

Examining the Role of Silat as Malay Intangible Cultural Heritage in Shaping Practitioners' Self-Identity

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ABSTRACT

Silat is often understood as a traditional Malay martial art associated with self-defence, physical movement and cultural performance. However, the findings of this study demonstrate that Silat functions far beyond combat practice. It operates as a holistic system of self-identity formation, personality development, moral education, emotional regulation, spiritual consciousness and cultural continuity. Based on qualitative findings from six individual interviews with experienced Silat practitioners, instructors and former students from three major Silat backgrounds, this article examines how Silat contributes to the cultivation of self-identity among practitioners. Thematic analysis reveals that discipline and self-control form the strongest foundation of Silat practice. These qualities support the development of confidence, courage, humility, ethical conduct, emotional maturity, leadership and social responsibility. The findings also show that Silat strengthens Malay cultural identity by connecting practitioners to heritage, family lineage, historical memory, spiritual values and community belonging. Verbatim quotations from participants indicate that Silat is not merely inherited as a cultural practice but actively embodied through training, ritual, teacher-student relationships and everyday conduct. This article argues that Silat should be recognised as a living form of intangible cultural heritage that develops disciplined, confident, morally responsible, emotionally resilient, spiritually aware and culturally grounded individuals.

Keywords: Silat; self-identity; intangible cultural heritage; Malay heritage; discipline; personality development.

INTRODUCTION

Silat holds an important place in Malay cultural life as a traditional martial art, cultural performance, and symbol of collective heritage. However, understanding Silat only as a form of physical self-defence limits its broader meaning. In Malay society, Silat is closely linked to discipline, humility, respect, courage, spirituality, and communal responsibility. These values show that Silat is not merely a bodily practice, but also a process of character building, identity formation, and moral development.

This article is based on interview analysis that explores the role of Silat in developing self-identity among practitioners. The study draws from six individual interviews involving experienced Silat practitioners, instructors, former students and students from three main Silat Seni Gayong, Silat Lincah and Silat Cekak backgrounds. These interviews provide insight into how long-term involvement in Silat shapes discipline, self-identity, moral values, cultural belonging and personal development. The findings show that discipline is the most dominant theme, followed by self-control, confidence, cultural identity, moral values, spirituality, emotional regulation, social bonding, and family heritage.

The article argues that Silat functions as a holistic framework for identity formation. It develops practitioners physically, emotionally, morally, socially, spiritually, and culturally. Through repeated training, respect for the instructor or *guru*, communal practice, ritual discipline, and cultural symbolism, Silat shapes how practitioners

understand themselves and behave within society. Therefore, Silat should be recognised as an important intangible cultural heritage that preserves traditional knowledge while transmitting values across generations.

LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Silat as Intangible Cultural Heritage

Intangible cultural heritage refers to living practices, expressions, knowledge and skills recognised by communities as part of their cultural heritage. According to UNESCO (2003), intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation and continuously recreated by communities in response to their environment, history and social conditions. This definition is important because it views heritage as a living and dynamic process rather than a fixed tradition.

So, it is significant to highlight that Silat fits within this definition because it combines physical movement, oral knowledge, ceremonial practice, traditional attire, spiritual recitation, teacher-student transmission and communal participation. In 2019, UNESCO recognised Silat as part of intangible cultural heritage, describing it as an ancient combative art of self-defence and survival rooted in the Malay Archipelago. UNESCO Malaysia further explains that Silat has evolved into physical and spiritual training that includes traditional Malay attire, musical instruments and customs.

In the Malaysian context, Silat is not only understood as a martial practice but also as an important symbol of Malay cultural identity and national heritage. Hasmah Md. Ali (2013) explains that Silat is closely associated with Malay cultural heritage through elements such as traditional clothing, movement, customs and music. She further emphasises that Silat has been recognised as intangible heritage under the National Heritage Act 2005 because it reflects the identity, values and symbolic pride of its practising community.

Similarly, Mohamad Nizam Mohamed Shapie et al. (2015) describe Silat as a traditional Malay martial knowledge system that exists together with cultural elements such as language, customs, arts, literature, attire and weaponry. This shows that Silat is not only a system of self-defence, but also a cultural practice that preserves Malay heritage and strengthens national identity.

