

# The Influence of Students' Attitudes on their Perceptions of Learning Jawi Script in Secondary School

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## ABSTRACT

Jawi Script holds a special status and was not only used in the Malay Peninsula in the past, but also widely spread throughout the Nusantara region. It played an important role as a medium of communication between the people and the Malay rulers in the olden days, particularly in the writing of official letters, the compilation of legal manuscripts, and various administrative documents. However, its role has since declined and is increasingly being forgotten. This decline has also significantly affected the ability and appreciation of Muslims to read the Holy Quran. Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the influence of students' attitudes on their perceptions of learning Jawi script. The participants of this study were among 113 Form Five students at SMK Putrajaya Presint 8 (1), Putrajaya, Malaysia. This is a quantitative study that employs questionnaires as the main method for collecting primary data. The findings show that the respondents have little interest in using Jawi script in their daily lives, which proves that Jawi is increasingly being marginalized. This is evident as respondents do not spend much time revising Jawi lessons and show little interest in purchasing reading materials written in Jawi. Nevertheless, despite the lack of enthusiasm towards the Jawi script, the majority of respondents acknowledged that learning Jawi has helped them improve their Quranic reading fluency.

**Keywords:** Students' Attitudes, Perceptions, Jawi Script, Jawi Learning

## INTRODUCTION

The Jawi script is a form of writing that has been practiced by the Malay community since ancient times. Originally, the term "Jawi" was used by the Malays to refer to the Arabic script. However, the true meaning of "Jawi" extends beyond the script itself; it was also a term used to refer to the peoples of the Malay Archipelago who spoke the language known as Jawi and wrote using the Jawi script. This script was introduced to the Malay world alongside the arrival of Islam in the region (Bania & Akob, 2025). Initially based on the Arabic script, Jawi was adapted and expanded by the local Malay community to suit the phonological needs of the Malay language. As a result, Jawi became a more complete script, enabling effective communication in various contexts within Malay society (Abdullah et al., 2020).

As an Islamic heritage that has been established for centuries, the Jawi script symbolizes the excellence and identity of the Malay people, who possess their own civilization. This script contributed to the advancement of Malay society in various fields, including science, politics, trade, literature, law, and diplomacy (Hidayat & Rohman, 2024). However, after more than three centuries of being the primary writing system for the Malays, the arrival of European colonizers in the Malay Peninsula brought significant changes. With colonial policies in place, the Romanized script (Rumi) was introduced to the Malay community and gradually replaced the use of Jawi (Coluzzi, 2022).

The arrival of the British in the Malay Peninsula accelerated the decline of Jawi, leading to its gradual abandonment by younger generations. The Romanized script became more dominant and widely used, including in religious books that were translated from Arabic (Hussin & Kamal, 2021). Additionally, the formulation of the National Education Policy in 1963, which emphasized the importance of science and technology, further impacted the role of Jawi in the national education system (Kamaruzaman & Nik, 2021).

Almost all subjects, including Islamic Studies, were taught using the Romanized script, except for the Quran and Hadith.

The National Language Act 1963 stipulates that Jawi script is one of the official scripts for the national language (McCabe, 2011). However, this provision has received little attention, and the teaching of Jawi in schools has not been strongly emphasized. This is due to the absence of examination questions that require the use of the Jawi script, as well as the lack of new-generation Malay language teachers proficient in it (Nahar et al., 2018). Most schools have assigned the responsibility of teaching Jawi to religious teachers, assuming that they have expertise in the Jawi spelling system.

