



The Perception of UNITEN Students towards the Capability to Use Jawi as an Indicator of Malay Identity and Jawi Script as Malays' Cultural Heritage

Noraziah Mohd Amin¹, Noor Azam Abdul Rahman² and Wan Noorli Razali³

^{1,3}Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang

²Jabatan Bahasa dan Sains Sosial, Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN), Putrajaya

Corresponding email: tinyfunnybunny7@gmail.com

Article Information

Keywords

Jawi, Malay identity, cultural heritage

Abstract

Jawi script is considered the heritage of the Malay people and the Sultan of Perak, Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah once expressed his concern and disappointment with the lack of effort performed by the Malays in preserving the script (Nazura, 2016). Sustaining Jawi script can be realized by using the script itself especially in the publication of reading materials (*Tidak Rela Warisan Bangsa Dihina*, 2012). Therefore, it is important to identify the perception of the Malays particularly the younger generation towards mastery Jawi script and being skillful at using this script as one of the characteristics that shape the identity of the Malays as well as their views on Jawi script as their cultural heritage. 100 degree Malay students of Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN) participated in this quantitative research which employed questionnaire survey. Most of them agreed with the idea of equipping themselves with the skills of using Jawi script for the sake of preserving it apart from acknowledging it as their cultural heritage.

INTRODUCTION

Hashim (2005) claims that the only real treasure of Malaysia is Malay language with its writing system, Jawi script which is almost 1,000 years old, compared with Roman script that Malaysians use which is less than 50 years. Despite being in this country for almost 1,000 years, Jawi script today is not extensively used as in the old days since the introduction of Romanized script and the decision made for the official writing system for this country as mentioned in the National Language Act 1963/67 (Aziah, 2000). Abd Jalil (2012) also agrees with this idea as he states that greatness of Jawi script has gradually been ignored since the time when the government put more emphasis on the use of Romanized script which results in the new generation being unfamiliar with Jawi script. It is therefore important for the youth of the Malay race especially to be exposed to Jawi writing system by mastering it, so that its sustainability can be ensured and its role in characterizing the identity of the Malay can be executed.

Problem Statement

Jawi script now is being given less attention in Malaysia since Roman script was introduced by the British in this country (Aziah, 2000), and the decision made by the Parliament regarding the official writing system in

Malaysia as enshrined in Section 9 of the National Language Acts 1963 and 1967 (Faidhur Rahman & Fatihah, 2014). Therefore, it is important to investigate the perception of the younger generation in order to identify if the local people especially the Malay youngsters still regard being able to use Jawi script well as their identity and the script as their cultural heritage that should be preserved or not.

Research Objectives

This study mainly attempts to discover the perceptions of the participants, UNITEN Malay students regarding the identification of Malay identity through the capability in using Jawi script apart from the vitality in appreciating Jawi script as the cultural heritage of the Malays. Basically, the present study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To investigate the perception of Malay UNITEN students towards the ability to use Jawi script as a representation of Malay identity.
- ii. To identify the perception of Malay UNITEN students towards the importance of appreciating Jawi script as the cultural heritage of the Malays.

Research Questions

The research intends to seek the answers to these questions:

- i. What is the perception of Malay UNITEN students towards the ability to use Jawi script as a representation of Malay identity?
- ii. What is the perception of Malay UNITEN students towards the importance of appreciating Jawi script as the cultural heritage of the Malays?

