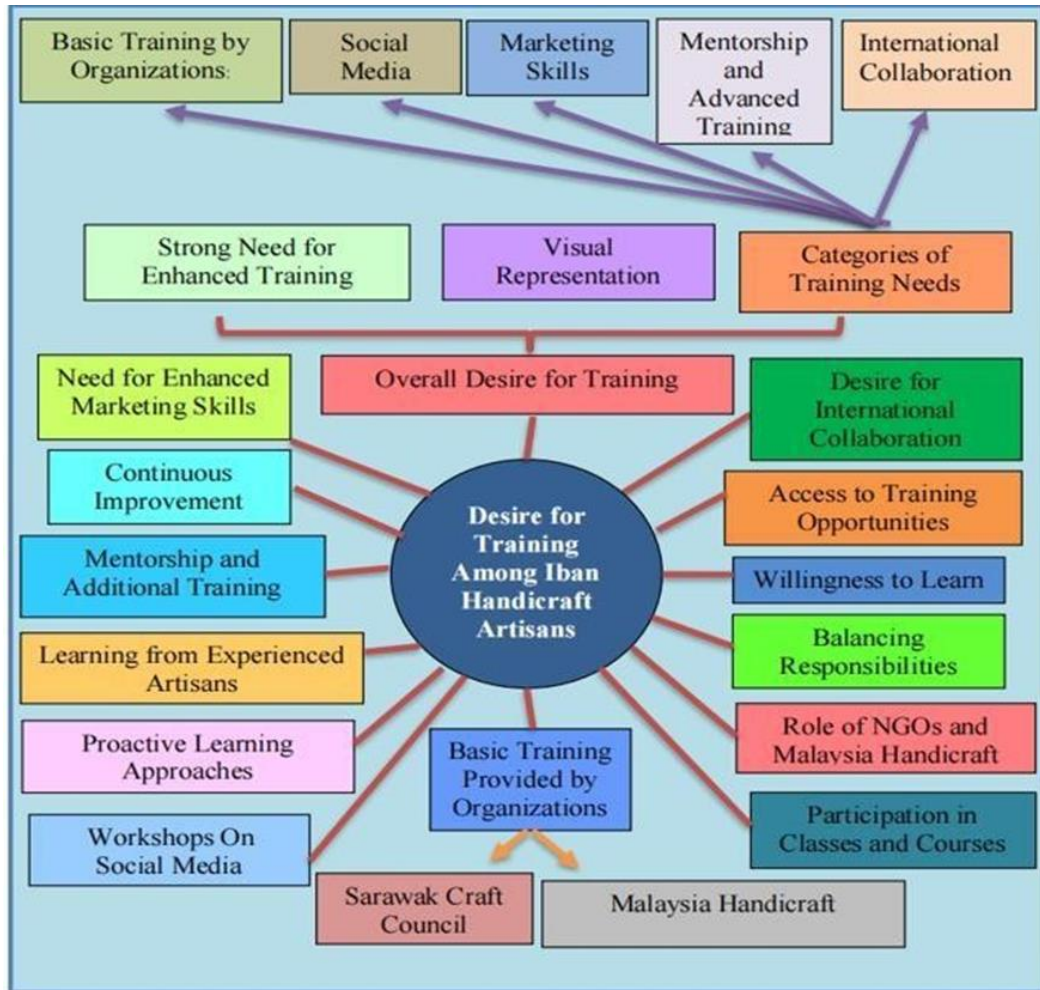


Figure 4-2 Desire for training among Iban handicraft artisans (Source: Author)

4.3.4 Online Marketing Challenges

Online marketing poses significant challenges for Iban artisans, as revealed in the interviews. Madam Janet underscored the necessity for artisans to acquire marketing skills, particularly in utilizing social media, instead of passively waiting for customers. She noted that artisans must know how to sell on the best platforms and emphasized the rise in social media as an opportunity for them to earn money.

Mr. Naquidin highlighted a fundamental issue: many artisans lack basic digital literacy and internet access, making it difficult for them to engage in even basic online marketing activities such as using WhatsApp, let alone more advanced platforms. He

mentioned that the government should promote artisans similarly to how television and newspapers promote events and pointed out that artisans often didn't even know how to use WhatsApp.

Angelia and Helena have moved their sales efforts online through Facebook, with varying degrees of success. Angelia reported selling products via Facebook and receiving custom orders through this platform, while Helena mentioned using both Facebook and a website for sales. However, Louis Weslly's experience highlights a different approach and highlights the importance of teaching artisans how to market on platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and websites.

Reynald shared that they use Facebook, Instagram, and their official website to support artisans, organizing craft bazaars several times a year. This demonstrates a structured approach to combining both online and offline marketing efforts. Angelia and Helena have moved their sales efforts online through Facebook, with varying degrees of success. Angelia reported selling products via Facebook and receiving custom orders through this platform, while Helena mentioned using both Facebook and a website for sales and highlighted the importance of teaching artisans how to market on platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and websites.

Louis Weslly's experience with selling and displaying on Facebook is more positive compared to selling at bazaars and events. He mentioned that he has never sold anything at such physical venues despite participating once. This indicates his total dependence on selling through the Internet, which has been a successful experience for him. Louis's long experience of up to 18 years underscores his effective adaptation to online sales.

Maria pointed out that while there is a Facebook page for sales, it remains underutilized. Similarly, Suzana found it challenging to sell online, mainly due to the handmade nature of their products, which are crafted by a single person. This individual production process limits the scalability and consistency required for effective online sales.

Cathrine mentioned selling products online and supplying corporate uses. She uses TikTok occasionally but mostly relies on Facebook and Instagram. Dickson acknowledged the difficulties of marketing but recognized the survival benefits provided by platforms like Facebook. Although he sells some products online, he noted that his physical shops generate more income and highlighted the need for marketing training, including online marketing, which he has received.

Doris identified poor internet connections in her hometown as a significant barrier to utilizing digital platforms effectively. Despite this, she uses YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok, albeit with varying levels of activity. Her motivation to learn digital marketing stems from the desire to promote products online, and she finds social media marketing effective in boosting product awareness.

Nipek has experimented with online methods, focusing on the Malaysian market, using online channels and friends to market his products. Oshin uses a unique strategy, marketing through TikTok and videos. Engga shared that while she has never used social media platforms due to poor internet connectivity, her older sister has marketed their products online, primarily through Instagram. Engga relies on face-to-face sales and WhatsApp for customer orders. Ita mentioned using Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram for marketing and selling products at bazaars. These examples demonstrate the diverse experiences and challenges faced by Iban artisans in navigating online marketing. Overall, while some artisans have embraced online platforms with varying degrees of success, many

faces significant challenges due to a lack of digital skills, poor internet connectivity, and the individualized nature of their production processes. There is a clear need for comprehensive training and support to help artisans effectively leverage online marketing opportunities.

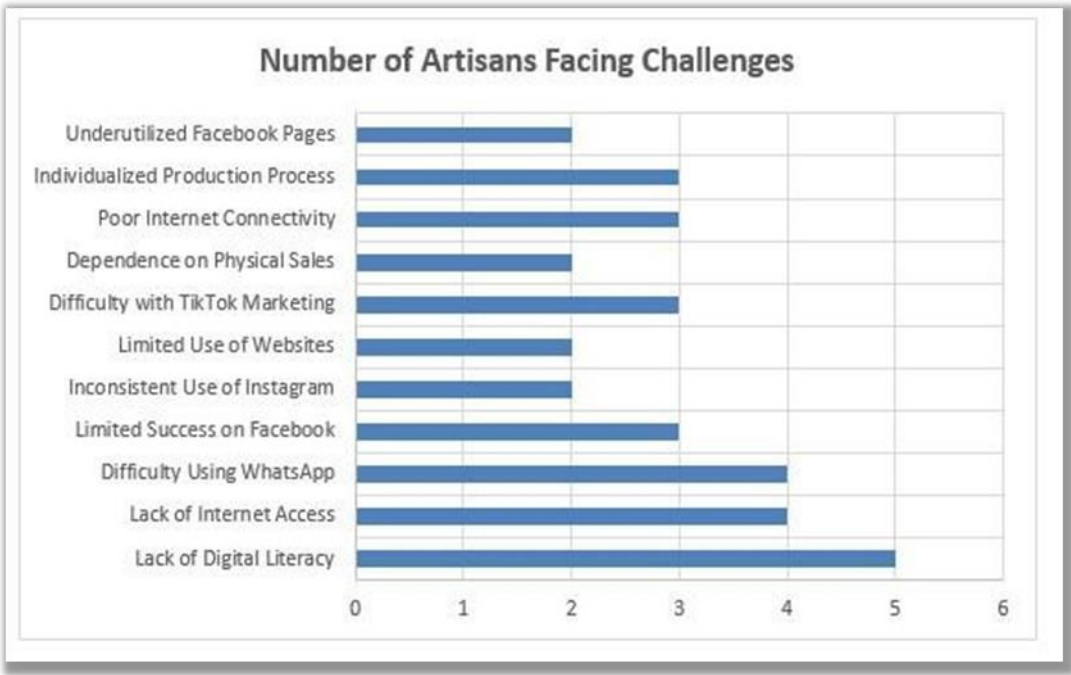


Figure 4-3 Challenges that artisans face in online marketing (X-axis: Types of challenges; Y-axis: Number of respondents) (Source: Author)

Beyond these individual experiences, recent evidence indicates that TikTok represents a particularly promising tool for indigenous artisans. Hussin et al. (2023) show that structured social media strategies significantly increase the market reach of traditional textile producers such as songket weavers. Likewise, Madhavedi et al. (2025) emphasize that authenticity and storytelling are central to consumer engagement, which aligns with TikTok’s short-form video format. In practice, Sabahan entrepreneurs such as Ruhie Rue, Elysiana Jemaslin, and Saila of LJD Corporation have successfully scaled their cultural products through TikTok Shop, combining heritage narratives with livestreaming and interactive sales (Bernama, 2025). These successes are supported at the institutional level:

TikTok has partnered with financial institutions such as Maybank to deliver SME upskilling programmes (Fintech News Malaysia, 2025), while platform features like TikTok Shop record over 100 million daily searches in Malaysia (TikTok Newsroom, 2025; World of Buzz, 2025). These developments suggest that, if provided with training and infrastructure support, Iban artisans could similarly harness TikTok to overcome current marketing limitations and reach broader national and international audiences.

4.3.5 Lack of Materials and Impact of Alternative Materials

The Iban artisans face significant challenges due to the scarcity of traditional raw materials. Madam Janet highlighted that the primary issue is obtaining essential materials like silver, which affects the completion and cost of the products. Additionally, the quality of alternative materials, such as aluminium, is often not on par with traditional components.

Mr. Reynald elaborated on the difficulty of sourcing natural materials, noting that many artisans have switched to plastic from China due to the scarcity of traditional resources like rattan. This shift compromises the originality and value of the products. He explained that rattan, which grows wild and takes a long time to mature, is increasingly hard to find due to overharvesting and land development for cash crops like palm oil and rubber. As a result, weavers use plastic substitutes like PVC strips, which, while visually similar, lack the cultural value of the original materials. He also mentioned that while local buyers might accept plastic, foreign tourists, particularly Europeans, prefer natural materials. Traditional methods are slow, making it challenging to compete with the mass production of items using alternative materials.

Mr. Tandan reiterated that the scarcity of natural raw materials is a significant issue, as these resources take a long time to regrow once harvested. The switch to plastic materials from China has become common, but this affects the cultural authenticity of the products.

He noted that the main competition lies in production speed, with traditional methods being slower and less able to meet large orders compared to mass-produced alternatives. Angelia, a ceramic beads maker, pointed out that her unique ceramic beads made from local clay stand out in the market. However, the shift to alternative materials is evident among other artisans. Louis Weslly discussed the high cost of traditional materials like silver, which makes traditional products expensive and less popular compared to modern designs using cheaper materials like aluminium. Lucile highlighted that the presence of plastic products impacts the sales of traditional items. While cheaper plastic pieces are more accessible, they do not hold their value as traditional items made from glass or stone do. She emphasized educating customers on the long-term value of natural materials. Maria mentioned that some artisans use plastic beads as an alternative to ceramic and crystal beads due to cost and availability.

Cathrine acknowledged that modern materials like PVC have affected traditional craft sales, as they are cheaper and more popular, yet they undermine the authenticity of traditional Handicrafts. Suzana noted the necessity of buying rattan from others, implying difficulties in sourcing this traditional material locally. Dickson shared that most of his materials, especially beads, are imported from Indonesia, as local Sarawak materials are insufficient for his needs. Doris stated that materials sourced from China do not affect the authenticity of the design but are a necessity due to local unavailability.

Engga pointed out that her sister imports materials from China because local cotton production has ceased, leaving them no choice but to source materials from abroad. Ita Pantau mentioned the flexibility in substituting traditional materials with rubber or plastic, indicating a pragmatic approach to material shortages. Nipek described the difficulty and expense of sourcing unique materials, such as a specific yellow colour that is hard to replicate and costly. Jaqline noted that while there is interest in traditional materials from other

countries, there is a preference for imported goods from places like China, Japan, or Australia. Oshin highlighted the challenge of finding materials of the right quality and quantity, which affects the production process.

Overall, the scarcity of traditional raw materials has led many Iban artisans to adopt alternative materials like plastic, which, while practical and cost-effective, diminish the cultural value and authenticity of their products. This shift impacts the perception and marketability of traditional handicrafts, both locally and internationally.

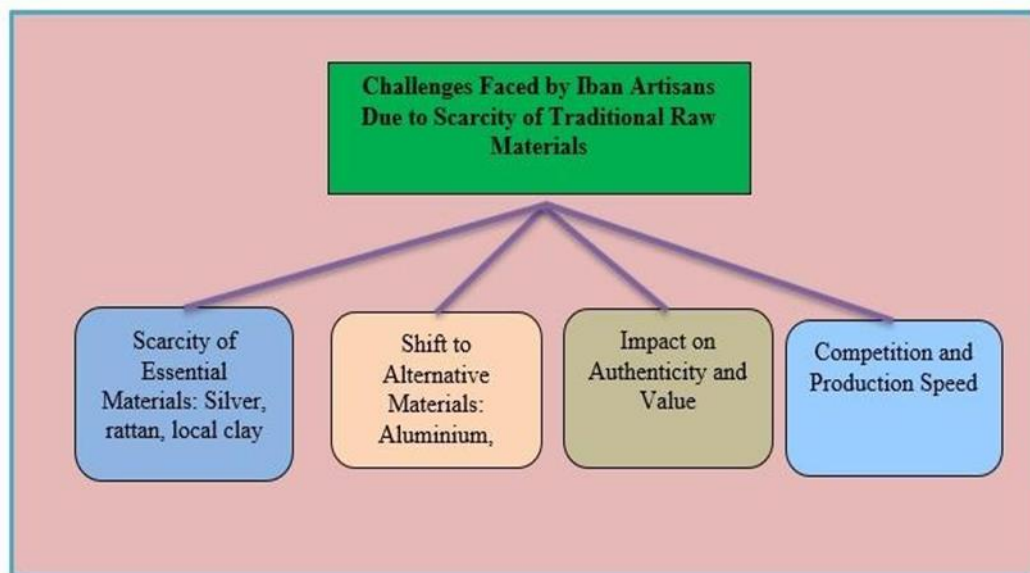


Figure 4-4 Challenges faced by Iban artisans due to the scarcity of traditional raw materials (Source: Author)

4.3.6 Cultural Restrictions (Taboos)

Cultural restrictions and taboos play a significant role in the practices and traditions of the Iban community, affecting how cultural elements are represented and marketed. Madam Janet emphasized the sensitivity around certain cultural practices, noting that some rituals, such as death ceremonies, are sacred and not suitable for public display or commercial exploitation. These taboos require careful consideration to avoid cultural abuse.

Additionally, gender-specific attire is strictly observed; for example, women are not permitted to wear the Sirat (traditional loincloth) or other male attire during events, as this would cause societal disapproval. Such gender-specific restrictions highlight the importance of respecting traditional roles and practices. Lucile added that there are also specific designs that can only be created or worn by particular individuals, maintaining the cultural integrity and significance of these items. These cultural taboos and restrictions are essential to preserving the authenticity and respect for Iban traditions, impacting how artisans and marketers can promote their cultural products.

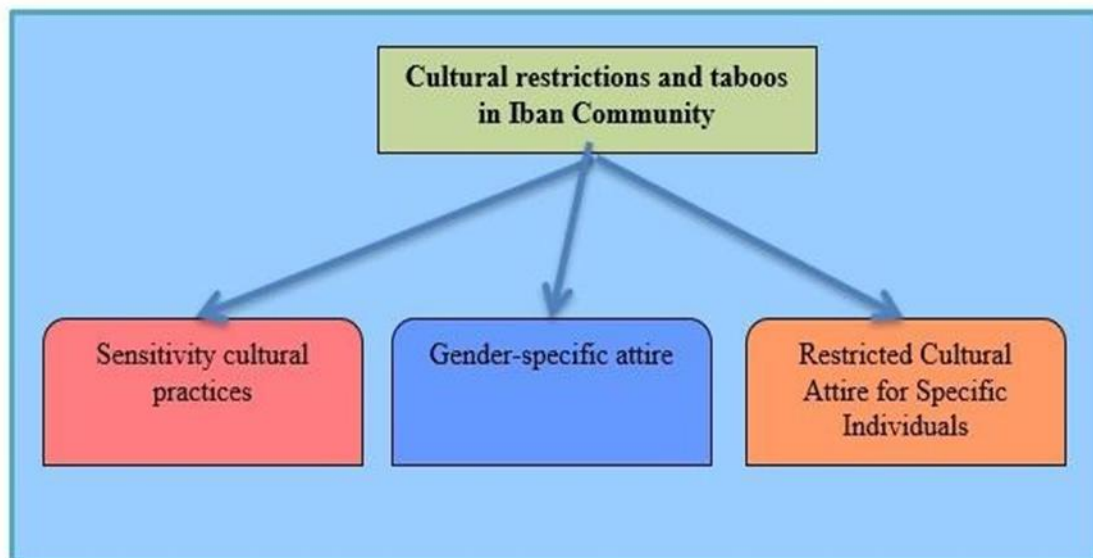


Figure 4-5 Cultural restrictions and taboos among the Iban community (Source: Author)

4.3.7 Exploring the Effects of Strong Competition from Low-Cost, Mass-Produced Imports

The Iban handicrafts industry faces significant competitive pressures from inexpensive, mass-produced imports, which challenge artisans' ability to sustain their traditional practices and maintain market share. These imported products often appeal to consumers due to their affordability and availability, putting local artisans at a disadvantage.

