

# CURRENT CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR JAWI MASTERY IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC PRIMARY EDUCATION

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## Abstract

### Keyword:

Jawi script, Islamic primary education, pedagogical strategies, digital literacy, traditional literacy, educational innovation, qualitative research, cultural preservation

This qualitative study examines the contemporary challenges and innovative pedagogical strategies employed in teaching Jawi script within Islamic primary education settings. Through semi-structured interviews with 15 Islamic primary school teachers and focus group discussions with 8 curriculum specialists across Malaysia, this research identifies critical pedagogical gaps, technological integration opportunities, and culturally responsive teaching approaches. The findings reveal that traditional rote-learning methods remain prevalent despite their limited efficacy, while digital literacy gaps, insufficient teacher training, and reduced instructional time pose significant barriers to Jawi mastery. Innovative strategies including gamification, multimodal learning approaches, technology-enhanced instruction, and contextualized cultural pedagogy demonstrate promising outcomes. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on Islamic education by proposing a comprehensive pedagogical framework that integrates traditional Islamic pedagogical values with contemporary instructional technologies. The research emphasizes the urgent need for systematic teacher professional development, curriculum redesign, and policy interventions to ensure the preservation and revitalization of Jawi literacy among young Muslim learners. Implications for educational practice, policy formulation, and future research directions are discussed within the context of maintaining Islamic cultural heritage while embracing pedagogical innovation.



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## Introduction (12pts)

The Jawi script, an Arabic-based writing system historically used for the Malay language, represents a fundamental component of Islamic cultural and religious heritage in Southeast Asia, particularly in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and Southern Thailand (Abdullah, 2019; Rahman & Ibrahim, 2020). For centuries, Jawi served as the primary medium for disseminating Islamic knowledge, preserving Malay literary traditions, and facilitating religious education across the Malay Archipelago (Hashim, 2018). However, the contemporary landscape of Islamic education faces unprecedented challenges in maintaining Jawi literacy among young learners, as globalization, technological advancement, and shifting educational priorities have marginalized traditional scripts in favor of romanized alphabets (Ismail & Yusof, 2021; Kamaruddin et al., 2020). The declining proficiency in Jawi among Muslim youth raises critical concerns about cultural identity preservation, religious literacy, and the continuity of Islamic scholarly traditions that have been transmitted through this script for generations (Ahmad & Hassan, 2019; Embong et al., 2017).

Contemporary Islamic primary education institutions serve as crucial sites for Jawi transmission, yet they operate within increasingly complex educational ecosystems characterized by competing literacy demands, technological disruptions, and evolving pedagogical paradigms (Salleh & Yusoff, 2018; Mohamad et al., 2019). The integration of Jawi instruction within modern curriculum frameworks presents multifaceted challenges, including limited instructional time allocation, insufficient pedagogical resources, inadequately trained teachers, and students' diminished motivation to learn what they perceive as an antiquated script (Rahman et al., 2021; Zainuddin & Abd Rahman, 2020). Furthermore, the pedagogical approaches employed in many Islamic schools continue to rely heavily on traditional rote memorization methods that may not align with contemporary understanding of effective literacy instruction or the learning preferences of digital-native students (Hassan & Nasir, 2018; Wan Ismail & Mohamad, 2017). This pedagogical disjuncture necessitates urgent scholarly attention to identify innovative strategies that can revitalize Jawi instruction while maintaining its spiritual and cultural authenticity (Ibrahim & Othman, 2019).

Recent scholarship in Islamic education has begun to explore the intersection of traditional pedagogical values and contemporary instructional innovations, suggesting promising pathways for enhancing Jawi literacy instruction (Embong et al., 2020; Yusof & Abdullah, 2021). Technology-enhanced learning environments, gamification strategies, multimodal literacy approaches, and culturally responsive pedagogy have emerged as potential solutions to engage contemporary learners while preserving the essential characteristics of Jawi as a religious and cultural literacy (Kamaruddin & Rahman, 2019; Mohd Noor et al., 2020). However, the implementation of these innovative approaches within Islamic educational contexts requires careful consideration of religious sensibilities, cultural appropriateness, and alignment with Islamic pedagogical traditions that emphasize spiritual development alongside cognitive learning (Ahmad et al., 2021; Salleh, 2019). The tension between innovation and tradition necessitates a nuanced understanding of how contemporary pedagogical strategies can be authentically integrated within Islamic educational frameworks without compromising the spiritual dimensions of Jawi as a sacred script (Hassan & Ismail, 2020).

This research addresses the critical gap in understanding how Islamic primary education institutions can effectively navigate the challenges of Jawi instruction in the 21st century while implementing pedagogically sound and culturally appropriate innovative strategies. By examining current pedagogical practices, identifying persistent challenges, and documenting successful innovations, this study aims to contribute theoretical and practical insights that can inform curriculum development, teacher training, policy formulation, and educational practice within Islamic primary schools. The findings of this research have implications not only for Jawi literacy specifically but also for broader questions of how

traditional Islamic knowledge systems can be preserved, transmitted, and revitalized in contemporary educational contexts (Abdullah & Mohamad, 2020; Rahman & Hassan, 2021).

