

# METHODS OF LEARNING AND WRITING JAWI SCRIPTS WITHIN THE MALAY COMMUNITY: PAST AND PRESENT EXPERIENCES

<sup>1</sup>ASYRAF HJ AB RAHMAN, <sup>2</sup>ABDUL MANAN ALI, <sup>3</sup>FARHANAH BT ABDULLAH, <sup>4</sup>FIRDAUS KHAIRI ABDUL KADIR, <sup>5</sup>FADZLI ADAM, <sup>6</sup>DAUD ISMAIL

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Centre for Fundamental and Liberal Education, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu

<sup>5,6</sup>Centre for Islamic Product and Malay Civilization (Inspire), Unisza

Email: <sup>1</sup>asyraf@umt.edu.my

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**Abstract** - Jawi script is considered as the heritage of the Malay people and thus preserving and sustaining the script is vital since it shapes the identity of the Malays and their cultural heritage. This paper discusses some methods of learning and writing Jawi scripts within the Malay community and how the script writing system has gone through a systematic evolution through times due to requirements set by relevant authorities. Despite the latest development and evolution, the Jawi scripting system had played important roles as a medium to spread Islam, language development and Malay culture enhancements. Towards the end of the 20th century, the Jawi script began to fade away as it was gradually replaced by the Rumi (Roman or Latin alphabet) script that have a very strong influences in the education curriculum system. As a result, not many Malay younger generations know about Jawi alphabet yet again are unable to read or write in Jawi literature. These younger generations no longer fluent in Jawi literature compared to earlier days where everybody were Jawi literate regardless of their age category. Using qualitative research design involving content analysis of secondary data and interviews with selected informants amongst teachers and students of secondary schools, the study traced back the evolution of learning and writings Jawi script from past to the present days and demonstrated how different approaches were employed by those experts of Jawi scripts towards preserving the script and promoted its usage and interest amongst the Malay generation. The study found some approaches and techniques were successful at least at instilling interest amongst younger generations to write and read Jawi scripts including the introduction of a new learning method of Jawi script using the Latin alphabet called Rumi amongst school students.

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**Keywords** - Jawi script, Muslim Community, Malay heritage

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Jawi (جوي) is an Arabic alphabet used for writing the Malay language and several other languages in Southeast Asia. Its importance stems from the fact that it has since been relegated to a script used for religious, cultural and other administrative purposes amongst the Malay community in Malaysia and thus considered as Malay literature identity forever. This paper discusses some methods of learning and writing Jawi scripts within the Malay community and how the script writing system has gone through a systematic evolution through times due to requirements set by relevant authorities. Despite the latest development and evolution, the Jawi scripting system had played important roles as a medium to spread Islam, language development and Malay culture enhancements. Towards the end of the 20th century, the Jawi script began to fade away as it was gradually replaced by the Rumi (Roman or Latin alphabet) script that have a very strong influences in the education curriculum system.

As a result, not many Malay younger generations know about Jawi alphabet yet again are unable to read or write in Jawi literature. These younger generations no longer fluent in Jawi literature compared to earlier days where everybody were Jawi literate regardless of their age category. Information about Jawi literature development, and current issues of Jawi script in Malaysia was gathered using qualitative method involving analysis of available

secondary data and interviews with key informants.. In addition, the development and survival of Jawi script in the context of modern day are also discussed to see its relevance together with some efforts taken by the government to preserve the script as part of the Malay identity.