Current circumstances indicate that Jawi script has been marginalized by society, particularly among school students (Malik et al., 2024). This is because students have started to perceive Jawi as difficult to understand and learn. This perception of difficulty leads school students to lose interest in learning Jawi easily (Amin & Rahman, 2019). In reality, the decline of Jawi script has been occurring since the late 1960s to the 1970s (Malik et al., 2020). This situation prompted Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka to make efforts to revive Jawi script, making it easier to learn and more appealing to users (Tajuddin & Zulkifli, 2024). During the era when Malay schools still existed, Jawi was the primary writing system in the Unfederated Malay States. However, after the introduction of the 1963 education policy, Jawi script was only taught within the Malay Language subject (Ab Rahman, 2020). The situation worsened as the number of teachers proficient in Jawi continued to decline. As a result, the teaching of Jawi was shifted to the Islamic Education subject. Despite this, its status remained marginalized, as it took time away from the core Islamic Education syllabus, leading to the further decline of Jawi script (Kamaruzaman & Nik, 2021).

### **Problem Statement**

Jawi education is not unfamiliar with the national education curriculum. In the past, Jawi script was taught separately from the Romanized (Rumi) script in Malay schools (Hoogervorst, 2023). However, due to its diminishing emphasis within the education system, a significant portion of today's younger generation is no longer proficient in Jawi script. This situation is becoming increasingly alarming as Jawi is being forgotten and regarded merely as a heritage of past generations.

Although various efforts have been made to improve the Jawi spelling system, its usage still depends on public interest. If interest in Jawi script continues to decline, old Jawi manuscripts stored in various institutions, both locally and internationally, will remain neglected and unstudied. Even more concerning is the possibility that if foreign scholars take a greater interest in studying Jawi, they may eventually become experts in this field, while the Malay community itself might have to learn about their own ancestral heritage from them (Dungcik, 2017). The low level of Jawi literacy among the Muslim community, especially the younger generation, also contributes to difficulties in reading the Quran (Faris et al., 2023). Some Muslims neglect Jawi script, believing it is no longer relevant in the modern era. This perspective comes from those who forget that Jawi script is an integral part of Islamic identity, which has flourished since the arrival of Islam in the Nusantara region.

In addition, there is an imbalance between the efforts of government institutions and educators and the attitude and response of the Muslim community, especially the younger generation, towards Jawi script (Din et al., 2025). This longstanding issue requires proactive measures from the government to restore Jawi's prominence. Collaboration among all stakeholders is essential to reintegrate Jawi into the Malay community, especially within schools and higher education institutions. Therefore, this study is conducted to examine the influence of students' attitudes on their perceptions of learning Jawi script.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A study by Razali and Zulkifli (2023) highlighted a critical challenge faced by secondary school students which is the difficulty in recognizing Jawi characters and Hijaiyyah letters. This struggle is largely attributed to the prevailing dominance of the Romanized (Rumi) script, which is extensively employed across various subjects in the school curriculum. As a result, students often find themselves spending considerable time trying

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to master the Jawi script, affecting their overall language proficiency.

Furthermore, this research parallels the findings of Zakaria (2020), which focused on primary school students and assessed their acquisition of Jawi skills, as well as the factors that influence their learning. His study revealed similar challenges, notably in the areas of recognizing and connecting Jawi letters and converting between the Jawi and Roman scripts. This indicates a consistent trend across different educational levels regarding the difficulties students face with Jawi literacy. The research underscores several key factors that play a vital role in mastering the Jawi script, including students' interest in the subject matter, their awareness of its cultural significance, intrinsic motivation to learn, and the effectiveness of teaching methods used in the classroom. By addressing these factors, educators can enhance the teaching of Jawi, ultimately fostering greater literacy and appreciation for this traditional script among students.

Another previous study by Abd Hamid et al. (2016), investigated the proficiency levels in Jawi script among students in religious primary schools and identified factors contributing to declining mastery. The researchers employed a quantitative approach, surveying 100 third-grade students from 10 religious primary schools. It was found that both reading and writing skills in Jawi were found to be at a moderate level among the students. Therefore, the study emphasizes the role of school leadership in enhancing Jawi proficiency by creating supportive environments and providing adequate resources to improve student performance in Jawi literacy. This research also highlighted the need for increased attention to Jawi education, addressing both in-school strategies and external support systems to bolster students' mastery of the script.

