

ACCEPTANCE OF ARABIC AND DIRECTION OF JAWI SCRIPT: AN OUTLOOK FROM YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Direction of Arabic and development of Jawi script should be in accordance with the need and priority in mastering them. This need is seen through different dimensions. Youth nowadays look at the acceptance towards Arabic as having close relationship with the Islamic practice and its relevance to economic, social and world politics. The upholders of Arabic and Jawi script are both religious people and general society. Three areas of discussion in this paper are; the challenge faced by Arabic and Jawi script, the difference in their use, and the strategies to ensure their sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

The effort to put Arabic learning and Jawi script at their rightful position must be in accordance with the need and the relevance of their sustainability; namely the market needs and current significance as it mirrors the balance and fast development of this country.

As widely known, the use of Jawi script and Arabic vocabularies were rampant in the Malay land around the 17 and 19 century. From 1750 until after the Second World War, it was acknowledged as the main writing system for classical Malay literature especially the Unfederated Malay states and the Malay lands outside peninsular. Many people from Brunei, Riau-Lingga, Siak seri Inderapura, Jambi, Palembang, Deli-Serdang, Aceh, Pontianak, Sambas and Banjarmasin accepted the use of Arabic and some of them even further their studies to the Arab land (Amat Juhari, 1996).

Arabic learning is extremely synonymous with *pondok* learning system, where students need to master the said language in order to understand Islamic knowledge. It is important to note that the deterioration of Jawi script begins when Language Act (1963), which enforces the use of Rumi script as official writing for Malay language; were introduced. Since then, Jawi script seems to lose its grip (on its root) and strength to fight the dominance of Rumi script. As a result, people no longer pay attention to this type of writing which eventually has resulted in (their) extremely low competency level in terms of spelling and reading. It is not surprising if one day the Jawi script becomes a history (Siti Fatimah Ahmad, 2010).

To those concerned with Islamic development in this country, this is seen as a serious phenomenon. Hence, an alternative measure was taken as an effort to relish the glory of

Arabic and Jawi scripts; by establishing a special religious school, or better known as Sekolah Agama Rakyat. Around 1970s, there was a rise of more systematic learning schools (as compared to *pondok* system) in Malaysia.

In this economic era, which is more on Islamic side, it is seen as a way towards encouraging the use of Arabic. Taking into consideration the current status of Arabic and Jawi script, the writers would like to bring readers' attention towards these particular issues:

1. Prospect of Jawi script and the use of Arabic. It is measured based on acceptance perspective, writing mastery, and; language and its relationship with the development of Islam.
2. Building their direction by assessing their importance and relationship with Malay language and Islam (as a Lingua Franca); and identifying the best strategy to enrich Jawi script.

Besides looking at the need, the writers indirectly try to project the different prospect and stance between Jawi script of Arabic and Jawi script of Malay language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Isahak Haron et.al (2005), the deterioration of Jawi competency took place in the early 1960s as a result of the implementation of Rumi script in the publication of both Islamic study's texts and reference books. However, on the insistence of Islamic society, in the middle of 1980s, Jawi script was once again employed in the teaching and learning materials for Islamic study. Regardless of how hard the effort to establish a more systematic ways of studying Arabic was, it did not encompass all institutions.¹

The deterioration of Jawi script can be proven through studies conducted by a few researchers; to name a few:²

1. Report on j-QAF observation in Sarawak 2008, several schools in Sarikei and Sibul reveals that there are still a large number of students who do not have Jawi skill; and there are also j-QAF teachers who are not clear of the concept of Remedial Jawi Class.
2. Research by Sabariah (2008) found that students' performance in Jawi Remedial Model is still at the average level (min 2.5 – 2.99). This study involves 305 j-QAF teachers from the year 2005, 2006 and 2007 intake in one of Teacher Training Institutes in Sabah. Based on the overall min of the data, it shows that the students' achievement level is average and unsatisfactory.
3. Research by Siti Fatimah (2007) towards 15 respondents by using Qualitative method reveals that out of 3 aspects of research; 42% does not know Jawi letters, 65.4% cannot write using Jawi and 48.4% cannot read Jawi script.
4. Research by Nik Rosila (2007) on 400 form 2 and 4 students from two secondary schools in Shah Alam and Kuala Lumpur shows that Jawi competency is low in terms

¹ Only implemented by government institutions like Kelantan Islamic Foundation, Pahang Institute of Islamic Development and a few other institutions including private ones.