The Importance of the Study

This study is hoped to contribute some information with respect to the issue of identity and how people of a certain race perceive their identity should be presented through a particular element. As for this study, it is expected that this insights from this research can be another source of knowledge of the function of Jawi script in depicting the identity of the Malays and the significance of sustaining this cultural heritage of the Malay community via mastering the skills of using the script.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of "Malay"

Traditionally, Malays were described in relation to "Joseph Conrad's mysterious, dangerous pirates; the best-mannered gentlemen of the East; the 'lazy natives' of the colonial economies" (Milner, 2011, p. x). Coon (1962, cited in Ishak, 2011) describes Malay people in the statement, "These people are mostly short, with a mean stature for males between 157-160 centimetres; of medium built, yellowish or browned skinned; mostly straight haired, and with features of general mongoloid cast, but excessive facial flatness" (p. 8). Ismail Noor and Muhammad Azaham (2000, p. xi) define the term, "Malay" by relating it to their religion, current common residence, and place of origin as he states, "The Malay is a practicing Muslim, residing in Malaysia, whose roots go back to his ancestors of the Old Malacca Empire and of those who were the sons of the soil in the other parts of the Malay archipelago, stretching as far back in history as 3000 B.C." In terms of the place of residence, Milner (2011, p. 1) claims that, "Today, even employing a relatively narrow definition of Malay– the Malays are settled across a wide area. Figures are often difficult to determine with accuracy, but apart from the 12 million Malays in Peninsular Malaysia." More officially, Article 160 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia has the same term defined as "a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom and– (a) was before Merdeka Day born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or is on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or (b) is the issue of such a person" (p. 153).

The Historical Background of Jawi Script

Regarding the epistemological context of the name, Jawi, according to Abd Jalil (2012), a Muslim scholar, Ibn Battuta used the term, al-Djawah to refer to the Malay Archipelago, while the word, Jawi was the name of the people residing in this region. With the advent of Islam to this area, Jawi script has been used by the community since the 13th century (Aziah, 2000). With respect to the historical aspect of the local development of Jawi script, Faisal@Ahmad Faisal and Faizuri (2014) claim that the discovery of the inscribed stone dated February 22, 1303 century AD in Kuala Berang, Terengganu is undisputable evidence of the practice of Jawi script in the Malay land. Hashim (2006) in discussing the usage of Jawi script in history quotes the claim of Shellbear (1975) who states that Jawi script was introduced to the Malays directly from the Arabs, and it was the Arab people

who first used Arabic writing system to write Malay language that was named, Jawi. According to Faisal@Ahmad Faisal and Faizuri (2014), many books in the old days were written using Jawi script and one of the books is *Bustan al-Katibin*, a work of Raja Ali Haji. By the 20th century AD, the use of Jawi for recording the Malay correspondence had already included other aspects of life as well (Abd Jalil, 2012).

Jawi Script and Malay Identity

National identity is often defined by the primordial (innate) characteristics inherited by a certain group of people, such as the original language and original culture of the people from one generation to the other (Hassan, 2006). In the discussion of Jawi, this type of script is commonly linked to the Malay race. This is because the Jawi script is so synonymous in the life of the community (Faisal@Ahmad Faisal & Faizuri, 2014). Jawi script is viewed as an essential element of Malay identity as it plays a vital role in the dissemination of the Islamic civilization and knowledge in the Southeast Asia (Norhasnira, 2015). According to Faisal@Ahmad Faisal and Faizuri (2014), because Jawi script is the Malay Muslims' cultural heritage that is valuable to the community since as it represents the identity of this race, if its survival is not ensured, it is not impossible that the Malays will lose it as something priceless as a medium for portraying their identity.

The Skills of Using Jawi Script as an Identity Marker of the Malays

The skills of reading Jawi script and writing using this script should be empowered as Jawi is part of the Malays' national identity (Nazimah, 2013). Therefore, it is imperative for the people of this race to preserve their orthographical identity marker which is Jawi script by mastering it. According to Hashim (2005), being skillful at using Jawi script, the learners who master this script can benefit a lot from this as this writing system can enable them to obtain the knowledge and the wisdom of the previous generation developed during the civilization of the Malay people in the Southeast Asia, besides conserving the true identity marker of the people through having the skills to use Jawi.