Meanwhile, a study conducted by Malik et al. (2024) underscored the crucial role of proficiency in Jawi reading and writing among students, emphasizing that this skill is integral to their understanding and performance in Islamic Studies. The research revealed that challenges in mastering Jawi can significantly impede students' ability to engage with Islamic educational materials effectively. This gap in understanding can lead to a decline in both interest and overall performance in the subject, which is vital for holistic Islamic education. This study also identified several contributing factors to the diminishing proficiency in Jawi. These include varying levels of student interest, the influence of parental attitudes, and the general educational environment surrounding the students. Notably, a lack of robust support and encouragement from parents was found to exacerbate the challenges faced by students. This highlights an urgent need for enhanced parental involvement, as active engagement from caregivers can play a pivotal role in fostering children's skills in Jawi writing and reading.

Further reinforcing these findings, Kamaruzaman and Nik (2021) conducted a related study that examined the specific challenges secondary school students encounter while trying to master the Jawi script, particularly in subjects related to Al-Quran and Al-Sunnah. Their research indicated that students' deficiencies in Jawi writing directly corresponded with lower achievements in these critical subjects. Additionally, many students demonstrated a negative attitude toward learning Jawi, often perceiving it as a difficult and irrelevant skill, which in turn hampered their performance in Islamic Education. This negative perception underscores the need for educational strategies that reframe Jawi as a valuable and essential component of their learning experience.

In a comprehensive study of the teaching and learning of Jawi, Nahar et al. (2018) conducted a study to assess the proficiency of Islamic Studies teachers in the Complete Jawi Spelling System (CJSS) in Malacca. Their findings indicated that while these teachers exhibited a commendable level of proficiency in CJSS, the proficiency of their students in Jawi remained relatively low to moderate. This notable discrepancy highlights the possibility that various factors may contribute to students' challenges in mastering Jawi, extending beyond mere teacher competency. For instance, student interest in the subject, motivational levels, and the resources available for learning could significantly affect their engagement and understanding. Additionally, the curriculum's focus or lack thereof on the practical applications and cultural significance of Jawi may further influence students' ability to grasp and retain the language. Therefore, addressing these underlying issues may be essential for improving student outcomes in Jawi literacy.

All of these findings collectively indicate that while some students exhibit interest in the Jawi script, its practical usage remains low. The challenges in mastering Jawi not only affect students' performance in Islamic Studies but also pose a risk to the preservation of the script among younger generations. Addressing these

issues requires a multifaceted approach, including enhancing teaching methods, increasing curriculum emphasis on Jawi, and fostering positive attitudes towards its learning and usage.

## RESEACRH METHODOLOGY

This study is a quantitative research project designed to analyze specific variables within a defined population. To gather primary data, the research utilizes structured questionnaires, which aim to capture the perspectives and insights of the respondents effectively. The participants consist of 113 students selected from a total of 167 Form Five students at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Putrajaya Presint 8 (1). These students were chosen to ensure a representative sample that reflects the diverse backgrounds within the school. The data collected from the respondents is derived from their completed questionnaires. This approach not only ensures a systematic collection of feedback but also allows for a rich analysis of the responses received from the students.

This questionnaire is structured into two sections. The first section focuses on respondents' backgrounds, collecting essential personal information, such as age, education level, and their prior experiences with learning Jawi script. This information will help establish the demographic context of the participants and their varying familiarity with the Jawi writing system.

The second section delves into more specific topics, including participants' interest in learning Jawi, their current proficiency levels in reading and writing the script, their daily engagement with the language, and their perception of the importance of Jawi script in their lives. This section aims to understand not only the motivations behind learning Jawi but also its practical implications in the participants' everyday activities and cultural identity.