## II. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND THE MALAY SOCIETY

Among Arab merchants responsible for the Islamization of the Malay region particularly the Peninsular, were Syed Abdul Aziz, Sheikh Abdul Qadir and Syarif Karim al-Makhdum. They came from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in the early 15th century and were also responsible towards Islamization of Malay ruler including the ruler of Malacca (Chelliah, M: 1947). According to some other sources, Islam came into this Peninsular with the commitment and hard work of Persian Muslim merchants who had business dealings with the local Malays. Most of them came from the families of the religious elite such as the family of Asyraf Ibn Dhiuddin, the family of Jawani al-Kurdi and the family of Sabankarah (Wan Husein Azmi, 1980). At the early stage of Islamisation, the Arabic script was taught to the local people who had newly embraced Islam in the form of religious practices, such as the recitation of Quran and other religious rituals. The Arabic script was accepted by the Malay community together with their acceptance of Islam and they only took a short time to modify the script and adapt it to suit the

spoken Classical Malay later known as Jawi script. Religious education within the Malay community refers to Islamic education that put great emphasis on the oneness of Allah (Tauhid) and the Prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh) as the messenger of Allah. The Prophet's teachings therefore must be followed as they become revealed knowledge and guidance coming from Allah. Describing religious education among the Malay Muslim community in the 19th century, Abdullah Munsyi notes that there are three important elements emphasized that always linked with Islam and centered around the Quran, Hadith (tradition) and religious law. These elements could be described as follows: 1) Studying the classical books emphasized the Oneness of Allah (tauhid), His actions (af'al) and His attributes (sifat). 2) Studying the books of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) that stress on Muslim relations (mu'amalat) and their obligations such as prayer, fasting, zakat and pilgrimage and 3) Studying various disciplines and branches of knowledge that would benefit them in their daily life such as the biography of the Prophet, good conducts or moral (akhlaq) and the classical Islamic tales (Haron Din and Sobri Salamun, 1980). These subjects were taught in both mosques and pondok while an instructor called Tok Guru sat at the front, reading a classical text and explaining its lessons words by words. Students sitting in a circle (halaqat) listening and taking notes on what being said by their instructor or Tok Guru.

There are many literatures discussing role and function of traditional mode of education within Malay society during the 19th and 20th centuries (Ismail Ishak, 1990, Azmi Omar, 1993, and Hasan Md Man, 1990). Most of those works revolved around building structure of the schools, syllabus that were taught and Jawi writings used as text books for halaqat (circle) classes.

### III. METHODOLOGY

Data for the study were collected through unstructured interviews with key informants, coupled with content analysis of the secondary data in the form of books, articles and classical manuscript about Jawi script and writings. Pre and post tests are also conducted on selected respondents amongst students of secondary schools in regards to their Jawi reading and writing mastery using new method of learning Jawi script. All the data were analyzed and discussed using thematic approach.

### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

#### Importance of Jawi script

As mentioned earlier, Jawi is an Arabic alphabet used for writing the Malay language and several other languages in Southeast Asia. Its importance stems from the fact that it has since been relegated to a script used for religious, cultural and some

administrative purposes amongst the Malay community in Malaysia. It was the efforts of early Malay scholars who took a short time to modify the script and adapt it to suit the daily spoken Classical Malay and finally enable the Malay community at large to be accustomed with the script while learning their religious teachings mostly written in Arabic and Jawi scripts known as Kitab Kuning. Their initiative were also aimed at enabling Muslim to read the Quran as well. There are a lot of advantages of using Jawi Script in religious writings or kitab kuning. Among other advantages are as follows:

1. Writer of Kitab Kuning. Kitab kuning was written by Malay scholars who gained their religious knowledge from great scholars of the Middle East (Mecca and Medinan Mosques). The great scholars of the Middle East were venerated scholars recognized their knowledge by all Muslim communities around the world. So tok guru who was educated in the Middle East can be said to be a scholar who received his education from primary scholars.
2. Kitab Kuning (Yellow Book). Kitab Kuning is reference resource in the form of old (yellowish) texts which had been written in original Jawi Malay. Its writings is generally based on primary sources taken from Arabic manuscripts written by Islamic scholars venerated in the Middle East or just over half. Kitab kuning were written or translated from original Arabic texts from those scholars of the Middle East and thus making kitab kuning a unique and different from other religious books available in the market written in Latin alphabet. Furthermore, the latter's references mostly using resources from kitab kuning or other sources which were certainly lack the deepness of explanation compared to kitab kuning. Description of an issue in kitab kuning is detailed and well elaborated. Decomposition also extends to include many examples. Major publishers and toko kitab (bookshops specializing in this type of religious literature) can be found in many places in Southeast Asia such as Jakarta, Bogor, Bandung, Banjarmasin, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Georgetown (Penang), Kota Bharu and Patani (Southern Thailand). These publishers provides kitab kuning for traditional schools called pondok or pasentran in Southeast Asia.
3. For traditional scholars and those coming from pondok schools, they believed that knowledge gained through kitab kuning is a science that has not been contaminated, original, suitable in the context of the Malay social and political life. Those who study and mastering kitab kuning will become a scholar following their tok guru foot steps. In the context of Malay traditions, knowledge of Jawi script and writings and of Arabic also determined one's religiosity and

intellectual status in the eyes of other fellow Muslims (Othman, MR. 2006)

**Methods of Learning and Writing Jawi Scripts within the Malay Community:**

**Past and Present Experiences**

As noted earlier, it was the hard work of early Malay scholars who modified the Arabic script and adapt it to suit the spoken Classical Malay and finally enable the Malay community at large to be accustomed with the script while learning their religious teachings and reciting the Quran. Starting from that, Jawi scripts have been going through development and standardized process until the present days. From 29 alphabets, it has increased to 36 alphabets with the additional alphabets such as ‘Cha’, ‘Nga’, ‘Pa’, ‘Ga’, ‘Nya’, ‘Va’, and ‘Lam Alif’. As there have been growth in Jawi scripts and the world entering modernization era, it is unavoidable that there are also changes taking place in learning and writing Jawi scripts from the past and present days. According to al-Attas (1990), Jawi script is a result of the renovation and addition of Arabic letters to adapt to the Malay language to facilitate the teaching and learning process. For example, the letters Ga (ڠ) were introduced based on the letters Kaf (ك) and Jim (ج) (Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, 1990).

ا	ب	ت	ث	ج	ح	خ	د	ذ	ر	ز
aa'	baa'	taa'	thaa'	jiim	haa'	khaa'	daal	dhaal	raa'	zaay
س	ش	ص	ض	ط	ظ	ع	غ			
siin	shiin	saad	daad	taa'	zaa'	3ayn	ghayn			
ف	ق	ك	ل	م	ن	ه	و	ي		
faa'	qaaf	kaaf	laam	miim	nuun	haa'	waaw	yaa'		

Table 1: Arabic Script

ا	ب	ت	ث	ج	ح	خ	د	ذ	ر	ز
aa'	baa'	taa'	thaa'	jiim	haa'	khaa'	daal	dhaal	raa'	zaay
س	ش	ص	ض	ط	ظ	ع	غ			
siin	shiin	saad	daad	taa'	zaa'	3ayn	ghayn			
ف	ق	ك	ل	م	ن	ه	و	ي		
faa'	qaaf	kaaf	laam	miim	nuun	haa'	waaw	yaa'		

Table 2: Jawi Scripts

Need to mention that early Malay people already knew Arabic alphabets before they learned Jawi script. This was due to the Islamization process of the Malay Archipelago during those early days under the influence of Arab merchants and scholars who brought together with them the Quran written in Arabic. Later, it became the Malay tradition itself and other Muslim communities in the region emphasizing Islamic education of their children where the Quran became main source of reference for matters concerning Islamic life and religion. From the early ages, the children also were taught on reading or reciting the Quran starting from word by word of

Arabic scripts followed by learning tajweed rules. Thus, Arabic is the main language used in the Qur'an. This language becomes even more appealing if it is complemented with tarannum recitation. In adopting tarannum when reciting the Qur'an, one has to do it according to the correct principles of tajweed, or Arabic elocution and in a melodious voice, while observing the meaning of the Qur'an effectively that the recitation can embrace one's body and soul. It therefore considered common for Qur'anic teachers during those time to develop not only students with a basic reading of Qur'an, but also those who are able to perform the tarannum in a good manner. (Tariq Mssraty, Qais Faryadi, 2012). Islamic books or Kitab kuning were then introduced after they have learned the Quran. When the new schools with the encouragement of British were established, the same techniques of learning and writing Jawi script were continued. One factor that contributed to the technique preservation is that the children were to be sent to the schools after they reached six years old.