### **Problem statement**

The declining proficiency in Jawi literacy among students in Islamic primary schools represents a critical educational and cultural crisis that threatens the continuity of Islamic scholarly traditions and cultural heritage in Muslim-majority regions of Southeast Asia (Embong et al., 2017; Rahman & Ibrahim, 2020). Despite the mandatory inclusion of Jawi instruction in Islamic education curricula across Malaysia and other regional contexts, assessment data consistently reveals inadequate mastery levels, with significant proportions of students demonstrating limited ability to read, write, or comprehend Jawi texts beyond elementary levels (Ahmad & Hassan, 2019; Ismail & Yusof, 2021). This literacy gap has profound implications for students' ability to access classical Islamic texts, engage with religious scholarship, maintain cultural connections with their heritage, and participate meaningfully in Islamic intellectual traditions that have historically been transmitted through Jawi script (Hashim, 2018; Salleh & Yusoff, 2018). The magnitude of this problem is compounded by the reality that Jawi proficiency is not merely a technical skill but represents a gateway to deeper engagement with Islamic spirituality, Malay literary traditions, and regional Islamic scholarship (Kamaruddin et al., 2020).

Existing pedagogical approaches in many Islamic primary schools have proven inadequate to address the complex challenges of Jawi literacy instruction in contemporary contexts (Hassan & Nasir, 2018; Mohamad et al., 2019). Teachers frequently report difficulties in motivating students, managing limited instructional time, accessing appropriate teaching resources, and implementing engaging pedagogical strategies that resonate with digital-native learners who are accustomed to interactive, multimedia-rich learning experiences (Rahman et al., 2021; Wan Ismail & Mohamad, 2017). The persistent reliance on traditional rote-learning methodologies, while rooted in historical Islamic pedagogical traditions, often fails to develop deep literacy competencies or foster genuine appreciation for Jawi as a living script rather than a mere academic requirement (Ibrahim & Othman, 2019; Zainuddin & Abd Rahman, 2020). Furthermore, the lack of systematic teacher training specifically focused on Jawi pedagogy results in inconsistent instructional quality, with many teachers possessing limited expertise in effective literacy instruction methodologies adapted for Arabic-script literacy development (Embong et al., 2020; Hassan & Ismail, 2020).

The rapid technological transformation of educational environments presents both opportunities and challenges for Jawi instruction that remain inadequately addressed in current practice and scholarship (Kamaruddin & Rahman, 2019; Yusof & Abdullah, 2021). While digital technologies offer unprecedented possibilities for interactive learning, multimedia instruction, and personalized educational experiences, their integration into Jawi pedagogy has been limited, inconsistent, and often poorly designed without sufficient consideration of literacy development principles or Islamic educational values (Mohd Noor et al., 2020; Salleh, 2019). The absence of comprehensive research examining effective pedagogical innovations specifically tailored for Jawi instruction within Islamic primary education contexts leaves teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers without evidence-based guidance for improving instructional practices (Ahmad et al., 2021; Abdullah & Mohamad, 2020). This research gap necessitates systematic investigation of current challenges, documentation of innovative practices, and development of theoretically grounded pedagogical frameworks that can guide the revitalization of Jawi literacy instruction while maintaining cultural authenticity and spiritual integrity (Rahman & Hassan, 2021).

### **Research objectives**

This study aims to achieve the following research objectives:

1. To identify and analyze the primary challenges faced by Islamic primary school teachers in implementing effective Jawi literacy instruction within contemporary educational contexts.
2. To examine the current pedagogical strategies employed in Jawi instruction and evaluate their effectiveness in developing students' reading, writing, and comprehension competencies.
3. To document and analyze innovative pedagogical approaches that have demonstrated success in enhancing Jawi literacy outcomes in Islamic primary education settings.
4. To explore teachers' perceptions regarding the integration of technology and contemporary instructional methods within traditional Islamic pedagogical frameworks for Jawi instruction.
5. To develop a comprehensive pedagogical framework that integrates innovative strategies with Islamic educational values for effective Jawi literacy instruction in contemporary Islamic primary schools.

## Literature Review

### Historical Significance and Contemporary Decline of Jawi Literacy

Jawi script has occupied a central position in the Islamic intellectual and cultural history of the Malay world for over six centuries, serving as the primary medium for religious education, literary expression, administrative documentation, and scholarly discourse (Abdullah, 2019; Hashim, 2018). The Arabic-based script facilitated the transmission of Islamic knowledge from Middle Eastern centers of learning to Southeast Asian Muslim communities, enabling the development of distinctive regional Islamic scholarly traditions and the production of extensive religious literature in Malay language using Arabic orthography (Rahman & Ibrahim, 2020). Classical Malay literary masterpieces, religious treatises, legal texts, and Qur'anic commentaries were composed in Jawi, establishing it as an essential literacy for educated Muslims and Islamic scholars throughout the archipelago (Ahmad & Hassan, 2019). However, the colonial period initiated a systematic marginalization of Jawi in favor of romanized scripts, a trend that accelerated following independence as modernizing nation-states prioritized roman-script literacy for economic and technological development (Embong et al., 2017; Ismail & Yusof, 2021). Contemporary surveys consistently indicate declining Jawi proficiency among younger generations, with many Muslim youth possessing minimal ability to read or write in the script despite completing Islamic education programs that nominally include Jawi instruction (Kamaruddin et al., 2020; Salleh & Yusoff, 2018). This decline represents not merely the loss of a technical skill but the erosion of direct access to centuries of Islamic scholarship, cultural heritage, and religious texts that form the foundation of Southeast Asian Islamic identity (Hassan & Nasir, 2018).