To analyze the data collected from the completed questionnaires, the researchers employed frequency distribution methods, which allowed them to identify trends and patterns within the respondents' answers. The final part of this study will present a detailed discussion of the research findings, offering insights into the analysis of the collected data and drawing meaningful conclusions that highlight the significance and potential impact of Jawi learning.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Section A

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| Male   | 61        | 53.9       |
| Female | 52        | 46.1       |
| Total  | 113       | 100        |

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents based on gender. According to the table, a total of 61 male students participated, representing 53.9% of the overall respondents, while 52 female students took part, accounting for 46.1% of the total respondents in this study.

Table 2: Parents' Occupation

| Occupation     | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Public Sector  | 95        | 84         |
| Private Sector | 17        | 15         |

|                |     |     |
|----------------|-----|-----|
| Businessperson | 1   | 1   |
| Others         | 0   | 0   |
| Total          | 113 | 100 |

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents based on their parents' or guardians' employment sector. According to the study, 95 respondents, representing 84%, have parents or guardians working in the public sector. Meanwhile, 17 respondents, accounting for 15%, have parents or guardians employed in the private sector.

Table 3: Beginning of Learning Jawi Script

| Stage                  | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Secondary School       | 2         | 1          |
| Primary School         | 73        | 64.6       |
| Kindergarten/Preschool | 38        | 34.4       |
| Total                  | 113       | 100        |

Table 3 details the distribution of respondents based on when they first started learning Jawi script. Only 2 respondents, accounting for 1%, began learning Jawi at the secondary school level. Meanwhile, 73 respondents, representing 64.6%, started at the primary school level. Additionally, 38 respondents, or 34.4%, were introduced to Jawi script as early as kindergarten or preschool.

Table 4: Purpose of Learning Jawi Script

| Purpose of Learning Jawi Script             | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Fulfilling subject requirements             | 37        | 32.7       |
| To become proficient in reading the Quran   | 30        | 26.5       |
| To understand and appreciate Malay heritage | 20        | 17.6       |
| To strengthen understanding of Islam        | 26        | 23.2       |
| Total                                       | 113       | 100        |

Table 4 presents the findings on the reasons why respondents learn Jawi script. A total of 37 respondents, or 32.7%, learned Jawi as a requirement for their subjects. Meanwhile, 30 respondents, accounting for 26.5%, are interested in learning it to master Quranic recitation. Additionally, 20 respondents, representing 17.6%, learn Jawi to deepen their understanding and appreciation of Malay heritage. Lastly, 26 respondents, or 23.2%, stated that their purpose is to strengthen their understanding of Islam.

Table 5: Time Allocation for Learning Jawi per Week

| Time Allocation for Learning Jawi per Week | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| More than 3 hours                          | 7         | 6.3        |
| 2 to 3 hours                               | 6         | 5.3        |



|                  |     |      |
|------------------|-----|------|
| 1 to 2 hours     | 19  | 16.8 |
| Less than 1 hour | 81  | 71.6 |
| Total            | 113 | 100  |

Based on Table 5, a total of 7 respondents, or 6.3%, spend more than 3 hours per week reviewing their Jawi lessons. Meanwhile, 6 respondents, representing 5.3%, revise for 2 to 3 hours weekly. Additionally, 19 respondents, or 16.8%, allocate 1 to 2 hours per week for revision. On the other hand, the majority of respondents, totalling 81 individuals or 71.6%, review their Jawi lessons for less than 1 hour per week.

Table 6: Interest in Learning Jawi Script

| Interest in Learning Jawi Script | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Not Interested                   | 4         | 3.6        |
| Less Interested                  | 57        | 50.4       |
| Interested                       | 52        | 46.0       |
| Total                            | 113       | 100        |

Referring to Table 6, a total of 4 respondents, or 3.6%, are not interested in learning Jawi script. Meanwhile, 57 respondents, representing 50.4%, show a low level of interest. On the other hand, 52 respondents, or 46%, expressed interest in learning the Jawi script.