Jawi as the Cultural Heritage of the Malays

Jawi is a cultural heritage that represents the Islamic identity of the Malays which must be preserved (Faisal@Ahmad Faisal & Faizuri, 2014). Jawi script is like the gateway of learning about Islam and it is also an exclusive Malay cultural heritage (Nazimah, 2013). M. Mokhtar (2000) asserts that as a Malaysian citizen of a country of independence and sovereign, they definitely need to preserve their identity as a nation of dignity through mastering Jawi script. The Sultan of Perak, Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah proposes that the effort in ensuring the survival of Jawi from being under the threat of extinction is a struggle of the nation. Jawi script is part of the national heritage that must be preserved, given the priority and sustained as long as the Malays still exist in the world (*Tidak Rela Warisan Bangsa Dihina*, 2011). The Sultan of Perak, Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah also expressed his disappointment towards the attitude of the Malay community for failing to conserve the Jawi script which is this race's heritage (Nazura, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study employed a descriptive, quantitative research design using a questionnaire survey on the perception of participants the ability to use Jawi script as a representation of Malay identity and the importance of appreciating Jawi script as the cultural heritage of the Malays.

Participants

There were 100 Malay students made up of 50 males and 50 females, aged 21-23 from UNITEN involved in the research as participants. The respondents were Engineering and Computer Science students who were completing their degree program. Their demographic particulars such as their gender and age were not the variables investigated in the study.

Instrument

The questionnaire utilized in this research was designed with 23 items of self-reporting statements which each was measured primarily in terms of the extent of their agreement or disagreement with the statements. The levels of agreeing and disagreeing of the participants with the statements included in the questionnaire distributed are represented by the 5-point Likert scale as follows: Strongly disagree= 1, Disagree= 2, Undecided= 3, Agree= 4, and Strongly agree= 5.

Data Collection

The results were gathered from the questionnaires administered to 30 respondents for the pilot test, while 100 respondents for the main study. Besides, the data was collected in one stage and this means there was no test-retest involved in this study.

Data Analysis

For the analysis of the data collected, descriptive statistical analysis was employed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0. The participants' responses to the questionnaire were calculated in terms of frequencies and percentages. The overall patterns of the respondents' perception towards the ability to use Jawi script as a representation of Malay identity and the importance of appreciating Jawi script as the cultural heritage of the Malays were generated numerically.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Internal Consistency of the Pilot Study

TABLE 1: CRONBACH'S ALPHA RELIABILITY COEFFICIENT FOR THE INSTRUMENT

N= 30		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of items
0.728	0.749	23

A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability of the items in the questionnaire that included 30 respondents. The Cronbach's alpha value of 0.728 obtained indicated a reliable value that signified the items in the questionnaire were acceptable as well as reliable to be utilized for the present research.

The Main Study

Research Question 1: What is the perception of Malay UNITEN students towards the ability to use Jawi script as a representation of Malay identity?

What is the perception of Malay UNITEN students towards the importance of appreciating Jawi script as the cultural heritage of the Malays?

TABLE 2
FREQUENCY (F) DISTRIBUTION (IN PERCENTAGE) FOR THE RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS JAWI SCRIPT AS THE REPRESENTATION OF MALAY IDENTITY AND JAWI SCRIPT AS A CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE MALAYS

N= 100								
	Items	Mean	Std. Dev	Response options				
				SD	D	U	A	SA
	Jawi Script as the Representation of Malay Identity			%	%	%	%	%
1	The ability to use Jawi script well can strengthen my identity as a Malay Muslim.	3.22	1.072	0	3	20	40	37
2	The ability to use the Jawi script well can be an indication (indicator) for the true identity of the of the Malays.	3.43	0.914	0	8	26	45	21
3	The Malays must feel responsible for associating the ability to use Jawi script and their identity as Malays.	3.81	0.815	18	45	20	15	2
4	Because of Jawi script is closely related to Arabic, the ability to use Jawi script can strengthen the identity of the Malays as Muslims.	3.24	0.682	23	42	11	16	8
5	As Malay Muslims, the ability to use Jawi script is important for the Malays for it represents their identity.	3.12	0.715	0	10	2	65	23
6	As a Malay, I feel proud if i can read Jawi script well.	4.21	0.726	0	1	2	60	37
7	As a Malay, I feel proud if I can write using Jawi script well.	4.03	0.714	1	1	1	65	32
8	As a Malay, I am proud to introduce to the non-Malays that Jawi is one of the indicators of Malay identity.	3.81	0.815	6	18	0	52	24
9	I think if a Malay does not have the skills to read Jawi script and write using this script, they can be considered to have lost one of their Malay identity markers.	4.24	0.719	8	21	3	45	23

