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Discovering Earth's Gem: New Clay Sources for Creative Artistic Inspiration

Muhammad Safwan Mohd Shariff^{1,*}

¹ International General Certificate of Secondary Education Highland International Boarding School, KM 10 69000 Bentong Genting Highlands, Pahang Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the potential of newly discovered clay sources as alternative materials for the creation of creative artworks, particularly within the context of contemporary ceramic art in Malaysia. The discovery of new clay locations with unique compositions opens up opportunities for innovation, enabling artists to experiment with new forms, textures, and techniques. In addition to offering aesthetic diversity, the use of these local materials also contributes to environmental sustainability and strengthens an art identity rooted in local culture. Figures such as Cheah Yeow Seng have demonstrated how local clay resources can serve as a significant medium for artistic expression, while innovators like Farrah Wahida Saari have elevated clay into a modern medium through the creation of 3D cartoon-like portraits. Furthermore, Muhammad Safwan Mohd Shariff has contributed to the field of creative 3D ceramic education, focusing on abstract forms and artistically driven teaching models. Other initiatives, such as the use of clay in batik production in Terengganu, reflect the development of more user-friendly techniques, particularly appealing to younger generations. This study also references scientific research on the combination of clay with other natural materials to create sustainable and innovative ceramic glazes. Overall, the use of alternative clay sources not only enriches ceramic art practices but also strengthens the connection between natural resources and human creativity. These findings are expected to contribute to the empowerment of the local art industry and the production of sustainable art with a strong national identity.

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization and increasingly challenging climate change, the issue of material sustainability in art is becoming more important, especially in the field of ceramic art. Ceramic art is not only a medium of aesthetic expression but also serves as a cultural heritage that reflects the values, identity, and creativity of a society. Therefore, the search for alternative raw material sources, such as new clay deposits, plays a significant role in empowering and modernizing this field sustainably. This study focuses on discovering new local clay sources that have the potential to be

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: muhammadsafwanshariff5037@gmail.com

used as the main material in producing creative artworks. The unique composition of clay from local sources provides artists with opportunities to experiment with forms, textures, and innovative techniques, while preserving local elements that strengthen cultural identity. Artists like Cheah Yeow Seng have demonstrated that local clay can be a powerful medium for conveying profound and sustainable artistic messages. According to him, "The discovery of new clay opens wide space for innovation in contemporary ceramic art, where unique local materials can trigger deeper and more identity-driven creative expressions" [2].

Meanwhile, contemporary approaches by Farrah Wahida Saari in creating 3D cartoon-style portraits have brought clay towards more modern and commercial applications. She stated, "Contemporary ceramics is not just about form and function, but also the exploration of different materials, including alternative clays that give artists opportunities to explore new textures, colors, and techniques" [4]. In the context of art education, Muhammad Safwan Mohd Shariff contributes through creative teaching methods in 3D ceramics, emphasizing abstract aspects and artistic perspectives. He highlights that, "The use of alternative clay in contemporary ceramics reflects sensitivity towards the environment and local culture, thereby strengthening the continuity of artistic heritage in a modern context" [11].

Additionally, innovations such as using clay in batik production in Terengganu demonstrate efforts to modernize traditional arts through more user-friendly methods. This development reflects the potential integration of heritage arts and contemporary technology in expanding the application of clay in various art branches. Alongside advances in material science, this study also touches upon scientific research regarding mixing clay with other natural materials to produce more sustainable ceramic glazes. These efforts not only support environmental sustainability but also empower creativity among local artists. Therefore, this study aims to understand the importance and potential of alternative clay not only as an artistic medium but also as a catalyst for sustainable, innovative, and nationally-identified local art development.

2. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore the potential of new clay as an alternative medium in producing creative art. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with artists, art educators, and local art practitioners who use clay in their works. Observations were also conducted on the ceramic production process and experiments using clay from new locations. The data were analyzed thematically to identify aspects of innovation, artistic expression, and sustainability values embedded in the use of these local materials.

According to Tajul Shuhaizam Said [14], "The exploration of new clay allows contemporary ceramic artists to produce works that are not only aesthetic but also carry relevant cultural and ecological narratives." Meanwhile, Harozila Ramli [6] states, "Innovation in the use of materials such as alternative clay is key to the development of sustainable and globally competitive ceramic art." MS Shariff 2024 is an art educator who has developed a practical ceramic studio model to foster artistic creativity based on alternative clay. This model aims to enhance students' understanding and skills in ceramic art through a more creative and innovative approach. He has also conducted research on the use of clay from ash landfill sites as an alternative material in contemporary ceramic art. His study was published in the *Jurnal Peradaban Melayu* in April 2024.

