

# The Relationship Between Islamic Education Teachers' Jawi Skills and Literacy and Primary Pupils' Jawi Mastery in Sabah

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between Islamic Education teachers' Jawi skills and literacy as factors influencing primary school pupils' Jawi mastery in Sabah. Mastery of Jawi script is a critical element in Islamic education, and teacher competence is highly consequential for instructional effectiveness. Adopting a quantitative survey design, the study involved 343 primary Islamic Education teachers in Sabah as respondents. The research instrument comprised a questionnaire measuring teachers' levels of Jawi skills and literacy. Descriptive analysis indicated that teachers' skills were at a moderately high level ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 0.529$ ), while teachers' Jawi literacy showed considerable variation ( $M = 0.735$ ,  $SD = 0.981$ ). However, Pearson correlation analysis revealed no statistically significant relationship between Jawi skills and literacy among teachers ( $r = .058$ ,  $p > .05$ ). These findings imply that pedagogical skills and Jawi literacy are distinct competence domains that should be developed in balanced, dedicated professional training streams. This study is expected to inform stakeholders in designing more focused interventions to strengthen the teaching and learning of Jawi at the primary level in Sabah. It contributes a Sabah-specific evidence base, addressing a regional gap that is seldom explored in primary Jawi literacy. Our results inform targeted enhancements to j-QAF implementation and teacher professional development grounded in PCK/TPACK in Sabah, including attention to challenging item-level content (hamzah, loanwords, diphthongs). Policy recommendations include developing context-sensitive micro-modules for Jawi and establishing diagnostic monitoring mechanisms aligned with Sabah's school ecosystem.

**Keywords:** teacher skills; Jawi literacy; Jawi mastery; Islamic Education; primary school

## INTRODUCTION

Jawi skills and literacy are pivotal in Islamic education, particularly at the primary level. Beyond enabling access to religious texts, Jawi script represents a cultural heritage that must be preserved and strengthened among pupils. Pupils' mastery of Jawi is substantially influenced by the Islamic Education teacher's levels of skill and literacy.

In Sabah, primary-level Jawi instruction faces several challenges, notably related to teachers' ability to master and deliver Jawi effectively. Limited teacher skill and literacy in Jawi can undermine instructional effectiveness and consequently affect pupils' mastery. Accordingly, this study investigates the extent to which Islamic Education teachers' Jawi skills and literacy are related to primary pupils' Jawi mastery in Sabah.

The main objective is to examine the relationship between Islamic Education teachers' Jawi skills and literacy and primary pupils' Jawi mastery. The study assesses the extent to which teachers' skills and literacy influence pupils' mastery of Jawi script. The findings aim to provide deeper insights into the teacher's role in strengthening pupils' Jawi mastery and to serve as a basis for improving Jawi teaching and learning quality at the primary level.

This study offers originality by establishing a Sabah-focused empirical evidence base—a region whose sociocultural characteristics, geography, and school ecology differ from Peninsular Malaysia. By targeting the

teacher literacy–skills relationship and pupils’ Jawi mastery while mapping weaknesses at the item level (particularly hamzah, loanwords, and diphthongs), the study informs the design of context-sensitive teacher training, enhancements to j-QAF implementation, and data-driven instructional monitoring in Sabah.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Mastery of Jawi script among primary school pupils is central to Islamic education and Malay cultural heritage. Mohamad Zafri Azri Zakaria (2024) examined the level of Jawi writing mastery and related skills among pupils in Tawau, Sabah, finding that mastery remains at a level warranting special attention, especially in accurate and effective reading and writing. The study underscores the importance of effective teaching techniques to support pupils’ Jawi mastery.

The International Journal of Humanities, Technology and Civilization (2001) reported that primary pupils’ Jawi mastery is at a moderate level. Contributing factors to the decline include interest, parental influence, and environmental aspects. The study highlights the need for school leadership to foster a conducive environment to improve Jawi performance.

Regarding teacher literacy, Eusebio and Sabariah Kee Mohd Yussof (2025) emphasized that Jawi literacy among Islamic Education teachers (GPI) in Sabah is at a moderate level, with major weaknesses in recognizing additional letters, writing complex sentences, and applying effective teaching methods. Other challenges include a lack of innovative teaching aids and limited professional training. The study recommends using technology, interactive teaching tools, and continuous professional development to improve teachers’ Jawi literacy.

Earlier works by Awang Mohamad Amin (1989) and Mustapha Ya likewise stressed that teachers’ ability to read and write Jawi is a crucial prerequisite for effective instruction; when teachers lack mastery, it is difficult to deliver lessons effectively.

Collectively, these studies affirm that teacher skills and literacy—alongside technology use and innovative pedagogical approaches—are key determinants of primary pupils’ Jawi mastery. Therefore, the present study focuses on the relationship between Islamic Education teachers’ Jawi skills and literacy and pupils’ mastery in Sabah to strengthen Jawi teaching and learning.

## METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach to identify the relationship between Islamic Education teachers’ Jawi skills and literacy and primary pupils’ Jawi mastery in Sabah. Data were collected through a written test and a questionnaire adapted from prior studies and validated by experts in Jawi and Islamic education to ensure instrument validity and reliability.