² Please refer to Siti Fatimah Ahmad ([Munsyi Dewan](#)), focusing on Jawi script, 29 October 2010 (Friday)/ 2323 p.m – Sarikei, Sarawak. And in her blog entitled "Tulisan Jawi Semakin Terancam", 30 Oct 2010.

of writing skill, spelling ability, multiple-choice-question test, essay writing test, and writing Quranic verses test.

As for the Arabic competency, current learning system focuses more on communication skill and basic Arabic only. Based on interview with students who take Arabic as third language, they agree that the effort to put this language at its rightful position should be given more emphasis.

METHODOLOGY

With reference to the objective of this research, among the issues that the writers would like to put forward is regarding youths' acceptance towards the use of Arabic and Jawi script; if they are going to retain their current place in future. Apart from that, the writers would like to discuss how to measure the challenge of practising them and the strategies to ensure the sustainability of this Jawi/Arabic writing.

The scope of this research is 170 teenagers around 19 and 20 years old from Universiti Malaysia Kelantan. The teenagers' scope are chosen based on the population of Malaysian society; namely gender, ethnicity (and sub-ethnicity), as well as secondary school background. The writers only focus on Muslim students' views, as they would like to see their concern towards the responsibility to uphold the language and writing of the Holy Qur'an.

Two main areas that the writers would like to measure are Acceptance and Direction which focuses on the Challenge and Mastery Strategy. This simple research is measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. The former is based on nominal measurement; Extremely Yes (), Yes (), Less Yes (), Less No (), No (), and Extremely No (). Hence, the research problems are:

1. To know whether Arabic can become a Lingua Franca and Jawi script takes over the use of Rumi script in the future.
2. To identify whether Islam can develop/ stand tall without Jawi script.
3. To put forward the competency level of basic Arabic language and Jawi writing skill among teenagers at random.

After elaborating on the ability and position of Arabic and Jawi script in the future, the writers, briefly expose students' view in terms of their direction (challenges and mastery strategies):

1. Measure the importance of Arabic and Jawi script
2. Determine whether Islam will disappear when Jawi script vanishes
3. View the relationship between Jawi script, Malay language and Islam in terms of Lingua Franca
4. Identify the factors that will lead to making the mastery of Arabic and Jawi script compulsory.

FINDINGS

From our findings, for **acceptance and direction** of Arabic and Jawi script, the conclusion is as follows:³

1. Can Arabic become a lingua franca, and Jawi script takes over the use of Roman script in the future?

Extremely Yes (14), Yes (69), Less Yes (18), Less No (18), No (17), and Extremely No (3)

14	8%	69	41%	49	29%	18	11%	17	10%	3	2%
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49% teenagers confidently answer Yes (69) and Extremely Yes (14) because they are optimistic with the increase of books published in Jawi script and they see Arabic becomes a lingua franca due to the acceptance of Islamic economy and currency at the global level. This view represents almost half of the respondents.

However, there are quite a number of respondents (49) that are less confident, but hoping towards it. Their hope is expressed through giving some suggestions on how to improve Islamic teaching.

Only 3 respondents, representing 2%, who are extremely not confident with Jawi script; due to the fact that it is Roman script that is the official one. Same goes with Arabic, for them it is only an alternative language.

