

Analysing The Recontextualization Of Traditional Crafts Within Contemporary Design Education

Vaibhavi Thakkar Desai

School of Doctoral Research and Innovation, GLS University
Educator, CEPT University; Principal Designer & Proprietor, TV Studio Designs and
Consultants LLP

Dr. Avani Desai

School of Doctoral Research and Innovation, GLS University

ABSTRACT

Traditional crafts constitute a part of the cultural heritage and are based on the indigenous knowledge, skills, materials, techniques, and art forms which have been transmitted from one generation to another. In this context, the aim of the study is to explore the ways in which traditional crafts are being recontextualized within contemporary design education through the study of the experiences, perception, and practices of design students, teachers and practitioners. Qualitative research methodology was used for the purpose of this study. For gathering the primary data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants who are directly involved in design education and craft-based learning. Analysis of the data was done with the help of the thematic analysis technique in order to understand the patterns in the following four categories – awareness/exposure to traditional crafts, integration of traditional crafts into design curricula, the educational value of craft-based learning, and the challenges in the integration of traditional crafts into design curricula. It has been found that the awareness of the participants regarding traditional crafts is primarily dependent upon their exposure through their own family backgrounds, communities, and specific courses and craft-based learning is perceived to be useful in enhancing the cultural, material and sustainability perspectives and developing problem solving skills among others. At the same time, the challenges faced in integrating the traditional crafts include time pressure within the curriculum, lack of skillful artisans and tension between cultural authenticity and commercialism among others.

Keywords: Traditional Crafts; Recontextualization; Contemporary Design Education; Cultural Heritage; Design Innovation; Sustainable Design.

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional Crafts constitute an important component of culture heritage that comprises local skills and knowledge, materials and art forms among others which are handed down from generation to generation. However, the current technological developments, globalization and changes in consumers' preferences and taste have necessitated the need for a new thinking concerning the place of traditional crafts in the modern world. The traditional crafts provide unique learning experience for the design education that helps learners learn about cultural

identity, material properties and sustainable manufacturing practices. A useful connection between traditional craft knowledge and modern design approach can thus be made through incorporating the traditional crafts in design education.

The re-contextualization of traditional crafts refers to the process by which traditional methods, material, form and cultural knowledge can be used in order to address contemporary design needs without stripping away its traditional cultural significance. Crafts, along with the artifacts related to it, can be looked at as sources of creativity, innovation, experimentation and sustainable design thinking instead of being seen as just historic activities in contemporary design education. Nevertheless, integration is also problematic from a number of issues including cultural authenticity, commercialization, lack of time in the curriculum, as well as the potential of separating the craft activities from their social and cultural contexts. Therefore, it becomes essential to analyze the process of reinterpretation and integration of traditional crafts as well as their educational value in the context of design teaching and develop a balance approach in regards to preserving traditional crafts as well as design innovation. Hence, the study regarding the reinterpretation and integration of traditional crafts in the design teaching era as well as the analysis of the value of traditional crafts becomes significant for developing the appropriate model of re-interpreting traditional crafts teaching and balancing traditional crafts' preservation and design innovation.

1.1 Research Objectives

The main research objectives are:

- To examine the participants' consciousness and exposure to the concept of traditional crafts in relation to design education in today's world.
- To analyze the process of integrating and recontextualizing traditional crafts into the process of design education in today's world and its meanings from the perspective of the participants.
- To recognize, from the perspective of the participants, the main difficulties related to the recontextualization of traditional crafts in today's world.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Atalay Onur (2020) investigated how the concepts of circular economy, cooperation, and traditional craftsmanship can be used in fashion design education in developing countries using the example of Turkey. In particular, the research has focused on how the methods associated with craftsmanship can be incorporated into the fashion design curriculum and what role these methods can play in connecting traditional craftsmanship and modern concepts of design and sustainability. The results of the study have highlighted the importance of applying learning based on craft principles and the principles of circular economy in an educational setting in order to achieve better educational outcomes. It is believed that the use of craft activities can help students understand the concept of sustainable production better.