In this study, Silat is understood as a living cultural practice that transmits Malay values such as respect, humility, discipline, proper conduct, loyalty and responsibility. These values are experienced through training, ritual, repetition and social interaction. Supported by Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus, Silat may be viewed as a cultural habitus where Malay values are internalised through movement, discipline and social conduct.

More importantly, recent Malaysian scholarship suggests that the preservation of Silat must also involve youth as active cultural agents. Muhammad Fairus Hussain, Mustaffa Halabi Azahari, and Khairun Nisa Mustaffa (2025) argue that Silat is more than self-defence because it embodies values, rituals, philosophies and community identity. They also note that Silat faces challenges among younger generations due to modernisation, urban lifestyle changes and competing global influences. Therefore, Silat as intangible cultural heritage must continue through participation, reinterpretation and intergenerational engagement.

Self-Identity and Personality Formation

Self-identity refers to how individuals understand who they are, what values guide them and how they position themselves in society. Erikson (1968) explains that identity development is central to human growth because individuals form a stable sense of self through personal experience, social relationships and cultural expectations. In the Malay context, self-identity or *jati diri* carries a broader meaning than individual self-concept. It includes personal character, moral strength, cultural belonging, dignity, responsibility and awareness of one's role within society. Therefore, *jati diri* is not only psychological, but also cultural, ethical and social.

It is relevant to note that the connection between Silat and *jati diri* is strongly supported in Malaysian literature. Hasmah Md. Ali (2013) clearly states that Silat contains both physical and spiritual elements that can nurture *jati diri*. Her study on Seni Silat Cekak Malaysia analyses *jati diri* through *adat*, religion, patriotism and identity, especially in relation to behaviour, emotion, values and beliefs among Silat practitioners. This supports the present study's argument that Silat contributes to self-identity not only through physical discipline but also through moral, emotional and cultural formation.

Furthermore, the development of self-identity can also be understood through Social Identity Theory. Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that part of a person's self-concept is shaped by membership in meaningful social groups. Individuals develop identity not only through personal qualities, but also through belonging to communities that carry shared values, symbols and traditions. In this regard, Silat provides practitioners with a strong group identity because it connects them to a community, lineage, teacher, cultural history and Malay heritage.

The findings indicate that Silat strengthens self-identity by developing discipline, confidence, self-awareness, cultural pride and spiritual grounding. Identity in Silat is not passively inherited; it is actively formed through practice. Practitioners are shaped by bodily discipline, the values of the instructors, the rituals of the Silat training arena and the expectations of the Silat community. This supports Bourdieu's (1977) view that identity and social behaviour are formed through repeated embodied practices. Similarly, Vertonghen and Theeboom (2010) argue that martial arts can support psychosocial development when practised within structured, value-based and educational settings.

In the Malaysian youth context, Silat must remain culturally meaningful to younger generations. Muhammad Fairus Hussain et al. (2025) explain that Silat can serve as a medium of cultural transmission, self-expression and identity formation among Malaysian youth. Their review also highlights the importance of revitalisation efforts by educational institutions, cultural agencies and digital influencers to sustain youth interest in Silat. This suggests that Silat identity should not be preserved only through rigid repetition of past forms, but through meaningful engagement with contemporary youth experiences.

Discipline, Adab and Moral-Spiritual Development

Traditional martial arts often emphasise discipline, self-regulation and personal control. Lakes and Hoyt (2004) found that martial arts training can promote self-regulation, particularly in cognitive, affective and behavioural control. This is relevant to Silat because practitioners must regulate movement, attention, emotion and response. In Silat, discipline is not only physical, but also psychological and moral. Practitioners are expected to control their body, speech, emotion, ego and intention.

Malaysian Silat scholarship also supports the relationship between Silat and discipline. Mohamad Nizam Mohamed Shapie et al. (2015) explain that Silat education can produce balanced individuals through values such as truthfulness, trustworthiness, discipline, affection, service, diligence and confidence. They argue that Silat helps individuals defend themselves from negative influences while developing noble values. This strengthens the argument that Silat functions as a system of self-regulation and character formation.

Silat also adds a culturally specific layer through proper manners or *adab* and moral character or *akhlak*. *Adab* refers to proper conduct, manners, ethical behaviour and appropriate positioning of oneself in relation to others, knowledge and authority. Al-Attas (1980) places *adab* at the centre of Islamic education, arguing that education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but the formation of a person with proper conduct and moral awareness. This is important in Silat because respect for the instructor, humility and proper behaviour are grounded in *adab*.