This section examines the effects of this intense competition, starting with the production related obstacles that hinder artisans' ability to efficiently create and market their handicrafts.

4.3.8 Production Challenges

The artisans face various production challenges that impact their competitiveness and ability to sustain their handicrafts. Madam Janet highlights the competition from imported products like Ikat textiles from Indonesia and notes that many artisans are illiterate, relying on family members for business operations. Mr. Naquidin emphasizes the superior quality of local products compared to imports from China and other places of Malaysia, which can be distinguished visually. However, Mr. Reynald points out that traditional production methods are slow, making it difficult to meet large orders, and artisans often overestimate their production capacity, leading to failed deals. He suggests a hybrid production approach combining machine preparation and handcrafting to maintain traditional values while increasing efficiency. Mr. Tan illustrates the time-consuming nature of traditional weaving, such as Pua Kumbu, which can take up to a month per sheet. Angelia faces issues with the high cost of beads and competition from imported beads, stressing the need to maintain standard pricing despite this competition. Helena notes the saturated market for ceramics, with many customers preferring imports from countries like China, Japan, or Australia. Lucile has adapted to changing customer preferences by creating lighter, more functional products, such as versatile filter necklaces.

Cathrine mentions the high competition among local crafters, who often produce similar items due to shared ethnic traditions. She also points out that traditional Handicrafts using natural materials face competition from modern Handicrafts made with cheaper materials like PVC. Dickson sources most of his materials from Indonesia, preferring them over local or Chinese materials, which do not meet his standards. Doris faces strong

competition in the Buriek (Burie Long Skirt) market but focuses on improving and differentiating her designs. She also highlights the high prices of local products due to material costs, especially when reselling imported items.

Engga underscores the importance of maintaining product quality, particularly for custom orders, and the need for continuous improvement due to high competition. She also faces capital challenges, which affect her production capabilities. Ita Pantau notes that production has become more difficult since COVID-19 due to economic impacts. Nipek adjusts her designs to stand out from competitors and embraces challenges to innovate. Jaqline finds the ceramic market crowded, with competition primarily based on price, as local customers prefer more affordable options. Finally, Oshin struggles with the high cost of using original material of Pua Kumbu in her products, which limits sales despite efforts to be flexible with pricing. This sometimes forces her to produce lower quality or printed products of Pua Kumbu to sell.

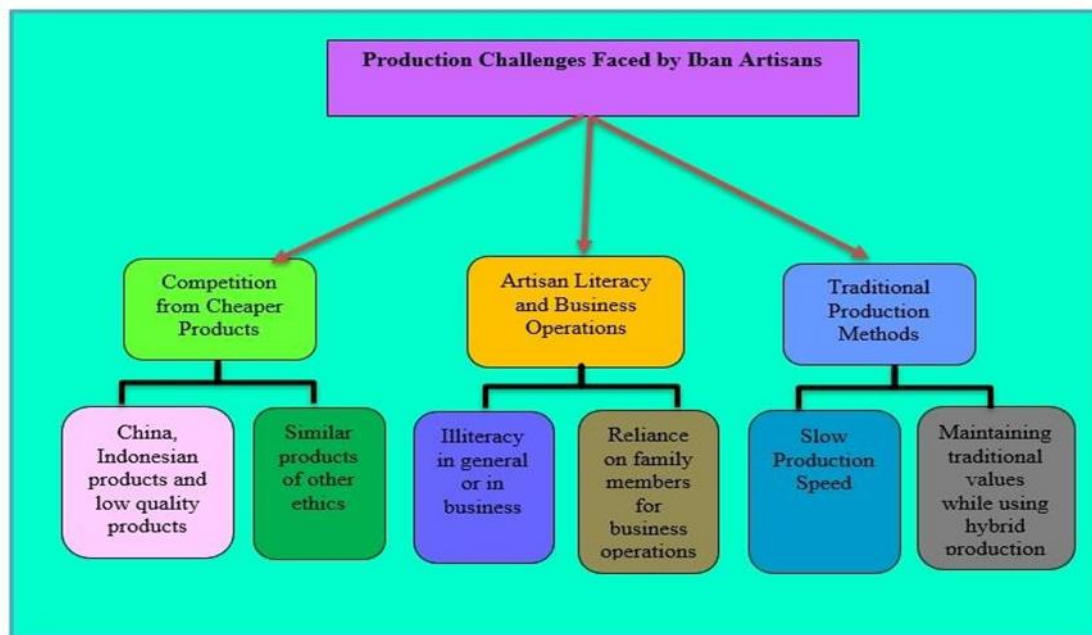


Figure 4-6 Production challenges faced by Iban artisans (Source:Mukresh, 2024)

4.3.9 Market Saturation

Madam Janet observes that market saturation is an increasing issue, especially as there is a growing trend of people wanting traditional costumes, leading to heightened competition. This demand is often met with a mix of authentic and imported products, such as Indonesian Ikat textiles, which dilute the authenticity of local Iban costumes. Mr. Naquidin highlights the influx of products from China and other Malaysian states, emphasizing that local products can still be distinguished by their superior quality. Angelia notes the impact of imported goods on the local market, pointing out that competition now includes products from other countries. Helena mentions that the ceramic market is particularly saturated, with many people opting for ceramics from China, Japan, or Australia over local products.

Maria reflects that many products are similar, leading to repetitive offerings in the market. Cathrine echoes this sentiment, noting that the similarity among products from

different ethnic groups in Sarawak, such as Bidayuh and Iban, adds to the competitive pressure. Dickson shares that while he runs two shops, market saturation means that profitability is higher in locations where he can personally attend to customers. Doris finds that while there is a significant number of competitors making Buriek (Burie Long Skirt), she focuses on continuously improving her designs to stand out.

Engga emphasizes the need for high product quality and continuous effort to stay ahead of the competition. Ita Pantau confirms a high demand for her profession, despite the crowded market. Nipek explains that marketing has become more challenging due to the oversaturation of sellers, requiring constant innovation to differentiate her products. Finally, Jaqline points out the crowded ceramic market but remains optimistic about selling locally despite the competition.

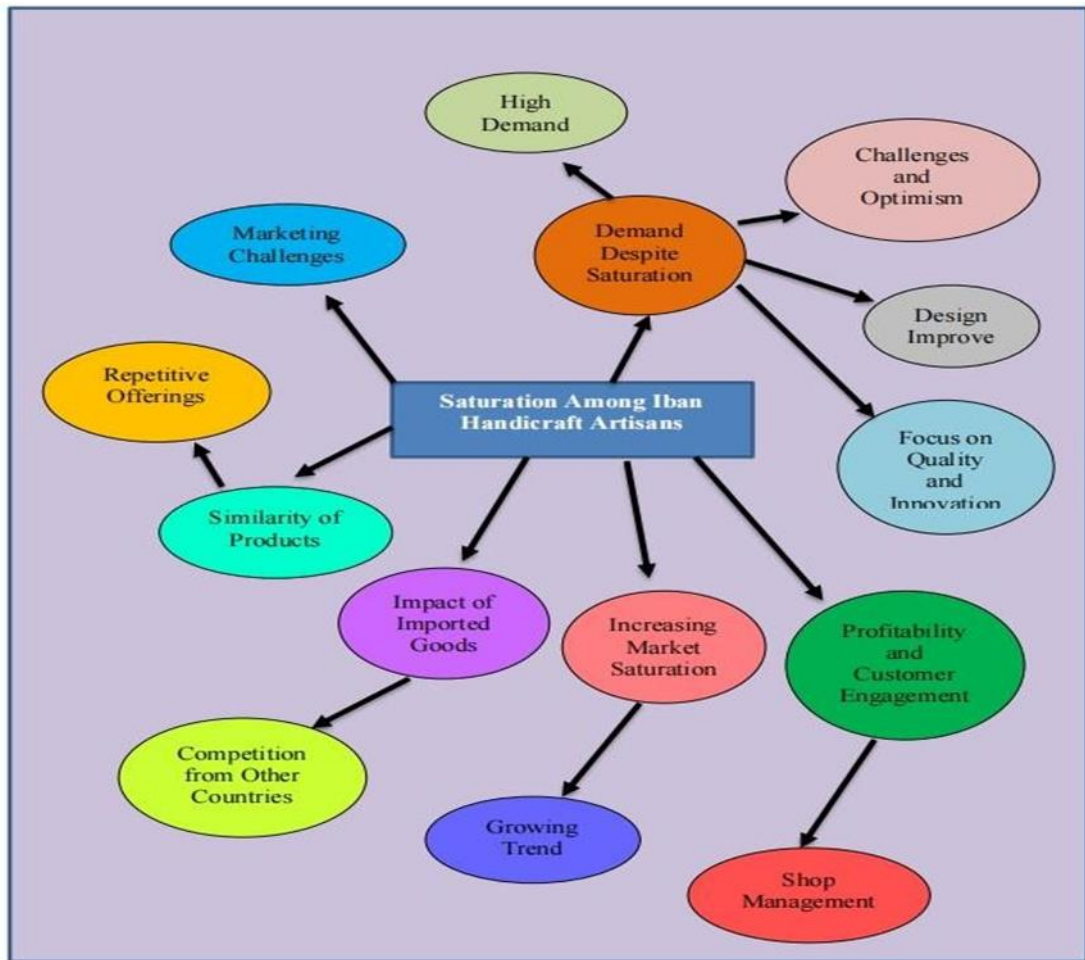


Figure 4-7 Market saturation among Iban artisans (Source: Author)

4.3.10 Quality Versus Quantity

Madam Janet emphasizes the importance of quality over quantity in traditional Handicrafts. She highlights the difference between Chinese corsets, which are shinier and more refined, and Mamaloh corsets from Indonesia, which have a lower silver content and are made with aluminium, making them less durable and less appealing to her. She suggests that while some costume components are of high quality, others, particularly aluminium products, need improvement. Mr. Naquidin echoes this sentiment, stating that local products are of higher quality compared to those from China. He notes that while some people prefer

cheaper, lower-quality products, knowledgeable customers recognize and appreciate the quality of local handicrafts.

Helena observes that while local customers often seek perfection, international buyers value the uniqueness of handmade items. Lucile points out that while cheaper materials like plastic may sell faster, they always encourage the use of high-quality products to maintain craftsmanship standards. Cathrine notes that traditional handicrafts made from natural materials face competition from cheaper, modern materials like PVC, which are more popular. Doris explains that to stay competitive, they continually strive to make their designs unique and of the highest quality.

Engga stresses the need for ensuring high product quality, especially for custom orders, to stand out in a competitive market. Oshin identifies a major challenge as sourcing high-quality materials, which affects both the cost and availability of their products. She notes that while they try to be flexible with pricing, the high cost of original materials of Pua Kumbu makes it difficult to maintain both affordability and quality. Overall, these perspectives highlight the artisans' commitment to quality and the challenges they face in maintaining it amidst competition and market demands.

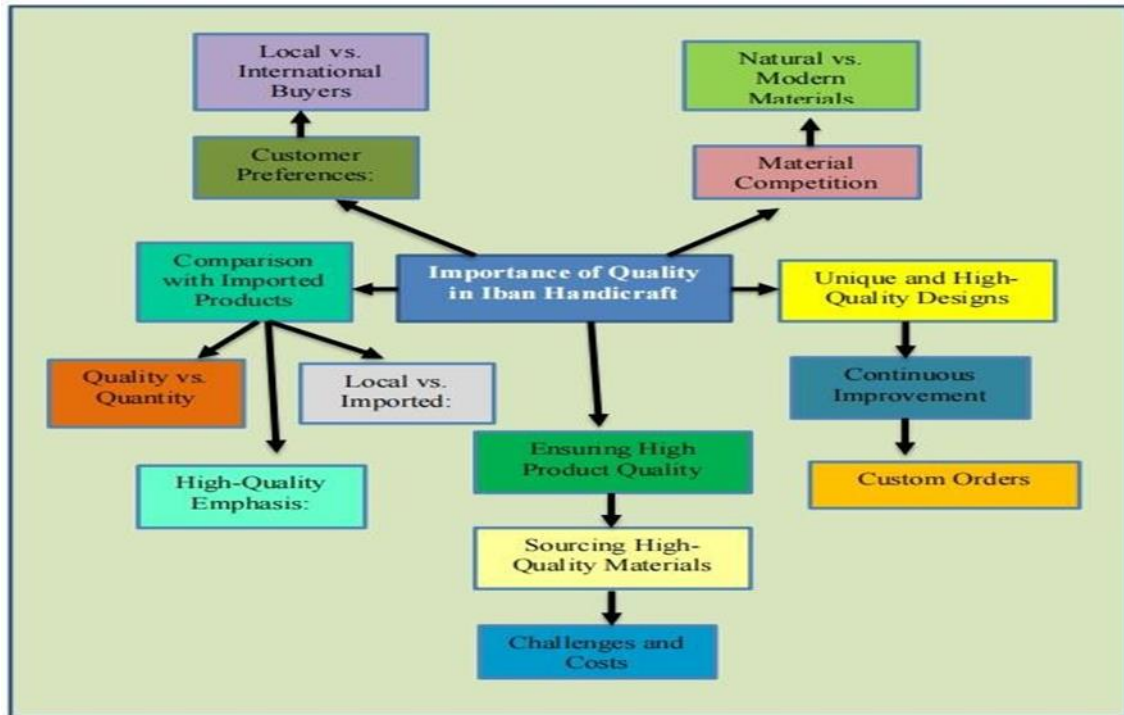


Figure 4-8 Importance of quality over quantity in Iban artisans (Source: Author)

4.3.11 Pricing and Selling

Madam Janet highlights the necessity for artisans to understand effective sales strategies and social media marketing to reach their customers, emphasizing that they cannot simply wait for buyers to come to them. Mr. Naquidin draws attention to the ability to distinguish between high-quality local products and cheaper imports from China, stressing the importance of recognizing and promoting the quality of local craftsmanship.

Angelia shares her experience with pricing challenges, particularly with beads, noting that while it may be tempting to lower prices, maintaining a standard price is crucial to uphold the value of handicrafts. Helena discusses the difficulty in selling ceramic plates as many customers prefer cheaper options from countries like China, Japan, or Australia. She adapts by adjusting prices and offering unique designs for each piece.

Louis Weslly mentions the surprise of customers at the high prices he can command for his intricate snail handicrafts, illustrating the potential for high returns on unique, wellcrafted items. Lucile points out that while cheaper plastic products affect sales of traditional handicrafts, they advise customers on the long-term value of high-quality materials like glass beads, which can appreciate significantly over time. She also emphasizes the importance of understanding and calculating profit margins, suggesting a minimum margin of 30%. Maria notes a lack of online sales activity, highlighting a potential area for improvement in reaching broader markets. Dickson explains that his pricing strategy is based on creativity, time, and the novelty of the product, allowing him to mark up prices for unique pieces. He also finds his shop at Waterfront to be more profitable due to his personal presence there. Doris discusses the price differences between local and imported products, noting that reselling products can lead to increased prices due to added costs. Ita Pantau affirms the value and worth of her work despite the economic challenges. Nipek mentions the challenge of setting prices that are competitive enough to prevent customers from seeking cheaper alternatives elsewhere. Jaqline also relies on competitive pricing to attract local customers who prioritize affordability. Oshin faces difficulties in selling original Pua Kumpu due to its high cost, but she strives to be flexible with pricing while ensuring fairness based on effort and material costs. Overall, these perspectives underscore the balancing act between maintaining quality, ensuring fair pricing, and adapting to market demands.

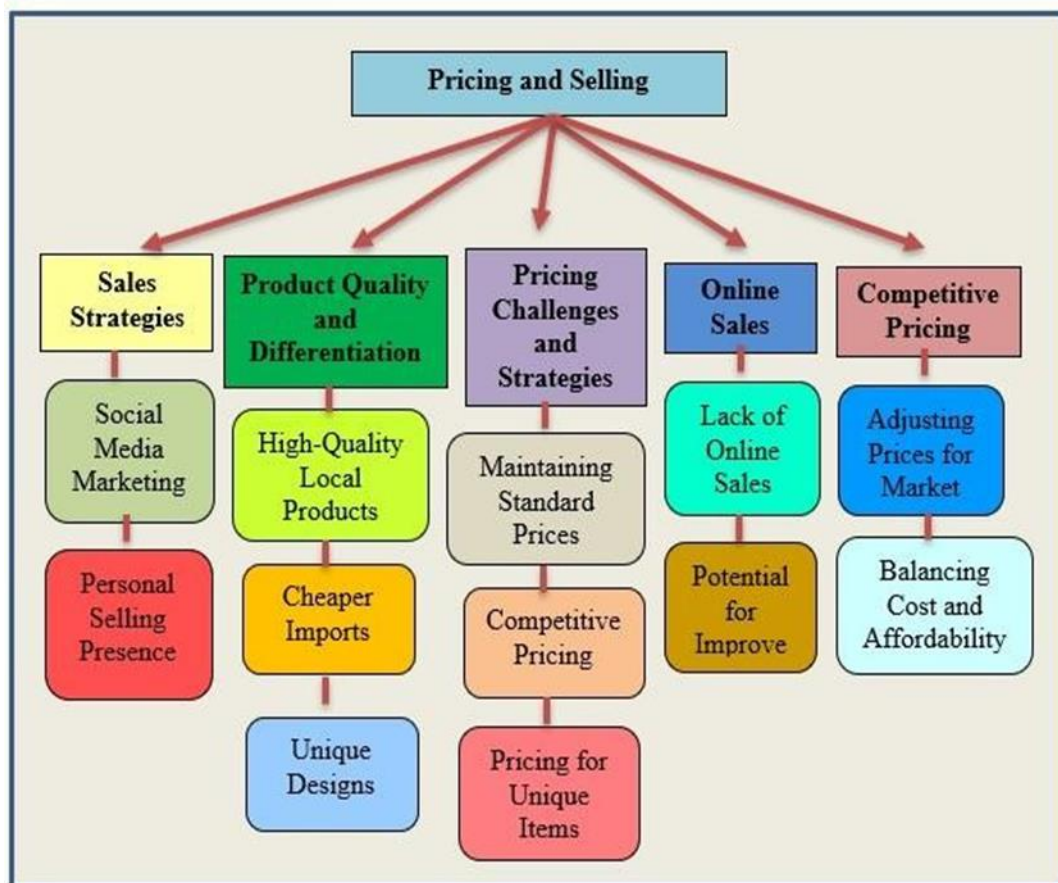


Figure 4-9 Pricing and selling (Source: Author)

4.3.12 Innovation and Modernization

Madam Janet discusses adapting traditional products, such as children's loincloths, to be shorter and more practical while still retaining cultural significance and agree with modifying the costume pieces by material and design a little as long as it doesn't affect the identity and authenticity of the costume but make it better for the market. Angelia highlights her strategy of continually updating her designs to be contemporary and versatile, appealing to a broader audience while maintaining the identity of the Iban culture. She notes that this adaptability has kept her sales unaffected by changes in market trends.

