

JAWI SCRIPT AS A LEGACY OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION IN MALAY LANDS

Putri Andriani¹, Lilis Permita Sari², Siti Mariyah³, Maryamah⁴

Islamic Studies, Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang

Email: 23041070245@radenfatah.ac.id¹, 23041070246@radenfatah.ac.id²,
23041070264@radenfatah.ac.id³, maryamah_uin@radenfatah.ac.id⁴

Abstrak

Keywords:

Jawi Script,
Islamic Civilization,
Cultural Heritage

The Jawi script is a significant form of cultural and intellectual heritage in the history of Islamic development in the Malay region. Since the arrival of Islam in the 13th century, Jawi has served as the primary tool for spreading religion, education, administration, and literary works. This article focuses on research regarding the contribution of Jawi script in shaping the scientific and cultural identity of the Malay community and analyzes various elements that have led to its decline in use in the modern era. The method used in this research is qualitative-descriptive, relying on literature analysis and historical studies. The findings of the analysis show that the Jawi script is more than just a medium of written communication, but also symbolizes the process of Islamization and cultural fusion between the Middle East and local traditions in the archipelago. However, the phenomena of globalization, modernization of the education system, and the dominance of the Latin script have caused changes in the function of Jawi in everyday life. This study emphasizes the importance of revitalizing Jawi script through education, digitization, and cultural preservation efforts so that it remains a relevant part of the Islamic civilization heritage in the Malay Archipelago.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license



INTRODUCTION

The introduction of Islam into the Malay world resulted in a significant transformation of the writing patterns and academic traditions of the local community. As



Islam spread, the Arabic script was adapted into the Jawi script, which was used before the Malay community understood the Latin alphabet. The Jawi script became the primary tool in the Malay language and grew as a means of spreading religion, knowledge, trade, government, and culture.(Norhuda,. 2025)

Before the arrival of Islam, the Malay people used several different writing systems, including the Pallava script and the Kawi script. Meanwhile, the Jawi script is estimated to have been used since the 10th century AD, coinciding with the arrival of Islam to the Malay islands. As a result of the development of Islam, the Jawi script replaced the previous writing systems because it was more suitable and facilitated the learning process, especially in studying Islam.(Ahmad et al.2020)

Jawi script originated from Arabic letters, which came to the archipelago along with the expansion of Islam. These Arabic letters began to appear in this region in the third century Hijrah, based on artifacts found on gravestones in the area. The term ‘Jawi’ is derived from the Arabic adjective “Jawah,” which came to be considered “Jawi.” Jawi script has two main functions: it is used in written communication and for writing various other documents such as books, manuscripts, treatises, administrative records, legal documents, money, gravestones, and so on.(Abdullah et al., 2020)

This Malay Arabic script originated from the standard Arabic alphabet, which was adapted to match the sounds of the Malay language. This script began to be used in the coastal regions of Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula in the 13th century, coinciding with the arrival of Islam through trade routes. The adaptation of Arabic letters into the Jawi form began to develop in the 14th century to reflect the distinctive sounds of the Malay language. Several letters such as **ڤ** (pa), **چ** (cha), **ڠ** (nga), **گ** (ga), and **ن** (nya) were created to meet local phonological needs. This adaptation shows that Islam did not arrive in the archipelago by erasing local culture, but rather by integrating it, and this inclusive and flexible nature is a characteristic of Islam in the Malay region. The combination of Arabic script and the Malay language demonstrates the ability of local communities to absorb outside influences without losing their identity.(Barus & Mawaddah, 2025)

Over time and with the development of Islam, Jawi script has undergone significant progress for nearly 700 years in Malay culture. However, the heyday of Jawi script in the Malay Archipelago did not last long. The reason for this was the arrival of European colonizers in Malay lands. They began to establish Malay educational institutions by introducing Rumi script or Latin letters, causing Jawi script to be sidelined.(Dungcik, 2017)

The decline in the use of Jawi script among the Malay community is not only due to the influence of the Latin alphabet brought by European colonizers, but also because of the lack of planned integration into the modern education and cultural systems. To overcome this problem, the most appropriate and strategic step is to revive the Jawi script through formal education combined with the use of digital technology. This method focuses not only on preservation, but also on empowerment, because reviving Jawi in the fields of education, modern media, and social activities. Therefore, the combination of formal education and digital innovation is a comprehensive solution that can address the historical, social, and cultural challenges faced by Jawi script today.