Meanwhile, 35 mentioned that Jawi script is yet to replace Rumi script. The reasons given are: they are more comfortable with Roman script, Jawi script is now forgotten, Western hegemony influence, no interest in the script, no enforcement by the government and also because they do not master Jawi.

2. Can Islam develop without Jawi script in the future?

Extremely Yes (24), Yes (54), Less Yes (20), Less No (20), No (39), and Extremely No (13)

24	14%	54	32%	20	12%	20	12%	39	23%	13	8%
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Ironically, even though many see the ability of Jawi script to challenge Rumi script, 78 respondents (46%) say that Islam can exist on its own; without Jawi script. This feedback is based on the history that Islam raised without Jawi script; it was there to help develop Islamic literature in the Malay Land after Islam is already practised.

31% of the respondents disagree with the above opinion. They insist that Jawi script represents the Qur'an writing; hence it can rise if there is demand from its practitioners. Furthermore, this type of writing is more interesting than the other types. 13 respondents adamantly view Islam rises with the help of Jawi script.

³ The numeral in () represents number of respondents

However, 40 respondents (24%) are still undecided towards the use of Jawi script in the Islamic literature.

This finding is very important to the authors as it can show that the importance of Jawi script and Arabic are NOT PARALLEL. 46% do not see Jawi script is important, 24% still regard Jawi script and Arabic as similar despite their differences; as Jawi script is based on Malay language. Meanwhile 31% students fight for equal rights for both Jawi script and Arabic. It is apparent that Arabic is the Qur'an language, while Jawi script is only a writing medium that features Islamic image.

3. Are you competent in Jawi writing?

Extremely Yes (13), Yes (59), Less Yes (70), Less No (11), No (11), and Extremely No (6)

13	8%	59	35%	70	41%	11	6%	11	6%	6	4%
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After some discussion on the future of Jawi script, the authors put forward questions regarding the respondents' competency level; in order to measure the sustainability of its future.

There were only 13 respondents (8%) who are extremely confident with their Jawi writing competency level. The factors are their education background; which is in religious school, family support, and own interest. 35% believe they can read and write Jawi script; even though they rarely use it. 70 respondents are less sure with their ability despite the fact that they were exposed to the writing when they were in secondary school. This is due to less practice, limited ability, limited exposure as well as the motivation to learn was only to pass in the examination. 15 (10%) respondents admit that they are not competent at all; and worse, some are Jawi illiterate.

Through open interview, the authors found out that on average, UMK students can only understand basic Arabic like the readings in prayer and basic communication; precisely their mastery is only at the religious obligatory level (fardhu ain).

Meanwhile, for **Direction (challenges and strategies)**, the findings are as follows:

4. Are Arabic and Jawi script important?

Extremely Yes (58), Yes (91), Less Yes (6), Less No (6), No (1), and Extremely No (2)

58	34%	91	54%	6	7%	6	4%	1	1%	2	1%
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Despite the weak acceptance towards Arabic and Jawi script, 149 (88%) respondents still agree that both are still and very important; this is because they are seen as knowledge legacy which contributes to religious culture, helps the practitioners to get closer to Qur'an, strengthens Malay root and its fight to uphold Malay image, as well as shows how beautiful the combination of Malay culture and Islam.

Only 3 (2%) respondents do not see the importance to improve Jawi script position. They represent the generation which totally rejects the fight for Arabic and Jawi script; and they are also among those who are not proficient in these two skills.

5. Will Islam cease to exist with the disappearance of Jawi script?

This question aims to emphasize on the relationship between Islam and Jawi script (as of question 2). The findings reveal the different needs between Arabic, which is also the language of Qur'an; and Jawi script.

Extremely Yes (13), Yes (22), Less Yes (26), Less No (21), No (39), and Extremely No (49)

13	8%	22	13%	26	15%	21	12%	39	23%	49	29%
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There were 35 (21%) respondents who view Islam relies on Jawi script for its existence. Meanwhile 26 respondents are still not clear of the relationship. This is due to the fact that Islam is the official religion for this country, there is decrease in Malay spirit; only those with strong soul for Malay will fight for Jawi script's survival.