Akhlak refers to moral character. In Silat, *akhlak* is expressed through humility, patience, respectful speech, self-restraint, responsibility and avoidance of arrogance. Lickona (1991) argues that good character involves moral knowing, moral feeling and moral action. Silat reflects this because practitioners are trained to practise moral behaviour through discipline, correction, ritual and social interaction.

Spirituality also plays an important role in Silat. Mohamad Nizam Mohamed Shapie et al. (2015) state that *Silat Melayu* in Peninsular Malaysia is rooted in Islam and that Islamic principles shape its spiritual formation. This supports the finding that practitioners connect Silat with remembrance of God, prayer, inner calmness and moral accountability. Therefore, Silat may be interpreted as a holistic system of moral-spiritual development that integrates body, mind, emotion, culture and faith.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This article draws on qualitative interview data to examine the lived experiences of Silat practitioners. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand how practitioners interpret Silat's role in shaping self-identity, behaviour, values and cultural belonging.

Participants and Sampling

The study involved six informants selected through purposive sampling. The participants consisted of experienced Silat instructors, former students and current students from three selected Silat backgrounds: Silat Seni Gayong, Silat Lincah and Silat Cekak. These styles were chosen because they are among the popular and widely practised forms of Silat Melayu in Malaysia. Although Malaysia has more than 150 traditional and regional Silat styles, these three were selected due to their large membership base, cultural presence and relevance to the study's qualitative context. The informants were chosen based on their direct involvement, extensive experience and ability to provide meaningful reflections on Silat practice. Their participation in Silat ranged from more than fifteen years to over fifty years, allowing the study to obtain rich accounts of identity formation, discipline, moral development and cultural continuity. Details are presented in **Table 1**.

Ethical Considerations

Before the interviews were conducted, each participant was informed about the purpose of the interview and that the data would be used for this study only. Participation was purely voluntary, and participants were told that they had the right to decline, withdraw or refuse to answer any question if they felt uncomfortable. Their identities were protected through anonymous coding from Informant 1 to Informant 6. Each interview was audio-recorded with the participant's permission to ensure accuracy during transcription and analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were gathered through individual interviews. The interviews explored participants' experiences of learning Silat, their understanding of discipline and self-control, their views on Malay cultural identity, and the ways Silat shaped their personality, spirituality and social behaviour. This method allowed participants to explain their experiences in depth while enabling the study to explore emerging issues related to self-identity and intangible cultural heritage.

Data Saturation

Data saturation was considered to have been reached when similar patterns appeared across the interviews and no substantially new themes emerged from later responses. This indicated that the interview data were sufficient to identify recurring meanings related to Silat practice and self-identity formation among the six informants.

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis and Thematic Coding

The data were analysed using thematic analysis and thematic coding. First, all interview recordings were transcribed and reviewed repeatedly to become familiar with the respondents' experiences and meanings. Second, initial codes were developed based on recurring words, ideas and meanings. Third, related codes were

organised into broader themes. Fourth, the themes were reviewed and refined according to their relevance to the study's focus on Silat and self-identity formation.

The main themes identified were discipline, self-control, confidence, adab, cultural identity, spirituality, emotional regulation, family influence, leadership and self-protection. These themes were compared across all six informants to identify shared patterns and differences in experience.

Analytical Reflexivity

Analytical reflexivity was also considered during the interpretation process. The authors remained aware that their understanding of Silat as cultural heritage and identity formation could influence the analysis. Therefore, the findings were repeatedly checked against the original interview data to ensure that the interpretation remained grounded in the informants' meanings.

Qualitative Credibility and Trustworthiness

Several strategies were applied to strengthen qualitative credibility. Verbatim quotations were included to preserve participants' voices and support the interpretation of each theme. The themes were also reviewed in relation to the research objectives and relevant literature to ensure consistency, transparency and analytical trustworthiness.

Therefore, the findings should be understood as context-specific insights rather than universal characteristics of all Silat traditions. The findings reflect the lived experiences of six informants from Silat Seni Gayong, Silat Lincak and Silat Cekak backgrounds in relation to self-identity formation, discipline, moral development and cultural belonging.

