



## **The Visual Arts Education Crisis in Malaysia: Placement of Students into the Arts Curricular Stream at the Upper Secondary Level in Malaysian Secondary Schools**

**Ahmad Suffian Asmawi bin Ponijan,  
Mohamad Faizuan bin Mat & Sarah Naemah Aman Leong**

Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak,  
94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia  
E-mail: suffian\_asmawi@yahoo.com

**Abstract.** In Malaysia, the curricular subject of visual art, especially at secondary school level, pays little attention to the aspect of artistic knowledge development. Students are assigned to the arts stream based on their Level Three assessment results, which ultimately causes problems in the visual art learning process in the classroom. On the other hand, formal art education is absent among students in the science stream and visual art is perceived to be only for underperforming students, when in fact visual art can be a valuable subject for all students. This study used a qualitative triangulation method to assess the similarities between data from face-to-face interviews, observations and literature study. Visual arts education is duly needed at the upper secondary level of education in Malaysia to cultivate future generations with creative and critical minds. However, does the art education offered in the arts stream actually benefit the students who are assigned to this curricular stream based on the existing student placement system? This study aimed to investigate problems and issues in Malaysian visual arts education based on the system of student placement into curricular streams.

**Keywords:** *curricular streams; issues and problems; visual arts education; visual art.*

### **1 Introduction**

Having a good educational background is essential for every individual in order to compete in today's job market. For this reason, the pressure to excel academically exists for students at all levels of education, not to mention other factors such as family, social, economy, and politics, which are also driving forces for young people to obtain the best quality of education to secure a good future. The *Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025)* published by the Ministry of Education Malaysia [1] reveals that the Malaysian education system gives more importance to certain academic domains, i.e. science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, as they bear the capacity to boost the country's economy. However, visual arts education (pendidikan seni visual) should also be emphasized in the education system due to the fact that creative minds are needed in every field. According to Mat [2], there is a visual