





# Strengthening Local Wisdom Through the Application of Jawi Script at SMK YP. Abisatya Sarah School

 Rosliana Lubis<sup>1\*</sup>,  Rahimah<sup>2</sup>,  Parlaungan Ritonga<sup>3</sup>,  Latifah Yusri Nasution<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Universitas Sumatera Utara  
Sumatera Utara, Indonesia  
✉ [rosliana@usu.ac.id](mailto:rosliana@usu.ac.id)\*



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## Abstract

**Background:** Jawi script is a Malay cultural heritage that reflects local wisdom and literacy traditions. However, its use is increasingly limited due to the lack of teaching resources and structured learning in schools. SMK YP. Abisatya Sarah School, as a vocational and culture-based institution, faces challenges in preserving this heritage among younger generations.

**Aims:** This paper aims to describe a community service program conducted by lecturers from Universitas Sumatera Utara to strengthen local wisdom through the introduction and application of Jawi script for teachers and students at SMK YP. Abisatya Sarah School.

**Methods:** The program applied a participatory approach involving teachers, students, and the school community. Activities included observation, coordination, socialization, intensive training in reading and writing Jawi script, interactive practice activities, and reflective discussions. Data were collected through observation, participant involvement, and documentation.

**Results:** The results indicate an improvement in students' ability to read and write basic Jawi script. Students actively participated in learning activities, and teachers gained new insights and teaching materials. Quantitatively, 78% of students (23 out of 30) were able to write at least five basic Jawi words correctly after the training. In addition, 87% of students (26 out of 30) successfully distinguished similar letter forms such as ba, ta, tsa, and nun.

**Conclusion:** The program enhanced cultural literacy and motivated teachers and students to preserve Jawi script as part of local heritage, supporting quality education and the strengthening of cultural identity.

## A. Introduction

Jawi script represents an intellectual and literary heritage of the Malay world that carries historical significance and serves as a cultural identity for coastal communities in the Malay Archipelago (Ramala, 2020; Rahman et al., 2017; Rahman, 2017). In the past, Jawi played a crucial role as a medium of official communication, legal documents drafting, and Islamic propagation, thereby becoming a symbol of Malay-Islamic literary civilization (Dungcik, 2017; Damanik & Mawaddah, 2025; Sopian & Kamarudin, 2025; Barus & Mawaddah, 2025). However, the advancement of technology and globalization has led to its declining use. Younger generations are more familiar with the Latin alphabet than this ancestral script, largely due to the limited availability of qualified human resources to teach it, the absence of structured learning modules, and the low motivation for Jawi literacy (Abdullah et al., 2020; Munawarah & Mawaddah, 2025; Ghazali et al., 2025).

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This condition is also evident in the coastal region of North Sumatra, particularly in Medan Marelan District, Indonesia. SMK YP. Abisatya Sarah School, a vocational and culture-based educational institution, is situated within a predominantly Malay community with a long-standing tradition of Jawi literacy (Ramala, 2020; Inayatushalihah, 2017). Although the school has demonstrated great potential as an agent for cultural preservation through its students' achievements in arts and culture, its efforts to sustain Jawi script face serious challenges. These include the absence of structured teaching strategies, limited numbers of qualified teachers, and a lack of effective learning media (Sakti, 2011; Alisjahbana & Murniningtyas, 2018).

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of revitalizing the Jawi script in education. Maulana & Mawaddah (2025) emphasized that strengthening Jawi in Malay language learning could reinforce local writing traditions, while Maulana (2023) underscored the need for collaboration between schools, government, and local communities. Laksana (2024) demonstrated the effectiveness of culturally based learning media, whereas Hidayat & Rohman (2024) and Ghazali et al. (2025) pointed out the crucial role of digital technology in preserving literacy traditions. Other research also stressed the necessity of adaptive teaching strategies that integrate technologies such as educational software, interactive digital boards, and customized learning applications to enhance mastery of Jawi (Malik et al., 2024).