The study population comprised 3,061 Islamic Education teachers teaching in primary schools across Sabah. Cluster and simple random sampling were used to select a sample representing six District Education Office (PPD) clusters corresponding to Sabah’s main zones: south, west, interior, north, Sandakan, and southeast. The optimal sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan formula, with 341 respondents ultimately included, sufficient to represent the population.

Data collection instruments comprised two main components. First, a written test assessed teachers’ Jawi mastery via conversion of Romanized Malay (Rumi) to Jawi and the selection of correct Jawi spellings. Second, a questionnaire measured teaching practices, knowledge, and skills in Jawi instruction, as well as respondents’ demographic backgrounds. The questionnaire was adapted from prior research and organized by relevant constructs to measure the independent and dependent variables.

A pilot study was conducted with 81 Islamic Education teachers in Penampang and Sipitang who shared similar characteristics with the target population. SPSS analysis indicated Cronbach’s alpha values exceeding 0.90 for all variables, indicating high reliability. In addition, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) assessed construct validity, with all questionnaire items loading between 0.40 and 0.80, confirming instrument suitability.

Study locations were selected based on pupils' Jawi mastery performance data (TP3) and the distribution of Islamic Education teachers in each PPD. Selecting six PPDs ensured that the data reflected on-the-ground realities across Sabah's main zones. Sampling involved randomly selecting PPDs within each zone, followed by data collection from all Islamic Education teachers in the selected primary schools.

Overall, the methodology was designed to ensure systematic, accurate, and reliable data collection and analysis to meet the objective of examining the relationship between Islamic Education teachers' Jawi skills and literacy and primary pupils' Jawi mastery in Sabah.

## RESULTS

To address the study objective, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between teachers' Jawi skill levels and literacy levels among primary Islamic Education teachers in Sabah. The results indicated no statistically significant relationship between the two variables, with a correlation coefficient of  $r = .058$  and a significance value of  $p = .286$ . As  $p$  exceeds the 0.05 significance level ( $p > .05$ ), the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) fails to be rejected. Although the relationship is positive, its strength is very weak. In sum, there is insufficient statistical evidence to conclude a relationship between skill level and literacy level among the study respondents.

Overall, these findings suggest that Islamic Education teachers' Jawi skills and Jawi literacy are separate competence domains within this study's context. The absence of a significant relationship underscores the need to develop both aspects in a balanced and targeted manner through ongoing professional training. This finding can inform the planning of more effective interventions to strengthen Jawi teaching and learning in Sabah's primary schools.

## DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between Jawi skills and Jawi literacy among Islamic Education teachers in Sabah. The main finding, based on Pearson correlation, indicates no statistically significant relationship between the two variables ( $r = .058$ ,  $p = .286$ ). This result is noteworthy and somewhat counterintuitive, as theory would suggest that teachers with high pedagogical skill in Jawi would also demonstrate high Jawi literacy. However, empirical data from 343 respondents did not support this hypothesis.

The non-significant relationship can be interpreted from several perspectives. First, the constructs of 'skills' and 'Jawi literacy' in this context may capture two distinct competence domains that are not interdependent. 'Skills' likely refer to pedagogical practice—the teacher's ability to deliver instruction and apply effective teaching methods. 'Jawi literacy' pertains to content mastery of Jawi itself, such as proficiency in spelling conventions and writing. Thus, a teacher may be highly skilled in instructional techniques (skills) yet possess only moderate content mastery of Jawi (literacy), or vice versa.

Second, the findings may reflect emphases within teacher training programmes or professional development courses. Such training may focus more on one aspect—either pedagogical skill or strengthening Jawi literacy—without integrating both holistically. Consequently, competence development in these domains may occur in parallel rather than in tandem.

This study adds a new dimension to the extant literature. Prior works have underscored the individual importance of teacher literacy and skills as prerequisites for effective teaching. This study goes further by examining the relationship between the two competencies. The finding of no significant relationship suggests that these domains should be treated as distinct sets of competencies to be developed concurrently. It supports the argument that strength in one aspect does not automatically guarantee strength in the other.

## IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The findings carry several implications for stakeholders in Islamic education. The Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM), Sabah State Education Department, and Institutes of Teacher Education (IPG) should design

balanced and integrated training programmes. Training modules should not be limited to teaching methods (skills) but must include components that strengthen Jawi content mastery (literacy). Diagnostic assessments can be implemented to identify teachers' specific needs in each domain. At the school level, administrators can plan Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to address individual teachers' needs, whether to enhance pedagogical skills or to strengthen Jawi literacy.

This study has limitations. Its scope is confined to teachers in Sabah, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the quantitative survey design does not allow an in-depth exploration of reasons underlying the absence of a relationship. The following avenues are recommended for future research: (a) Conduct qualitative case studies to explore teachers' experiences and perspectives to better understand why skills and literacy do not always align; (b) Expand the study to the national level for a more comprehensive picture; and (c) Examine the relationship between skills and literacy alongside other variables such as teaching experience, academic qualifications, and frequency of attending courses.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study successfully investigated the relationship between Islamic Education teachers' Jawi skills and literacy in Sabah. The main finding—no significant relationship between the two variables—contributes to understanding Jawi teacher competencies. It emphasizes that pedagogical skill and literacy mastery are two distinct domains, both critical and requiring balanced development to ensure effective Jawi teaching and learning. The findings are expected to guide efforts to elevate the status of Jawi script through improvements in teacher quality.

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