Helena mentions that while many people create similar products, differing designs foster a sense of community and shared learning rather than competition. Louis Wessly

observes a demand for modernized traditional items, like those used in pageants, indicating a blend of old and new styles. Lucile emphasizes the need to modernize products to align with fashion trends and make them more affordable. She uses modern materials and techniques to reduce production time and costs, making traditional Handicrafts more accessible. Maria talks about combining different materials, like carbon, ceramic, and crystal, to create innovative designs. She points out that modernized products, which can be worn at any event, are more popular because of their versatility, despite the lack of original materials.

Cathrine notes an increase in demand for improvised products, which are easier to produce and more convenient for customers. Dickson shares his practice of modifying traditional designs and using a mix of materials to maintain sales, indicating flexibility in his approach. Doris discusses the challenge of competition but highlights the importance of continuous improvement and innovation in design. She adds that incorporating the identity of Sarawak or Iban culture into products made from materials sourced from China helps preserve cultural significance.

Ita Pantau emphasizes the importance of introducing new designs annually to stay competitive. She keeps an eye on competitors' offerings and adapts accordingly. Nipek speaks about the necessity of making her products unique and not shying away from challenges, embracing new ideas to stand out. Oshin focuses on creating new designs that fit the market and are practical for everyday use. She mentions the high cost of original Pua Kumbu but tries to be flexible with pricing. Additionally, she modernizes her products based on customer requests while maintaining a traditional touch. These insights collectively underline the importance of innovation and modernization in keeping traditional Handicrafts relevant and appealing in a competitive market.

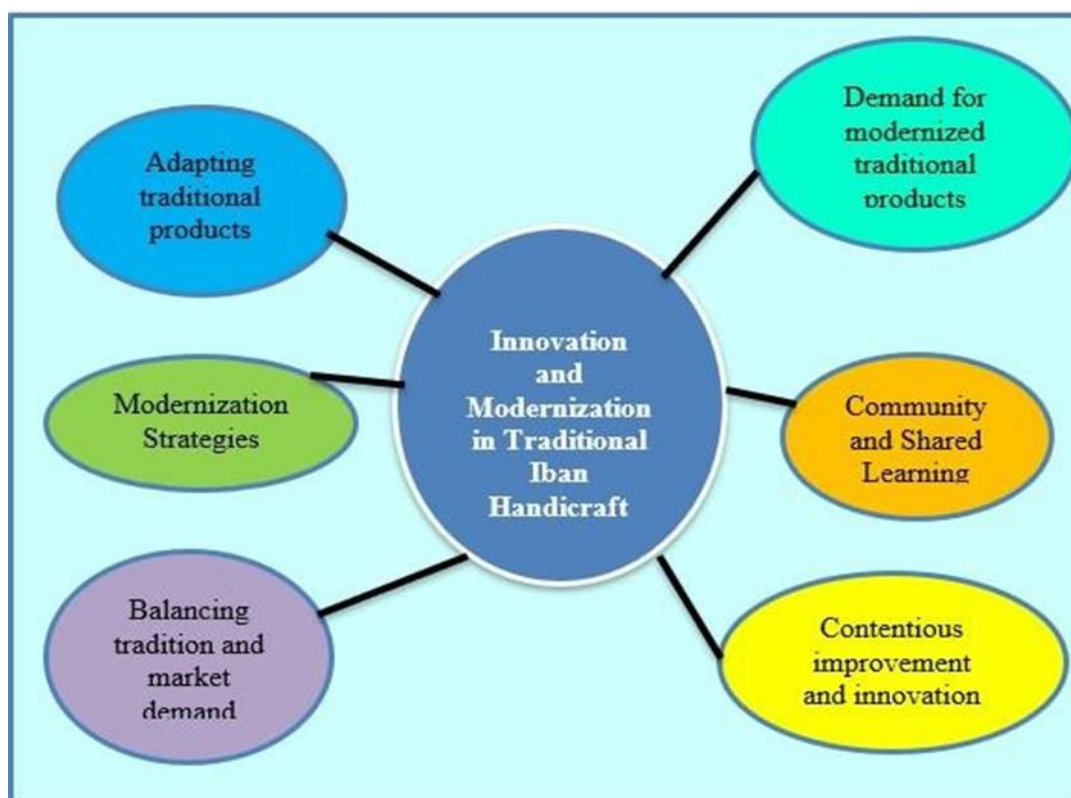


Figure 4-10 Innovation and modernization in traditional Iban handicraft (Source: Author)

4.3.13 Family Involvement and Challenges in Iban Handicrafts

Madam Janet explains that within families, traditional artisans often rely on their more educated children to handle the business aspects, such as using phones and selling products, creating a family collaboration where different generations contribute their strengths. Mr. Reynald highlights a significant challenge: the younger generation's loss of interest in handicrafts. Most producers are older, so efforts are being made to work with schools to create awareness and interest among youth through events and teaching sessions. However, there is also a need for new trainers to keep these training programs effective.

Louis Weslly shares a success story where a student from Kapit, initially learning parttime, eventually opened his own shop after completing his education, showing a potential pathway for young artisans. Maria discusses teaching students' product patterns and modern

responsibilities, indicating a move towards integrating traditional handicrafts with contemporary skills. She emphasizes family involvement in craft businesses, teaching her cousin's children and her own, ensuring the continuation of skills and interest within the family.

Doris acknowledges that while many young people are interested in handicrafts, including her cousins, her own children are not yet involved as they are still in school. She believes in passing down these skills through generations to maintain the craft's legacy. Engga sees value in teaching her children traditional skills like making Pua Kumbu, not only for cultural preservation but also as a viable source of income. She involves her children during school holidays, which helps them appreciate the craft's value.

Lengidi supports the idea of educating young people to continue traditional Handicrafts, emphasizing its benefits for those without other job opportunities. Oshin adds that as long as there is interest, the business of traditional costumes will continue. However, she notes that success depends on the younger generation's willingness to be diligent and learn how to find customers.

Mr. Tan and Mr. Reynald both point out the diminishing interest in handicrafts within the Iban community, with young people preferring more stable income sources like farming. This presents a major challenge for the future of traditional handicrafts. Angelia, representing the third generation of her family in the craft business, initially saw it as a hobby but now appreciates its financial benefits. Maria echoes the importance of family involvement in maintaining interest in traditional Handicrafts, teaching her children and relatives to ensure the continuation of these skills.

Cathrine mentions the continued use of traditional patterns, reinforcing the importance of preserving cultural heritage within the craft industry. Mr. Naquidin discusses logistical challenges, such as the difficulty of accessing markets in the city for those living in remote areas, which affects the ability to sell products.

Overall, the generation gap in traditional handicrafts is evident, with older generations actively involved and concerned about the younger generation's declining interest. However, efforts to integrate modern techniques, family involvement, and educational programs offer hope for preserving these cultural practices.

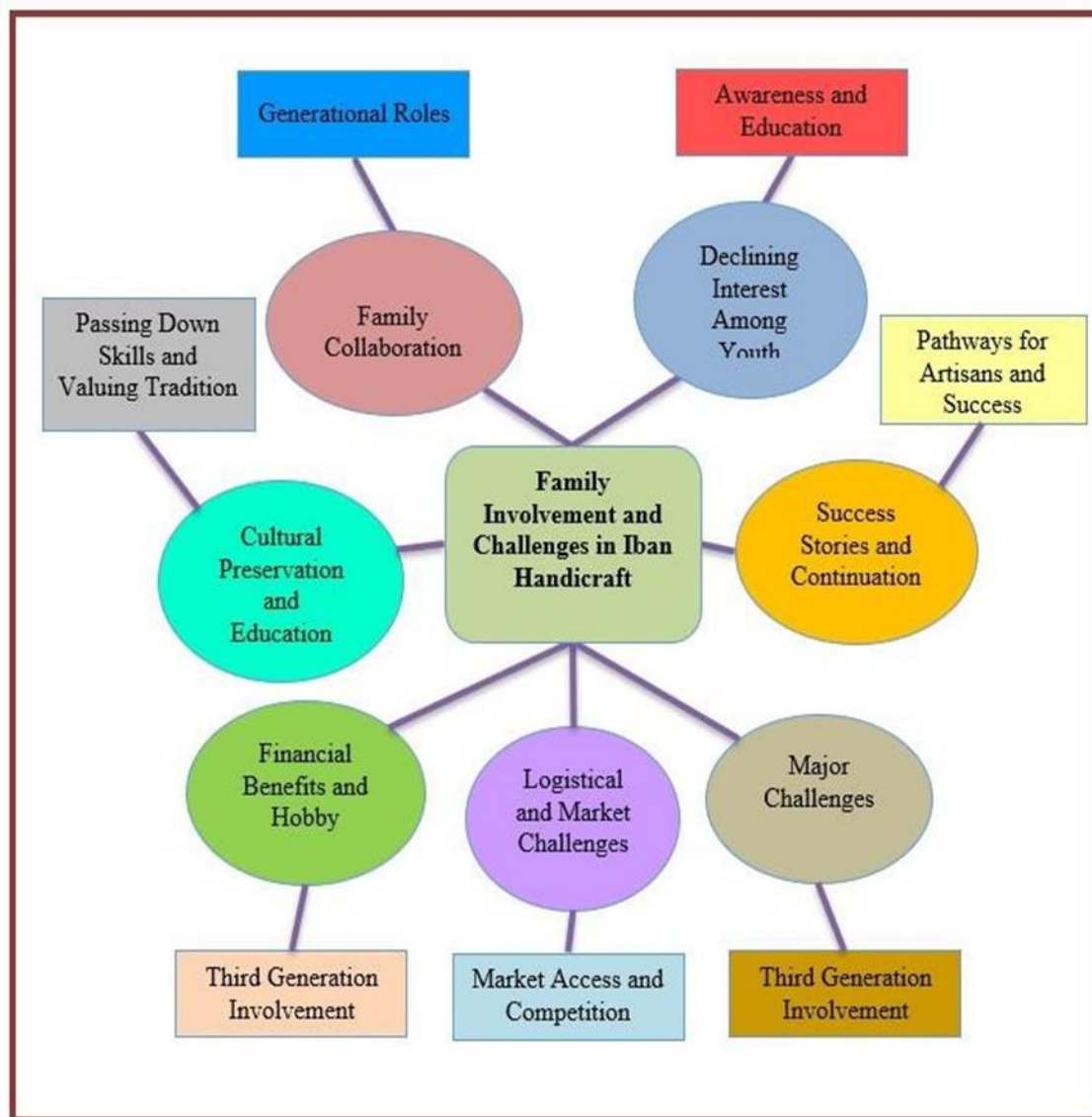


Figure 4-11 Family involvement and generation gap in Iban handicraft (Source: Author)

4.3.14 Assessing the Impact of Artisans Deficient Business Acumen on Their Effectiveness in Product Promotion

Limited business knowledge and skills significantly hinder Iban artisans' ability to effectively promote and sell their products. While artisans often excel in the craft and cultural aspects of their work, many struggle with the commercial

strategies needed to reach and engage buyers directly. This section delves into the selling challenges artisans face, highlighting how a lack of business acumen affects their

reliance on intermediaries, ability to communicate product value, and overall sales effectiveness.

4.3.15 Selling Challenges

Artisans face several challenges when it comes to selling their products. Madam Janet highlighted that many artisans rely on middlemen to sell their creations, which often results in the middlemen making most of the money. Instead of selling directly to customers, artisans usually sell their products to entrepreneurs, bypassing direct sales opportunities. Mr. Reynald pointed out that educating customers about the traditional and cultural stories behind the products can add value and help in promoting them. However, many artisans lack formal education in business, which hampers their ability to effectively sell their products. Additionally, artisans sometimes overestimate their production capacity, leading to failed deals when they can't meet large orders. Mr. Tan emphasized that many artisans, especially those without formal education, struggle with the business aspects of production and selling.

Angelia noted that innovating traditional designs to cater to different cultural groups can be challenging but is essential for broader market appeal. Helena mentioned that bazaars are more effective for selling because customers can see and appreciate the uniqueness of the products in person, whereas online sales are more challenging because customers online mostly look for the cheapest price. Louis noted that since the COVID-19 pandemic, business has been thriving, but it has since slowed down significantly. He attributed this decline to more people pursuing education, reducing their interest in purchasing handmade goods as they prefer to learn and make these items themselves. Despite the risks, Louis continues to teach others how to make traditional Iban Handicrafts, believing it is essential to keep the Iban culture alive. Lucile explained that the choice of materials significantly impacts sales, as expensive materials like glass beads and ceramics are harder to sell, whereas cheaper

materials like plastic can sell faster. However, promoting the use of good-quality materials remains important.

Maria admitted that there is a lack of activity in online sales among artisans. Doris elaborated on the price differences between local and foreign materials, which can increase costs. Products sold in other countries tend to be more expensive, impacting local sales. Additionally, poor internet connectivity in some areas makes it difficult to utilize digital platforms for sales, leading to a reliance on physical customers. Despite these challenges, Jaqline mentioned that some artisans use online platforms like Facebook and their websites to reach customers. Sponsorships from organizations like the Sarawak Craft Council can help artisans reach international markets, such as London.

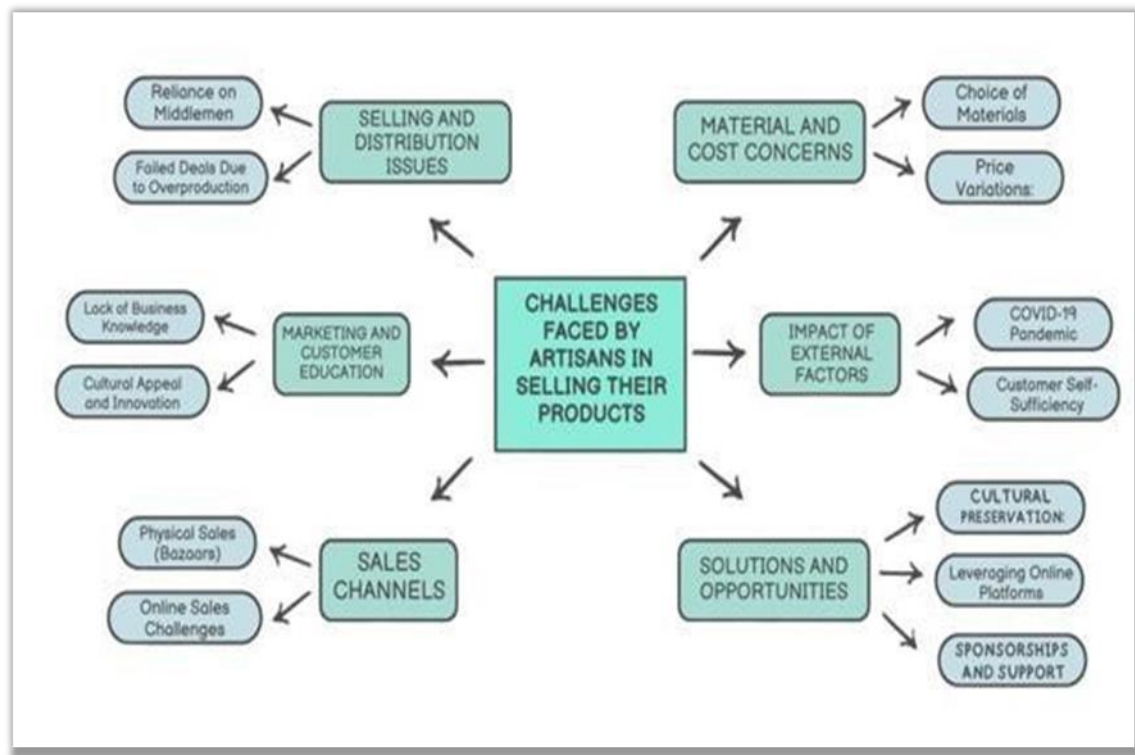


Figure 4-12 Challenges faced by artisans in selling their products

4.3.16 Financial Management

Financial management challenges for artisans are multifaceted and influenced by various factors such as training, market demand, and the balance between traditional methods and modern business practices. Training programs are recognized as essential, yet there is a pressing need for new trainers to enhance the effectiveness of these programs. Doris, who has been in the business for five years, describes how she juggled other jobs, such as running a school canteen and working at a government kindergarten, before fully committing her craft. She highlights the importance of workshops and registration with Malaysia Handicraft for formalizing and advancing her business.

Engga underscores the potential for generating income through traditional handicrafts like Pua Kumbu, which she integrates into her family activities during school holidays. This not only preserves cultural heritage but also provides a source of income.

However, Ita Pantau notes the difficulty of managing financial stability, as many artisans, including herself, treat their craft as a part-time endeavour alongside their professional jobs, which makes it challenging to fully commit and profit from their artisanal work.

Madam Janet emphasizes the importance of knowing how to sell on the best platforms and utilizing social media marketing, while Mr. Reynald discusses the competition from faster, mass-produced items and the tendency of artisans to overestimate their production capacity, leading to failed deals. Mr. Tan points out that many artisans shift to agriculture due to its more stable income compared to handicrafts, and highlights that the profit from Handicrafts can be seasonal, peaking during festivals like Gawai and declining afterward.

Angelia shares her strategy of selling through a shop and leveraging Facebook to reach more customers, whereas Lucile stresses the importance of understanding profit margins and using quality products to ensure sustainable income. Cathrine discusses the use of online platforms like Facebook and Instagram for selling, though she notes that sales are higher during festivals and through custom orders. Dickson mentions the seasonal nature of his business and the challenge of marketing, despite surviving through online platforms.

Engga also highlights the high cost of materials and the difficulty in finding customers locally, with sponsorship playing a crucial role in sustaining the business. Lengidi talks about efforts to increase market presence through courses and collaborations, while Nipek points out the challenges of marketing amidst growing competition and the need for affordable pricing. Oshin notes that sales can be inconsistent, with certain products selling more based on demand and trends.

These insights collectively illustrate the complex financial management challenges faced by artisans, ranging from the need for effective training and marketing strategies to balancing multiple income sources and adapting to market dynamics.