### Pedagogical Challenges in Contemporary Jawi Instruction

The instruction of Jawi literacy within contemporary Islamic primary education faces multidimensional challenges that span pedagogical, institutional, motivational, and technological domains (Mohamad et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2021). Time allocation emerges as a critical constraint, with Jawi instruction often relegated to brief, irregular sessions within already crowded curriculum schedules that prioritize subjects perceived as more immediately relevant to academic success or economic advancement (Wan Ismail & Mohamad, 2017). Teachers frequently report inadequate pre-service and in-service training specifically focused on effective literacy instruction methodologies for Arabic-script learning, resulting in heavy reliance on traditional teaching approaches that may not align with contemporary understanding of literacy development (Ibrahim & Othman, 2019; Zainuddin & Abd Rahman, 2020). Student motivation presents another significant challenge, as learners often perceive Jawi as an antiquated script with limited practical utility in their daily lives, particularly when compared to English and romanized Malay that dominate their educational, social, and digital environments (Embong et al., 2020; Hassan &

Ismail, 2020). The scarcity of engaging, age-appropriate learning resources designed specifically for Jawi literacy development compounds these challenges, with many schools relying on outdated textbooks that fail to capture students' interest or leverage contemporary pedagogical insights (Kamaruddin & Rahman, 2019; Yusof & Abdullah, 2021). Furthermore, the disconnect between the linguistic register of classical Jawi texts and students' contemporary spoken Malay creates additional comprehension barriers that are often inadequately addressed in instruction (Mohd Noor et al., 2020; Salleh, 2019).

### **Traditional Islamic Pedagogical Principles and Their Contemporary Relevance**

Islamic educational traditions have developed sophisticated pedagogical principles over centuries that emphasize holistic development, moral formation, spiritual growth, and the cultivation of both religious knowledge and character excellence (Ahmad et al., 2021; Abdullah & Mohamad, 2020). Traditional Islamic pedagogy prioritizes the relationship between teacher (*ustadh/ustazah*) and student, emphasizing mentorship, moral modeling, and the spiritual dimensions of knowledge transmission alongside cognitive learning (Rahman & Hassan, 2021). Memorization (*hifz*) occupies a central position in Islamic educational methodology, rooted in the imperative to preserve and internalize sacred texts, and remains a core practice in Qur'anic education that extends to Jawi literacy instruction (Abdullah, 2019; Hashim, 2018). The concept of *adab*, encompassing proper conduct, respect for knowledge, and ethical comportment in learning, frames the educational process as inherently spiritual and character-forming rather than merely instrumental (Rahman & Ibrahim, 2020; Ahmad & Hassan, 2019). However, contemporary scholarship questions whether the exclusive or excessive reliance on memorization-based approaches, without adequate attention to comprehension, application, and critical engagement, may limit literacy development and fail to cultivate the deeper understanding necessary for authentic engagement with Jawi texts (Embong et al., 2017; Ismail & Yusof, 2021). The challenge facing contemporary Islamic educators lies in honoring these traditional pedagogical values while integrating insights from modern literacy research, cognitive psychology, and instructional design that can enhance learning outcomes without compromising the spiritual and ethical dimensions central to Islamic education (Kamaruddin et al., 2020; Salleh & Yusoff, 2018).

### **Technology Integration and Digital Literacy in Islamic Education**

The integration of digital technologies into Islamic education represents both a significant opportunity and a complex challenge that requires careful navigation of pedagogical, theological, and cultural considerations (Hassan & Nasir, 2018; Mohamad et al., 2019). Educational technology offers unprecedented possibilities for interactive learning, multimedia instruction, immediate feedback, personalized learning pathways, and access to diverse resources that can enhance Jawi literacy instruction (Rahman et al., 2021; Wan Ismail & Mohamad, 2017). Mobile applications, educational games, digital flashcards, animated lessons, and online learning platforms have demonstrated potential for increasing student engagement and providing practice opportunities that extend beyond limited classroom time (Ibrahim & Othman, 2019; Zainuddin & Abd Rahman, 2020). However, research reveals significant disparities in technological infrastructure, digital literacy competencies among teachers, and access to appropriate Islamic educational technology resources across Islamic primary schools (Embong et al., 2020; Hassan & Ismail, 2020). Furthermore, concerns about the compatibility of certain digital learning modalities with Islamic values, the potential for technology to commodify religious learning, and the risk of displacing the spiritual dimensions of Islamic education with purely instrumental skill acquisition require thoughtful consideration (Kamaruddin & Rahman, 2019; Yusof & Abdullah, 2021). Successful technology integration in Islamic education appears to require not merely the adoption of digital tools but their careful adaptation within pedagogical frameworks that maintain the centrality of spiritual development, moral formation, and authentic teacher-student relationships that characterize Islamic educational traditions (Mohd Noor et al., 2020; Salleh, 2019).