However, the interesting finding is, 88 (52%) respondents think Islam does not rely on Jawi script for its survival. 29% holds an opinion that the rise and fall of Islam has no relationship whatsoever with Jawi script. One strong defence for this is; Islam knows no language boundaries, and the Rumi script is still relevant, offers comfortable use, and has many references. Moreover, it is apparent that throughout the use of Roman script, Islam is there; being widely practised, and more often than not, the decrease in Islamic practise is seen as being influenced by other factors.

However, when the above discussion regarding Jawi script is replaced with Arabic, the need is seen as similar to religious need. That is, Arabic is valued as means to reach the Almighty.⁴

⁴ The authors provide degeneration factor as support data;

- a) Jawi as a subject in school is turned into a component of Malay Language subject. Religious study subject also does not make it compulsory to use Jawi script in all learning medium (books, question, answer and notes); it is only used to write Qur'an verses and Hadiths (prophet's sayings). Sometimes, Roman script is also used to spell the pronunciation of those verses and sayings.
- b) Today's society has diverted a lot from religious teaching; Qur'an and Hadith are seen as irrelevant, social problem (among youth) is worsening, practising Islamic culture is viewed as not being up-to-date, halal and haram is treated in light manner; in short, the teaching of Qur'an is neglected.

6. Jawi script was at its peak in the past due to two reasons; namely domination of Islam and Malay language functioning as the lingua franca. On the other hand, its downfall is due to domination of Western ideology and domination of English as the lingua franca.

Is there any truth in the above statement?

Extremely Yes (44), Yes (74), Less Yes (20), Less No (13), No (15), and Extremely No (4)

44	26%	74	44%	20	12%	13	8%	15	9%	4	2%
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70% of the respondents agree with the above statement, 20% are undecided, and 11% disagree. This finding supports the efforts to make Jawi script and Arabic a lingua franca.

This issue has to be analyzed from the viewpoint of the relationship between Malay and Jawi script as well as Malay and Rumi script. From the 11% who disagree with the above statement, it can be deduced that Malays are under the Western influence; even though initially Malay society uses Jawi script in their lives. They believe the change in writing is a dynamic process. What is important is its practical usage and market value.

The above opinion is seconded by many, especially when people visit Mecca, most of them use Arabic. Hence, many believe Arabic can become a lingua franca.

7. What is the factor that can make it compulsory for us to master Arabic and Jawi script?

Jawi script is completely taught in religious schools only. All text books, note, examination questions and answers must use Jawi script (Haji Alipudin bin Haji Omarkandi, 2004).

The findings for this question are qualitative in nature. The most important thing it seeks to look at is how concerned one is towards his or her religion. The more intense the religious influence is, the more ready and comfortable one feels towards using Arabic and Jawi script. It is associated with the Qur'an factor.

The other factor the authors deem as important is to introduce policies and enforcing it at all management levels.⁵ It is also closely related to political influence. This means it will be great if the top people in this country also support the rise of Jawi script.

⁵ For example, by changing the act on Roman script to Jawi script, or at least by maintaining the rights of those institutions which fight for Jawi script; like the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Among the suggestions forwarded on improving Arabic and Jawi script are: to have Arabic and Jawi classes and learning system across all education levels; from primary to tertiary education. However, it is important to note that other factors like interest, family encouragement, and peer influence do play crucial role. Thus, there should be more effort put in motivating people to learn these two skills.

Some justifications to help heighten the motivation to learn Arabic and Jawi script are:

a) Jawi script is the original writing system for Malay language

Jawi script was the original writing system for Malay language since the 15th century. It was also the source of Malay development. For instance, Brunei Darussalam made it an official language for government's administrative matters (Haji Alipudin bin Haji Omarkandi, 2004).