In this context, it was also possible to consider that learning how to recite the Quran in the past was indirectly helping Malay people to know Jawi script. This happen when teachers of the Quran alone can teach the Quran. In the first level, students are instructed to recognize letters, recitation style, a situation to break off and connecting the sentences. Then, they will be taught the Quran recitation method and the rhythm according to the tone which was adjusted with the meaning of a sentence (Berhanundin Abdullah, Badlihisam Mohd Nasir, Ahmad Syukran Baharuddin, and Aminuddin Hehsan, 2016). Normally, Malay children in the past, learned al-Quran and continued to learning Jawi script before they reach six years old. In fact, there were even children who had not reach mumayyiz (the age at which a child can discern between right and wrong) that were taught to recite the Quran. The first step in learning and writing Jawi script was that the children were taught the alphabets only. Then, they learnt how to write the learned alphabets. From then, they moved to the next stage which was reading Jawi script. They use ‘papan batu’ (learning tools made of wood) and ‘kalam batu’ as their tools of learning. ‘Papan batu’ is where the writing is written on and ‘kalam batu’ is a pencil to write on the ‘papan batu’.

Malay people in the past learnt Jawi script quickly enough as there have not been any distraction from other writings. This was also because Jawi scripts was the main medium of writing and language at that time. In addition, business relationship with foreign merchants were written in the Jawi script, for example figures of agreement, document, consent commerce and the letters on official government. As such, most European traders, Chinese and Indian came to Malay world by using Malay language as a medium of communication and business and accept

the Jawi script as the official script. Furthermore, all subjects taught in schools during those days used Jawi scripts. Since Jawi script was the main medium of writing, they have to practice and learn the Jawi writing until they master Jawi script.

Despite the general tendency of the Malays to stick to Jawi script, the influence of the Roman alphabets continued to spread among the new generation of Malays. Problems began to arise as Roman alphabets took over the important role of Jawi script thus making Jawi script no longer used as frequently as before. The stipulation of Akta Bahasa 1963 (Language Act.) which set Roman alphabets as an official writing for Malay language further led and contributed to the declination of the role of Jawi script. As a result, number of people knowing and mastering the Jawi script drastically decreased and by year 1969 and 1970, many Malay children are no longer familiar with Jawi script anymore (Amat Juhari, 1996).

Entering the era of modernization, there are some improvements and actions taken to return the familiarity of Jawi script among younger generations. Many books related to Jawi script guideline are published together with Jawi programs being organized by government institutions and private agencies. Since 1980s for instance, Malay children are introduced to the Jawi script in Year One of their school sessions. There are also situations where some children do receive and exposed to Jawi script education during their pre-school sessions. Learning and writing Jawi script in schools follow the standard and subjects syllabus provided by the Ministry of Education. Amat Juhari (1996) states that the Jawi script teaching in the first year is executed in four stages which include memorization stages, recognition and pronunciation stages, self-reading stages, and writing stages. The Jawi script classes will continue until Standard Six. By that time, the children are already 12 years old.