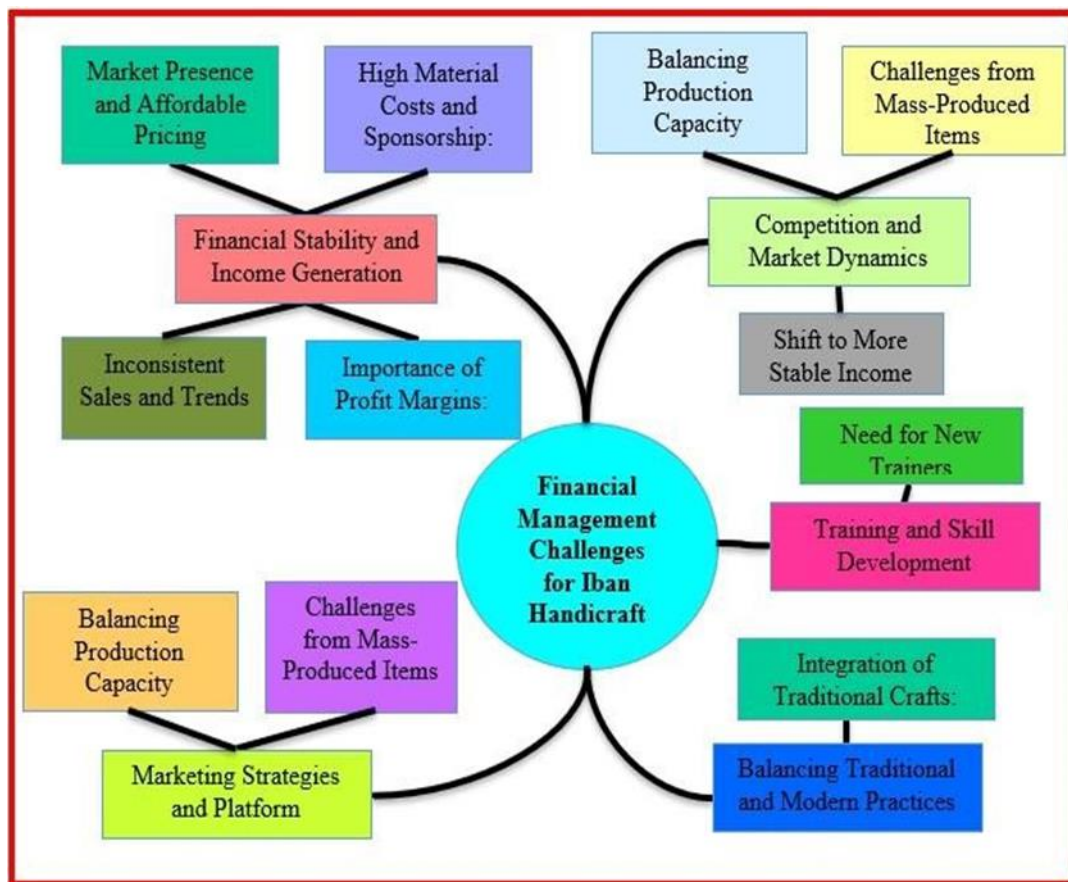


Figure 4-13 Financial management challenges for Iban handicraft artisans (Source: Author)

4.3.17 Training and Education Gaps

Training and education gaps among artisans are evident in various aspects, from basic skills to advanced business strategies. Madam Janet acknowledges the need for artisans to learn more about selling and pricing, emphasizing that while basic training is provided, longterm improvement depends on the individual's commitment. Mr. Naquin highlights that while Kraftangan offers comprehensive training from product creation to sales, many

artisans lack digital literacy and access to the internet, which hampers their ability to market their products effectively.

Mr. Reynald stresses the importance of creating awareness and interest among the youth through school events and digital marketing courses. He points out that many artisans rely on government support for promotion due to a lack of formal business education. To address this, there are plans to introduce business and entrepreneurship courses and collaborate with successful entrepreneurs to create a sustainable production system.

Angelia notes that she has benefited from classes offered by NGOs and knowledge passed down from her family. Helena adds that sharing ideas and learning from peers, rather than viewing them as competitors, can also be a valuable educational experience. Louis Weslly takes pride in teaching others, seeing it as a way to preserve knowledge and ensure it is passed down to future generations.

Dickson provides motivational talks and workshops focused on online marketing, recognizing the importance of digital platforms in today's market. Doris mentions attending workshops that taught her to utilize social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok. In contrast, Engga and Nipek have largely been self-taught and express interest in joining formal courses or workshops if opportunities arise. Lengidi also emphasizes the value of learning from organizations like Malaysia Handicraft and expresses a desire to further enhance her skills and strategies.

Oshin finds that marketing and business come naturally to her, though she hasn't taken any recent courses, balancing her craft with other responsibilities like taking care of school children. She acknowledges the availability of cultural education in her village, even though she doesn't reside there. These varied experiences highlight the diverse training needs

and educational gaps among artisans, pointing to the necessity for more accessible and comprehensive training programs to support their growth and sustainability in the craft industry.



Figure 4-14 Training and education gaps among Iban handicraft artisans (Source: Author)

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined the key economic challenges confronting the Iban handicraft industry in Sarawak, drawing on fieldwork, interviews, and policy analysis. The findings reveal systemic barriers—such as marketing limitations, raw material scarcity,

competition from mass-produced imports, and gaps in business skills—that hinder the sector’s growth and sustainability. Artisans struggle with digital illiteracy, pricing strategies, and market access, while cultural preservation and generational disinterest further complicate long-term viability. Despite these obstacles, there is a strong desire among artisans for training and modernization to adapt to changing market demands. Addressing these challenges will require coordinated efforts, including government support, improved access to resources, and initiatives to bridge the gap between tradition and contemporary market needs. Without such interventions, the Iban handicraft industry risks further marginalization in an increasingly competitive global marketplace.

CHAPTER 5

UNDERLYING CAUSES OF THE DECLINE AND STAGNATION OF THE IBAN HANDICRAFT MARKET

5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses Research Objective 2 (RO2), which is to analyze the reasons behind the decline or stagnation of the Iban handicraft market in Sarawak. While Chapter 4 identified the key challenges confronting artisans, the present discussion examines the underlying causes that have led these challenges to undermine the growth and competitiveness of the industry.

The analysis is organised thematically into four broad categories of causes: structural, market-related, capacity-related, and cultural. This approach allows for a clearer understanding of the interplay between institutional gaps, shifting market conditions, limited entrepreneurial capacity, and cultural dynamics that collectively constrain the expansion of Iban handicrafts. Evidence is drawn from field interviews, participant observations, and secondary literature, enabling a nuanced assessment of both internal and external factors contributing to market stagnation.

By systematically linking each cause to its effect on the industry's performance, this chapter establishes the foundation for the subsequent discussion in Chapter 6, which explores how these market dynamics impact the livelihoods and economic well-being of the Iban community.

5.2 Collaboration

Collaboration among artisans reveals a diverse range of experiences and benefits. Madam Janet notes that many artisans sell their products through middlemen, often relying on family members to handle sales due to illiteracy and lack of digital skills. This dynamic creates a family business model where each member contributes differently based on their

skills. Angelia highlights the collaborative training she received from local artisans, forming a group that benefits from resources like government-provided materials and free booths. Helena and Jaqline share a perspective that sees other artisans not as competitors but as sources of inspiration, enhancing creativity through shared ideas.

Lucile recounts an experience of receiving bulk orders that required community assistance, leading to weekend classes to improve craftsmanship and design. This collaboration not only met immediate demand but also fostered skill development within her community. Maria suggests that collaboration can be particularly beneficial for handling large orders, indicating potential for business growth through cooperative efforts. Suzana mentions cooperation with organizations like Sarawak Craft, while Cathrine reflects on the conditional benefits of collaboration, noting that it depends on alignment of ideas and products. Dickson shares his experience of organizing classes and collaborating in marketing efforts, which allows artisans to learn from each other and improve their products.

Doris, though not currently active, points to her history of participating in various workshops and collaborating with organizations like Malaysia Handicraft. Engga expresses a desire to collaborate internationally, currently working with her sister who markets their products online despite connectivity challenges in longhouses.

Ita Pantau mentions collaborating within a group to enhance their business, emphasizing the collective approach. Nipek utilizes online channels and friends for marketing, indicating a blend of individual effort and collaborative support. Jaqline acknowledges that seeing others' work can inspire improvements in their own products, showcasing the value of collaborative learning and mutual enhancement.



Figure 5-1 Collaboration among Iban handicrafts artisans (Source: Author)

5.3 Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship within the handicraft sector showcases varied experiences and pathways. Madam Janet highlights a significant trend where artisans typically focus on creating products and rely on business entrepreneurs to handle sales. These artisans often pass their products to entrepreneurs in places like Lachau (Town in Sarawak), where smallscale business activities are prominent. This model allows artisans to concentrate on their craft while leveraging entrepreneurs to reach the market.

Lucile emphasizes the importance of entrepreneurship courses, particularly in rural areas. She mentions having organized such courses, which aim to empower artisans with

business skills. Within her community, Lucile has observed the rise of talented designers who, through these courses, have developed their own brands and actively participate in bazaars and events. This entrepreneurial spirit is strongly encouraged to foster independence and growth.

Doris serves as a pioneer in the handicraft business, having taken proactive steps to learn and apply entrepreneurial skills. She attended workshops that taught her how to leverage social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok for business purposes. Doris’s initiative in embracing modern marketing techniques exemplifies how artisans can transition into successful entrepreneurs by utilizing available resources and training.

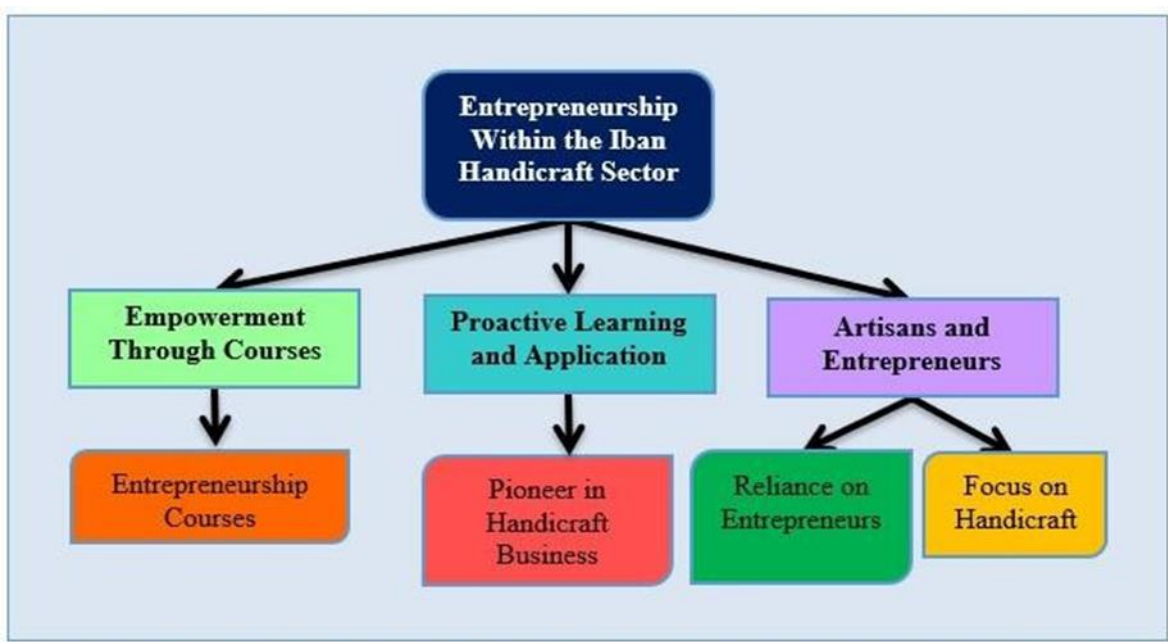


Figure 5-2 Entrepreneurship within the Iban handicrafts sector (Source: Author)

5.4 Practical Experience Versus Formal Training

The dialogue on practical experience versus formal training among the artisans reveals a spectrum of approaches and opinions. Mr. Reynald advocates for a hybrid approach that balances traditional craftsmanship with modern efficiency. He suggests using machines

for material preparation while ensuring the final product remains handcrafted to preserve cultural values.

Helena and Dickson highlighted the importance of direct interaction through bazaars and shops. Helena finds bazaars beneficial for showcasing unique products directly to customers, while Dickson notes his shop at the Waterfront is more profitable due to his direct involvement. Doris emphasizes the value of formal training, having attended workshops that taught her to utilize social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok for marketing purposes.

Oshin, on the other hand, relies more on her natural aptitude for marketing and business rather than formal courses, reflecting a preference for experiential learning. Madam Janet discusses the reliance of artisans on middlemen or entrepreneurs for selling their products, pointing to a gap in direct selling skills among artisans. Angelia and Helena highlight the importance of explaining the cultural significance behind their designs, indicating a blend of practical storytelling and formal understanding of their craft. Cathrine argues for preserving cultural values and maintaining the authenticity of goods without excessive modernization, underscoring the importance of traditional knowledge.

Overall, the artisans exhibit a mix of practical experience and formal training, with many leaning towards hands-on learning and direct engagement, while recognizing the benefits of structured education in enhancing their business acumen and preserving cultural heritage.

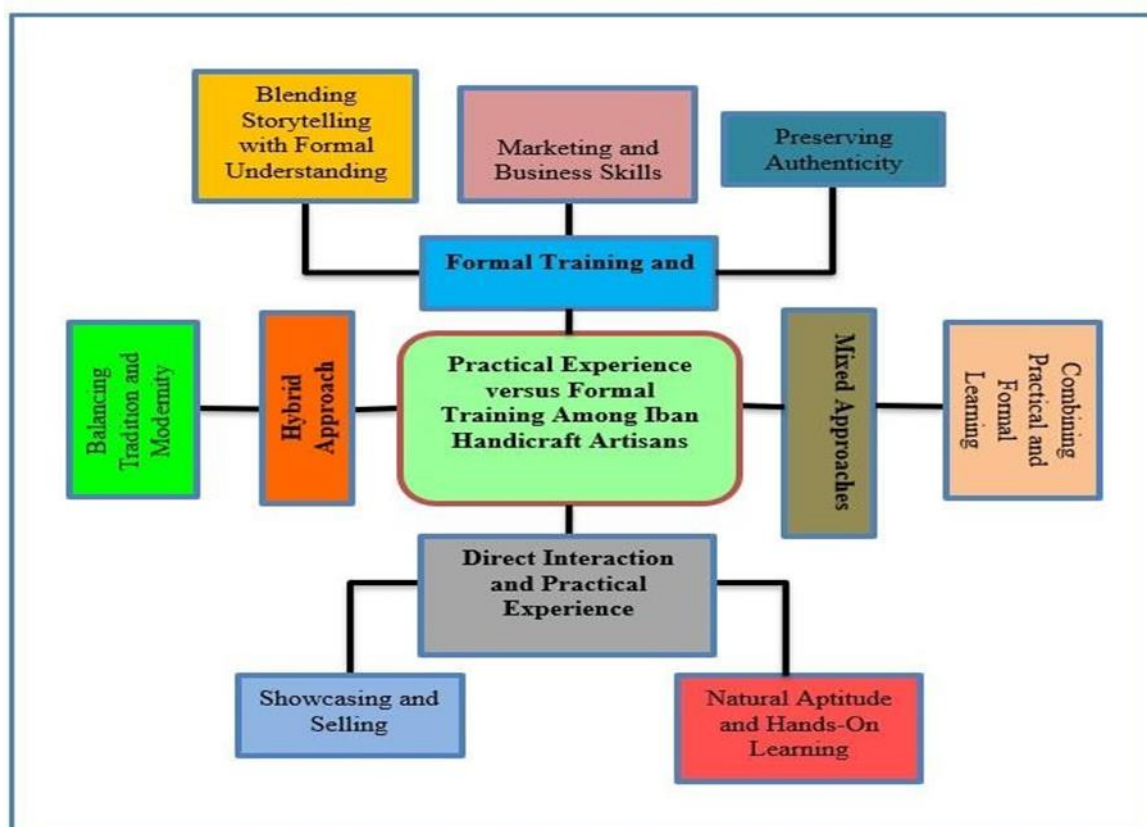


Figure 5-3 Practical experience versus formal training among Iban handicraft artisans
(Source: Author)

5.5 Government Support Gaps – Structural Causes

That Impede the Comprehensive Development of artisans in Malaysia Government support plays a crucial role in sustaining and promoting the handicraft industry in Malaysia. While various initiatives and assistance programs exist, many artisans continue to face significant challenges in accessing adequate funding, training, and infrastructure. This section explores specific areas where government support falls short, focusing on the financial struggles of artisans, gaps in training and skill development, and the lack of consistent market access opportunities. By examining real experiences and perspectives from artisans, this study highlights the strengths and weaknesses of existing government initiatives and identifies areas for improvement to ensure the long-term viability of the handicraft sector.

5.6 Comparative Study: Challenges of Iban Handicrafts Towards the Economy in the Iban Community

The Iban community, primarily residing in Sarawak, Malaysia, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, particularly in traditional handicrafts such as Pua Kumbu (woven textiles), basketry, beadwork, and woodcarvings. These handicrafts hold significant cultural value but also contribute to the local economy. However, several challenges hinder their full economic potential. This study compares these challenges across different dimensions.

5.6.1 Comparative Analysis of Challenges

A. Economic Contribution vs. Market Limitations

Table 5-1 Comparative Study: Challenges of Iban Handicrafts Towards the Economy in the Iban Community (Economic Contribution vs. Market Limitations) (Source: Author)

Aspect	Positive Economic Impact	Challenges
Income Generation	Provides livelihood for rural artisans, especially women.	Low income due to undervaluation of handmade products.
Tourism Potential	Attracts cultural tourism, boosting local businesses.	Lack of marketing and global exposure limits sales.
Export Potential	High demand in niche international markets (e.g., Japan, Europe).	Logistical and certification barriers hinder exports.

B. Traditional Craftsmanship vs. Modernization

Table 5-2 Comparative Study: Challenges of Iban Handicrafts Towards the Economy in the Iban Community (Traditional Craftsmanship vs. Modernization) (Source: Author)

Aspect	Preservation of Tradition	Modern Challenges
Skill Transmission	Elders pass down techniques to younger generations.	Youth disinterest leads to declining craftsmanship.
Production Methods	Handmade authenticity increases cultural value.	Competition with cheaper, mass-produced imitations.
Design Innovation	Traditional motifs maintain cultural identity.	Difficulty in adapting to contemporary market trends.