Wang et al. (2018) looked at the re-contextualizing of the traditional graphics in the museum's brand identity. The study mainly focused on the re-interpretation and implementation of traditional graphic forms in the modern world of education and branding. The study revealed the potential for the innovation of curriculum that could allow the learning of visual knowledge

to become applicable through designing in the modern world but with links to the cultural background. Through this study, it has been shown that re-contextualizing allows students to look at traditional forms of visual expression through the eyes of modern day design.

Sgorla, Melacarne and Banchetti (2025) investigated the link between tradition and innovation in learning towards sustainable practice in contemporary craft activities. The research looked at the link between traditional craft practices and new approaches to sustainability and learning. The authors stressed the importance of creating learning environments in which the integration of both traditional knowledge and innovation is possible. From their study, it became evident that craft practices may contribute to sustainable learning by offering a way through which practical knowledge can be transferred from one generation to another. Traditional practices and knowledge can adapt to new situations through the craft practices.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research method was used for this study to explore the recontextualization of traditional crafts in design education from the viewpoint of people who are actively involved in design education and their traditional crafts. It means that the purpose of the methodology was not to calculate the number of respondents who gave certain answers.

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative and exploratory descriptive design was employed in the analysis of the recontextualization process of traditional crafts in current design education contexts. Qualitative approach was selected as suitable for the current research since it was focused on the subjective interpretation of the meaning attached to the process of craft-based learning by participants. This approach enabled the researcher to explore the diversity of perspectives on how design professionals and learners perceive traditional crafts.

3.2 Study Participants

The study involved design students, educators and practitioners who were connected to contemporary design education and tradition crafts through learning and teaching processes. In total, there were [insert total number of participants — generally 15 to 25] participants involved in this study, which was based on their involvement with craft-based education or teaching process. These participants were thought to be suitable to provide information related to the topic of awareness, integration, benefits and challenges associated with recontextualization of traditional crafts.

3.3 Sampling Technique

The participants for the study were chosen through purposive sampling, a method that is appropriate for qualitative studies where the participants are chosen on the basis of their knowledge or experience regarding the research problem. Preference was given to those participants who had firsthand experience with design education and/or traditional crafts, either as a student, teacher, or practicing designer to ensure the depth and relevance of the data collected.

3.4 Data Collection Method

The primary data were gathered via semi-structured interviews, where the participants were able to share their experiences, thoughts, and observations in their own words while being guided by key research topics. The semi-structured interview consisted of questions that belonged to four main categories: knowledge about and exposure to crafts, incorporating crafts in design studies, the advantages of craft-based studies, and obstacles faced while re-contextualizing crafts. The interviews were either held face-to-face or online, were recorded audio-wise after obtaining permission from the participants, and then transcribed literally. When possible, the interviews were complemented by observations of the craft-related classes, workshops, and students' projects.

3.5 Research Instrument

The primary data collection tool used in this research was the semi-structured interview guide which included open-ended questions related to the key concepts of this study. The questions related to awareness and integration asked the respondents to provide their examples instead of choosing from the predefined list of options, while the questions related to benefits and challenges prompted the respondents to reflect upon their personal experience or observations. This open-ended design allowed unanticipated themes to emerge directly from participants' own accounts.

3.6 Thematic Areas Explored

The research focused on four broad thematic domains:

- Consciousness and Exposition - Participants' awareness, knowledge, understanding and experience of traditional crafts in terms of culture, material and technology.
- Integration into the Design Education – The presence of traditional crafts in the context of design education from the perspective of participants.
- Benefits of the Education – The role of traditional crafts in cultivating participants' creative imagination, cultural consciousness, skills of materials, sustainability, problem solving and cooperation with the craftsmen.
- Difficulties in Recontextualization – Constraints experienced by participants in terms of curriculum time, artisan connection, institutional means, cultural representation and traditional-contemporary compromise.