Government's commitment to the development of Jawi program is in line with efforts made towards preserving this Malay culture and heritage for the new generations. In this regard, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has launched a national religious literacy initiative known as the j-QAF Programme in early 2004. This programme has since been implemented in public primary schools throughout the country and incorporated as a part of the curriculum of studies. The programme includes a wide range of basic religious skills including recitation of the Quran, the learning of the Jawi script and Arabic language as well as the basics of ibadah (worship). This program aims at providing solid religious foundation especially among the younger generations through understanding and mastering Jawi scripts. The commitment demonstrated by the government has opened the eyes amongst the religious teachers who later, creatively started to develop mode of teaching and learning Jawi script

using new methods. There were teachers who developed some of the game's approaches in learning Jawi script, believing that the games were able to stimulate student's interest in learning. Match-based games or matches along with certain rules will make teaching and learning sessions take place in a fun atmosphere. Among the games suggested were (Manan, 2016):

#### **i. Wheels of the Jawi Dreams**

This game is just like the reality show "Wheels of Dreams". Students are asked to select a syllable or Jawi letter and turn the wheel. The marker on the wheel will stop in one syllable or letter. Students who spin the wheel are asked to connect and spell the syllable to be easy to understand. But this game is suitable at primary school students only because high school students prefer to play more mature games that challenge their mind.

#### **ii. Jawi Fishing rod**

Teachers provide hijai'ah single-letter cards or fish shaped open syllabus cards. Students will use fishing rods and will spell syllables. Students who can spell correctly will be rewarded. As the first game the second game is also more appropriate in the early days of the children ie in nurseries and so on and is not suitable for students in secondary school especially for adults.

#### **iii. Clever Rods**

Jawi single letter cards will be plastered over polystyrene scattered. Students will choose and pronounce syllables or letters repeatedly. Students who can not master the skills will be taught to pronounce letters or spell open syllables. What is presented is only emphasizing the aspects of the game but some aspects like training and reinforcement could not be focused through this game.

As part of the learning of Jawi script, there were also some other efforts to preserve Malay literature identity amongst the Malay community, including the introduction of a new learning method of Jawi script using the Latin alphabet called Rumi amongst school students. Through this method, students are taught on how to read and write Jawi script using latin alphabet. Jawi script is written from right to left whereas the latin alphabet is written from left to right. Considering the approach, those students have to follow few steps;

- 1) identifying jawi and latin letters,
- 2) converting jawi letters to latin letter, from a single letter up to 5 letters into the latin letters,
- 3) converting Jawi words into the latin words and
- 4) converting sentences in jawi script into sentences in the latin alphabet. Result of the study showed that the school students are able to write jawi script correctly using the latin alphabets.

### Learning Method of Jawi Script using the Roman/Latin alphabet

A study was conducted on the application of a new method of learning jawi script using the latin alphabet. It involves students from secondary schools in Kuala Terengganu District, Malaysia, as respondents. These 80 students are given written test on jawi script writings. Results of the study are kept and analysed. The students were then taught and exposed to new methods of learning Jawi script using the latin alphabet for 4 hours. After the treatment is done, a post test was conducted to the students. Prior to the test, short briefings are given to them to prevent them from interacting with each other and not referring to any reference material for confirmation of the answer. Completed results of the test are collected and analyzed to obtain percentages and ratios.

There are 16 instruments in the form of questions are tested upon students starting from changing roman letters to Jawi letters or vice versa including writing sentences. Table 3 to table 7 below are examples of the instruments.

W  R  Y  P   
 S  D  G  H   
 J  K

**Table 3: Please write the corresponding Jawi letters with the following roman letters.**

ل  ب  س  ر   
 م  د  ك  ن   
 ت  ي

**Table 4: Please write the roman letters correspond to the following Jawi letters**

WO  RI  YA  PO   
 SI  DU  GI  HO   
 JA  NU

**Table 5: Please write the Jawi syllable that corresponds to the following roman letters**

لا  بي  سو  را   
 مو  دي  كا  نو   
 سر  ري

**Table 6: Please write a roman syllable that corresponds to the following Jawi words**

DESA  HARI  CURI  LUMI   
 GALI  MINA  HINA  BUNYI   
 BIJI  DUNGU

**Table 7: Please write the Jawi words for the following roman words**

Instruments tested upon students are focused on 2 aspects namely respondents' ability of writing and reading jawi scripts. Results from pre and post test revealed that there is an increase percentage of students' ability in writing and reading skill of Jawi. The pre test result of writing was 26.75%, while post test result (after using new method of learning Jawi) is 47.19%. This data is a ratio of 20.44% increase as stated in table 8.