C. Government and NGO Support vs. Sustainability Issues

Table 5-3 Comparative Study: Challenges of Iban Handicrafts Towards the Economy in the Iban Community (Government and NGO Support vs. Sustainability Issues) (Source: Author)

Aspect	Support Initiatives	Existing Gaps
Funding and Training	NGOs provide workshops and financial aid.	Insufficient long-term funding for artisans.
Digital Promotion	E-commerce platforms help reach wider markets.	Many rural artisans lack digital literacy.
Policy Implementation	Government policies aim to preserve heritage crafts.	Weak enforcement and lack of infrastructure in remote areas.

5.7 Case Study Comparisons

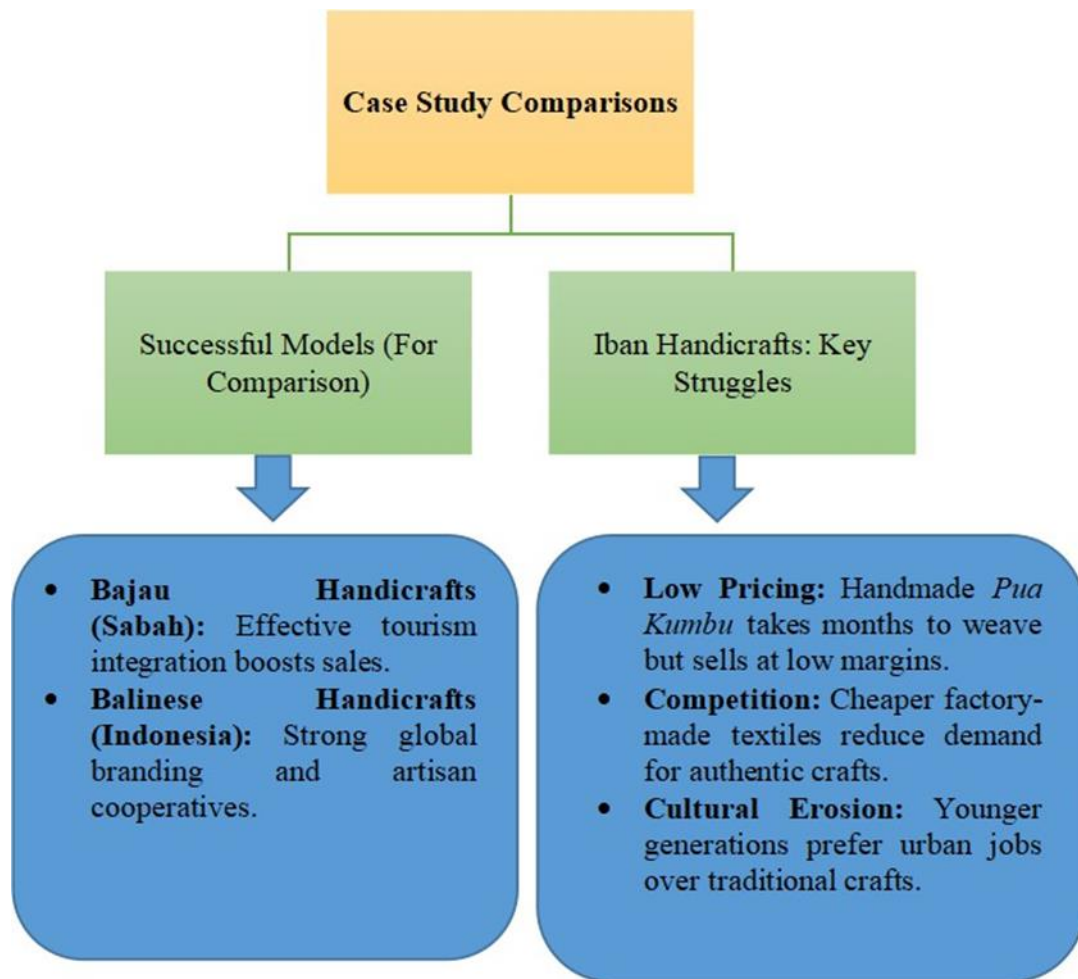


Figure 5-4 Study Comparisons (Source: Author)

As shown in Figure 4.21, while both Iban and Bidayuh artisans face constraints in raw material supply and market access, the nature of these challenges differs. Iban artisans' dependence on cotton and natural dyes creates high production costs (Tingi & Tugang, 2021), whereas Bidayuh artisans are more reliant on bamboo and rattan, making them vulnerable to seasonal shortages (Othman et al., 2024). Market access also diverges: Bidayuh crafts are often promoted through eco-tourism programs in rural communities, while Iban artisans are more visible in state-organised craft festivals (Ling, 2023b). These contrasts

underline the importance of tailoring policy interventions to each community's cultural and material context.

5.8 Examining the Specific Areas of Insufficient Government Support That Impedethe Comprehensive Development of artisans in Malaysia

Government support plays a crucial role in sustaining and promoting the handicraft industry in Malaysia. While various initiatives and assistance programs exist, many artisans continue to face significant challenges in accessing adequate funding, training, and infrastructure. This section explores specific areas where government support falls short, focusing on the financial struggles of artisans, gaps in training and skill development, and the lack of consistent market access opportunities. By examining real experiences and perspectives from artisans, this study highlights the strengths and weaknesses of existing government initiatives and identifies areas for improvement to ensure the long-term viability of the handicraft sector.

5.8.1 Funding and Financial Assistance

Funding and financial assistance for artisans in Malaysia exhibit a range of experiences, highlighting both support and challenges. Madam Janet noted that artisans receive aid from the Sarawak Dayak National Union (SDNU) and the state government, as well as from private designers, but emphasized the need for more marketing training. Mr. Naquidin mentioned the existence of digital marketing apps Like "My craft" app which was made to help the artisans sell their products and the benefits of direct selling at events. Mr. Reynald and Mr. Tan pointed out that artisans heavily depend on government support for materials, marketing, and promotion, often relying entirely on these resources. Angelia shared that the government provides free booths and supplies for bead-making, while Madam Helena receives sponsorships from organizations like the Sarawak Craft Council

(SCC) to attend international events. However, Lucile had to promote her Handicrafts alone initially due to a lack of support. Suzana expressed the need for more substantial support, such as expensive sewing machines to expand their product range. Doris acknowledged government support through events that provide platforms for entrepreneurs, while Engga highlighted the high cost of materials and difficulty finding customers without sponsorship from Sarawak Energy. Finally, Nipek shared the challenge of frequently having government assistance requests rejected, forcing her to manage independently. These experiences underline the crucial role of financial assistance in the development of artisans, while also revealing significant gaps and inconsistencies in the support provided.

5.8.2 Market Access and Promotion

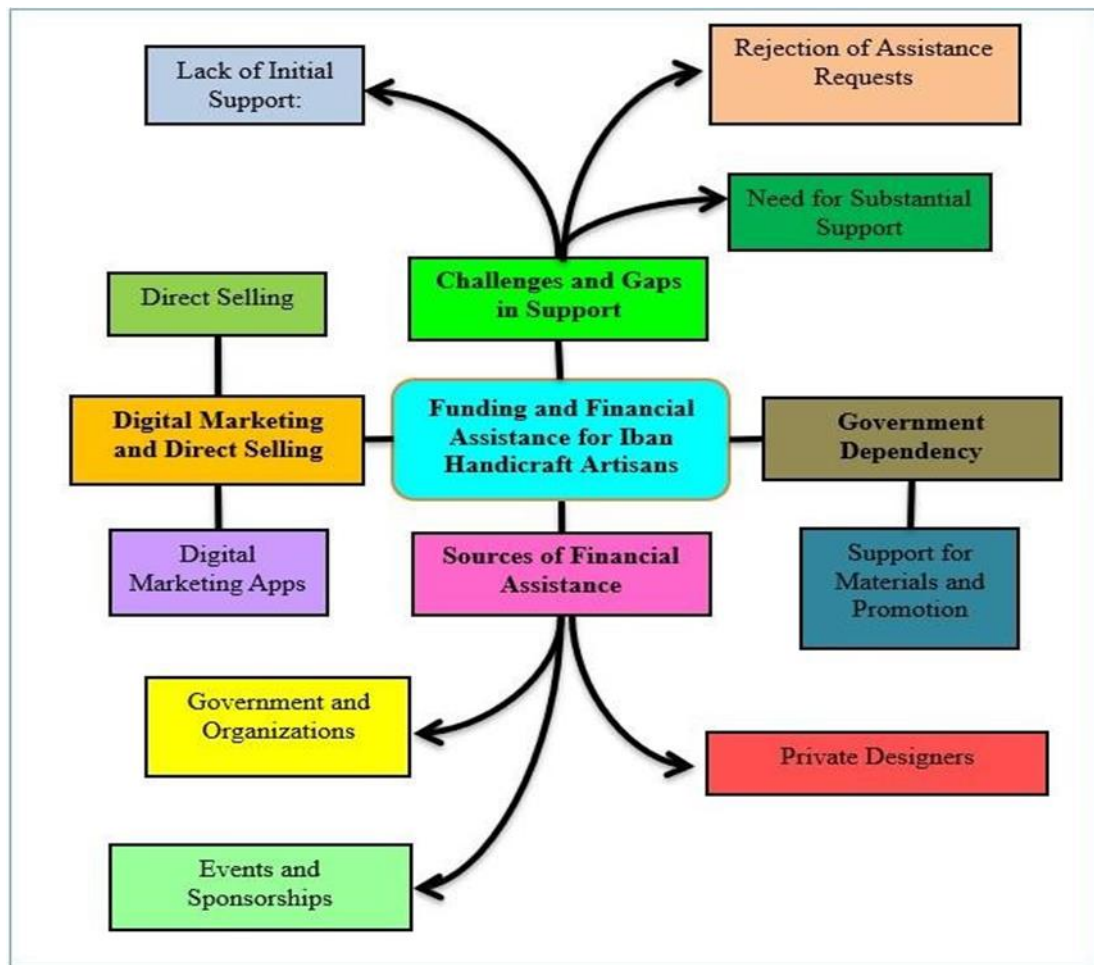


Figure 5-5 Funding and financial assistance for Iban handicraft artisans (Source: Author)

Market access and promotion for Malaysian artisans involve various strategies and support systems. Mr. Naquidin discussed the government's efforts to enhance the visibility of artisans, such as organizing major events like the Hari Kraftangan Kebangsaan (HKK) in Kuala Lumpur and leveraging social media, television, and newspapers for marketing. He emphasized the importance of training artisans not only in crafting but also in business skills, allowing them to manage their enterprises independently. Additionally, the government helps with procuring tools necessary for production, such as glazing equipment for ceramics.

Mr. Reynald highlighted the effectiveness of social media in promoting Handicrafts and the added value of educating customers about the cultural significance of the products. He also mentioned that promoting Iban culture through traditional dances and activities, as well as continuous promotion beyond festivals like Gawai, is beneficial.

Mr. Tan mentioned that the government facilitates market access by collecting products from remote areas and selling them in more accessible locations. Helena and Suzana pointed out that organizations like the Sarawak Craft Council and Malaysia Handicraft are instrumental in teaching artisans how to promote their work. Dickson noted the role of motivational talks and workshops in supporting artisans. Doris shared that government-sponsored events provide essential platforms for artisans to showcase and sell their Handicrafts, contributing to their income. She also emphasized that social media marketing helps boost awareness and makes products known to more people. Madam Janet noted the role of the Sarawak Dayak National Union (SDNU) and private designers in promoting Handicrafts and emphasized the growing awareness through social media. Overall, these efforts collectively aim to improve market access and promotion for Malaysian artisans, helping them achieve greater commercial success.

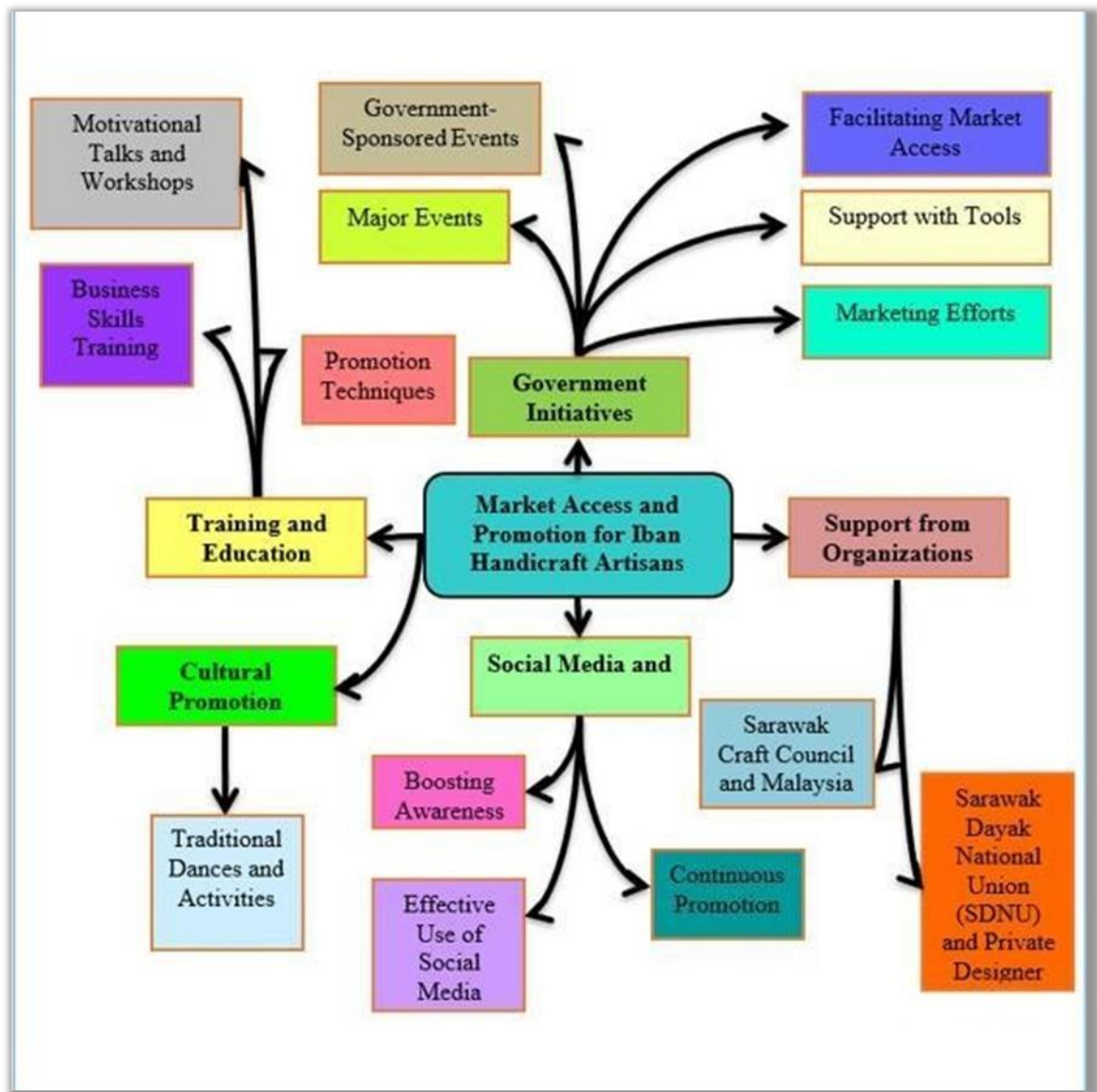


Figure 5-6 Market access and promotion for Iban handicrafts artisans (Source: Author)

5.8.3 Training and Skills Development

Training and skill development for artisans in Malaysia involve a combination of basic instruction, community-based programs, and digital marketing education. Madam Janet highlighted the initial training provided, emphasizing the potential for artisans to leverage social media for income. Mr. Naquidin detailed the comprehensive training offered by Malaysia handicraft, covering the entire process from crafting to selling products, and

emphasized the importance of teaching artisans how to market their creations. Mr. Reynald discussed collaborations with schools to engage youth and the necessity of new trainers for effective programs. He also mentioned planned business and entrepreneurship courses to create sustainable production systems. Angelia and Helena shared their experiences with classes and training from NGOs and the Sarawak Craft Council, respectively. Lucile noted participation in various programs by the Sarawak Craft Council and Malaysia Handicraft, learning both crafting and online business skills. Dickson mentioned workshops and motivational talks focused on crafting and online marketing. Doris emphasized the importance of workshops and training programs, noting the interest among young people. Engga, Ita Pantau, and Oshin highlighted a more self-taught approach, with some reluctance to engage in formal training due to personal responsibilities. Overall, the training landscape includes formal workshops, online programs, and community initiatives aimed at enhancing the skills and business acumen of artisans in Sarawak.