Meanwhile, researchers Farah Nabila Nordin, Humin Jusilin, and Oscar Gordon Wong studied the use of clay powder and wood ash in producing glazes for ceramic surfaces. They used a 'line blend' formula to create satin and matte effects on ceramic surfaces. This study contributes to ceramic producers in Sabah by helping to produce higher-quality ceramic crafts. Their research was published

in the *Jurnal Gendang Alam* in December 2018. As Cheah Yeow Seng [1] states, "By exploring underutilized local clay sources, artists can create unique works that reflect local identity in contemporary art."

Furthermore, the Terengganu branch of Kraftangan Malaysia, together with 16 guided entrepreneurs, successfully produced batik products using clay as an alternative to wax in the batik motif-making process. These new products are known as 'clay marble,' 'screen marble and clay,' and 'screen marble.' The use of clay is considered easier and more user-friendly compared to traditional techniques that use wax and resin. This initiative was showcased at the East Coast Textile Craft Festival and National Craft Day in 2022.

3. Results

3.1 Research Findings

Based on the potential of new clay as an alternative material, the study found that clay obtained from new locations has a unique composition suitable for producing creative artworks, especially in ceramics. The unique texture and physical properties of this clay allow artists to create variations in form and innovative techniques, opening up broader opportunities for artistic exploration. Innovations in techniques and artistic expression using alternative clay not only provide aesthetic uniqueness but also enable artists to create works that combine traditional and contemporary elements. The discovery of new clay in the respondents' residential area facilitates easier access to raw materials for creative arts. This reduces transportation costs and time while strengthening the community's connection to local resources. Respondents showed strong interest in using this clay, which also helps empower local culture and sustainability. The discovery further promotes social bonding through community involvement in art activities based on their natural materials.

Figures like Cheah Yeow Seng and Farrah Wahida Saari [2] have shown that local clay can serve as a significant medium of expression, from classical ceramic forms to modern 3D portraits. Meanwhile, the work done by MSM Shariff [10], serves as a starting point and reference in applying alternative clay and developing artistic creativity. The discovery of new clay in the respondents' residential area facilitates easier access to raw materials for creative arts. This reduces transportation costs and time while strengthening the community's connection to local resources. Respondents showed strong interest in using this clay, which also helps empower local culture and sustainability. The discovery further promotes social bonding through community involvement in art activities based on their natural materials.

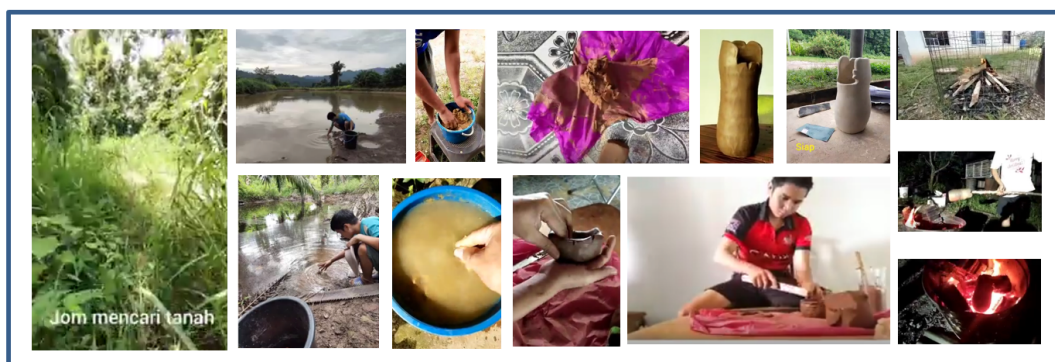


Fig. 1. Research findings based on the practical ceramic studio model: "Discovering the Earth's Treasure – New Clay"

This research was conducted based on the Practical Ceramic Studio Model, which emphasizes a hands-on approach in exploring local clay sources as the primary medium in ceramic art creation. The main focus of this study is to identify and examine the potential of newly discovered clay found in residential areas and surrounding environments making it a significant community-based and contextual effort in the field of contemporary art.

The research process involves several key phases:

1. Exploration and Site Excavation:

- Conducting fieldwork to gather raw materials (clay) from the surrounding area.
- Observing the physical characteristics of the clay such as color, texture, and moisture content.

2. Testing and Filtering:

- Performing tests to determine the suitability of the clay for ceramic production.
- Filtering the clay to remove impurities and foreign materials to ensure the required level of fineness.

3. Drying and Clay Preparation:

- Naturally drying the clay (evaporation) before it is processed into a usable material.
- Wedging and storing the clay according to ceramic studio procedures.

4. Art Creation:

- The processed clay is used to create various forms of artwork from functional objects to artistic expressions.
- Techniques such as slab building, coiling, and wheel throwing are applied depending on the clay type and artistic intent.

5. Firing and Product Presentation:

- The works are fired in a kiln to strengthen their structure and stabilize their form.
- The final products are presented through exhibitions or documentation as the outcome of the research process.