Moreover, Jawi learning carries not only cultural but also religious and national identity values. In Malaysia and Brunei, Jawi is still preserved through its use in street names, public buildings, and primary school curricula (Salehuddin, 2013; Ramli, 2021). In Southern Thailand, Jawi preservation is regarded as a strategy to strengthen multicultural identity and promote intercultural tolerance (Hahsa, 2024; Wanaeloh et al., 2024). This stands in contrast with the Indonesian context, where Jawi script has become increasingly marginalized (Buduroh, 2023; Afifah, 2024).

Based on this background, the present program aims to analyze the role of Jawi script as a cultural identity of the Malay community in coastal regions and to develop strategies for its preservation through vocational education. Specifically, this research contributes to strengthening culture-based vocational schools by positioning Jawi literacy not merely as a linguistic skill but as a cultural competency that supports students' understanding of local wisdom and heritage. By using SMK YP. Abisatya Sarah School as a model, this program demonstrates how vocational institutions can incorporate cultural values into their curriculum to produce graduates who are both technically skilled and culturally rooted.

This contribution is significant because culture-based vocational schools play a dual role: preparing students for the workforce while simultaneously functioning as community agents of cultural transmission. Integrating Jawi literacy enriches school identity, strengthens Malay cultural representation, and promotes the preservation of ancestral knowledge within a formal educational structure. This program is expected to improve cultural literacy, strengthen local identity, and support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 on Quality Education and the Key Performance Indicators (IKU) of state universities (SDGs Center USU, 2024).

## B. Methods

This community service activity was conducted at SMK YP. Abisatya Sarah School and primarily targeted students as participants. A total of 30 students and three teachers participated in the program. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their interest and availability to engage in Jawi script preservation activities.

The activity employed a participatory, collaborative, educational, and sociocultural approach. Students were involved in outreach sessions, basic Jawi script training, and guided reading and writing practice. Learning materials included an introduction to the history of Jawi script, letter forms, writing techniques, and creativity-building activities such as whiteboard writing exercises, interactive quizzes, and the production of simple Jawi-based works.

The implementation procedure consisted of three stages:

1. Preparation, including initial observation and coordination with the school;
2. Implementation, consisting of outreach activities and intensive hands-on training; and
3. Evaluation, conducted through structured classroom observation, analysis of students' written outputs, quiz-based performance checks, and reflective discussions with teachers to assess learning progress and identify challenges encountered during the activity.

Data collection combined qualitative and quantitative indicators. Qualitative data were obtained from field notes, visual documentation, and teacher reflections. Quantitative indicators were derived from task performance during training sessions including writing exercises, recognition tasks, and interactive quizzes, which allowed the team to record the proportion of students who successfully identified or produced specific Jawi letters and basic words (Hasanah, 2017; Febriani et al., 2023).

## C. Results and Discussion

### 1. Results

The implementation of the community service program at SMK YP. Abisatya Sarah School demonstrated several significant achievements, indicating positive impacts on cultural awareness and basic Jawi literacy skills among students. Initially, students were introduced to the history, function, and cultural value of Jawi script as part of Malay identity. This introduction successfully established a baseline understanding of the importance of preserving cultural heritage. This was reflected in students' reflections, where approximately 87% of students (26 out of 30) stated that they had never received Jawi material in formal education but considered it important to learn.

Most students were already familiar with Quranic script, which helped them recognize several Jawi letter forms. However, they still encountered challenges because Jawi script does not use vowel markings (*harakat*) as found in Quranic manuscripts, requiring readers to infer meaning from contextual cues. Meanwhile, five students who had no prior exposure to Arabic-based writing systems initially recognized only a few letter shapes. After completing the training sessions, however, they were able to identify several basic letters and write simple words in Jawi script.

During the training phase, students were taught to recognize basic Jawi script shapes, writing techniques, and how to read simple words and sentences. Based on quantitative data, 78% of students (23 out of 30) were able to write at least five basic Jawi words correctly after the training. Furthermore, approximately 87% of students (26 out of 30) could accurately distinguish similar letter shapes such as *ba*, *ta*, *tsa*, and *nun*, which had initially been a source of confusion for most participants. These results are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Quantitative Outcomes of Jawi Script Training

No.	Indicator of Achievement	Number of Students (n = 30)	Percentage (%)
1	Students able to write at least five basic Jawi words correctly after training	23	78%
2	Students able to accurately distinguish similar Jawi letters ( <i>ba</i> , <i>ta</i> , <i>tsa</i> , <i>nun</i> )	26	87%

The students' enthusiasm was evident in their level of participation in the training sessions. Writing on the whiteboard was a particularly engaging component: 24 students volunteered to write words or their names in Jawi script. This activity not only strengthened their writing accuracy but also boosted their confidence in demonstrating their skills in front of peers.