Table 1 Profile of Interview Informants

Code	Types of Silat	Role in Silat	Years in Silat
Informant 1	Silat Gayong	Senior Instructor / Committee Member	50
Informant 2	Silat Lincak	Senior Instructor / Executive Committee	51
Informant 3	Silat Lincak	Former Student / Instructor	21
Informant 4	Silat Cekak	Former Student / Instructor	34
Informant 5	Silat Cekak	Instructor	24
Informant 6	Silat Gayong	Former Student	15

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Discipline and Self-Control as the Foundation of Self-Identity

The most dominant finding is that discipline forms the foundation of Silat practice. Across the six individual interviews, participants consistently described discipline as the core value that shapes self-identity, behaviour and personality. In Silat, discipline is not limited to obeying instructions or performing movements correctly. It becomes an internal value that influences speech, emotion, decision-making and daily conduct.

“Silat disciplines the self. If we have no discipline, our life will fall apart.”(*Informant 1*)

This quotation shows that discipline is understood as a stabilising force in life. The phrase “life will fall apart” suggests that without discipline, a person may become emotionally unstable, behaviourally inconsistent and

socially irresponsible. Therefore, Silat acts as a corrective and formative system that trains individuals to regulate themselves.

Another informant also emphasised discipline as the most important value developed through Silat:

“Discipline is surely produced by Silat; that cannot be denied, it is number one.” (*Informant 5*)

This quotation confirms that discipline is not a secondary outcome but the main foundation of Silat. It supports other qualities such as confidence, courage, emotional control, leadership and moral behaviour. Without discipline, these qualities may not develop in a balanced way.

Silat develops discipline through routine, repetition and embodied practice. Movements such as steps or *langkah*, movement sequences or *jurus* and stances or *kuda-kuda* require focus, patience and bodily control. Over time, control of the body becomes control of the mind and emotion. Practitioners learn to pause before reacting, think before speaking and remain calm under pressure. Discipline is also connected to respect for the instructor, who functions not only as a technical instructor but also as a moral guide. Through correction, example and advice, the guru teaches practitioners how to behave responsibly. Thus, discipline in Silat is both physical and ethical, shaping the practitioner’s whole personality.

Confidence, Courage and Personal Transformation

The second major finding is that Silat develops confidence, courage and personal empowerment. Several informants described themselves as shy, reserved or less confident before joining Silat. Through continuous training, they became more confident in speaking, interacting with others and facing life challenges.

“I was an introvert, but after Silat I became more confident and braver to speak.” (*Informant 4*)

This quotation demonstrates that Silat contributes to social confidence, not only physical bravery. The informant’s transformation from introversion to confidence shows that Silat influences self-perception and social behaviour. It gives practitioners the courage to express themselves and participate more actively in society.

Another informant explained:

“Silat gives self-confidence and makes us more confident to express opinions.” (*Informant 5*)

This shows that confidence in Silat extends into communication. Practitioners become more willing to speak, share views and take responsibility. Such confidence is important in identity development because it changes how individuals see themselves and how they relate to others.

However, confidence in Silat is not arrogance. It is confidence guided by discipline and moral control. One informant stated:

“Silat gave me self-confidence and shaped my character until today.” (*Informant 6*)

This quotation links confidence with character or *sahsiah*, Silat does not merely make practitioners brave; it teaches them how to use courage responsibly. This produces balanced confidence: confident yet humble, brave yet controlled and strong yet respectful. Therefore, Silat functions as a mechanism of personal transformation, helping practitioners reconstruct their identity from weakness, hesitation or fear into self-belief, maturity and responsibility.

Adab, Akhlak and Ethical Character Formation

The findings also show that Silat functions as a moral and ethical system. Informants repeatedly described Silat as a practice that teaches *adab*, *adat*, respect, humility and proper conduct. This indicates that Silat is not only concerned with martial skill, but also with ethical behaviour and character formation.

“Silat teaches manners and customs... ensuring that our words do not offend others.” (*Informant 1*)

This quotation shows that Silat shapes both physical and verbal behaviour. A true practitioner must not only control movement but also control speech. The ability to avoid offensive words reflects emotional maturity, respect and social responsibility.