Through in-depth research, we hope this journal can make a real contribution to the preservation, revitalization, and development of the Jawi script. In this way, the Jawi script will not only be remembered as part of history, but will also continue to live on as a relevant, adaptable Malay cultural heritage that can be passed on to future generations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The decline of Jawi script among the Malay community is a historical process that occurred gradually and was closely related to social transformation, education, and modern policies. Nabila Meiliza Damanik and Sri Mawaddah (2025) their journal entitled “Aksara Jawi Dan Narasi Sosial : Menelusuri Bahasa Dalam Budaya Melayu” detail that since the era of Western colonization, the Latin alphabet began to take over the role of Jawi in the fields of administration, education, and official communication. Changes in the education system played an important role in accelerating the decline in the use of this script, as the younger generation no longer received sufficient instruction in Jawi writing.

This finding is in line with the research by Indah Rizkia and Sri Mawaddah.(2025), which emphasizes that colonialism and modernization have positioned Arab-Malay as a substitute in the structure of education and administration. They reveal that the Dutch implementation of the Western education model replaced the Arabic Malay script with the Latin script, thereby marginalizing this script from public spaces and institutions. The lack of support in the curriculum is the main reason for the decline in Jawi literacy among young people.

In addition to educational aspects, the dominance of the Rumi script in various media, official documents, and modern technology also limits the existence of the Jawi script. As a result, the Arabic-Malay script is no longer included in the national education curriculum, which has led to a break in the transmission of knowledge between generations. On the other hand, Nabila Meiliza Damanik and Sri Mawaddah. (2025) add that the lack of digital innovation and low support from institutions has caused Jawi to shift from being an active means of communication to merely a cultural symbol.

The impact of this situation is clearly evident in the low level of understanding of the Jawi script among the younger generation. Meanwhile, both studies confirm that Jawi was previously the main medium for shaping the religious, intellectual, and social identity of the Malay community. The lack of organized documentation and minimal research related to manuscripts has further accelerated the discontinuity of the Jawi literacy tradition.

Nevertheless, both researchers noted efforts to revitalize Jawi script through education, manuscript digitization, and cultural promotion. However, these efforts are considered to be insufficient and require stronger structural support so that Jawi script can be revived in a social and intellectual context, rather than simply being preserved as a historical relic.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach using library research methods, as its main focus is on historical exploration, factors of decline, and efforts to revive the Jawi or Arabic-Malay script through written sources. Information for this research was obtained from primary literature such as journals, manuscripts, and academic papers that directly discuss the development, changes, and social narratives of Jawi script in the context of Malay culture. In addition, this research also utilizes secondary sources such as academic books, journal articles, digitized manuscripts, research reports, and publications related to Islamic literacy, colonial policy, modern education, and cultural preservation.

The data collection process was carried out through documentation, namely by

searching academic journals, history books, digital archives, and academic repositories relevant to the research topic. After the data was collected, analysis was carried out using thematic analysis techniques. This analysis included grouping information based on themes such as the early history of the script, factors contributing to its decline, changes in the education system, the dominance of the Latin alphabet, and revitalization efforts through digitization, education, and cultural preservation. Next, data reduction was carried out to filter important information and compile narrative interpretations to map the relationships between themes analytically.

To ensure the accuracy of the findings, this study uses source triangulation by comparing the perspectives of various authors who discuss the same topic. Source evaluation is also carried out to assess the credibility, writing context, and relevance of publications. In addition, historical analysis is carried out to see the relationship between past conditions and current realities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The word “Jawi” comes from the Arabic term “Jawa,” which means “Arabian Peninsula.” The Jawi writing system, which is based on Arabic letters, is used to write Malay and several other languages. Jawi has a rich and famous history. In Arabic, the term for jawi is (Jawah). The Arabic name changed to “jawi” when it was converted into an adjective in Arabic. Al-Jawah and jawi are terms used by Ibn Battutah in 1964 to describe the archipelago and its people. The term “Jawi” is also used to refer to Malay people, the Malay language, and the Jawi script itself. There are four main concepts, namely the Jawi nation, the Jawi people, the Jawi language, and the Jawi script, which state that the traders who played a role in spreading Islam throughout the archipelago, especially in Malay lands, introduced and popularized the Jawi script.(Razali and Zulkifli,2023.)

In Malay culture, the existence of Malay Arabic script or Jawi script plays a vital role, not only as a means of communication, but also as a primary tool for spreading Islamic teachings and developing local culture. Malay Arabic script is a writing system that uses modified Arabic letters to write the Malay language.(Silvia Fahlevi, n.d.)

The Jawi script has undergone various stages of evolution since its introduction. Initially, to represent the sounds of the Malay language, the Arabic script was modified into the Jawi alphabet. This script was created in the 15th century under the Malacca Sultanate and is still used in writing the Malay language today. Jawi characters are adaptations of Arabic letters. These letters include alif (ا), ba (ب), ta (ت), tha (ث), jim (ج), ha (ح), kho (خ), dal (د), dhal (ڤ), ro (ر), zai (ز), sin (س), shin (ش), sod (ص), dod (ض), tho (ط), zho (ظ), ‘ain (ع), ghain (غ), fa (ف), qof (ق), kaf (ك), lam (ل), mim (م), nun (ن), wau (و), ha (ه), and ya (ي). These letters have been adapted and applied in the Malay language. However, these characters are not entirely sufficient to meet the phonetic needs of the Malay language because some sounds do not have equivalents in Arabic. Therefore, the Malay community added several letters from Farsi and Berber, including cha (چ), nga (غ), pa (پ), ga (گ), and nya (ڻ).