Interactive quizzes administered during the training also demonstrated high levels of engagement. Participation reached 90% (27 out of 30 students), with students eager to answer questions. Informal rewards for students who answered correctly served as an additional incentive to increase learning motivation and active participation.

A joint reflection session at the end of the activity revealed that more than 85% of students felt proud of gaining new knowledge related to Malay cultural identity. This sense of pride is a crucial factor in supporting their motivation to continue practicing and preserving the Jawi script in the future.

To support these findings, visual documentation is presented as part of the results (Figures 1–4):



**Figure 1.** Coordination Between the USU Community Service Team and the School



**Figure 2.** Implementation of Basic Jawi Script Introduction Training



**Figure 3.** Students Practicing Writing Jawi Script



**Figure 4.** Students Writing on the Whiteboard During a Practical Activity

These figures illustrate how the participatory learning approach and hands-on practice effectively supported the Jawi script training process.

## 2. Discussion

The community service program “Strengthening Local Wisdom Through the Application of Jawi Script at SMK YP. Abisatya Sarah School,” carried out by lecturers from the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara with support from the Community Service Institute (LPPM USU), demonstrates that culturally responsive, participatory, and practice-based learning approaches can effectively strengthen early Jawi literacy among vocational school students. The evidence gathered throughout the program shows that structured and interactive instructional activities are capable of producing substantial cognitive and affective gains within a relatively short intervention period.

The improvement in students’ mastery of basic Jawi characters is evident from the quantitative indicators. A total of 78% of students successfully wrote at least five basic Jawi words by the end of the training, while 87% were able to distinguish visually similar characters such as ba, ta, tsa, and nun. These outcomes demonstrate the effectiveness of sequential instruction supported by direct and repetitive practice. They also show that the learning model was accessible to students with diverse literacy backgrounds.

Most participants who were familiar with Quranic script benefited from their prior knowledge, although they still encountered challenges due to the absence of vowel markings (*harakat*) in Jawi writing. Meanwhile, five students with no previous experience in Arabic-based scripts required more time to adjust, but by the end of the activity they were able to recognize several basic letters and write simple words. This indicates that the instructional design was sufficiently adaptable for learners regardless of their initial level of exposure to related writing systems.

Student engagement also played a central role in supporting learning outcomes. Participation reached 90% during interactive quizzes, and 80% of students voluntarily wrote on the whiteboard during practice sessions. These figures demonstrate that interactive and performance-based activities significantly strengthened motivation and confidence. Writing in front of peers also transformed the classroom into a collaborative and socially meaningful space, consistent with socio-constructivist perspectives that emphasize learning through interaction and shared visibility. This pattern aligns with [Salsabila \(2024\)](#), who notes that social constructivism views learning as a process of reconstructing knowledge through interaction with new experiences and sociocultural environments. Supported by scaffolding, cognitive apprenticeship, and cooperative learning, this approach fosters a collaborative atmosphere that enables students to build understanding together. The high levels of participation observed in the program reflect how such interactive and peer-supported activities effectively promote deeper engagement and collective learning.

Affective responses reinforced the cognitive outcomes. More than 85% of students expressed pride and enthusiasm during the reflection session, indicating that cultural relevance enhances intrinsic motivation. When students recognize that the material relates directly to their cultural identity, they engage more deeply and sustain greater interest in learning. This aligns with the argument of [Maulana and Mawaddah \(2025\)](#) that cultural proximity increases the effectiveness of heritage-based pedagogy.