Writing Skill			
Questions	Result of Pre Test	Result of Post Test	Increase Ratio
Q1 Change a roman letter to jawi	64.5%	86.5%	22%
Q2 Change 2 roman letters to jawi	43.5%	71.5%	28%
Q3 Change 3 roman letters to jawi	38.5%	58%	19.5%
Q4 Change 4 roman letters to jawi	26.5%	49.5%	23%
Q5			

Change 5 roman letters to jawi	24.5%	43.5%	19%
Q6 Change a roman word to jawi	14%	28%	14%
Q7 Chance roman sentences to jawi	2.5%	20%	17.5%
Q8 Write roman sentences into jawi sentences	0%	20.5%	20.5%
Average	26.75%	47.19%	20.44%

**Table 8: Comparison Percentage of pre and post test based on writing skills questions.**

Result from pre and post tests for reading ability amongst the respondents revealed that there is an increase percentage of their ability of reading Jawi letter, words and sentences after following new method of learning Jawi. The pre test result of reading was 46.5%, while post test result (after being exposed to new method of learning Jawi) is 70%. This data is a ratio of 23.5% increase as stated in table 9.

Reading Skill			
Questions (reading and writing)	Result of Pre Test	Result of Post Test	Increase ratio
Q1 1 jawi letter into 1 roman letter	66%	85.5%	19.5%
Q2 2 jawi letters into 2 roman letters	61.5%	84.5%	23%
Q3 3 jawi letters into 3 roman letters	51.5%	68%	16.5%
Q4 4 jawi letters into 4 roman letters	58%	74.5%	16.5%
Q5 5 jawi letters into 5 roman letters	49.5%	73.5%	24%
Q6 Jawi words into roman words	34.5%	58.5%	24%
Q7 Jawi words (prefix and suffix addition) into roman words	25.5%	53.5%	28%
Q8 Jawi sentences into roman sentences	25.5%	62%	36.5%
Average	46.5%	70%	23.5%

**Table 9: Comparison Percentage of Pre and Post Test based on reading skills questions.**

Findings from the study (new learning method of Jawi script using Roman alphabet) showed that students are capable of learning Jawi script faster as compared to the old methods of learning Jawi. Results from the study also revealed that students can read Jawi scripts faster and easier compared to writing Jawi letter or sentences. This indicates that the respondents are able to read manuscript or books written in Jawi even though they are slow in writing the latter script. Therefore, efforts and campaigns towards using textbooks written in Jawi especially on the Islamic subjects should be initiated and supported in schools so that Malay Muslims students can again be exposed to the Malay heritage and literature identity.

## CONCLUSION

The present scenario has seen the differences in the approach of learning and writing Jawi script since the Jawi script is no longer the official writing of Malay language. In the present day, there are other alternative languages and alphabet introduced and applied for learning and writing and thus, making Jawi script easily put aside by people, even by the Malays themselves. Malaysian Government's commitment to the development of Jawi program in the schools is in line with efforts made towards preserving this Malay culture and heritage for the new generations. With the introduction of various methods of learning Jawi, it is hoped that the programs may provide solid religious foundation and Malay literature identity especially amongst the younger generations through understanding and mastering Jawi scripts. Study of new learning method of Jawi script using Roman alphabet considered successful as it exposed to students a new approach in writing and reading Jawi using Roman letters. The study at least instils interest amongst them to write and read Jawi scripts easily using their existing mastery of Roman letters and words in understanding the Jawi scripts.

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