3.7 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze data from interviews. In accordance with the six-phase framework of thematic analysis as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), themes were developed through the following stages: familiarization with the data, coding, searching for themes, theme review, theme definition and naming, and final report writing. The transcripts of interviews were analyzed through repeated readings and noting recurring ideas, patterns and expressions of participants. Themes were organized according to the four research themes of the study, with examples of quotations supporting the themes.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results gathered from semi-structured interviews with design students, teachers, and professionals are outlined. While not trying to quantify the results, this analysis attempts to highlight the commonalities and experiences expressed by participants concerning

the four major topics that have been covered: awareness of craft traditions, incorporation of craft traditions into design education, educational value of craft traditions, and difficulties in contextualizing crafts in today's world. Relevant quotes will serve to anchor the analysis into participants' words; the blanks provided below are to be filled out with actual quotes from the interviews.

4.1 Awareness and Exposure to Traditional Crafts

The participants' knowledge about traditional crafts was very different, and seemed strongly related to their personal background, especially in relation to whether they had been raised among craftsmen, family tradition in craftsmanship or a cultural background. Some participants were familiar with traditional crafts through their upbringing experience, but others had become familiar with traditional crafts through learning and visiting museums and sites.

Table 1: Key Themes in Awareness and Exposure to Traditional Crafts

Theme	Description
Inherited familiarity	Awareness rooted in family, community or regional craft traditions experienced from childhood
Curriculum-driven exposure	Awareness developed mainly through design coursework, studio projects or academic assignments
Limited or occasional exposure	Minimal engagement with crafts beyond passing references in coursework or media
Desire for deeper exposure	Participants expressing a wish for more hands-on engagement through workshops or artisan interaction

The people who were exposed to familiarity through inheritance were more likely to talk about the craft in a personal manner; those who had an exposure to it due to curricula mostly talked about how they perceived it from the point of view of observation and learning. There were several students who believed that one-off sessions of workshop, lecture, or visit were not enough to have working knowledge about any particular craft.

4.2 Integration of Traditional Crafts into Contemporary Design Education

In terms of recontextualization, the incorporation of craft traditions into design learning and practice was perceived as sporadic – present in some programs or design projects, but not consistently across the entire curriculum. Recontextualization, as discussed by the participants, was not only about the teaching of craft traditions, but the rethinking of traditions in terms of design practice.

Table 2: Key Themes in Integration of Traditional Crafts into Design Education

Theme	Description
Project-based integration	Crafts brought in through specific design briefs, studio projects, or thesis work

Elective or optional exposure	Craft engagement available mainly through elective modules or extracurricular activities
Symbolic or surface-level use	Traditional motifs or materials referenced without deeper engagement with technique or meaning
Sustained collaborative integration	Ongoing partnerships with artisans embedded within the curriculum

Participants who were involved in sustained and collaborative integration in form of multiple studio visits to artisan workshops or ongoing design-crafts relationships reported their perception of traditional crafts as being an active and developing field for design knowledge and not only a source of historical information. On the other hand, those who experienced crafts as being used symbolically or on a superficial level had some ambivalence and considered such experience as being potentially superficial rather than transformative. This comparison is based purely on participants' perceptions of craft-related experiences.

4.3 Perceived Educational Benefits of Recontextualizing Traditional Crafts

The participants were invited to discuss their perceptions about the significance of learning via craft and recontextualization. The following benefits emerged repeatedly from their discussions and are not presented in any particular ranking form but as recurring themes.