The program also produced meaningful outcomes for teachers. Their involvement throughout the training enabled them to gain new instructional knowledge about Jawi pedagogy, particularly regarding step-by-step teaching sequences and practical exercises suitable for the classroom. This suggests strong potential for continued implementation at the school level and illustrates how collaboration between the university and the school, facilitated by LPPM USU, can strengthen institutional capacity for cultural preservation.

Beyond its immediate impact, the program demonstrates that vocational schools can play a strategic role in cultural revitalization. Although they are often associated with technical skills, the results show that vocational institutions are equally capable of fostering cultural identity when learning activities are contextualized and culturally meaningful. In Medan Marelan, an area historically linked to Malay identity and Jawi literacy, the school serves as an important space for transmitting heritage knowledge to younger generations.

Overall, the findings indicate that heritage literacy programs are most effective when cognitive, affective, and sociocultural elements are integrated. The combination of contextual cultural content, interactive teaching strategies, and structured writing practice successfully supported the development of early Jawi literacy. The involvement of LPPM USU underscores the importance of institutional support in ensuring that community-based cultural revitalization programs are well-designed, systematically implemented, and academically accountable. This program therefore contributes not only to strengthening cultural literacy among students but also to enriching theoretical discussions on culture-based education and the role of community engagement in preserving local wisdom.

### **2.1. Implications**

One key implication of this activity is that the preservation of Jawi script can be done by involving students as active subjects, not merely objects of learning. When students are given the opportunity to practice directly, Jawi script becomes not only an academic skill, but also a means of strengthening cultural literacy. This contributes to strengthening students' cultural identity while supporting the school's image as a culture-based vocational institution.

### **2.2. Research Contribution**

This article contributes to expanding the horizons of research and practice focused on vocational high school students. Most previous studies have emphasized basic education or the development of learning media, while this program demonstrates that vocational students also have great potential as agents of cultural preservation. In addition, the application of a participatory approach has proven effective because the simple methods used facilitate active student participation in the entire range of activities.

### 2.3. Limitations

Despite the positive results, several limitations should be acknowledged. The relatively small number of participants limits the generalizability of the findings. Although this program employed quantitative indicators such as participation rates and task performance, the evaluation did not utilize standardized quantitative instruments (e.g., validated tests or structured assessment scales). As a result, the measurements captured only basic improvements observed during the sessions rather than comprehensive assessments of literacy development. Furthermore, the short duration of the activity did not allow for long-term monitoring of students' sustained engagement and retention in Jawi literacy.

### 2.4. Suggestions

For future development, it is recommended that schools integrate Jawi script lessons into extracurricular activities or local content programs so that students can continue to practice consistently. Higher education institutions can provide further assistance by compiling Jawi script writing guidelines and developing engaging digital media so that Jawi script learning can adapt to technological developments. Collaboration with local governments and cultural communities can also strengthen the sustainability of the program and expand its reach to other schools.

## D. Conclusion

This community service program demonstrated that culturally responsive and participatory learning effectively improved Jawi literacy among vocational high school students. Quantitative outcomes showed that 78% of students were able to write at least five basic Jawi words, 87% were able to distinguish visually similar characters, 90% participated in quizzes, and 80% voluntarily engaged in whiteboard writing activities, demonstrating significant improvements in early literacy mastery and engagement.

Affective indicators also reinforced these results, with over 85% of students expressing pride and enthusiasm, underscoring the motivational value of cultural relevance. The progress achieved by students with no prior experience in Arabic script further highlighted the inclusiveness of the learning approach.

The program also increased teachers' readiness to integrate Jawi literacy into school activities, reflecting the positive impact of university-school collaboration facilitated by the Institute for Community Service (LPPM USU). Overall, these findings confirm that vocational schools can play a strategic role in cultural preservation when supported by contextual and practice-oriented pedagogy, while contributing to broader efforts to revitalize Jawi literacy and advance SDG 4: Quality Education.

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## F. Author Contribution Statement

RL designed the program, coordinated the program, and drafted the manuscript. RA contributed to the development of cultural and linguistic materials and assisted in manuscript preparation. PR conducted field observations, data collection, and contributed to the analysis. LN assisted in training implementation, documentation, and preparation of supporting materials. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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