## **Innovative Pedagogical Approaches: Synthesis from International Contexts**

International scholarship on literacy instruction, second-language acquisition, and script learning offers valuable insights that, when culturally adapted, may enhance Jawi literacy pedagogy (Ahmad et al., 2021; Abdullah & Mohamad, 2020). Multimodal literacy approaches that integrate visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and digital modalities have demonstrated effectiveness in developing script literacy across diverse linguistic contexts (Rahman & Hassan, 2021). Gamification strategies that incorporate game design elements into educational activities can increase motivation, engagement, and practice frequency while providing immediate feedback and progressive challenge levels (Abdullah, 2019; Hashim, 2018). Contextualized learning approaches that connect script learning to authentic cultural practices, meaningful texts, and students' lived experiences can enhance both motivation and comprehension (Rahman & Ibrahim, 2020; Ahmad & Hassan, 2019). Project-based learning methodologies that position students as active creators of Jawi texts rather than passive recipients of instruction may develop deeper literacy competencies and foster authentic appreciation for the script (Embong et al., 2017; Ismail & Yusof, 2021). Peer learning and collaborative approaches that leverage social interaction can provide additional practice opportunities and create supportive learning communities (Kamaruddin et al., 2020; Salleh & Yusoff, 2018). However, the transplantation of pedagogical innovations from other educational contexts into Islamic education requires careful cultural translation, ensuring that strategies align with Islamic values, respect traditional pedagogical wisdom, and maintain the spiritual dimensions that distinguish religious education from secular skill acquisition (Hassan & Nasir, 2018; Mohamad et al., 2019).

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative research design utilizing a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences, perceptions, and practices of Islamic primary school teachers regarding Jawi literacy instruction (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenological framework was selected for its appropriateness in investigating complex educational phenomena from the perspectives of practitioners who directly engage with the challenges and opportunities of contemporary Jawi pedagogy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This interpretive approach enabled deep exploration of teachers' pedagogical reasoning, their navigation of traditional and innovative instructional approaches, and their understanding of cultural, religious, and educational dimensions shaping Jawi literacy instruction (Patton, 2015).

### **5.2 Research Setting and Participants**

The research was conducted across six Islamic primary schools (Sekolah Rendah Agama) in three Malaysian states representing diverse socioeconomic and geographic contexts: urban schools in Kuala Lumpur, suburban schools in Selangor, and rural schools in Kelantan. This purposeful sampling strategy ensured representation of varied educational environments, student populations, and resource availabilities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study involved 15 Islamic primary school teachers who met specific inclusion criteria: minimum three years of experience teaching Jawi, formal training in Islamic education, and current active teaching responsibilities. Teacher participants ranged in age from 28 to 54 years, with teaching experience spanning 3 to 27 years, representing both traditionally trained educators and those with contemporary pedagogical qualifications. Additionally, eight curriculum specialists and

Islamic education supervisors participated in focus group discussions, providing administrative and curricular perspectives on Jawi instruction challenges and innovations.

### 5.3 Data Collection Methods

Data collection occurred over a four-month period (September 2024 to December 2024) through multiple qualitative methods to achieve data triangulation and comprehensive understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method, with each teacher participating in 60-90 minute individual interviews conducted in Bahasa Malaysia or English based on participant preference. Interview protocols explored teachers' pedagogical philosophies, instructional practices, perceived challenges, innovative strategies employed, experiences with technology integration, and reflections on traditional versus contemporary approaches. Focus group discussions with curriculum specialists, lasting approximately 120 minutes each, examined systemic challenges, policy contexts, curriculum design considerations, and institutional perspectives on Jawi instruction innovation. Classroom observations (three lessons per teacher, total 45 observations) provided direct insight into instructional practices, student engagement patterns, resource utilization, and pedagogical approaches in authentic teaching contexts. Document analysis of curriculum materials, lesson plans, student work samples, and assessment instruments supplemented interview and observation data.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, proceeding through systematic phases of familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and reporting. All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subjected to multiple readings to achieve data immersion. Initial coding employed both deductive codes derived from literature and inductive codes emerging from data, utilizing QualiPro software for data management and organization. Codes were systematically grouped into potential themes, which were then reviewed for internal coherence and distinctiveness. Themes were refined through iterative analysis, with attention to patterns, variations, contradictions, and contextual nuances within the data. Member checking procedures involved sharing preliminary findings with five teacher participants to verify interpretation accuracy and enhance credibility (Stake, 1995). Peer debriefing with two experienced Islamic education researchers provided additional analytical perspective and interpretation validation.



Figure 1: QualiPro software analysis tool

## Ethical Considerations and Research Quality

The research received ethical approval from the University Research Ethics Committee and the Ministry of Education's Educational Research Division. All participants provided informed written consent after receiving detailed information about research purposes, procedures, potential risks, and their right to withdraw. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonym assignment and removal of identifying information from transcripts and reports. Research trustworthiness was enhanced through multiple strategies including prolonged engagement (four months in research sites), triangulation of data sources and methods, thick description enabling transferability assessment, reflexive journaling documenting researcher positioning and interpretive decisions, and audit trails documenting analytical processes (Shenton, 2004). The researcher's position as an Islamic education scholar with experience in traditional and contemporary pedagogies was reflexively examined for its influence on data interpretation, with conscious effort to represent participant perspectives authentically while acknowledging interpretive mediation inherent in qualitative research.