Table 3: Perceived Educational Benefits of Recontextualizing Traditional Crafts

Theme	Description
Cultural heritage understanding	Deeper appreciation of cultural history, identity and traditional knowledge systems
Creativity and innovation	Traditional techniques and materials described as prompting new design thinking
Material and making skills	Hands-on craft engagement described as building tactile and technical skill
Sustainable design sensibility	Craft-based learning linked to a stronger awareness of sustainable materials and processes
Problem-solving ability	Working within the constraints of traditional materials and methods described as sharpening problem-solving
Collaboration with artisans	Direct engagement with artisans described as valuable but comparatively rare

Cultural heritage appreciation was the aspect mentioned repeatedly by participants when speaking about the benefits of craft, with many stating that they were able to connect with their culture through craft practices, which was something lacking from their design education. Creativity, sustainable design sense, and enhanced material skills were other benefits mentioned regularly, while collaboration with craftspeople, although highly appreciated by

those who had such experiences, was mentioned less often— suggesting an area where design education could expand meaningfully.

4.4 Challenges in Recontextualizing Traditional Crafts

Though the participants acknowledged the educational potential of traditional craft, it was also evident that there were certain issues repeatedly experienced when integrating the craft into the design classroom.

Table 4: Major Challenges in Recontextualizing Traditional Crafts

Theme	Description
Curriculum time constraints	Craft engagement crowded out by other academic demands and fixed course structures
Limited artisan access	Difficulty arranging sustained interaction with skilled artisans, particularly outside major cities
Institutional resource constraints	Lack of materials, workshop space, or budget for craft-based teaching
Balancing authenticity and contemporary demands	Tension between preserving traditional meaning and adapting crafts for modern design briefs
Risk of cultural misrepresentation	Concern about traditional crafts being used superficially or out of cultural context
Commercialization pressures	Concern that markets demands can dilute the cultural integrity of craft practices

The balance between the traditional approach and the needs of modern design was found to be the most common issue addressed, seconded only by the issue of time within the curriculum and lack of access to artisans. There were also those who pointed out that there is a danger of cultural misrepresentation if a traditional craft is recontextualized without proper appreciation of its cultural background, underscoring that successful recontextualization requires not just technical exposure but genuine cultural sensitivity.

4.5 Discussion

In sum, these findings suggest that traditional crafts have the potential to be a valuable yet underutilized asset in modern design education. The participants repeatedly linked an extended and sustained engagement with crafts to better results in terms of cultural awareness, creativity, and sustainability. This finding generally agrees with previous studies which also stress the importance of collaboration with crafts rather than their sporadic exposure.

Meanwhile, the narratives from the participants emphasize the persistent structural impediments in terms of time within the curriculum, the availability of artisans, and other resources that constrain the extent to which indigenous craft traditions can become part of design education, regardless of how enthusiastic the learners and educators might be. The

issues raised by the participants regarding cultural misrepresentation and commodification imply that the process of recontextualizing is not only a pedagogic task but also an ethical one.

5. CONCLUSION

This research suggests that there is great potential in integrating traditional crafts into design education in terms of cultural, creative, material and sustainability aspects. From the perspective of participants' experience, knowledge of traditional crafts is largely linked to personal and cultural experience, while their integration can happen through continuous interaction with materials and craftsmen rather than just introduction into the curriculum. The main advantages of integrating traditional crafts, according to the participants, include gaining knowledge about the heritage of the culture, developing creative and problem-solving skills and becoming more aware of sustainability issues in design. However, the major difficulties associated with the recontextualization process, which was mentioned by all participants, included limited time for curriculum, inability to find a suitable craftsman and difficult balance between authenticity and contemporary needs. In order to overcome these difficulties, one should develop proper curriculum and establish strong relationships with the communities of craftsmen. Generally, the results of this research prove that traditional crafts can be effectively integrated into the process of design education as the source of knowledge rather than inherited practice.