This origin is supported by some studies on the word 'Jawi' itself. Some people believe it refers to Arab nicknames for Malay people since the early centuries of Islam in the Malay Land (Syed Naquib al-Attas, *Islam Dalam Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu*, p.43), and also rooted from a Sumatran name, Lama al-Jawah, that is JavaDwipa, a south east Asia district in the early ages. This second opinion is found in the Arab notes written in the middle of 14th century; which is supported by many historians.⁶

b) It is more academic to write in Arabic and Jawi script than to write in Sanskrit and Rumi script.

The improvement in Malay's writing culture and the way they think were stimulated by Arabic which has scientific inclination; both thinking ('aqliyah) nature and language structure are based on knowledge. It is different from Sanskrit language which places more emphasis on ecstatic values which are very limited to satisfying senses and soul only. The use of Arabic alphabet for Islamic Malay writing is very suitable as it has clear and organised language structure, which does not go beyond human rational. Jawi script can express religious expression precisely, while Roman script can lead to confusion (or misleading meaning) due to its pronunciation. With Jawi script, religious people or teachers can translate those books from Arabic into Malay (tanyalahustaz_pdi@yahoo.com).

c) Closely related to Islam

The relationship can be seen from prayer ritual. There are two things that are related: first, when a muslim performs his prayer, he will automatically uses Arabic and indirectly learns to spell Jawi in prayer recitation; second, when he

⁶ For example, Hashim Haji Musa, *Sejarah Perkembangan Tulisan Jawi*, Amat Juhari Moain and Omar Awang referred to Yaqut in *Mu'jan al-Buldan*, Abu Al-Fida' in *Taqwim al-Buldan* and Ibn Batutah in *Rihlah Ibn Batutah*. Meanwhile, W.Marsdan and G.H. Werndly regarding what has been mentioned by Marco Polo.

understands the meaning of the words he recites, he will be more focus (khusyu'). In addition, if anyone fails to recite properly, especially in pronouncing words, then he will change their meaning, which eventually will nullify his prayer (Zainut Talib, chapter on Toharah and Solat). For instance:

- أُسَلِّي pronounced as أُسَلِّي
- فَرَضَ pronounced as فَرَضَ
- الَّذِينَ pronounced as الَّذِينَ
- سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْعَظِيمِ وَبِحَمْدِهِ pronounced as سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْعَظِيمِ وَبِحَمْدِهِ
- إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ pronounced as إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ (dropped “و”)

The authors believe that skill in writing Jawi is the foundation for learning Arabic and understanding the content of Qur'an. To know Qur'an means to love Qur'an (Dr. Mohd Zain, chapter on Toharah and Solat).

CONCLUSION

The trust to uphold nation's image, culture, and language is not an easy way in today's world. Hence, we must have more concerned and honest heart; as well as stronger will to ensure its realization.

Other than this research, the authors have taken a close look at other researches. It can be said that today's society needs to master Arabic and Jawi writing skill in order to ensure the full understanding of its contents; which eventually helps us to turn them into something beneficial that will lead to the practice of Islam as a perfect way of life.

The role of religious institutions in upholding Jawi script (from its downfall due to the wide use of Roman script) is of utmost importance as they are the only institutions which allow the use of Jawi in their centres. Religious teachers are highly in favour of the use of Jawi script as it enables the precise religious expression (Haji Alipudin bin Haji Omarkandi, 2004).

According to the previous *mufti* Of Brunei, Pehin Datu Seri Maharaja Dato Seri Dr. Ustaz Awang Haji Ismail bin Omar Abdul Aziz, "Malay writing or Qur'an writing is a source of Islamic knowledge, as both Islamic Malay book and Islamic book are written using Malay letters or Qur'an letters. Hence, it is the duty of parents and teachers to practise the Malay writing, or Qur'an's letters in their daily lives so that they can familiarise their children to read and write Jawi script."

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