## Section B

This section consists of questions presented to the respondents.

| No | Item  | Frequency % |      |      |     |     |
|----|---|-------------|------|------|-----|-----|
|    |   | SA          | A    | LA   | D   | SD* |
| 1  | I am interested in and enjoy learning Jawi script.      | 31          | 36   | 43   | 2   | 1   |
|    |   | 27.4        | 31.8 | 38.0 | 1.7 | 1.1 |
| 2  | Jawi script is easy to learn and master.                | 16          | 40   | 46   | 5   | 6   |
|    |   | 14.1        | 35.3 | 40.7 | 4.4 | 5.5 |
| 3  | Jawi helps me in learning the Quran.                    | 40          | 65   | 6    | 2   | -   |
|    |   | 35.3        | 57.5 | 5.3  | 1.9 |     |
| 4  | Learning Jawi is very important to me.                  | 24          | 41   | 44   | 4   | -   |
|    |   | 21.2        | 36.2 | 38.9 | 3.7 |     |
| 5  | I feel very happy every time I learn Jawi.              | 22          | 39   | 43   | 6   | 3   |
|    |   | 19.4        | 34.5 | 38.0 | 5.3 | 2.8 |
| 6  | I often buy books and reading materials in Jawi script. | 3           | 11   | 59   | 15  | 25  |

|    |  |      |      |      |      |      |
|----|--|------|------|------|------|------|
|    |  | 2.6  | 9.7  | 52.2 | 13.2 | 22.3 |
| 7  | I allocate time to revise Jawi.                    | 7    | 14   | 33   | 39   | 20   |
|    |  | 6.1  | 12.3 | 29.2 | 34.5 | 17.9 |
| 8  | Jawi is a relatively challenging subject to learn. | 25   | 55   | 20   | 9    | 4    |
|    |  | 22.1 | 48.6 | 17.6 | 7.9  | 3.8  |
| 9  | I can write Jawi well.                             | 12   | 33   | 45   | 14   | 9    |
|    |  | 10.6 | 29.2 | 39.8 | 12.3 | 8.1  |
| 10 | I can read Jawi well.                              | 23   | 55   | 19   | 16   | -    |
|    |  | 20.3 | 48.6 | 16.8 | 14.3 |      |

\*Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A) Less Agree (LA) Disagree (D) Strongly Disagree (SD)

The findings of the study indicate that the majority of respondents have a low interest in learning the Jawi script, with 43 respondents or 38%. Additionally, 46 respondents, representing 40.7%, disagree that Jawi script is easy to learn and master. In terms of Quranic studies, 65 respondents, or 57.5%, believe that learning Jawi helps them read the Quran more fluently. However, only 4 respondents or 3.7%, strongly disagree that the Jawi script is important in the life of a Muslim.

Additionally, 43 respondents, or 38%, somewhat disagree that they feel happy when learning Jawi, while 39 respondents, or 34.5%, stated that they enjoy the learning process. Meanwhile, only 3 respondents, or 2.6%, frequently purchase books and reading materials in Jawi script as references for their daily learning.

Only 21 respondents, or 18.4%, allocate time to revise their Jawi lessons. On the other hand, the majority of respondents, 80 individuals or 70.7%, agree that learning and mastering Jawi is quite challenging.

In terms of Jawi writing skills, 45 respondents (39.8%) demonstrated good proficiency, while another 45 respondents (39.8%) somewhat disagreed with this statement. Additionally, 14 respondents (12.3%) disagreed, and 9 respondents (8.1%) strongly disagreed that they were proficient in writing Jawi.

However, the majority of respondents, 78 individuals (68.9%), agreed that they can read Jawi script fluently and well. On the other hand, 19 respondents (16.8%) somewhat disagreed, while 16 respondents (14.3%) disagreed with the statement that they are able to read Jawi fluently and well.

## DISCUSSION

The majority of students, specifically 73 respondents, which accounts for 64.6% of the surveyed group, have learned the Jawi script during their primary school education. This indicates a significant level of exposure to this traditional writing system in their early academic lives. However, it is noteworthy that 57 respondents, representing 50.4% of the total, reported a low interest in further learning of Jawi. This discrepancy raises important questions about the factors influencing students' engagement with the script and highlights a potential gap in motivation that could be addressed in educational approaches.