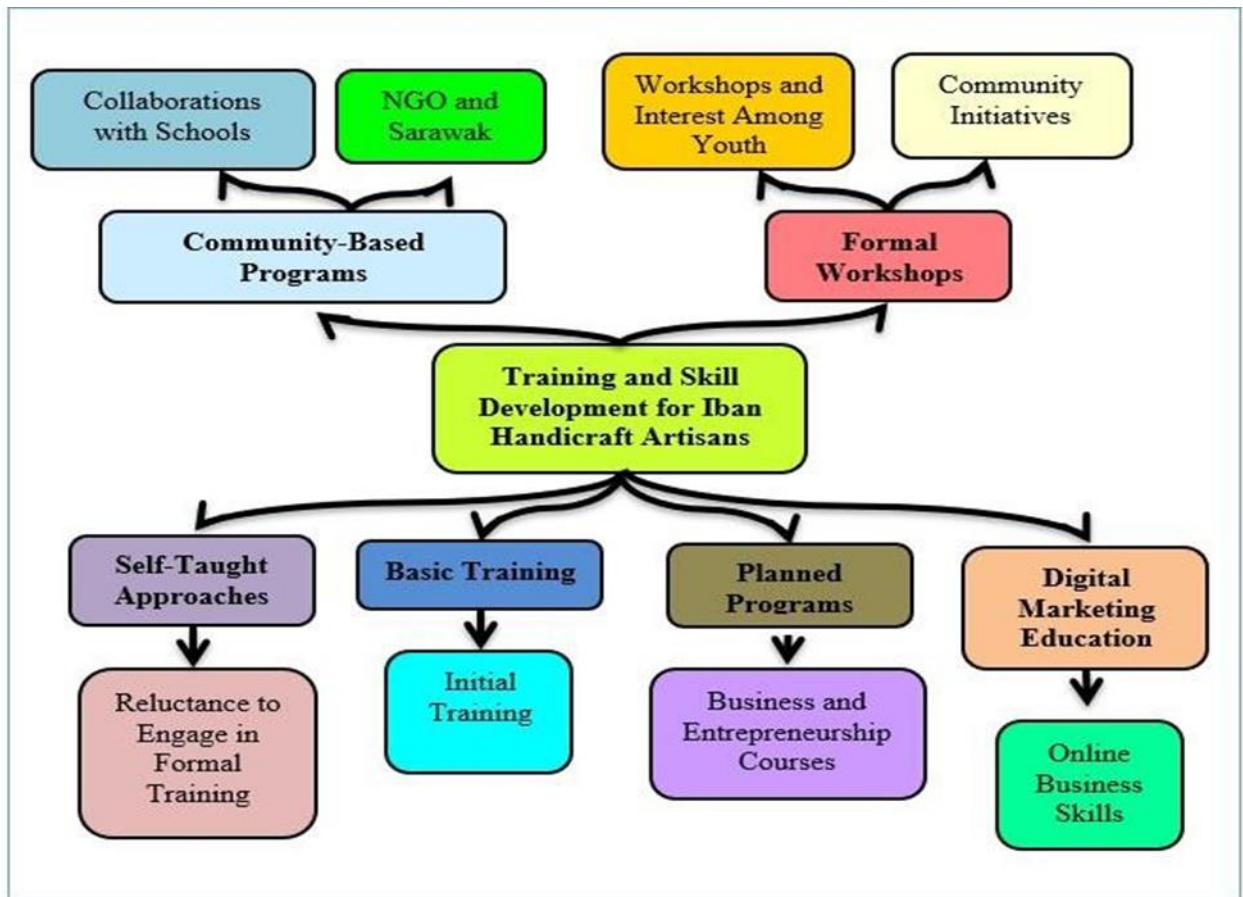


Figure 5-7 Training and skill development for Iban handicraft artisans (Source: Author)

5.8.4 Infrastructure and Facilities

Infrastructure and facilities play a crucial role in supporting artisans in Malaysia. Angelia noted the government's provision of free booths and necessary equipment like cane firing for beads, which significantly aids artisans. Suzana highlighted the need for specific machinery, such as a side sewing machine, which is often too expensive for individual artisans to purchase. She stressed that access to such equipment would allow artisans to expand their product range and increase production. Dickson mentioned his affiliation with the Sarawak Craft Council and Malaysia Handicraft, organizations that provide essential infrastructure and support. Doris shared her experience of joining various workshops and registering with Malaysia Handicrafts and the Malaysia Handicraft Community, which

helped her transition back into the handicraft business. Ita Pantau and Lengidi also emphasized their registrations with significant organizations like the Sarawak Craft Council and Malaysia Handicraft (Kraftangan Malaysia), indicating the importance of formal affiliations in accessing resources and facilities. These insights underscore the necessity for accessible infrastructure and facilities to empower artisans, enhance their productivity, and enable business growth.

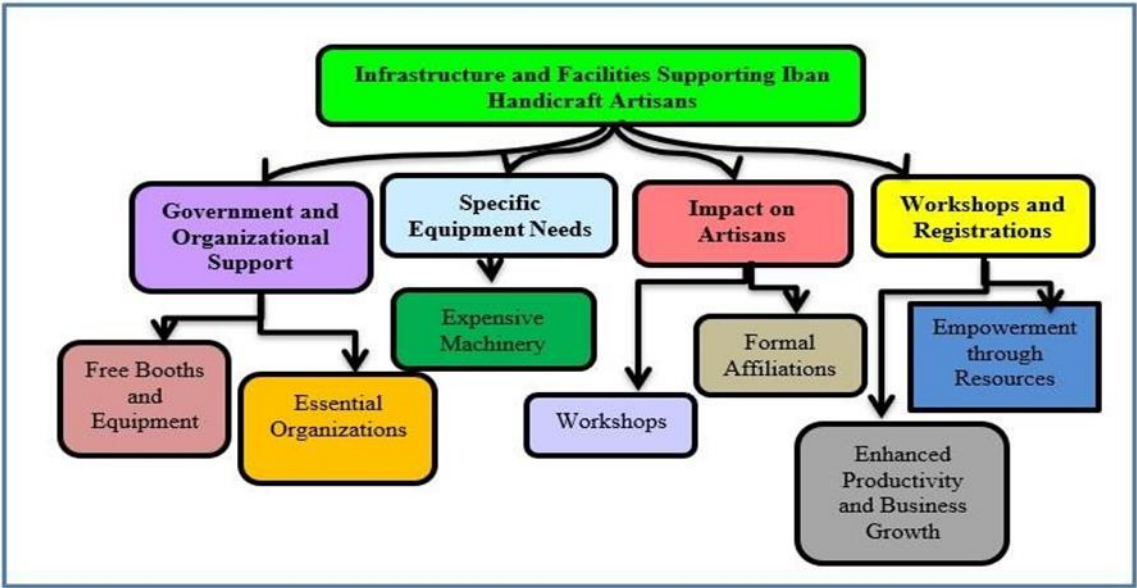


Figure 5-8 Infrastructure and facilities supporting artisans in Sarawak (Source: Author)

5.8.5 Policy Impact Assessment: Evaluating Past Government Initiatives

The Sarawak Craft Council (SCC) and related government bodies such as the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation (Kraftangan Malaysia) have introduced multiple initiatives aimed at promoting indigenous crafts. These include the annual Sarawak Craft Festival, training workshops in entrepreneurship and product innovation, and exhibition opportunities both within Sarawak and at the national level. Such programs have undoubtedly increased public awareness of Iban and other indigenous crafts, providing artisans with platforms to access new audiences and tourist markets (Ling, 2023).

Despite these achievements, the long-term impact of these initiatives remains uneven. Firstly, participation in government-sponsored exhibitions often benefits artisans located in urban centres such as Kuching or Miri, while rural artisans struggle with transportation costs and limited access to information about these programs.

Secondly, although short-term exposure during festivals has resulted in improved sales, many artisans lack follow-up support to maintain consistent market demand after such events (Gapor et al., 2019). This highlights a critical gap between promotional visibility and sustainable income generation.

Moreover, while SCC workshops on business skills and digital marketing have been introduced, the outreach of such training remains limited, with most artisans reporting that they rely on informal learning or peer support rather than structured government training (Tingi & Tugang, 2021). Similarly, financial assistance programs, while available, are often perceived as insufficient and bureaucratically difficult to access, particularly for small-scale artisans with limited literacy or digital access (Hasan et al., 2011).

Overall, the assessment of these initiatives suggests that although government programs contribute positively to the cultural promotion of handicrafts, their effectiveness in ensuring long-term sustainability remains limited. A more holistic approach is required—one that integrates continuous financial support, raw material subsidies, digital mentorship, and rural outreach—to ensure equitable benefits across artisan communities.

Table 5-4 Assessment of Key Sarawak Craft Council (SCC) Initiatives (Source: Author)

Initiative	Objectives	Positive Outcomes	Limitations / Challenges
Sarawak Craft Festival (Hari Kraf)	Promote local handicrafts to tourists and urban consumers (Ling, 2023).	Increased visibility and short-term sales for participating artisans (Ling, 2023).	Benefits concentrated in urban centres; rural artisans face high travel costs and limited participation (Gapor et al., 2019).
Training Workshops (Entrepreneurship, Product Innovation, Digital Marketing) <i>(Government-sponsored)</i>	Enhance artisans' business acumen and modernize craft practices (Tingi & Tugang, 2021).	Some artisans gained basic knowledge in pricing, branding, and digital outreach (Tingi & Tugang, 2021).	Limited outreach; many rural artisans lack awareness or access to training; insufficient follow-up support (Hasan et al., 2011).
Exhibitions and Bazaars (Kraftangan Malaysia, 2022)	Provide platforms for artisans to access larger markets, including international buyers; opportunities for networking (Ling, 2023).	Exposure to domestic and international markets; potential for business linkages (Ling, 2023).	Temporary exposure without long-term market mentorship or structured follow-up after events (Gapor et al., 2019).
Financial Assistance Programs (Grants / Loans)	Support artisans with funding for production and marketing (Hasan et al., 2011).	Some artisans accessed small grants to expand craft activities (Ling, 2023).	Bureaucratic barriers, limited accessibility, and insufficient funds for sustainable development (Tingi & Tugang, 2021).

5.8.6 Evaluation of SCC Initiatives

As summarized in Table 5.4, the initiatives undertaken by the Sarawak Craft Council and related agencies have provided important platforms for the promotion of indigenous handicrafts. Programs such as the Sarawak Craft Festival and government-sponsored exhibitions have successfully increased visibility for artisans, while training workshops and small financial assistance schemes have offered some opportunities for capacity building

(Ling, 2023; Kraftangan Malaysia, 2022). However, the overall assessment reveals that these initiatives are largely fragmented and short-term in nature. Many benefits remain concentrated in urban areas, excluding rural artisans who face logistical and financial constraints in accessing these opportunities (Gapor et al., 2019). Furthermore, while workshops contribute to raising awareness of entrepreneurial skills, they often lack sustained mentorship or follow-up mechanisms to ensure long-term learning and application (Tingi & Tugang, 2021). Financial schemes, though available, are similarly constrained by bureaucratic procedures and limited outreach (Hasan et al., 2011). Collectively, these gaps highlight the need for a more comprehensive and inclusive policy framework that not only promotes handicrafts as cultural symbols but also ensures equitable and sustainable economic empowerment for artisans across Sarawak.

5.9 The Future of Iban Handicrafts: Engaging the Next Generation

The sustainability of Iban handicrafts depends heavily on the involvement of the younger generation, which is currently at risk due to declining interest.

5.9.1 Declining Interest and the Need for Modernization

Several informants, including Mr. Reynald and Doris, noted that many young people are moving away from traditional crafts in favour of more stable jobs. This trend threatens the continuity of these cultural practices. Maria and Mr. Naquidin emphasized the importance of modernizing traditional crafts to make them more appealing to the youth, such as by integrating contemporary designs and utilizing digital marketing.

5.9.2 Successful Youth Engagement and the Path Forward

Despite the challenges, there are successful examples, like Oshin, who has effectively used platforms like TikTok to market her products, demonstrating the potential to engage

the younger generation with the right support. Informants suggested that targeted training programs and workshops could help bridge the gap between traditional practices and modern expectations, making handicrafts a viable career option for the youth.

5.9.3 Barriers to Youth Participation

Several artisans, including Mr. Naquidin and Doris, pointed out specific barriers that deter young people from entering the handicraft industry. These include the perception of handicrafts as a low-income career, the lack of modern tools and training, and the absence of clear career progression in this field. Addressing these barriers is essential to attract and retain younger artisans, ensuring the continuity of Iban handicrafts.

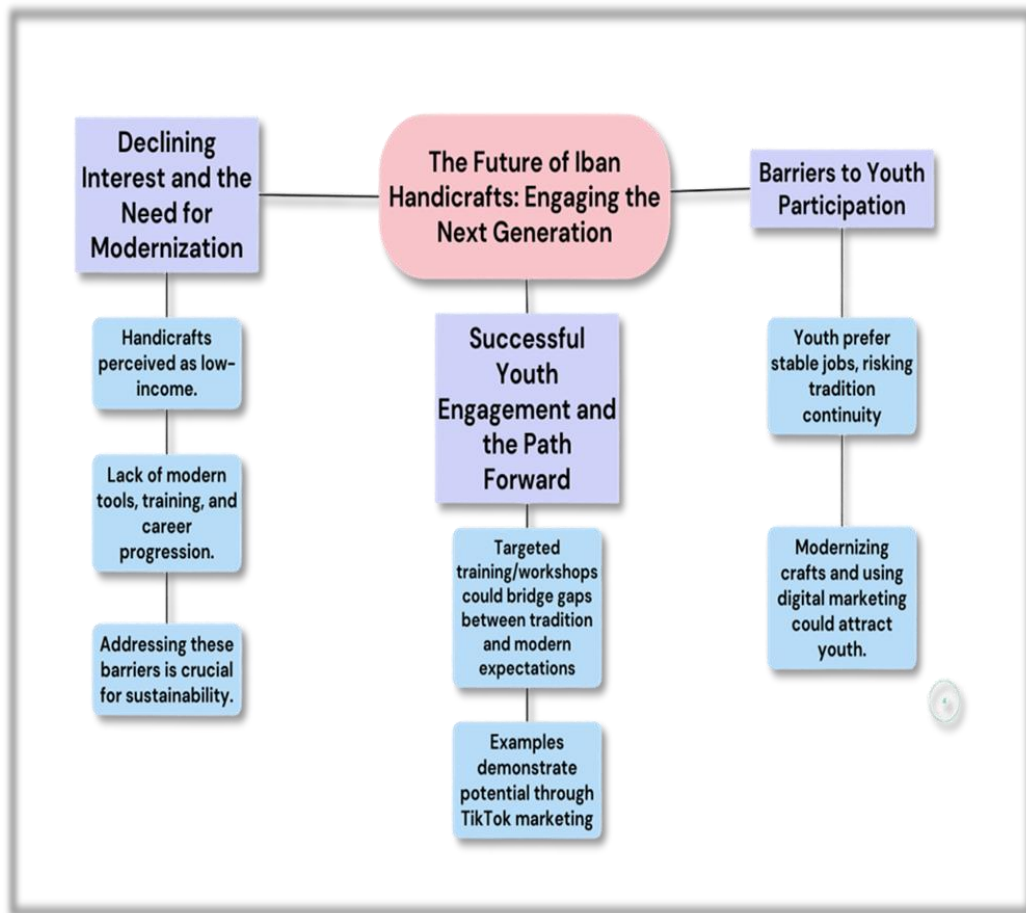


Figure 5-9 The future of Iban handicrafts: Engaging the next generation

5.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined the underlying causes contributing to the decline and stagnation of the Iban handicraft market in Sarawak. Through in-depth analysis of structural constraints, market dynamics, capacity limitations, and cultural factors, it becomes evident that the industry faces multifaceted challenges that require urgent attention. The findings reveal critical gaps in government support systems, particularly in funding distribution,

market access facilitation, and skills development programs. Additionally, the generational shift in occupational preferences poses a significant threat to the continuity of traditional craftsmanship. While some artisans demonstrate resilience through collaborative efforts and adaptation to modern market demands, systemic interventions are needed to

address the root causes of stagnation. These insights lay crucial groundwork for understanding how these market challenges directly impact the economic wellbeing of Iban artisans, which will be explored in the subsequent chapter. The preservation and revitalization of this cultural heritage industry will depend on strategic policies that bridge traditional craftsmanship with contemporary economic realities.

CHAPTER 6

HIGHLIGHT ECONOMIC CHALLENGES AFFECT THE LIVELIHOOD AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY OF THE IBAN COMMUNITY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

6.1 Impacts on the Livelihood and Sustainability

The Iban handicrafts sector faces numerous obstacles that threaten its sustainability and growth. These challenges, rooted in economic, cultural, and generational issues, hinder artisans' ability to thrive in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Below, the key challenges are categorized to provide a comprehensive understanding of the barriers impacting the industry:

6.1.1 Economic Barriers

The sustainability of the Iban handicraft industry is heavily influenced by economic challenges that hinder artisans' ability to grow their businesses and compete effectively in the market. Limited financial support, high production costs, and competition from massproduced imports create significant obstacles for local craftsmen. Additionally, restricted market access, insufficient promotional efforts, and a lack of business and digital marketing skills further limit their reach and revenue potential. This section examines these economic barriers in detail, highlighting the key financial and market-related struggles that artisans face and their impact on the overall sustainability of the industry.

a. Limited Financial Support

Artisans face inadequate funding for materials, advanced equipment, and marketing initiatives.

b. High Production Costs

Expensive materials and equipment hinder artisans' ability to produce competitively priced goods.

c. Market Competition

Low-cost, mass-produced imports dominate the market, reducing demand for handcrafted Iban products.

d. Market Access and Promotion

Limited distribution channels, inadequate marketing strategies, and low digital adoption hinder artisans' ability to reach broader markets and compete effectively.

e. Limited Reach

Reliance on local markets restricts artisans' sales and growth potential.

f. Lack of Digital Integration

Few artisans utilize digital marketing or online sales platforms to reach broader audiences.

g. Insufficient Business Skills

Artisans often lack formal training in marketing, financial management, and strategic planning, further restricting market access.

6.1.2 Generational Sustainability

The declining interest among youth, coupled with an aging artisan population, threatens the transmission of traditional skills and the long-term survival of the Iban handicraft industry.

a. Youth Disinterest

Younger generations view handicraft work as financially unviable, favouring modern professions instead.

b. Cultural Gap

The lack of interest among youth jeopardizes the transmission of traditional skills and knowledge.

c. Aging Artisan Population

Without younger apprentices, the industry's continuity is under threat.

6.1.3 Government Support Gaps

As discussed in Chapter 5, insufficient government support in the handicraft sector has far-reaching implications for the livelihoods of Iban artisans. Inadequate financial aid limits artisans' capacity to invest in quality materials, upgrade production equipment, or diversify their product lines. Gaps in training — particularly in modern business practices, digital marketing, and entrepreneurship — reduce their competitiveness in a market increasingly dominated by low-cost imports. Insufficient Funding.

a. Insufficient Funding

Existing financial assistance does not meet the comprehensive needs of artisans, resulting in reduced output, compromised quality, and limited product variety.

b. Training Deficiencies

Current programs lack focus on skills aligned with evolving market demands, leaving artisans unprepared to adapt or expand their reach.

c. Limited Promotion Initiatives

Efforts to showcase handicrafts, though present, fail to secure consistent market access, which in turn disrupts income stability.

d. Targeted Support for Women

Women artisans, often custodians of traditional designs, face additional challenges due to household responsibilities and restricted access to financial and training resources.

e. Policy Coordination Gaps

Fragmented initiatives and limited coordination between government agencies weaken the long-term integration of handicrafts into Sarawak's broader economic and cultural development strategies.

These challenges not only undermine artisans' current income and economic stability but also pose a threat to cultural preservation, as younger generations may view handicrafts as an unviable career path.

6.1.4 Cultural Sustainability Risks

The declining practice of Iban handicrafts poses a threat to cultural preservation, weakening traditional knowledge, artistic heritage, and community identity.

a. Loss of Heritage

The decline in handicraft production threatens the preservation of cultural narratives, knowledge, and artistic expression embedded in Iban crafts.

b. Community Impact

The erosion of the handicraft industry could diminish cultural identity and economic opportunities for the Iban community.

6.1.5 Research and Logistical Challenges

Conducting research and providing support for Iban artisans are hindered by geographical isolation and cultural complexities, making data collection, communication, and outreach efforts more challenging.

a. Geographic Remoteness

Accessing remote artisan communities complicates data collection and support efforts.

b. Cultural Nuances

Capturing and interpreting the subtleties of the Iban language and traditions is challenging for effective communication and promotion.

Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts among government bodies, local organizations, and the artisans themselves to ensure economic viability, cultural preservation, and generational continuity.

6.2 Additional Findings

Although not a primary focus of this study, the interviews revealed that women are the cornerstone of the Iban handicraft industry. They are primarily responsible for preserving traditional techniques and cultural knowledge, which are passed down through generations and contributing to the local economy.

6.2.1 The Role of Women in the Iban Handicrafts Industry

The interviews revealed that women are the backbone of the Iban handicraft industry, playing a crucial role in both preserving traditional techniques and contributing to the local economy:

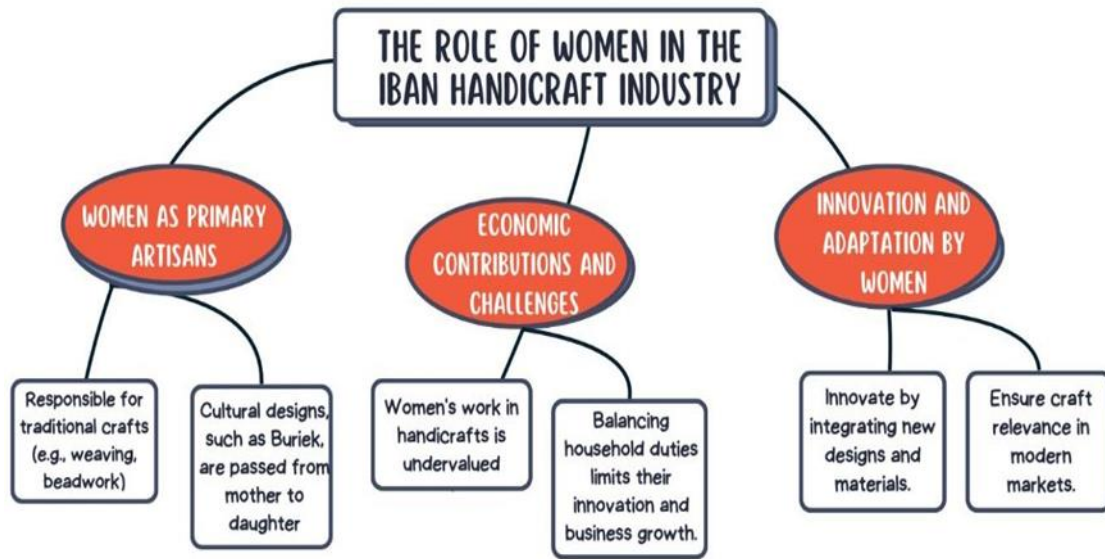


Figure 6-1 The role of women in the Iban handicrafts industry (Source: Author)

6.2.2 Women as Primary Artisans

Women are primarily responsible for the creation of traditional handicrafts, such as weaving and beadwork. Suzana highlighted that without the active involvement of women, many of these traditional practices would have disappeared. Doris also emphasized the cultural significance of traditional designs like Buriek, which are passed down through generations, primarily from mother to daughter.

6.2.3 Economic Contributions and Challenges

Despite their significant contributions, women artisans face various challenges. Angelia discussed the economic importance of women's work in this sector, noting that their efforts often go undervalued. Lucile pointed out that balancing household responsibilities with craftwork limits women's ability to innovate and grow their businesses, posing a barrier to the industry's development.

6.2.4 Innovation and Adaptation by Women

Women have also been at the forefront of adapting traditional practices to meet modern demands. Maria noted that women artisans often innovate by incorporating new designs and materials, which helps keep the crafts relevant in a changing market. This ability to adapt is crucial for the survival of these traditions in a rapidly modernizing world.

6.3 Conclusion

The Iban handicraft sector in Sarawak stands as both a significant cultural heritage and a potential driver of local economic growth. However, as this study highlights, several critical challenges threaten its sustainability. Primarily, artisans face economic barriers stemming from limited financial support, high production costs, and competition from low-cost, mass-produced imports. These issues make it challenging for Iban handicrafts to compete with cheaper alternatives in the marketplace, reducing demand for locally crafted products and threatening artisans' livelihoods. Additionally, the limited government funding available often falls short in addressing the multifaceted needs of artisans, who require not only financial assistance but also infrastructure, training, and market access to thrive.

Market access remains a crucial area of concern, with Iban artisans struggling to reach broader audiences due to a lack of effective promotion and competition from imported goods. The reliance on local markets restricts artisans' ability to scale, and without exposure to larger, more profitable markets, their products often remain undervalued.

Additionally, the absence of digital marketing strategies and online sales channels further limits their customer base. This situation is exacerbated by artisans' general lack of business acumen, which hinders their ability to engage in effective marketing, financial planning, and long-term strategic management. Artisans, despite their craftsmanship skills,

often lack formal training in essential business practices, making it difficult to adapt to market demands or capitalize on new opportunities. As such, artisans face significant obstacles in effectively pricing, managing, and promoting their work, which prevents them from achieving the financial sustainability necessary for long-term success.

The generational sustainability of the handicraft industry is also at risk, with younger generations increasingly disinterested in traditional crafts as viable career paths. Younger community members tend to perceive handicraft work as financially unsustainable, especially when compared to more modern professions. This disinterest creates a cultural gap that endangers the continuity of Iban handicrafts. If the youth remain disengaged, traditional knowledge, skills, and stories embedded in Iban handicrafts may be lost over time. The aging artisan population, coupled with a lack of younger apprentices, poses a serious threat to the industry's long-term survival, as fewer individuals carry forward the skills and cultural heritage associated with Iban crafts.

These challenges underscore the broader cultural implications of supporting the Iban handicraft sector. Beyond their economic potential, Iban handicrafts hold significant cultural value as symbols of Iban heritage and identity. Each piece embodies cultural narratives, traditional knowledge, and artistic expressions that have been passed down through generations. Therefore, preserving the Iban handicraft industry is not merely about economic sustenance but also about safeguarding cultural identity. If left unaddressed, the erosion of the handicraft industry could result in the loss of these unique cultural expressions, impacting not only the artisans but also the wider Iban community and the cultural richness of Sarawak as a whole.

This research highlights the potential for Iban handicrafts to contribute to Sarawak's economy and tourism if supported effectively. The economic value of handicrafts is evident

in their capacity to provide rural employment and generate income. With appropriate government support and strategic marketing, the handicraft industry could attract both local and international consumers, bolstering the economy and increasing artisans' income stability. Furthermore, enhancing the visibility of Iban handicrafts could contribute to Sarawak's appeal as a cultural tourism destination, drawing visitors interested in experiencing and purchasing authentic, handmade products. However, achieving this potential requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both economic and cultural dimensions of sustainability.

Although this research has provided valuable insights, certain limitations warrant consideration. First, accessing informants was challenging, particularly given the geographic remoteness of many artisan communities and the difficulties in coordinating interviews. Additionally, translating and interpreting culturally nuanced information proved complex, especially when capturing the subtleties of the Iban language and dialects used in interviews. These limitations, while managed to the best extent possible, suggest areas for further investigation. Future studies could explore digital integration within the handicraft industry, analyzing the effectiveness of online platforms in expanding market reach and assessing digital storytelling's role in preserving and promoting Iban culture.

In conclusion, this research emphasizes the need for collaborative action to support the Iban handicraft industry in Sarawak. Government agencies, local organizations, and artisans must work together to overcome economic barriers, enhance market access, and develop business skills among artisans. By addressing these challenges, stakeholders can help ensure that the Iban handicraft sector not only survives but thrives. This collective effort could lead to economic growth, increased cultural preservation, and a sustainable future for Iban artisans. With strategic investment, training, and a concerted focus on sustainability,

the Iban handicraft industry holds immense potential as a source of cultural pride, economic opportunity, and social cohesion.

Crucially, this study has shown that while cultural promotion initiatives exist, their fragmented and short-term nature has limited their effectiveness. Without structural reforms in policy, financial support, and rural outreach, the sector risks becoming further marginalized. Addressing these gaps is not only a matter of improving artisans' livelihoods but of protecting Sarawak's cultural economy from erosion.

Therefore, the survival of the Iban handicraft sector depends on recognising artisans not merely as cultural bearers but as key contributors to Malaysia's creative economy. By embedding handicraft development into broader economic and cultural policy, Sarawak has the opportunity to transform its indigenous heritage into a sustainable driver of inclusive growth. This, ultimately, is the strongest argument of the present study: that preserving Iban handicrafts is not only about the past but about shaping a resilient and culturally rich future.

6.4 Research Recommendations to Enhance Support for Artisans in Malaysia

The growth, sustainability, and international competitiveness of handicrafts in Malaysia rely heavily on effective market access, promotion strategies, and the establishment of comprehensive support systems. While existing initiatives by the government and craft organizations have laid important foundations, Malaysian artisans — particularly those from indigenous communities such as the Iban — continue to face significant challenges. These challenges include limited funding, insufficient infrastructure, outdated production equipment, rising costs of raw materials, restricted promotional opportunities, and a decline in youth participation in handicraft traditions.

Accordingly, it is essential that future policies and programs not only strengthen current measures but also introduce innovative, culturally sensitive, and economically viable solutions that address both immediate needs and long-term sustainability. The following recommendations are structured around key thematic areas of support: government involvement, infrastructure, access to equipment, market promotion, organizational roles, training and skills development, and targeted interventions to address the gaps.

6.4.1 Government Support

Government intervention remains critical in supporting the handicraft industry because it provides the structural framework, financial resources, and policy direction needed to ensure artisans are not marginalized within the wider economy. By investing strategically in infrastructure, equipment, promotional platforms, and training, government agencies can create an enabling environment that empowers artisans to innovate, expand, and sustain their livelihoods.

a. Infrastructure and Facilities

The Malaysian government has traditionally supported artisans by offering free stalls at cultural fairs and handicraft exhibitions. This initiative significantly reduces operational costs and provides artisans with exposure to local and international buyers. However, its impact is constrained by the seasonal and event-based nature of these opportunities.

A forward-looking alternative would be the establishment of rotating “Handicraft Corners” in supermarkets and hypermarkets, where a dedicated space showcases the work of local artisans on a monthly basis. Unlike cultural fairs that attract niche audiences, supermarkets are part of everyday consumer routines. Integrating handicrafts into such spaces would normalize craft purchasing as part of household consumption, thereby

broadening market reach and embedding artisanal products within mainstream consumer behavior. This model would also ensure artisans benefit from year-round visibility rather than being dependent on occasional fairs.

b. Advanced Equipment

Access to modern tools and machinery is crucial for enhancing productivity, diversifying product ranges, and maintaining quality standards. Many artisans still rely on manual or outdated equipment, which restricts their capacity to innovate. For instance, the absence of side-stitching machines limits the ability to transform basic textiles into more complex products such as dresses or fashion accessories.

To address this, it is recommended that the government or related agencies establish equipment-sharing hubs in key regional centers. These hubs would function similarly to “makerspaces” found in urban innovation ecosystems, but they would be tailored to the specific needs of handicrafts. By pooling resources, artisans could access advanced tools without the prohibitive costs of individual ownership. This approach promotes inclusivity by allowing small-scale artisans, who often lack capital, to benefit from the same technological advancements as larger producers.

c. Market Access and Promotion

Market visibility is essential for sustaining artisan livelihoods. Events such as the Hari Kraftangan Kebangsaan (HKK) in Kuala Lumpur provide valuable exposure, enabling artisans to connect with domestic and international buyers. However, these events are infrequent and do not guarantee long-term consumer loyalty.

To supplement such initiatives, artisans could be supported in offering a Craft Warranty and Repair Service. This service would allow buyers to return damaged woven

baskets, mats, or textiles for low-cost or free repairs. Beyond serving as an added value to customers, this initiative would differentiate authentic Iban handicrafts from mass-produced imports, reinforcing their image as durable, sustainable, and culturally significant products. It would also maintain customer engagement after the initial purchase, increasing the likelihood of repeat business.

Moreover, while training in craft skills remains essential, there is a pressing need to complement it with business management and digital marketing training. As highlighted by several stakeholders, many artisans lack the skills to independently manage online platforms, brand their products, and access global markets. Government-supported training programs should therefore integrate entrepreneurial knowledge, e-commerce practices, and branding strategies, ensuring artisans can fully capitalize on digital opportunities.

d. The Role of Craft organizations

Craft organizations such as the Sarawak Craft Council (SCC) and Malaysia Kraftangan play a central role in providing artisans with workshops, training, and promotional opportunities. These institutions create important networks that help artisans transition from small-scale producers to recognized entrepreneurs.

However, artisans also face growing challenges related to raw material shortages and rising costs. A proposed long-term solution is the establishment of community- owned raw material farms, where longhouse communities collectively cultivate bamboo, rattan, and natural dye plants. Such initiatives would not only secure a steady and sustainable supply of essential resources but also help preserve indigenous plant species that are under threat. By reducing reliance on external suppliers, communities can become more self-reliant while simultaneously safeguarding the ecological and cultural foundations of their craft.

e. Training and Skills Development

Training remains a cornerstone of handicraft sustainability, but current programs are often limited in scope, focusing primarily on traditional techniques while neglecting modern entrepreneurial needs. Several enhancements are recommended:

- **Entrepreneurship and Digital Marketing:** Training should include modules on financial management, e-commerce, branding, and digital storytelling. These skills are essential for artisans to compete in both domestic and international markets.
- **Targeted Training for Women Artisans:** Women are often the custodians of traditional handicraft knowledge, yet they face additional barriers, including household responsibilities and limited resource access. Training programs tailored to women's circumstances — such as flexible scheduling, childcare support, and targeted business skills — would empower them to expand their economic participation while preserving cultural heritage.
- **Craft-for-Health Initiatives:** Handicraft training can be innovatively linked with health and community well-being. Collaborations with rural clinics or NGOs could promote handicraft workshops as tools for stress relief, therapy, and elderly care. This would create new income streams for artisans while positioning handicrafts as vehicles of cultural pride and holistic well-being, rather than solely as commercial commodities.

6.4.2 Addressing Gaps in Government and Institutional Support

While government initiatives have made strides in supporting the handicraft sector, significant gaps remain that hinder the industry's growth and sustainability. From inadequate funding to limited market access and the challenge of engaging younger generations, these

shortcomings highlight the need for more robust and targeted support systems. Below are specific areas where government assistance falls short and recommendations for improvement.

a. Funding and Financial Assistance

Artisans consistently report challenges in accessing sufficient funds for raw materials and equipment. To address this, the creation of an Artisan Development Fund is recommended. Such a fund could be structured around performance-based grants, where artisans who meet specified benchmarks in production, quality, or sales receive additional financial support. This approach would not only provide critical funding but also increase the innovation and accountability within the sector.

b. Market Access and Promotion Challenges

While cultural fairs and exhibitions increase visibility, they are not sufficient to address long-term marketing barriers, particularly in the digital space. Many artisans lack the resources and knowledge to invest in packaging, logistics, and online advertising. Cooperative marketing pools, modeled after successful agricultural cooperatives, could provide a solution. By pooling resources at the community or longhouse level, artisans could collectively manage e-commerce platforms, standardize packaging, and reduce shipping costs, thereby lowering individual burdens while enhancing collective competitiveness.

c. Engaging the Younger Generation

One of the most pressing challenges is the declining interest of youth in handicraft traditions. Without deliberate efforts, the intergenerational transmission of knowledge may be disrupted, threatening cultural continuity. Beyond scholarships and skill-based training, an innovative solution would be to develop Residency Programs in Longhouses, where

young Malaysians and international visitors live with artisans for extended periods. These residencies would allow participants to learn traditional techniques, contribute to production, and immerse themselves in community life. For local youth, this creates opportunities for skill acquisition and supplementary income. For international visitors, it offers an authentic cultural experience that could be integrated into tourism development strategies. Together, such programs ensure that artisanal skills are preserved, while simultaneously generating new streams of revenue for communities.

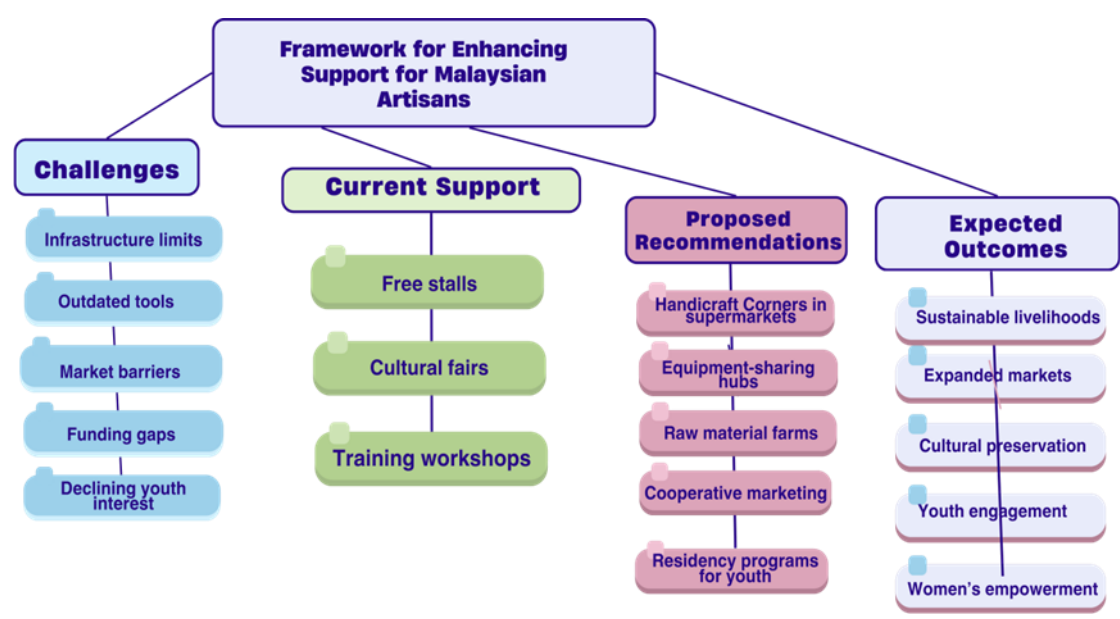


Figure 6-2 Conceptual Framework for Enhancing Support for Malaysian Artisans (Source: Author)

6.5 Research Recommendations

The challenges faced by Iban artisans in Sarawak, as identified in this study, require comprehensive and targeted solutions to address their economic, cultural, and generational dimensions. These recommendations aim to empower artisans, safeguard cultural heritage, and create sustainable economic opportunities. By leveraging government support, enhancing marketing capabilities, ensuring resource sustainability, and engaging younger

generations, these measures provide a strategic framework for overcoming the identified barriers.