Entering the 20th century, the presence of European colonialism brought significant changes to the education system in the archipelago. The use of Arabic Malay declined, becoming limited to Islamic boarding schools, prayer rooms, and communities that still adhered to tradition. Both the colonial government and the Indonesian republican government prioritized Indonesian, which was written using the Latin alphabet. The

schools introduced by the Dutch replaced the use of Arabic-Malay script with the Latin alphabet, resulting in a decline in the use of Arabic-Malay script in formal education.(Maya Putri, n.d.)

Many revitalization initiatives utilizing digital technology are currently addressing this marginalization. According to a journal on digital integration in Malay Arabic learning, this historical script is being revived through the use of interactive applications, animated multimedia, augmented reality, and Latin-Jawi character converters. Although early colonial practices excluded Jawi from school curricula, technology now allows this script to be reintroduced into contemporary educational settings, particularly in madrasas and locally-based schools. Rather than simply repeating Jawi's historical function, this digital revitalization redefines Jawi as religious literacy and cultural identity relevant to the demands of the digital generation. Therefore, technology serves as a bridge to help communities recover from the decline initially caused by colonialism and the dominance of the Latin alphabet.(Muna & Mawaddah, n.d.)

As a result of globalization and language policies, the script used by the Malay community has undergone significant changes. The Jawi script has been marginalized due to the tendency of Malay-speaking countries to adopt the Latin alphabet in an effort to blend in with the global community. The Jawi script, which was once more dominant, has been replaced by English and the Latin alphabet, which are now more influential in trade and education due to globalization. Lack of Awareness and Interest The younger generation today is not very interested in or aware of the importance of preserving the Jawi script. Lack of social interaction, limited educational opportunities, and the belief that the Jawi script is outdated and irrelevant to modern life. (Maulana & Mawaddah, 2025)

Many revitalization initiatives utilizing digital technology are currently addressing this marginalization. According to a journal on digital integration in Malay Arabic learning, this historical script is being revived through the use of interactive applications, animated multimedia, augmented reality, and Latin-Jawi character converters. Although early colonial practices excluded Jawi from school curricula, technology now allows this script to be reintroduced into contemporary educational settings, particularly in madrasas and locally-based schools. Rather than simply repeating Jawi's historical function, this digital revitalization redefines Jawi as religious literacy and cultural identity relevant to the demands of the digital generation. Therefore, technology serves as a bridge to help communities recover from the decline initially caused by colonialism and the dominance of the Latin alphabet.(Muna & Mawaddah, n.d.)

Revitalization efforts used by (Astawan et al., 2025) First, the main basis for preservation is the digitization of manuscripts and classical literature. Jawi script is converted into an online version so that it can be accessed by researchers, educational institutions, and the general public through the scanning of manuscripts and digital archives. Manuscripts that were previously geographically limited can now be included in the global knowledge network thanks to digital repositories and virtual libraries. In addition, this process protects manuscripts from damage caused by the environment and age.

Second, the development of supporting technologies, such as writing software, digital Jawi fonts, and automatic transliteration programs, also contributes to revitalization. The potential for Jawi script applications in modern communication, such as social media, graphic design, and digital publishing, has increased with its integration

into contemporary computer systems. The adaptive function of Jawi in the current period has been further strengthened by the development of OCR (Optical Character Recognition) and AI technologies for character conversion.

Third, education has evolved into a significant tool for renewal. Through Malay cultural literacy initiatives, teaching in Islamic boarding schools, and local subject curricula, the Jawi script has been revived. Digital media-based learning innovations such as interactive modules, educational films, and Jawi script literacy games engage the younger generation without relying on conventional and formalistic text-based approaches. This is in line with the focus of education in the 21st century, which emphasizes the use of technology to integrate local culture.

Fourth, the legitimacy of revitalization is further strengthened by the participation of government agencies and cultural communities. The standardization of Jawi writing, the promotion of academic transliteration, and the enhancement of its status as an Islamic-Malay identity are facilitated by cultural forums, archival institutions, and Malay study centers. The degeneration of Jawi script into a folklorized symbolic preservation without functional sustainability must be prevented through cross-sectoral cooperation.