Many students express dissatisfaction while learning Jawi, often stating that the script feels insignificant in their daily lives. They find Jawi lessons challenging and difficult to master, which may lead to a lack of motivation and engagement in the learning process. As a result, many students do not feel happy while learning the Jawi script and view it as irrelevant to their everyday experiences. This negative perception contributes to their disinterest and frustration, further diminishing their drive to achieve proficiency in Jawi. Many students invest little time in reviewing their Jawi lessons and show limited interest in purchasing Jawi reading materials. This lack of engagement can hinder their overall understanding and mastery of the subject.

One significant challenge that students encounter is their ability to read Jawi texts while struggling to write in the Jawi script effectively. This disparity can hinder their overall understanding and appreciation of materials, particularly in subjects like Islamic Studies where Jawi is commonly used. To help students overcome this hurdle, educators should encourage them to take notes in Jawi during their Islamic Studies lessons. This practice will not only enhance their writing skills but also provide them with regular exposure to the script, thereby fostering greater familiarity and confidence.

To address these challenges, educators are also encouraged to adopt a variety of effective and interactive teaching strategies to capture students' attention. By incorporating multimedia resources, hands-on activities, and culturally relevant content, teachers can create a more dynamic learning environment. Such approaches could significantly enhance students' interest and motivation to learn Jawi, ultimately leading to better outcomes and a deeper appreciation for the language.

To enhance students' mastery and interest in Jawi script and writing, it is essential for schools and the Ministry of Education to collaborate in aligning and adapting the learning activities outlined in the syllabus. By tailoring these activities to better meet the diverse needs of students, the educational experience can become more engaging and relevant. This strategically structured approach is designed to foster a stimulating learning environment, thereby significantly increasing students' interest, intrinsic motivation, and willingness to explore the intricacies of Jawi. In addition to classroom strategies, it would be beneficial for the Ministry of Education to actively promote the learning of Jawi through organizing and expanding Jawi calligraphy competitions and workshops. These events could serve as exciting opportunities for students to engage with the script creatively and expressively. By offering incentives, prizes, and recognition, these initiatives could significantly increase student interest and participation in mastering Jawi, ultimately preserving this important cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of these educational initiatives heavily relies on the teaching techniques and strategies employed by educators. By incorporating varied instructional methods, such as interactive lessons, hands-on practice, and culturally relevant content, teachers can facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of Jawi among students. Such strategies will not only support students in developing their writing skills but also in appreciating the cultural richness associated with the Jawi script. Ultimately, this multifaceted approach aims to improve students' overall proficiency in Jawi, preparing them for a deeper engagement with their linguistic heritage.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate a significant lack of interest among respondents in using Jawi script in their daily activities, highlighting its growing marginalization in contemporary society. Participants spend minimal time reviewing Jawi lessons, reflecting a disengagement from the script and cultural heritage. Moreover, there is little interest in purchasing Jawi reading materials, underscoring the need for initiatives to revitalize interest in its use. Despite this lack of enthusiasm, many respondents recognize that studying Jawi positively impacts their fluency in reading the Quran, indicating a connection between language skills and religious practice. It is essential for educators and the Ministry of Education to actively support efforts to enhance students' proficiency and interest in Jawi.

Educators should explore innovative teaching methods tailored to diverse learning styles, incorporating multimedia resources and interactive activities. Creating a positive learning environment can further encourage curiosity about Jawi's cultural significance. To improve students' proficiency, teachers can organize extracurricular programs that extend learning beyond the classroom. Using technology in lessons can engage students and provide immediate feedback. Schools might also allocate 15 minutes every Friday for mandatory Quran reading, reinforcing understanding and practice of Jawi. Finally, incorporating Jawi script on signboards and notices within schools can help familiarize students with the script in their daily lives, encouraging its use and enhancing overall comfort with it.

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