Another informant stated:

“Silat is closely connected to Malay culture manners, politeness, order, and respect for teachers.” (*Informant 3*)

This highlights the close relationship between Silat and Malay ethical values. Manners, politeness, order and respect for teachers are not additional elements; they are central to Silat pedagogy. Through these values, Silat becomes a moral education system rooted in Malay cultural practice. Moral control also appears through speech and behaviour:

“We learn to control ourselves when speaking and not easily use harsh words.” (*Informant 4*)

This quotation demonstrates that Silat develops moral character or *akhlak* through daily conduct. *Akhlak* is not limited to religious practice; it is expressed through communication, patience, humility and restraint. Therefore, Silat teaches practitioners that strength must be accompanied by responsibility. It produces individuals who are physically capable, morally aware, respectful and socially responsible.

Cultural Identity, Malay Heritage and Sense of Belonging

Silat plays a significant role in strengthening Malay cultural identity and heritage awareness. Informants described Silat as part of Malay values, family tradition, historical memory and cultural belonging. This confirms that Silat is a living expression of Malay intangible cultural heritage.

“Silat reflects Malay values and self-identity, and I want to continue that tradition.” (*Informant 4*)

This quotation indicates that Silat is not only a personal activity but also a cultural responsibility. The informant sees Silat as a way to continue Malay tradition and preserve cultural identity. Another informant connected Silat with Malay historical consciousness:

“I began to see Silat not merely as self-defence, but as cultural heritage and a symbol of the strength of the nation.” (*Informant 6*)

This quotation is significant because it positions Silat as a symbol of collective strength. It shows that Silat carries historical and national meaning. Practitioners do not only learn movement; they also connect themselves to Malay warrior memory, cultural struggle and heritage pride.

Cultural identity is also shaped by family, place and community exposure. Some informants joined Silat because their parents or grandparents were involved, while others were influenced by kampung life, training grounds and local cultural practice. Through attire, movement, ritual, language and teacher-student relationships, Silat becomes a cultural classroom. It teaches Malay identity through the body, not only through words. Therefore, Silat strengthens cultural belonging by allowing practitioners to live, practise and embody heritage.

Brotherhood, Community Bonding and Social Responsibility

Another important finding is that Silat creates brotherhood, social bonding and community responsibility. Informants described Silat as a medium of *silaturahmi* that unites people from different ages, backgrounds and social positions.

“Silat is a form of social bonding... to unite one person with another.” (*Informant 1*)

This quotation shows that Silat functions as a social institution. It creates relationships that extend beyond the training hall. Through shared practice, practitioners develop trust, respect and belonging. Another informant explained:

“We learn together... sharing hardship together, sharing ease together.” (*Informant 3*)

This quotation reflects the emotional foundation of Silat brotherhood. Shared struggle creates solidarity because practitioners experience difficulty, correction, progress and achievement together. These experiences build strong interpersonal bonds.

Silat also supports community leadership. Some informants explained that they established training spaces to contribute to society. This indicates that Silat is not merely about individual development; it also encourages practitioners to serve others. Through teaching, guiding and organising, practitioners become community contributors. Therefore, Silat strengthens social identity by giving practitioners a sense of belonging, responsibility and cultural continuity across generations.

Emotional Regulation, Resilience and Life Transformation

The findings further reveal that Silat contributes to emotional regulation and psychological resilience. Informants described becoming calmer, more patient, more mature and more thoughtful after learning Silat.

“After learning Silat... I became more patient and more thoughtful before taking action.” (*Informant 3*)

This quotation shows that Silat develops reflective behaviour. Practitioners learn not to react impulsively but to evaluate situations before acting, which reflects emotional maturity. Another informant explained:

“A person who learns Silat... does not raise their hand quickly. They think first... Silat teaches us to restrain ourselves.” (*Informant 2*)

This quotation demonstrates that Silat trains emotional control. Although Silat is a martial art, it does not encourage aggression. Instead, it teaches restraint, patience and wisdom. The ability to think before acting shows that Silat develops self-regulation.

Silat also contributes to resilience because training involves physical challenge, repetition, correction and pressure. Practitioners learn to endure difficulty and remain committed. Emotional resilience is further strengthened by the support of the Silat community.

“Silat shaped me to become more mature and confident in life.” (*Informant 4*)

This quotation indicates that Silat supports long-term personality development by helping practitioners become more stable, confident and responsible in responding to life.