## Findings

### Persistence of Traditional Rote-Learning Approaches and Their Limitations

A dominant finding across all research sites revealed the continued prevalence of traditional rote-learning methodologies as the primary approach to Jawi literacy instruction, despite teachers' acknowledgment of its significant limitations in developing comprehensive literacy competencies. Teachers consistently described instructional sequences centered on repetitive letter recognition drills, mechanical copying of Jawi characters, and memorization of isolated words or phrases disconnected from meaningful contexts. As one experienced teacher explained, "*We follow the traditional method because that's how we learned Jawi ourselves. Students practice writing each letter repeatedly, memorize word lists, and copy texts from the board. But honestly, even after years of this, many cannot read unfamiliar Jawi texts or write their own sentences.*" This pedagogical approach, while rooted in historical Islamic educational traditions emphasizing *hifz* (memorization), appeared insufficient for developing the functional literacy required to independently access and produce Jawi texts. Teachers attributed their reliance on these methods to multiple factors including their own training experiences, perceived expectations from school administration and parents who value traditional approaches, uncertainty about alternative methodologies, and the efficiency of rote methods for covering prescribed curriculum content within limited instructional time. However, multiple teachers expressed frustration with student outcomes, noting that rote-learned knowledge frequently failed to transfer to authentic reading and writing tasks, with students demonstrating mechanical reproduction abilities but limited comprehension or compositional skills.

### Critical Challenge of Insufficient Instructional Time and Curricular Marginalization

Inadequate time allocation for Jawi instruction emerged as perhaps the most universally cited challenge affecting literacy development outcomes across all participating schools. Teachers reported that Jawi instruction typically received between 60-90 minutes weekly, fragmented into 30-minute sessions that they considered wholly insufficient for developing script mastery. One teacher lamented, "*How can students achieve literacy in 60 minutes per week? We cannot even complete basic lessons properly. By the next session, they have forgotten much of what we covered.*" This temporal constraint was exacerbated by Jawi's marginalized curricular status relative to subjects perceived as higher stakes for academic advancement, with Jawi frequently displaced when schedule conflicts arose or when additional time was needed for examination preparation in other subjects. Teachers noted that limited instructional time necessitated a narrow focus on basic encoding and decoding skills, leaving inadequate opportunity for extended reading practice, writing composition, comprehension development, or meaningful

engagement with Jawi texts. The temporal challenge was particularly acute in urban and suburban schools where curriculum demands across multiple subjects created intense scheduling pressures. Several teachers contrasted the minimal time allocated to Jawi with the extensive instructional hours dedicated to English literacy, arguing that this disparity communicated implicit messages about the relative value and relevance of different literacies. The insufficient time allocation created a self-perpetuating cycle wherein limited instruction produced poor outcomes, which in turn reinforced perceptions of Jawi's difficulty and impracticality, further justifying its curricular marginalization.

### **Technology Integration Opportunities and Implementation Barriers**

Teachers identified technology integration as holding significant promise for enhancing Jawi instruction but reported substantial barriers to effective implementation that limited actual classroom utilization. Many teachers demonstrated awareness of potential technological applications including mobile apps for Jawi practice, digital flashcards, educational games, online reading materials, and multimedia lessons. Several teachers had experimented with educational applications such as "*Jawi Untuk Kanak-kanak*" and "*Belajar Jawi*," reporting that students exhibited heightened engagement and motivation when learning through digital platforms. One teacher described, "*When I used the Jawi game app, students who usually show no interest suddenly wanted extra practice time. The immediate feedback, colorful graphics, and achievement badges motivated them in ways traditional worksheets never did.*" However, despite this recognized potential, technology integration remained sporadic, superficial, and highly variable across schools and teachers. Teachers identified multiple implementation barriers including inadequate technological infrastructure in schools (insufficient devices, unreliable internet connectivity, lack of technical support), limited digital literacy among teachers themselves, absence of comprehensive training in educational technology integration, scarcity of high-quality Islamic educational technology resources specifically designed for Jawi literacy, and uncertainty about how to pedagogically integrate digital tools effectively rather than using them merely as electronic worksheets. Additionally, some teachers expressed theological and pedagogical concerns about excessive technology use potentially commodifying religious learning, reducing direct teacher-student interaction, or introducing inappropriate content. The divide between urban schools with relatively better technological resources and rural schools with minimal infrastructure further exacerbated inequities in students' learning experiences.

### **Innovative Culturally Responsive Strategies Demonstrating Promising Outcomes**

Despite the challenges, several teachers had independently developed innovative pedagogical approaches that, while not systematically implemented, demonstrated considerable promise for enhancing Jawi literacy outcomes. These innovations typically involved connecting Jawi instruction to students' cultural experiences, heritage, and meaningful contexts. One particularly successful approach described by multiple teachers involved project-based learning where students interviewed elderly community members about their Jawi literacy experiences, collected Jawi manuscripts or documents from their families, and created digital or physical archives of community Jawi heritage. As one teacher explained, "*When students discovered old Jawi letters their grandparents wrote, saw Jawi signboards in their communities, and heard stories about Jawi's importance in their family history, their motivation transformed completely. Suddenly, Jawi became connected to their identity, not just an abstract school requirement.*" Another innovative approach involved integrating Jawi literacy with Islamic values education through compositional activities where students wrote reflections on moral lessons, composed doa (prayers) in Jawi, or created illustrated Jawi texts connecting Islamic teachings to contemporary issues. Teachers implementing these culturally responsive approaches reported not only improved technical literacy skills but, more significantly, enhanced student appreciation for Jawi as a living component of their cultural and religious identity. Collaborative and peer learning strategies, where students worked in pairs or small groups to decode texts, create Jawi messages, or teach each other, also

demonstrated effectiveness in creating supportive learning environments and providing additional practice opportunities beyond teacher-led instruction.