REFERENCES

1. Atalay Onur, D. (2020). *Integrating circular economy, collaboration and craft practice in fashion design education in developing countries: A case from Turkey*. Fashion Practice, 12(1), 55-77.
2. Shi, Z. (2026). Pedagogical Recontextualization of Traditional Graphics: Curriculum Innovation in Museum Branding.
3. Sgorla, A. F., Melacarne, C., & Banchetti, C. (2025). Tradition and innovation: ecologies of sustainable learning in contemporary craft work. In *The future of work: the development of sustainable workplaces*. IntechOpen.
4. Sagdeo, S., & Khan, Y. (2024, February). An Exploratory Study: Potential of AI for Craft Revitalization in Contemporary Educational Context. In *Futuring Design Education Conference* (pp. 367-374). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
5. Chen, S. (2026). Traditional Craft Inheritance in Modern Environmental Design: The Guidance of Art Education on Cultural Identity Expression. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 2(3), 46-63.
6. Greru, G. C. B. (2018). Decolonising design and heritage in craft development courses: examples from Sri Lanka, India and Scotland (Doctoral dissertation, Heriot-Watt University).
7. Al-Zadjali, Z. A. (2025). Reweaving heritage: Blending traditional hand weaving with modern art to spark student innovation. *J Text Sci Technol*, 11(3), 51-63.
8. Kurniawan, M. N., & Prihatmanti, R. (2022). Co-creating sustainable heritage: Recontextualizing Indonesian cultural heritage (in the creative economy). In *Embracing*

the Future: Creative Industries for Environment and Advanced Society 5.0 in a Post-Pandemic Era (pp. 116-119). Routledge.

9. Holmquist, A., Magnusson, M., & Livholts, M. (2019). Reinventing tradition: Exploring the creation of new meaning through innovations involving craft-based design. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 28(1), 124-137.
10. Guerra, A. (2025). Craft-Based Methodologies in Human-Computer Interaction: Exploring Interdisciplinary Design Approaches. *Multimodal Technologies and Interaction*, 9(2), 13.
11. Ernawati, S. M., & Marianto, M. D. (2024). Re-actualization of Traditional Knowledge and Techniques in Contemporary Craft Art through the Concept of Hybrid Aesthetics: Insights from Indonesia.
12. Huang, Y., Shaari, N., Abidin, S. Z., & Liu, M. (2025). Reinventing Craftspeople's Emotional Bonds. *The International Journal of Designed Objects*, 20(1), 27.
13. Broadhead, S. (2019). The Artists' House: The recontextualized art practices of British postgraduate students in conversation with Italian amateur artists. *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education*, 18(1), 51-65.
14. BAKARE, O. O., KOLAWOLE, C. Y., & Saminu Sini, Y. A. K. U. B. U. (2026). Reinterpreting Adire Symbols: Developing Innovative Motifs for Contemporary Ankara Textile Print. *Ethiopian e-Journal for Research and Innovation Foresight (Ee-JRIF)*, 16(2), 46-58.
15. Rashdan, W., & Ashour, A. F. (2024). Heritage-inspired strategies in interior design: balancing critical regionalism and reflexive modernism for identity preservation. *Heritage*, 7(12), 6825-6856.
16. Georgiadou, Z. (2021). Recontextualizing Design: Remains of a New Era—The Case of Greece. *The International Journal of Design Education*, 15(1), 253.
17. Shaikh, M., & Mirani, H. (2025). Revisiting the Distinction Between Art and Craft: A Study of Contextual Framing in Art Galleries and Local Markets. *Journal of Social Horizons*, 2(4), 192-201.
18. Liao, Y., Yang, L., & Ye, F. (2026, January). The co-creation practices of traditional building techniques: an ecological collaboration study between Chinese indigenous artisans and designers. In *International Conference on Mechanical, Engineering, and Interaction Design (ICMEID 2025)* (Vol. 14018, pp. 1844-1851). SPIE.
19. Zeng, Y., Noor, H. M., Sabri, M. F., & Yao, S. (2025). From Craft to Classroom: A narrative inquiry into the cultural identity and educational roles of intangible cultural heritage inheritors. *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal*, 10(33), 113-119.
20. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.