3.2 Creative Art Inspiration

This project inspires the creation of works that are local, authentic, and contextual. The use of local clay not only contributes to environmental sustainability but also strengthens local artistic identity. This studio-based model also encourages a deep understanding of the process, from raw materials to finished products, making each piece not just an artwork, but a narrative of the relationship between humans and their natural surroundings.



Fig. 2. From 2D sketch to 3D product – clay application

Furthermore, the enhancement of skills and art education based on the practical ceramic studio model developed by Muhammad Safwan Mohd Shariff in the KPT study under collaboration with Prof. Dr. Tajul Shuhaizam Said [14] demonstrates the effectiveness of using alternative clay in art learning, particularly in improving students' creativity and skills. This approach strengthens the understanding of local materials while encouraging innovation in artwork creation. This is supported by the quote from Farrah Wahida Saari [4]: "The use of alternative clay gives artists opportunities to experiment with new techniques, enriching the visual language in contemporary ceramic art."

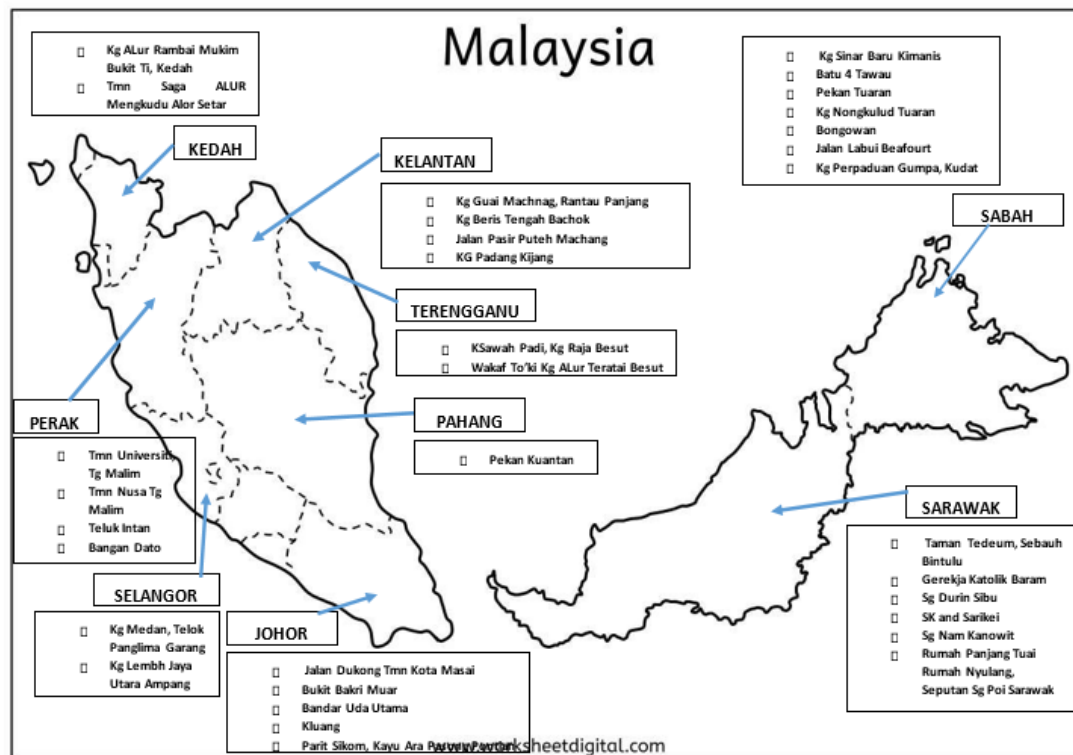


Fig. 3. Overall findings of the alternative clay study conducted online during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 (study respondents)

3.3 New Clay Discovery: Future Potential and Benefits

The discovery of a new clay source in residential and surrounding local areas offers significant opportunities in the field of ceramic art and community development. This area contains clay with unique characteristics in terms of color, texture, and plasticity, making it suitable for various ceramic forming techniques. This finding enables local artists and art students to explore raw materials that are more accessible, affordable, and environmentally friendly without relying entirely on commercial sources.

From a sustainability perspective, using local clay supports more eco-friendly art practices and reduces the carbon footprint, as it eliminates the need for long-distance transportation. Additionally, it can serve as a subject for further research by educational institutions in the fields of art, geology, and material science. This discovery also has the potential to boost the local micro-economy through handmade craft production, thereby strengthening the community's cultural identity. Overall, this area has the potential to become a source of materials, a site for community workshops, and a center for sustainable ceramic innovation in the future combining elements of heritage, education, and environmental preservation.