10	In my opinion, the Malays who have the skills to read Jawi script and write using this script are considered to have successfully maintained their Malay identity.	3.41	0.673	23	31	10	24	12
11	Malays who are proud of their Malay identity should learn how to read Jawi script and write using the script, so that their Malay identity can be preserved.	3.54	0.617	11	34	5	30	20
12	In my opinion, every Malay should be proud of Malay language that is associated with Jawi writing system as one of the Malay identity markers.	3.15	0.721	9	9	3	49	30
13	The skills to read Jawi script and write using the script is one of the Malay identity markers that differentiates the Malays from other races in Malaysia.	3.31	0.892	8	14	4	57	17
14	I think a non-Malay who has the skills to read Jawi script and write using the script cannot be deemed to have become a Malay, because Jawi script is the identity of the Malays only.	4.12	0.677	0	13	2	60	25
	Items	Mean	Std. Dev	Response options				
	Jawi Script as the Cultural Heritage of the Malays			SD	D	U	A	SA
				%	%	%	%	%
15	I think Jawi script has interesting and artistic letters.	3.23	0.715	12	34	18	24	12
16	Jawi is the heritage of the Malays that should be sustained from time to time.	4.02	0.689	18	18	6	40	18
17	Jawi script should be inherited from one Malay generation to other Malay generation.	3.78	0.822	12	31	13	32	12
18	The Malays should feel proud of Jawi script that is their heritage.	3.54	1.333	0	3	11	50	36
19	The Malays should feel proud of Jawi script which was widely used in the old days.	3.75	0.821	8	10	3	58	21
20	The use of Jawi script as a communication medium during the old days should be appreciated by the younger generation today.	4.43	0.712	0	2	4	58	36
21	The local authority such as the government agencies should plan properly on how to preserve Jawi script as one of the heritage markers of the Malays.	3.84	0.711	1	24	13	48	14
22	In my opinion, a person who is skillful at using Jawi is a creative individual because writing Jawi requires combining Arabic letters systematically that can be such a work of art.	3.41	0.875	8	14	4	57	17
23	Jawi is written using Arabic letters in Malay language. So, I think Jawi script has artistic elements associated with Islamic art.	3.84	0.711	12	24	3	47	14

The ability to use Jawi either in reading or writing using this type of writing system in relation to Malay identity was investigated by administering a questionnaire containing 23 self-reporting statements to the participants. The results indicated that the respondents in majority agreed that being able to use Jawi was an indicator of Malay identity. This was evident in the responses provided by the participants in answering item 8 (“As a Malay, I am proud to introduce to the non-Malays that Jawi is one of the indicators of Malay identity”), item 5 (“As Malay Muslims, the ability to use Jawi script is important for the Malays for it represents their identity”), item 13 (“The skills to read Jawi script and write using the script is one of the Malay identity markers that differentiates the Malays from other races in Malaysia”), and item 14 (“I think a non-Malay who has the skills to read Jawi script and write using the script cannot be deemed to have become a Malay, because Jawi script is the identity of the Malays only”), as the combined percentages for both response options, “agree” and “strongly agree” of each of the items were 97%, 94%, 74%, and 85% respectively. More than half of the participants associate the competency of using Jawi script to their Malay Muslim identity as the total number of those who “agree” and “strongly agree” for item 1 (“The ability to use Jawi script well can strengthen my identity as a Malay Muslim”) and item 2 (“The ability to use the Jawi script well can be an indication (indicator) for the true identity of the of the Malays”) were 77% and 67%. 68% of them agree with the statement “I think if a Malay does not have the skills to read Jawi script and write using this script, they can be considered to have lost one of their Malay identity markers” while 79% agree with the statement in item 12 “In my opinion, every Malay should be proud of Malay language that is associated with Jawi writing system as one of the Malay identity markers”. Negative feedbacks can be seen in the participants’ responses on item 3 (“The Malays must feel responsible for associating the ability to use Jawi script and their identity as Malays.”), item 4 (“Because of Jawi script is closely related to Arabic, the ability to use Jawi script can strengthen the identity of the Malays as Muslims.”), item 10 (“In my opinion, the Malays who have the skills to read Jawi script and write using this script are considered to have successfully maintained their Malay identity.”) and item 11 (“Malays who are proud of their Malay identity should learn how to read Jawi script and write using the script, so that their Malay identity can be preserved.”) where those who agreed were only 17%, 24%, 36% and 50% respectively. Despite