Figure 6.2 below illustrates the Integrated Recommendation Framework for Artisans Empowerment (IRFAE), which consolidates key recommendations and provides suggested models for implementation. Each recommendation is supported with both theoretical justification and example models that could facilitate practical execution and long-term transformation of the handicraft sector.

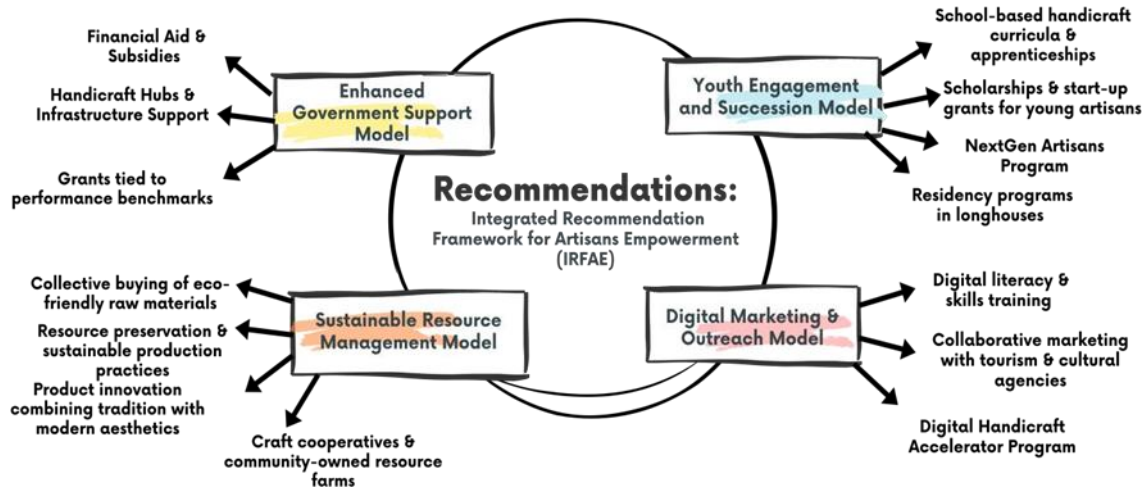


Figure 6-3 Integrated Recommendation Framework for Artisans Empowerment (IRFAE)
(Source: Author)

6.5.1 Enhanced Government Support Model

Government support must move beyond ad-hoc initiatives and adopt a structured system that provides continuous aid and accountability. A comprehensive support framework — including financial assistance, handicraft hubs, and performance-based grants — can empower artisans by improving access to resources, training, and market opportunities.

a. Increased Financial Aid

- A dedicated Artisan Development Fund should be established to subsidize the cost of raw materials and equipment.
- This fund could provide annual grants and subsidies, distributed based on production goals and craftsmanship quality.

b. Infrastructural Support

- The government should create handicraft hubs across key locations in Sarawak.

These hubs would function like small-scale innovation centers, providing artisans with advanced tools, collaborative workspaces, and shared marketing facilities.

- Beyond production, these hubs would also facilitate collective training in essential skills, offering a holistic ecosystem for artisans.

c. Example Model

- The Artisan Development Fund would support the purchase of machinery and raw materials, with grants tied to performance benchmarks.
- For instance, artisans who demonstrate specific levels of production or market reach would qualify for additional funding.
- This system promotes both accountability and scalability, ensuring that financial aid contributes directly to measurable outcomes.

6.5.2 Digital Marketing and Outreach Model

Artisans often lack the digital skills required to thrive in today's market.

Empowering them with structured training, collaborative marketing opportunities, and digital literacy can significantly enhance their online presence, expand their consumer base, and boost long-term sales.

a. Skills Training

- Digital literacy workshops should be organized, focusing on e-commerce, social media, and online payment systems.
- Training should cover practical skills such as photography, storytelling, branding, and customer engagement.
- Importantly, this training must be accompanied by ongoing mentorship rather than one-off workshops.

b. Collaborative Marketing

- Partnerships with tourism agencies and cultural institutions could be developed to host co-branded events showcasing handicrafts.
- Such collaborations would attract a diverse range of audiences, including international tourists and local consumers.

c. Example Model

- The Digital Handicraft Accelerator Program could run as an intensive 12-week course covering e-commerce, social media marketing, product photography, and customer service.
- Graduates of the program would receive starter toolkits (e.g., digital cameras, pre-set online shop accounts) and continued mentorship.
- This model builds long-term self-sufficiency rather than providing short-term exposure, enabling artisans to control their digital growth strategies.

6.5.3 Sustainable Resource Management Model

The sustainability of handicrafts depends fundamentally on the availability and affordability of raw materials. A systematic approach to resource management is therefore essential for ensuring the longevity of artisan industries.

a. Resource Access and Preservation

- Collective buying arrangements should be established to reduce raw material costs, especially for eco-friendly and locally sourced materials.
- Environmentally conscious practices should be encouraged to minimize environmental impact and reinforce sustainable production.

b. Product Innovation

- Artisans should be encouraged to innovate by integrating traditional methods with modern aesthetics, thereby appealing to both local and global markets.
- Innovation should be guided by cultural sensitivity, ensuring that adaptation does not erode traditional identity.

c. Example Model

- The Sustainable Craft Cooperative could oversee shared resource management, bulk-purchasing of materials, and adoption of eco-friendly alternatives.
- Beyond this, the cooperative could also facilitate workshops on sustainable practices and design innovation.
- Expanding the model, community-owned raw material farms (e.g., bamboo, rattan, dye plants) would give artisans direct control over their supply chain. This reduces dependency on external suppliers, prevents shortages, and strengthens community ownership while safeguarding biodiversity.

6.5.4 Youth Engagement and Succession Model

The survival of traditional Iban handicrafts depends on active engagement from younger generations. Integrating handicraft education into schools, offering apprenticeships, and modernizing practices through technology can ensure cultural continuity while making the sector more attractive as a career.

a. Incentives and Educational Integration

- Initiatives should be developed to make handicraft production appealing to youth, such as scholarship programs, apprenticeships, and school-based handicraft curricula.
- Partnerships with educational institutions would allow handicraft skills to be embedded into formal curricula, ensuring early exposure..

b. Modernized Crafting Practices

- Youth-focused programs should integrate technology, such as digital design tools, with traditional methods.
- This makes the craft more relevant to contemporary lifestyles while preserving cultural authenticity.

c. Example Model

- The NextGen Artisans Program offers a structured pathway from school engagement to professional handicraft careers.
- This model would include hands-on training, mentorship, and exposure to both local and international market trends.
- Scholarships and small start-up grants would help young artisans establish their businesses.
- Additionally, Residency Programs in Longhouses could be developed, allowing both local youth and international visitors to live with artisans, learn traditional techniques, and contribute to production. These residencies would foster intergenerational transmission of skills while simultaneously generating cultural tourism revenue.

6.6 Research Recommendations on Challenges Of Iban Handicrafts Towards The Economy In The Iban Community

The challenges faced by Iban handicrafts in contributing to the local economy require innovative, sustainable, and forward-thinking solutions. Handicrafts are not only cultural assets but also potential economic drivers; however, they face issues of scalability, limited market access, and competition in global markets. Therefore, the following research recommendations aim to revitalize the Iban handicraft industry, safeguard cultural heritage, and enhance its economic impact through a balance of tradition and innovation.:

6.6.1 Digital Integration and E-Commerce Expansion

- **Recommendation:** Develop a digital marketplace specifically for Iban handicrafts, integrating augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) features to showcase craftsmanship and longhouse culture.
- **Rationale:** Many artisans lack access to broader markets. A dedicated e-commerce platform with storytelling features (e.g., artisan profiles, cultural significance of motifs) can attract global buyers while preserving authenticity. By blending traditional artistry with modern digital tools, this approach increases international sales and visibility.

6.6.2 Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) for Sustainable Tourism

- **Recommendation:** Establish collaborations between the Sarawak government, tourism agencies, and Iban artisans to create immersive “craft tourism” experiences.
- **Rationale:** Tourists increasingly seek authentic cultural interactions. Workshops, live demonstrations, and handicraft trails within longhouses can transform them into cultural destinations. This model generates dual income: from tourism and from direct handicraft sales, while simultaneously promoting heritage preservation.

6.6.3 Blockchain for Authenticity and Fair Trade

- **Recommendation:** Implement blockchain technology to certify the authenticity of Iban handicrafts and ensure fair compensation for artisans.
- **Rationale:** Counterfeit products and artisan exploitation are significant challenges.

Blockchain can track the entire supply chain, ensuring ethical sourcing, transparency, and fair pricing. This adds premium value to Iban handicrafts in international markets while safeguarding artisan rights.

6.6.4 Innovation in Design and Eco-Friendly Materials

- **Recommendation:** Research and develop sustainable materials (e.g., organic dyes, recycled fibers, upcycled or eco-friendly alternatives) while maintaining traditional weaving and carving techniques.
- **Rationale:** Modern consumers value eco-conscious products. Combining Iban cultural motifs with environmentally friendly practices not only preserves tradition but also opens new market opportunities in eco-fashion, luxury crafts, and global green markets.

6.6.5 Youth Engagement through Creative Entrepreneurship Programs

- **Recommendation:** Establish “Iban Craft Innovation Hubs” where young entrepreneurs can learn digital marketing, design adaptation, modernized craft practices (such as using digital design software), and business management.
- **Rationale:** Younger generations often perceive handicrafts as outdated. By introducing entrepreneurship, digital tools, and creative pathways, handicrafts can be rebranded as modern, innovative careers. Apprenticeship stipends, mentorship, and

exposure to global market trends can ensure succession and continuity in the craft sector.

6.6.6 Policy Advocacy for Cultural IP Protection

- **Recommendation:** Lobby for stronger intellectual property laws to protect traditional Iban motifs and handicraft designs from mass reproduction.
- **Rationale:** Indigenous motifs are frequently copied without community benefit.

Strengthened IP frameworks would ensure royalties, recognition, and legal protection for Iban artisans, empowering them economically and safeguarding their cultural identity.

6.6.7 Cross-Industry Collaborations (Fashion, Interior Design, Tech)

- **Recommendation:** Form partnerships with Malaysian and international fashion designers, architects, and technology firms to integrate Iban motifs into modern products such as wearable technology, home décor, and contemporary fashion.
- **Rationale:** Cross-industry collaborations increase demand and relevance, bringing traditional handicrafts into new sectors. This approach revitalizes the handicraft economy by linking it with global lifestyle and creative industries.

6.6.8 Micro-Franchising Model

- **Recommendation:** Introduce a micro-franchising model under a shared brand identity, such as “Iban Heritage.”
- **Rationale:** Similar to global franchising systems, artisans in different longhouses could operate under one recognizable brand, producing standardized products while teaching apprentices. This ensures cultural integrity, collective marketing, wider

participation, and income-sharing. At the same time, it builds a consistent global identity for Iban handicrafts, making them more competitive internationally.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research Interview Questions (Source: Author)

- For Artisans

Objective 1: To identify the challenges encountered in the marketing of Iban Handicraft in Sarawak.

- (i) What specific challenges do you encounter when attempting to sell Iban Handicraft products?
- (ii) What are the reasons these challenges exist?
- (iii) How do you adapt your selling approach for Iban Handicraft products when consumer preferences change?
- (iv) To what extent do cultural factors influence the demand for Iban Handicraft products?
- (v) How do you address these challenges?
- (vi) Have you explored alternative selling methods such as online platforms? If so, what was the outcome of these alternative methods?

Objective 2: To explore the effects of strong competition from low-cost, mass-produced imports on the demand for Iban Handicrafts.

- (i) How do you differentiate Iban Handicraft products to compete with cheaper alternatives produced elsewhere?
- (ii) Has the presence of cheaper imported products made it challenging to sell Iban handicrafts?
- (iii) Have you observed a decrease in demand for Iban Handicraft due to competition from cheaper alternatives?
- (iv) Do you collaborate with fellow local artisans to enhance the visibility and appeal of Iban handicraft products?
- (v) How does collaboration with fellow local artisans benefit you?
- (vi) What strategies can be implemented to highlight the unique features of Iban handicrafts to attract buyers despite competition from cheaper alternatives?

Objective 3: To assess the impact of artisans' deficient business acumen on their effectiveness in product promotion.

- (i) Which aspects of selling/pricing Iban Handicraft do you find particularly challenging or unclear?
- (ii) How can interacting with other artisans seeking mentorship improve your selling skills for Iban handicrafts?

(iii) Why do you believe it's crucial for artisans to possess strong selling skills for Iban handicrafts in the long term? How can they acquire more business knowledge?

(iv) How do you think having a mentorship program or support system focusing on the business aspects of Iban Handicraft could benefit you?

Objective 4: To identify areas of insufficient government support and opportunities for improvement in the development of Iban artisans.

(i) How have you experienced government support in your craft?

(ii) In what areas do you feel government support is lacking or insufficient?

(iii) Can you provide examples of government initiatives that have positively impacted your comprehensive development as an artisan?

(iv) In what specific ways do you think increased government support could enhance the overall development of Iban artisans?

- For Experts

Objective 1: To identify the challenges encountered in the marketing of Iban Handicraft in Sarawak.

- (i) What are the common challenges faced by artisans when marketing Iban Handicraft products, based on your expertise?
- (ii) How can marketing strategies for Iban Handicraft be adjusted to align with consumer preferences?
- (iii) In your experience, how do cultural factors impact the promotion and demand for Iban Handicraft products, and what strategies can mitigate these challenges?
- (iv) From your understanding, how do cultural aspects influence the promotion and demand for Iban Handicraft products, and what strategies can enhance their appeal?
- (v) Can you suggest culturally sensitive advertising methods that would generate more interest in Iban Handicraft products?

Objective 2: To explore the effects of strong competition from low-cost, mass-produced imports on the demand for locally crafted handicraft products.

- (i) How can the unique cultural attributes of Iban Handicraft products be leveraged to compete with cheaper alternatives?
- (ii) Can you provide examples of instances where competition from cheaper imports posed challenges for Iban Handicraft artisans?
- (iii) Have you observed a decline in demand for Iban Handicraft products due to competition from cheaper alternatives?

(iv) What strategies can address this?

(v) How can collaborative efforts among Iban Handicraft artisans mitigate the impact of competition from low-cost imports?

(vi) What strategies can be implemented to highlight the cultural significance of Iban Handicraft products and differentiate them from cheaper alternatives?

Objective 3: To assess the impact of artisans' deficient business acumen on their effectiveness in product promotion.

(i) How do deficiencies in business acumen among Iban artisans affect their ability to promote Iban handicrafts products?

(ii) Are there specific training programs or support initiatives that could address the business acumen challenges faced by Iban artisans?

(iii) How can improved business acumen contribute to the long-term economic sustainability of Iban handicrafts products?

(iv) Which aspects of selling and pricing Iban handicraft products are typically challenging for artisans to grasp, considering cultural values?

(v) How can cultural values be integrated into business training programs to enhance artisans' selling skills for Iban handicrafts products?

Objective 4: To identify areas of insufficient government support and opportunities for improvement in the development of Iban artisans.

- (i) How do you perceive the current level of government support for Iban artisans?
- (ii) What areas of government support do you consider lacking or insufficient for the development of Iban artisans?
- (iii) Can you provide examples of government initiatives that have significantly benefited Iban artisans?
- (iv) What specific forms of increased government support do you believe would most effectively enhance the development of Iban artisans?

Appendix B: List of Informants' In-depth Interview Sessions Conducted in Semi-Structured Form (Source: Author)

No.	Name	Place / Event	Organization / Town	Experience (Years)	Race	Age
1	Doris	Festival Kraf Tekstil Borneo 2023 (Regatta)	Kapit	5	Iban	51–Above
2	Engga	Festival Kraf Tekstil Borneo 2023 (Regatta)	Kapit	10	Iban	51–Above
3	Naquidin	Festival Kraf Tekstil Borneo 2023 (Regatta)	Malaysia Kraftangan	–	–	36–50
4	Mr. Tandan	Sarawak Craft Council	Kanowit	22	Iban	51–Above
5	Mr. Reynald	Sarawak Craft Council	Sri Aman	22	Iban	51–Above
6	Cathrine	Aeroville Bazaar	Kapit	10	Iban	51–Above

7	Suzana	Aeroville Bazaar	Serian	16	Iban	36–50
8	Maria	Aeroville Bazaar	Mukah	10	Iban	36–50
9	Madam Janet	Tun Jugah Foundation	Sri Aman	35	Iban	51–Above
10	Lucile	Punggu Borneo	Bau / Mukah	14	Bidayuh	36–50
11	Oshin	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Kelabit	2	Iban	18–35
12	Dickson (Kodek)	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Bau	6	Bidayuh	51–Above (1959)
13	Louis Weslly	Louis Weslly Enterprise	Kanowit	18	Iban	36–50 (1987)
14	Nipek	Nipek Craft	Padawan	10	Bidayuh	51–Above
15	Helena	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Betong	8	Iban	36–50 (48)
16	Jaqline	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Betong	4	Iban	18–35 (1998)
17	Angelia	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Sri Aman	9	Iban	36–50 (1979)
18	Ita Pantau (Group)	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Lubok Antu	20	Iban	51–Above
19	Lengidi	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Betong	8	Iban	51–Above

Appendix C: Photos with Informants (Source: Author)

No.	Name	Place / Event	Origin / Organization	Photo
1	Doris	Festival Kraf Tekstil Borneo 2023 (Regatta)	Kapit	

2	Engga	Festival Kraf Tekstil Borneo 2023 (Regatta)	Kapit	
3	Naquidin	Festival Kraf Borneo (Regatta) 2023	Malaysia Kraftangan (<i>informant chose not to include photo</i>)	
4	Mr. Tandan	Sarawak Craft Council	Kanowit	—
5	Mr. Reynald	Sarawak Craft Council	Sri Aman	
6	Cathrine	Aeroville Bazaar	Kapit	
7	Suzana	Aeroville Bazaar	Serian	
8	Maria	Aeroville Bazaar	Mukah	

9	Madam Janet	Tun Jugah Foundation	Sri Aman	
10	Lucile & Jay (Couple)	Punggu Borneo	Bau	
11	Oshin	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Kelabit	
12	Dickson (Kodek)	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Bau	
13	Louis Weslly	Louis Weslly Enterprise	Kanowit	
14	Nipek	Nipek Craft	Padawan	

				
15	Helena	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Betong	
16	Jaqline	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Betong	
17	Angelia	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Sri Aman	
18	Ita Pantau (Group)	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Lubok Antu	
19	Lengidi & Husband (Couple)	Bazaar Gawai Dayak Sarawak 2024	Betong	