Spiritual Consciousness and Moral-Spiritual Development

The deepest dimension of Silat's influence is spiritual consciousness. Informants described Silat as a practice that brings them closer to God, develops inner calmness and strengthens moral accountability.

“Whatever we do, God is watching.” (*Informant 1*)

This quotation shows that Silat develops internal spiritual awareness. Practitioners regulate their behaviour not only because of social rules, but also because of divine accountability. This gives discipline a deeper moral foundation. Spiritual practice was also highlighted by another informant:

“I was taught spiritual aspects, including *zikir* and remembering Allah; I bring this practice into my daily life, and it helps me become calmer and more focused.” (*Informant 6*)

This quotation shows that Silat integrates physical practice with spiritual discipline. *Zikir* and remembrance of Allah help practitioners develop calmness, focus and emotional balance. Spirituality therefore supports inner discipline and emotional regulation. Another informant explained:

“Silat plays an important role as a life principle, discipline and self-identity.” (*Informant 5*)

This indicates that Silat becomes a philosophy of life. It guides how practitioners understand themselves, behave and make decisions. Thus, spirituality in Silat is not limited to ritual; it becomes a moral compass. Through the integration of body, mind and spirit, Silat functions as a psychospiritual system that develops inner awareness, humility, sincerity and moral responsibility.

Silat Beyond Self-Defence

Although Silat includes self-defence, the findings show that self-protection is not the dominant meaning expressed by informants. Instead, they emphasise discipline, identity, morality, culture, confidence and spirituality.

“I wanted to defend myself and remove my fear of the outside world.” (*Informant 5*)

This quotation shows that self-defence can be an initial motivation for joining Silat. However, it also indicates that the deeper issue is not only physical safety but psychological security. Silat helps practitioners overcome fear and develop confidence.

Overall, the findings challenge the assumption that Silat is mainly about fighting. While self-defence is part of Silat, informants speak more strongly about discipline, self-control, confidence, spirituality, family heritage and Malay cultural identity. Therefore, Silat should be understood as a holistic heritage system that develops the whole person.

Integrated Discussion: Silat as a Holistic Framework of Identity Formation

The combined findings show that Silat operates as a holistic framework of identity formation. Its influence emerges through the interaction of discipline, confidence, morality, culture, spirituality, emotion and community. Discipline forms the foundation because it trains practitioners to regulate the body, speech, emotion and behaviour. From this discipline, confidence develops as practitioners gain competence, courage and self-awareness.

At the same time, moral values such as ethical conduct or *adab* and moral character or *akhlak* ensure that confidence is guided by humility, respect and responsibility. Cultural identity gives practitioners a sense of belonging, while community bonding provides support, recognition and social responsibility. Emotional regulation strengthens resilience, and spirituality gives deeper meaning to self-control and moral conduct.

This integrated framework shows that Silat shapes the whole person. It does not separate physical training from moral development, or cultural identity from spirituality. Instead, Silat combines these dimensions into one lived practice. Practitioners do not simply inherit Malay identity; they practise it through movement, ritual, speech, discipline and social responsibility. Therefore, Silat becomes a living method of cultural preservation.

Theoretical Contribution: Habitus, Social Identity and Silat Self-Formation

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its integration of Bourdieu's concept of habitus with Social Identity Theory to explain how Silat shapes self-identity. Bourdieu's concept of habitus explains how repeated embodied practices gradually form dispositions, behaviour and ways of thinking. In the context of Silat, practitioners internalise discipline, respect, humility, restraint and moral responsibility through bodily training, correction, ritual practice and interaction with the instructor or guru. These values are not only taught verbally, but are absorbed through repeated movement, posture, speech control and social conduct.

Social Identity Theory complements this explanation by showing how identity is shaped through group belonging. Silat practitioners do not develop identity only as individuals. They also form a collective identity through membership in a Silat community, connection to lineage, respect for the guru, shared training experience, cultural symbols and Malay heritage. Through this process, practitioners come to understand themselves as part of a wider moral, cultural and social group.

Together, habitus and Social Identity Theory show that self-identity in Silat is formed through both embodied practice and collective belonging. Habitus explains how Silat values become part of the practitioner's body, behaviour and character, while Social Identity Theory explains how belonging to the Silat community strengthens cultural identity and self-understanding. This interaction demonstrates that Silat identity is not passively inherited. Rather, it is actively produced through disciplined practice, social recognition, cultural participation and moral-spiritual learning.