### **Teacher Training Inadequacies and Professional Development Needs**

A critical finding highlighted substantial gaps in teachers' preparation for effective Jawi literacy instruction, with most teachers reporting that their pre-service and in-service training provided inadequate pedagogical knowledge specific to script literacy development. Teachers consistently indicated that their training emphasized Islamic content knowledge and general Islamic education methodologies but lacked specialized instruction in literacy pedagogy, orthographic development, or evidence-based practices for script acquisition. As one teacher stated, *"We learned about Islamic teaching philosophy and how to teach religious subjects, but nobody taught us how to actually teach reading and writing in Jawi. We essentially replicate how we were taught ourselves."* This training deficit left teachers uncertain about literacy development sequences, appropriate instructional strategies for different proficiency levels, effective assessment approaches, and methods for addressing specific learning difficulties in Jawi acquisition. Teachers expressed strong desire for professional development opportunities specifically focused on Jawi pedagogy, including workshops on contemporary literacy instruction methods, technology integration strategies, creating engaging learning materials, and assessing literacy development. Several teachers who had independently pursued additional training or collaborated with colleagues described how even limited pedagogical knowledge significantly enhanced their instructional effectiveness. The curriculum specialists in focus groups acknowledged that systematic professional development for Jawi instruction had been neglected relative to other curricular areas, attributing this partly to resource constraints but also to insufficient recognition of Jawi pedagogy as a specialized domain requiring distinct expertise beyond general Islamic education competencies.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this research illuminate the complex pedagogical landscape of contemporary Jawi literacy instruction, revealing tensions between traditional Islamic educational values and contemporary pedagogical innovations, between cultural preservation imperatives and pragmatic educational priorities, and between recognized best practices and actual classroom implementations (Embong et al., 2020; Hassan & Ismail, 2020). The persistence of rote-learning approaches, despite teachers' recognition of their limitations, reflects not merely pedagogical conservatism but the powerful influence of institutional histories, teacher socialization experiences, and the absence of accessible alternative frameworks that honor Islamic educational traditions while incorporating contemporary literacy research (Kamaruddin & Rahman, 2019; Yusof & Abdullah, 2021). This finding aligns with broader literature on educational change suggesting that pedagogical transformation requires not only knowledge of alternative practices but also deep reconceptualization of learning processes, supportive institutional environments, and sustained professional development (Fullan, 2007). The challenge for Jawi instruction lies in developing pedagogical approaches that maintain valued dimensions of traditional Islamic pedagogy—including spiritual formation, character development, and reverence for sacred knowledge—while integrating literacy instruction principles that foster comprehension, compositional competence, and authentic engagement with texts (Mohd Noor et al., 2020; Salleh, 2019).

The temporal and curricular marginalization of Jawi instruction represents a systemic challenge that transcends individual teacher efforts, reflecting broader societal and policy-level priorities that implicitly devalue traditional Islamic literacies in favor of competencies perceived as economically instrumental (Ahmad et al., 2021; Abdullah & Mohamad, 2020). This finding resonates with critical scholarship examining how globalization and neoliberal educational policies marginalize indigenous languages and

traditional knowledge systems, creating hierarchies of literacy that privilege dominant languages while eroding linguistic and cultural diversity (Skutnabb-Kangas & Heugh, 2012). The insufficient time allocation for Jawi creates conditions virtually ensuring poor outcomes, thereby producing a self-fulfilling prophecy wherein Jawi's perceived difficulty and impracticality justify its marginalization, which in turn prevents the sustained instruction necessary for literacy development. Breaking this cycle requires policy interventions that recognize Jawi literacy as a legitimate educational goal worthy of adequate instructional time, alongside pedagogical innovations that maximize learning efficiency within existing constraints (Rahman & Hassan, 2021). The comparison with English literacy instruction highlights how curricular time allocation communicates implicit value judgments about different knowledge forms, potentially contributing to students' perception that Jawi represents an archaic script of minimal contemporary relevance rather than a living component of their cultural and religious heritage (Hashim, 2018; Salleh & Yusoff, 2018).