Fifth, the creation of Jawi-based digital content is an example of adaptive cultural renewal. Jawi script is being integrated into popular culture through digital comics, historical posters, short films, and social media. Community knowledge of Jawi script in contextual and communicative forms is being restored, and collective memory is being preserved. Overall, the revival of Jawi script in the digital age shows that preserving indigenous scripts requires integration into dynamic digital cultural practices, not just relying on text conservation. The four main pillars of digitization, education, technical innovation, and content creation confirm that Jawi is a literary work that can be revived in the modern cultural arena, not just a historical legacy.

CONCLUSION

The Jawi script illustrates that this writing system has undergone complex changes, beginning with its important role in the spread of religion, education, administrative functions, and Malay cultural identity, to a period of decline influenced by colonial rule, current language policies, globalization, and declining interest among the younger generation. However, the advent of the digital age has provided new opportunities for renewal through the digitization of ancient texts, advances in software, automatic transliteration, technology-based education, and the creation of digital cultural materials. These findings indicate that the preservation of Jawi script needs to shift from traditional methods and focus more on the application of educational technology, support from institutions, and strengthening cultural identity in the digital world. The necessary steps include developing a new curriculum for teaching Jawi in context, establishing a digital education platform, obtaining support from the government and cultural organizations, and utilizing popular media to attract the interest of the younger generation.

However, this study has limitations because it relies only on existing literature and lacks field observations, statistical data from users, or comparisons of revitalization efforts in various regions. Therefore, it is recommended that future research involve field studies in educational environments, assess the effectiveness of Jawi learning tools or media, review language policies at both the national and local levels, and investigate how the younger generation perceives Jawi from a sociocultural and technological perspective. Thus, further research is expected to strengthen the academic and practical foundations

for the revitalization of Jawi script as part of a cultural heritage that is still relevant today.

DAFTAR PUSTAKA

- Abdullah, Z., Yasran, A., & Aziz, A. (2020). *Peminggiran Tulisan Jawi Sebagai Lambang Jati Diri Melayu: Satu Kajian Tinjauan Abandonment of Jawi Script as a Symbol of Malay Identity: A Case Observation Research*.
- Ahmad, S., Othman, H., Afkari, R., Rusdi, M., Hisyam, M., Rahim, A., Tun, U., & Onn Malaysia, H. (n.d.). *Cabaran Semasa Tulisan Jawi Sebagai Warisan Masyarakat Peradaban Bangsa Melayu*.
- Astawan, N., Sadwika, N., & Muada, K. (2025). Transformasi Bahasa Indonesia: dari Lingua Franca ke Bahasa Nasional dalam Perspektif Historis Transformation of The Indonesian Language: from Lingua Franca to National Language in A Historical Perspective. In *Jurnal Nirwasita* (Vol. 6, Issue 2).
- Barus, E. A., & Mawaddah, S. (2025). Sejarah Tulisan Arab-Melayu Warisan Budaya dan Identitas Islam di Nusantara. *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial*, 02. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15715947>
- Damanik, N. M., & Mawaddah, S. (2025). Aksara Jawi Dan Narasi Sosial : Menelusuri Bahasa Dalam Budaya Melayu. *Educatioanl Journal: General and Specific Research*, 5(Juni), 123–129.
- Dan, S., Baca, P., Arab, T., Nusantara, M. Di, Rizkia, I., & Mawaddah, S. (2025). The History and Development of Malay-Arabic Literacy in the Archipelago. *Abdurrauf Science and Society*, 2(1), 784–793. <https://doi.org/10.70742/asoc.v1i4.299>
- Dungcik, M. (2017). Jawi's Writing As A Malay Islamic Intellectual Tradition. In *Journal of Malay Islamic Studies* (Vol. 1, Issue 2). <http://jurnal.radenfatah.ac.id/index.php/jmis>
- Maulana, A., & Mawaddah, S. (2025). Peran Tulisan Jawi dalam Pelestarian Tradisi Arab-Melayu di Nusantara. *Bayt Al Hikmah*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.54065/BaytAl-Hikmah.402>
- Maya Putri, S. (n.d.). *Analisis Penggunaan Arab Melayu dalam Dunia Pendidikan*.
- Muna, N. U., & Mawaddah, S. (n.d.). *Integrasi Teknologi Digital dalam Pembelajaran Baca Tulis Arab Melayu: Studi Kasus di Aceh*.
- norhuda, +Manajer+Jurnal, +Masyhur_Tulisan+Jawi. (n.d.).
- Razali, A. F., & Zulkifli, H. (n.d.). Kaedah Pengajaran Buta Huruf Jawi Dan Huruf Hijaiyyah Dalam Kalangan Pelajar Sekolah Menengah Harian [Teaching Methods For Jawi And Hijaiyyah Script Illiteracy Among Daily Secondary School Students]. In *Malaysian Journal For Islamic Studies*. <http://dx.doi.org/>
- Silvia Fahlevi, M. (n.d.). *Mengenal Sejarah dan Tulisan Arab Melayu*.