In contemporary society, Silat remains significant because it offers a culturally rooted model for developing self-identity, moral character, emotional resilience and social responsibility, especially among younger generations.

Conceptual Model

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Self-Identity Formation through Silat

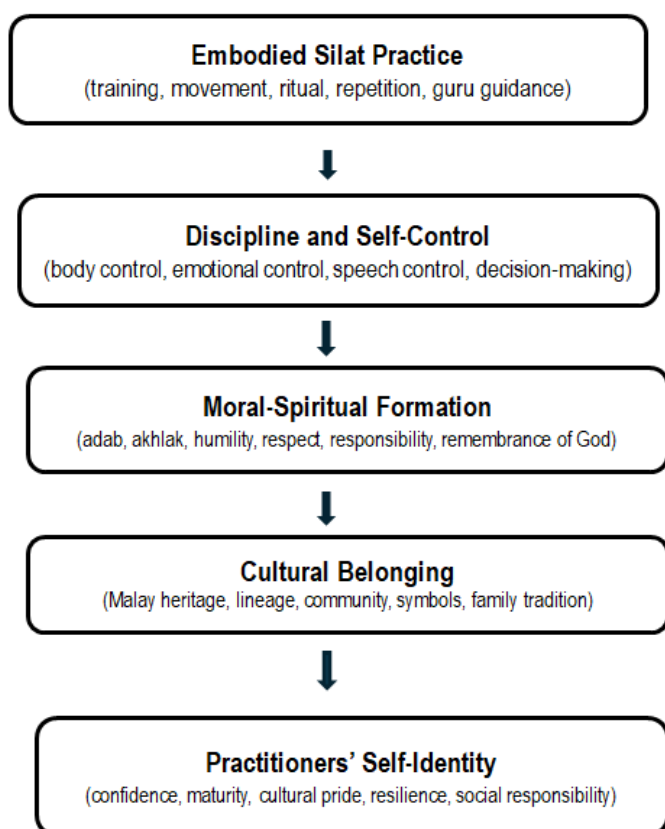


Figure 1 illustrates the process through which Silat contributes to self-identity formation. The model begins with embodied Silat practice, which includes physical training, movement repetition, ritual discipline, teacher-student guidance and communal participation. These practices develop discipline and self-control by training practitioners to regulate the body, emotion, speech and behaviour.

Discipline then supports moral-spiritual formation through the development of *adab*, *akhlak*, humility, respect, responsibility and awareness of God. At the same time, Silat strengthens cultural belonging by connecting practitioners to Malay heritage, lineage, community values, family tradition and cultural symbols. These dimensions collectively contribute to practitioners' self-identity, expressed through confidence, maturity, cultural pride, emotional resilience and social responsibility.

CONCLUSION

It is important to note that this study concludes that Silat functions as a holistic system for self-identity formation, personality development and Malay cultural continuity. The interview findings indicate that discipline is the most dominant theme, as it shapes practitioners' behaviour, speech, emotional control, decision-making and daily conduct. However, Silat should not be reduced to discipline alone. Its wider significance lies in the way it develops confidence, courage, *adab*, *akhlak*, humility, cultural pride, brotherhood, emotional resilience and spiritual consciousness.

Critically, the findings suggest that Silat operates as more than a physical or combative practice. The verbatim quotations show that practitioners experience Silat as a transformative process that provides moral guidance, cultural belonging, inner calmness and personal strength. This indicates that Silat contributes to identity formation through the integration of body, values, spirituality and social relationships. Therefore, Silat may be understood as a living form of intangible cultural heritage that shapes practitioners physically, emotionally, morally, socially, spiritually and culturally.

Nevertheless, the findings must be interpreted within the limitations of this study. The research involved only six informants from three main selected Silat backgrounds, namely Silat Seni Gayong, Silat Lincah and Silat Cekak. Therefore, the findings should not be treated as general conclusions about all Silat practitioners or all Silat traditions. Instead, they represent context-specific qualitative insights into how selected practitioners understand and experience Silat. Future research should involve a larger and more diverse sample, including different Silat schools, age groups, gender groups and regional contexts in Malaysia.

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