of the negative feedbacks, 97% agreed that they would be proud Malays if they are able to read and write Jawi well.

In terms of looking at Jawi script as a cultural heritage of the Malays, the participants were positive when responding to item 18 (“The Malays should feel proud of Jawi script that is their heritage”), item 19 (“The Malays should feel proud of Jawi script which was widely used in the old days.”), item 20 (“The use of Jawi script as a communication medium during the old days should be appreciated by the younger generation today.”) and item 21 (“The local authority such as the government agencies should plan properly on how to preserve Jawi script as one of the heritage markers of the Malays”) where 86%, 79%, 94% and 62% agreed with the respective statements. 61% agreed that “Jawi is written using Arabic letters in Malay language. So, I think Jawi script has artistic elements associated with Islamic art” while 74% agreed with item 21 (“In my opinion, a person who is skillful at using Jawi is a creative individual because writing Jawi requires combining Arabic letters systematically that can be such a work of art.”). However, only 58% agreed that “Jawi is the heritage of the Malays that should be sustained from time to time” while 44% agreed that “Jawi script should be inherited from one Malay generation to other Malay generation”. A small portion of only 32% agreed with item 15 (“I think Jawi script has interesting and artistic letters”).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

According to Faidhur Rahman and Fatihah (2014), rather than viewing the effort to use and honor the Jawi script as a way to diminish any of the other races’ identities, this movement should be perceived as something that allows Malaysians to fully appreciate their own history and eccentricities. As perceived by the majority of the participants representing the Malaysian younger generation, Jawi script is a significant unique representation of the Malay identity and an invaluable inheritance. These youngsters believe true Malays should be competent in the use of this script and they would be delighted if they are able to be its proficient users. Such positive feelings and intentions should not be allowed to fade away over time. Serious steps should be taken to not only retain such positive enthusiasm but also to help nurture and transform it into actions. Exposing the youngsters to the history of Jawi and how it forms the Malay identity may increase their appreciation of its existence. For the script to be highly valued, it has to play meaningful roles in our lives. Thus, its application in our daily lives whether in formal or informal settings should be broadened. As mentioned by Faisal@Ahmad Faisal and Faizuri (2014) in discussing the theory of the development of Jawi Script proposed by Prof. Dr. Kang Kyoung Seok quote his prediction regarding the possibility for Jawi script to be extinct in 10 to 20 years if it is not practiced every day. Daily practice of Jawi is therefore a necessity in ensuring its future sustainability.