Additionally, the contribution to sustainability and local identity through the use of local clay as the main material also helps preserve the environment and strengthen cultural identity in art. For example, innovations resulting from the discovery of alternative clay areas suitable to be used as reference sites and small-scale new resource findings have emerged. The development of sustainable ceramic glaze techniques has led to scientific studies on mixing clay with other natural materials such as wood ash, showing potential to produce more sustainable and higher-quality ceramic glazes. This opens opportunities for ceramic producers to apply innovative, eco-friendly, and durable techniques. MSM Shariff [9] states, "The transformation of traditional materials such as clay into contemporary

mediums proves how flexible this material is in supporting artistic innovation.” Tanah liat bukan sahaja bahan fizikal, tetapi juga mempunyai potensi transformasi dalam amalan sains dan budaya kontemporer.

The discovery of new clay not only provides fresh raw material for ceramic production but also opens up vast opportunities for artistic exploration and creativity. Each type of clay possesses its own unique characteristics in color, texture, and physical properties, serving as a rich source of inspiration to create works that are more authentic and meaningful. In the context of creative art, local materials like this clay encourage artists to connect their works with cultural identity and the surrounding environment, resulting in art that is not only visually appealing but also rich in narrative and context. The transformation process from raw material to art object allows room for experimentation in techniques, forms, and functions, broadening the boundaries of creativity.

Moreover, the use of local clay injects sustainability values into art, promoting more responsible and environmentally conscious artistic practices. Thus, this discovery becomes an important milestone in enriching the art ecosystem, strengthening the creative identity of communities, and building cultural continuity through the medium of ceramic art.

4. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the discovery and use of new clay as an alternative material in creative arts have a significant impact on the development of contemporary ceramic art in Malaysia. Clay with unique compositions from new locations offers artists opportunities to explore new and more innovative techniques and forms. This aligns with the views of art figures such as Cheah Yeow Seng and Farrah Wahida Saari, who emphasize that local materials are not only sources of inspiration but also rich artistic expression mediums filled with aesthetic and cultural values. Creativity in contemporary ceramics is increasingly driven by the discovery of new material sources that add unique touches to the texture and color of artworks [16].

Besides the creative aspect, the use of local clay also contributes to environmental sustainability by reducing dependence on imported materials or harmful chemicals. Initiatives like producing batik using clay in Terengganu show that material innovation can be combined with traditional techniques to create eco-friendly art products that remain relevant to contemporary developments. In education, the practical ceramic studio model emphasizing the use of alternative clay helps students and art practitioners understand the material’s properties and encourages their creativity. This highlights the importance of integrating local materials into the art curriculum as an effort to uphold local art and culture. Scientific studies on mixing clay with other natural materials also open doors for developing more sustainable and higher-quality ceramic techniques, which are crucial in today’s art industry that increasingly prioritizes sustainability.

Overall, this study confirms that newly discovered clay can become a highly potential alternative source in fostering artistic creativity, especially in contemporary ceramic art in Malaysia. The use of local materials not only enriches the aesthetic variety and production techniques of artworks but also contributes to environmental conservation and the empowerment of art identity rooted in local culture. “Experimentation with alternative clay opens space for artists to explore new techniques in contemporary ceramic art, creating works that are more expressive and innovative” [10].

Furthermore, art figures and educators who apply alternative clay have proven that this material can serve as a significant and innovative expressive medium. Additionally, eco-friendly art product initiatives such as clay batik demonstrate how alternative materials can harmoniously blend tradition and innovation. The findings of this study are hoped to serve as an important reference for artists,

educators, and policymakers in strengthening the local art industry and encouraging the use of sustainable materials with national identity.

5. Recommendations

It is proposed to establish a research and experimental center dedicated to local clay, serving as a specialized hub focusing on the study and experimentation of clay from various locations across Malaysia. This center could function as a platform for artists, researchers, and students to examine the physical and chemical properties of clay and to develop innovative art production techniques. It is recommended that art education institutions integrate specialized modules related to the use of alternative clay and local materials into their curricula. This would ensure that students understand the potential and challenges of local materials while encouraging creativity in art production.

Furthermore, strategic collaborations between artists, craft centers, and local industries should be developed to utilize alternative clay in creating commercially valuable art and craft products. This can help strengthen the creative economy and promote locally identified art products in both national and international markets. Additionally, organizing workshops and seminars on ceramic production techniques using alternative clay with eco-friendly and sustainable methods, including glaze production from natural materials, is important. This ensures environmentally responsible artistic practices. Systematic documentation efforts of traditional and contemporary clay art and production techniques, along with promotion through exhibitions and digital media, are also recommended. These efforts aim to increase awareness and appreciation of cultural values as well as the potential of clay as an artistic material.

The use of alternative clay from new locations opens wide opportunities for fostering creativity in ceramic art in Malaysia. This local material not only enriches the variety of techniques and art forms but also supports environmental sustainability and strengthens local cultural identity. Innovative approaches by art figures and educators demonstrate that alternative clay can serve as a significant artistic expression medium that is relevant to current art developments.

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