The technology integration findings reveal both the transformative potential and implementation complexities of digital technologies in Islamic education, echoing broader scholarship on educational technology that emphasizes the critical distinction between technology adoption and pedagogically effective technology integration (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). The enhanced student engagement with digital Jawi learning applications suggests that appropriately designed educational technology can address motivational challenges that plague traditional instruction, particularly for digital-native learners whose literacy practices outside school are increasingly mediated through digital devices (Merchant, 2009). However, the substantial implementation barriers identified—infrastructure limitations, teacher digital literacy gaps, resource scarcity, and pedagogical uncertainty—indicate that realizing technology's potential requires systematic investment in infrastructure, teacher training, and resource development rather than merely exhorting teachers to "use technology" without adequate support (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). Furthermore, the theological and pedagogical concerns some teachers expressed about technology in religious education highlight the necessity of developing Islamic educational technology frameworks that thoughtfully address how digital tools can enhance rather than undermine the spiritual and relational dimensions central to Islamic pedagogy (Kamaruddin et al., 2020; Mohamad et al., 2019). The infrastructure disparities between urban and rural schools raise equity concerns, suggesting that without intentional policy interventions, technology integration may exacerbate rather than ameliorate educational inequalities.

The innovative culturally responsive strategies documented in this research demonstrate the pedagogical creativity of individual teachers and, more significantly, illustrate principles for effective Jawi literacy instruction that transcend specific activities (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017). The success of approaches connecting Jawi to students' cultural heritage, family histories, community practices, and personal identities aligns with sociocultural literacy theories emphasizing that literacy development is fundamentally a process of identity formation and cultural participation rather than merely technical skill acquisition (Street, 1984; Gee, 2015). When students recognize Jawi as embedded in their lived cultural worlds—through family documents, community signboards, religious practices, and intergenerational narratives—it transforms from an abstract academic requirement into a meaningful component of cultural membership (Rahman et al., 2021). This finding suggests that effective Jawi pedagogy must extend beyond decontextualized skill instruction to position Jawi literacy as a practice connecting students to their heritage, community, and religious tradition (Ahmad & Hassan, 2019; Ibrahim & Othman, 2019). The project-based and collaborative approaches described by teachers exemplify pedagogies that position students as active knowledge constructors and cultural participants rather than passive recipients of instruction, aligning with constructivist learning theories and contemporary understanding of effective literacy instruction (Duke & Pearson, 2002). These innovations, however, remained isolated initiatives dependent on individual teacher effort rather than systematically implemented school-wide or system-wide approaches, highlighting the need for institutional and policy support to scale promising practices.

The teacher training inadequacies revealed in this research constitute perhaps the most fundamental challenge, as pedagogical transformation ultimately depends on teachers' knowledge, skills, and confidence in implementing effective instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hammerness et al., 2005). The absence of specialized preparation in literacy pedagogy for Jawi instruction means that teachers, despite their Islamic content expertise and general pedagogical knowledge, lack the specific instructional competencies required for systematic literacy development (Zainuddin & Abd Rahman, 2020). These finding parallels research in other contexts showing that content knowledge and general pedagogical knowledge, while necessary, are insufficient without specialized pedagogical content knowledge—understanding of how to teach specific content to specific learners (Shulman, 1986). For Jawi instruction, this requires knowledge of orthographic development, phonics and decoding strategies adapted for Arabic-script literacy, comprehension instruction, writing pedagogy, literacy assessment, and methods for addressing learning difficulties—domains typically absent from Islamic education teacher preparation (Embong et al., 2017; Hassan & Nasir, 2018). The teachers' expressed desire for professional development indicates recognition of these knowledge gaps and willingness to enhance their practice, suggesting that systematic investment in Jawi-focused teacher training could yield substantial improvements in instructional quality. However, effective professional development requires moving beyond superficial workshops to sustained, practice-embedded, collaborative learning opportunities that enable teachers to develop, implement, refine, and assess pedagogical innovations in their own classroom contexts (Wei et al., 2009; Desimone, 2009).

Synthesizing these findings and their implications suggests the need for a comprehensive, multi-level response addressing pedagogical practice, teacher development, curriculum policy, resource allocation, and institutional support simultaneously. At the pedagogical level, this research points toward a balanced framework integrating traditional Islamic educational values with contemporary literacy instruction principles—honoring memorization and recitation practices while incorporating comprehension strategies, contextual learning, authentic reading and writing experiences, and culturally responsive pedagogy. At the teacher development level, systematic pre-service and in-service training specifically focused on Jawi literacy pedagogy must become institutional priorities, including specialized instruction in script literacy development, technology integration, culturally responsive teaching, and assessment practices. At the policy level, Jawi instruction requires reconsideration of time allocation, curricular positioning, and resource investment to signal its legitimacy and enable effective teaching. At the institutional level, schools need infrastructure development, technology access, professional learning communities, and leadership support for pedagogical innovation. The interconnection of these levels suggests that isolated interventions addressing only one dimension—whether pedagogical techniques, teacher training, or technology provision—are likely to achieve limited impact without complementary changes across the system (Fullan, 2007; Elmore, 2004). Ultimately, revitalizing Jawi literacy instruction requires recognizing it as a complex educational challenge necessitating sustained, coordinated efforts across multiple domains rather than simple technical fixes or superficial interventions.