REFERENCES

- Abd Jalil Borhan. (2012). *Tulisan jawi: tulisan serantau*. Kertas kerja Ucaptama Seminar Tulisan Jawi dan Teknologi Peringkat Kebangsaan 2012 di Dewan Astaka, Universiti Malaysia Pahang pada 18 Oktober 2012. Retrieved March 21, 2016 from http://umpir.ump.edu.my/3330/1/Prof_Jalil_seminar_jawi.pdf
- Aziah Ismail. (2000). *Penguasaan Tulisan Jawi Di Kalangan Pelajar UPM*. Serdang: Tesis Sarjana Sastera, Universiti Putra Malaysia. Retrieved March 21, 2016 from <https://core.ac.uk/download/files/452/12228745.pdf>
- Coon, C.S. (1962). *The origin of races*. New York: Alfred M. Knopf, pp. ix-x. In Ishak Saat. (2011). *Radikalisme Melayu Perak 1945-1970*. Penang: Penerbit USM.
- Faidhur Rahman Abdul Hadi., & Fatihah Jamhari. (December 18, 2014). Use of Jawi should be encouraged, not condemned. *The Malay Mail Online*. Retrieved May 25, 2016 from <http://m.themalaymailonline.com/what-you-think/article/use-of-jawi-should-be-encouraged-not-condemned-faidhur-rahman-abdul-hadi-an>
- Faisal@Ahmad Faisal Abdul Hami., & Faizuri Abdul Latif. (2014). Sejarah Perkembangan Tulisan Jawi: Analisis mengenai Teori Kang Kyoung Seok. *Jurnal al-Tamadun*, Bil.9 (2), 1-15, API, UM, Kuala Lumpur.
- Federal Constitution*. (Reprint). (November 1, 2010). Printed With the Consent of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Pursuant to Article 160a of the Federal Constitution. Malaysia: The Commissioner of Law Revision.
- Hashim Hj. Musa. (2005). Peranan tulisan jawi dalam perkembangan Islam di Malaysia. *Jurnal Pengajian Melayu*, Jilid 16, 2005. Retrieved March 24, 2016 from http://www.myjournal.my/filebank/published_article/24027/Article_5.PDF
- Hassan Ahmad. (2006). *Ke Arah Kelahiran Melayu Global*. Shah Alam: Alaf 21 SDN. BHD.
- Ismail Noor, & Muhammad Azaham. (2000). *The Malays par excellence...warts and all: An introspection*. Selangor: Pelanduk Publications (M) Sdn. Bhd.

- M. Mokhtar Shafii. (2000). Pelaksanaan Tulisan Jawi dalam Sistem Pendidikan Malaysia. Dalam *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, Jilid 9 Bil. 2 Disember 2000. Kuala Lumpur: Institut Pengajian Ilmu-ilmu Islam.
- Milner, A. (2011). *The Malays*. Queensland, Australia: John Wiley & Sons.
- Nazimah Mohamad@Mohd Noor. (2013). Penggunaan Modul Pembelajaran Kemahiran Jawi. Tesis Sarjana Psikologi Pendidikan, Fakulti Pendidikan Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Skudai. Retrieved May 25, 2016 from [http://www.fp.utm.my/epusatsumber/pdf/fail/ptkghdfwP2/Nazimah%20Binti%20Mohamad@Mohd%20Noor.TP.pdf](http://www.fp.utm.my/epusatsumber/pdf/fail/ptkghdfwP2/Nazimah%20Binti%20Mohamad%20@Mohd%20Noor.TP.pdf)
- Nazura Ngah. (March 1, 2016). Sultan Nazrin dukacita tulisan Jawi gagal dipertahankan. *Berita Harian Online*. Retrieved March 21, 2016 from <http://www.bharian.com.my/node/129558>
- Norhasnira Ibrahim, (2015). Jawi Script in Hadith Literatures in Malaysia: Issues and Challenges. *International Proceedings of Economics Development and Research IPEDR*, vol. 83. Singapore: IACSIT Press.
- Shellabear, W. G. (1975). *Sejarah Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Fajar Bakti. In Hashim Musa. (2006). *Sejarah Perkembangan Tulisan Jawi, Edisi Kedua*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Tidak rela warisan bangsa dihina. (2011, Januari 14). *Utusan Online*. http://ww1.utusan.com.my/utusan/info.asp?y=2011&dt=0114&pub=Utusan_Malaysia&sec=Rencana&pg=re_01.htm