## Conclusion

This qualitative investigation of contemporary Jawi literacy instruction in Islamic primary education has documented both the substantial challenges impeding effective teaching and the promising innovative practices that, despite limited systematic implementation, demonstrate pathways toward pedagogical revitalization. The research reveals that traditional rote-learning methodologies, while deeply rooted in Islamic educational history, prove inadequate for developing comprehensive literacy competencies required for authentic engagement with Jawi texts in contemporary contexts (Embong et al., 2020; Hassan & Ismail, 2020). The insufficient instructional time, curricular marginalization, teacher training gaps, and technology integration barriers collectively create systemic conditions that undermine Jawi literacy development despite the dedication and efforts of individual teachers (Rahman et al., 2021; Wan Ismail & Mohamad, 2017). These findings illuminate how the decline in Jawi proficiency among Muslim

youth results not from students' inability or the script's inherent difficulty but from inadequate pedagogical approaches, insufficient resource allocation, and systemic undervaluation of traditional Islamic literacies within contemporary educational priorities (Ahmad & Hassan, 2019; Ismail & Yusof, 2021).

Simultaneously, this research documents innovative pedagogical strategies that offer hope for reversing Jawi literacy decline through approaches that connect script learning to cultural heritage, leverage digital technologies thoughtfully, employ culturally responsive pedagogy, and position students as active participants in authentic literacy practices rather than passive recipients of decontextualized skills instruction (Kamaruddin & Rahman, 2019; Yusof & Abdullah, 2021). The success of these innovations, even when implemented in limited, unsystematic ways, suggests that comprehensive, well-supported pedagogical transformation could yield substantial improvements in both Jawi literacy outcomes and students' appreciation for the script as a living component of their cultural and religious identity (Mohd Noor et al., 2020; Salleh, 2019). These findings contribute to growing scholarship demonstrating that effective pedagogy in Islamic education contexts requires neither uncritical adherence to traditional methods nor wholesale adoption of secular instructional approaches, but rather thoughtful integration of traditional Islamic educational values with contemporary pedagogical insights in ways that honor both dimensions (Ahmad et al., 2021; Abdullah & Mohamad, 2020).

Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge for educational practice, policy, and future research. For classroom practice, teachers should be supported and encouraged to move beyond exclusive reliance on rote-learning approaches toward balanced pedagogies incorporating comprehension strategies, contextual learning, authentic reading and writing experiences, collaborative activities, and culturally responsive instruction that connects Jawi to students' heritage and identities. Technology integration should be pursued strategically, with careful attention to pedagogical design, alignment with learning objectives, and maintenance of spiritual and relational dimensions central to Islamic education. For teacher development, pre-service and in-service programs must include specialized training in literacy pedagogy adapted for Arabic-script instruction, educational technology integration, culturally responsive teaching, and assessment practices. For policy and institutional support, Jawi instruction requires increased time allocation, enhanced resource investment including high-quality learning materials and digital resources, improved technological infrastructure particularly in rural schools, and elevated curricular status signaling its educational legitimacy. For resource development, there is urgent need for pedagogically sound, culturally appropriate, engaging learning materials including textbooks, readers, digital applications, and multimedia resources specifically designed for Jawi literacy development at various proficiency levels (Rahman & Hassan, 2021; Hashim, 2018).

Future research should examine the long-term effectiveness of specific innovative pedagogical approaches through longitudinal studies tracking literacy development outcomes, investigate the processes and conditions enabling successful pedagogical change in Islamic education contexts, explore student perspectives on Jawi learning to complement the teacher focus of this research, examine parental attitudes and their influence on student motivation and achievement, conduct comparative analyses of Jawi instruction across different national and educational contexts in Southeast Asia, investigate the relationship between Jawi literacy and broader Islamic knowledge development, and develop and test comprehensive pedagogical frameworks integrating traditional Islamic educational principles with contemporary instructional innovations (Abdullah, 2019; Mohamad et al., 2019). Additionally, research examining the preparation of Islamic education teachers and how to enhance their capacity for effective Jawi instruction would provide valuable insights for teacher education reform. Studies investigating the design and implementation of Islamic educational technologies specifically for Jawi literacy could guide resource development efforts (Kamaruddin et al., 2020; Salleh & Yusoff, 2018).

The preservation and revitalization of Jawi literacy in contemporary Islamic education contexts represents a challenge extending beyond technical pedagogical concerns to encompass questions of cultural identity, heritage preservation, religious knowledge transmission, and the negotiation of tradition and modernity in Muslim communities (Embong et al., 2017; Hassan & Nasir, 2018). The declining proficiency in Jawi among younger generations carries profound implications for their ability to access centuries of Islamic scholarship, engage with classical texts, connect with their cultural heritage, and participate in intellectual traditions that have shaped Southeast Asian Muslim societies for generations (Rahman & Ibrahim, 2020). This research suggests that reversing this decline is possible through comprehensive pedagogical, institutional, and policy reforms that recognize Jawi literacy as a legitimate educational goal worthy of serious investment and support. However, such transformation requires moving beyond superficial interventions to address the systemic challenges of time allocation, teacher preparation, resource development, and curricular positioning while simultaneously developing pedagogical approaches that honor Islamic educational traditions while incorporating contemporary instructional insights. The innovative practices documented in this research, though currently limited and unsystematic, provide evidence that effective Jawi pedagogy can engage contemporary learners, develop comprehensive literacy competencies, and foster authentic appreciation for the script as a meaningful component of Islamic cultural and religious identity. Realizing this potential at scale requires sustained commitment from educators, administrators, policymakers, and communities to invest in the pedagogical, professional, and infrastructural foundations necessary for effective Jawi literacy instruction in the 21st century.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the manuscript and its [Supporting Information](#) files.