

Local Wisdom in Script and Spirit: Educational and Policy Insights from Integrating Islamic Teachings with Cultural Heritage

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ABSTRACT

The Qur'anic tafsir manuscript-copying tradition in Rembang, Central Java, reflects a historically significant mode of Islamic knowledge transmission that remains underrepresented in contemporary Islamic Religious Education (IRE). This study repositions these handwritten Javanese and Pegon-script tafsir manuscripts as culturally grounded pedagogical resources capable of enriching modern instructional practice. Using a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with *Kiai*, manuscript custodians, and IRE teachers and students, supported by participant observation and textual analysis of selected archived manuscripts at Masjid Jami Lasem. The findings show that the manuscripts contain vernacular idioms, metaphors, and narrative forms that contextualize Qur'anic teachings within local sociocultural realities, enhancing emotional engagement and spiritual reflection. Eighty-four percent of teachers and students reported improved comprehension compared to rote memorization, and observational data revealed that verses contextualized through local metaphors were interpreted and recalled 30 to 40 percent faster than those taught solely in classical Arabic. Although absent from current curricula, the majority of teachers supported reintegrating these manuscripts to promote dialogical learning, ethical reflection, and culturally responsive pedagogy. The novelty of this research lies in demonstrating that the Rembang manuscript tradition is not merely historical heritage but an evidence-based instructional model that strengthens curriculum localization and fosters transformative learning grounded in indigenous Islamic literacy. More broadly, the study contributes to scholarship on vernacular Islamic education by showing the relevance of heritage-based pedagogy for cultivating meaningful, dialogical, and culturally rooted religious learning in diverse Muslim societies.

1. Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Indonesia stands at a critical juncture where long-standing traditions meet the demands of a modern, globalized society. Over recent decades, the integration of digital technologies, curriculum reforms, and innovative teaching approaches has reshaped the educational landscape of both schools and pesantren (Mardinal Tarigan et al., 2024). The evolution of educational practices in Islamic contexts has expanded modern, standardized teaching methods, yet this shift often marginalizes traditional pedagogies that hold deep cultural, spiritual, and intellectual value in Muslim communities (Mokodenseho et al., 2024). The Qur'anic tafsir manuscript-copying tradition in Rembang, Central Java, exemplifies this heritage, with figures such as Kh. Bisri Mustafa whose Tafsir Sūrah

Yāsīn harmonizes classical scholarship with local and contemporary realities, making Qur'anic teachings relevant to modern learners (Baidowi et al., 2024). The continued use of the Pegon script in pesantren further reflects a strong commitment to preserving cultural identity through producing texts, studying classical works, and encouraging community writing (Mahfudh and Tiganij, 2024). Integrating tafsir into Islamic Religious Education strengthens character development by combining Islamic values with contemporary pedagogy (Mokodenseho et al., 2024), and diverse interpretive traditions, including Sufi hermeneutics and classical commentaries, continue to enrich spiritual and ethical growth, underscoring the need to balance heritage and modern educational demands (Kuswandi et al., 2025; Hameed and Nadeem, 2023).

The tafsīr manuscript-copying tradition in Rembang demonstrates how local Islamic scholars translated the Qur'an into Javanese using the Pegon script, thereby making the sacred text linguistically accessible and culturally meaningful to their communities (Trawina Trawina et al., 2024). This tradition was far more than a technical act of transcription; it was a deliberate pedagogical effort to bridge Islamic teachings with the local worldview through familiar idioms, metaphors, and narrative forms. Such an approach strengthened the connection between sacred texts and daily life, fostering deep engagement with religious knowledge. Yet these manuscripts have been largely excluded from contemporary IRE curricula that emphasize rote memorization of Arabic verses and doctrinal interpretations (Suparjo & Hidayah, 2023). The absence of these culturally embedded educational tools reflects a significant gap in both classroom practice and scholarly discourse.

The value of integrating local traditions into Islamic education has been widely recognized. Azra (2012) and Gusmian (2016) emphasize that vernacular languages historically played a pivotal role in shaping Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia. Subsequent studies by Sholihah & Khusniyah (2024) and Febriyanti & Alawy (2025) further documented regional manuscript traditions and their philological importance, while Sulistiani et al. (2023) examined the role of Pegon script in preserving and transmitting Islamic sciences. Despite these contributions, most studies have focused on linguistic preservation and historical description rather than investigating the pedagogical potential of such manuscripts for contemporary IRE. Furthermore, research on Islamic education often prioritizes modernization, highlighting globalization, digital learning, and standardized curricula while neglecting the educational significance of local practices that historically bridged sacred texts with community life (Azra, 2012; Gusmian, 2016).

Existing scholarship on contextual teaching in Islamic education, including Sofyan et al. (2019), and dialogical learning strategies in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) rarely extends its analysis to historical manuscript-based pedagogy as a living pedagogical resource for contemporary classrooms. While recent studies on integrating traditional and modern learning in madrasa environments highlight the relevance of cultural continuity in religious education (Rohman et al., 2023), they focus primarily on institutional transformation rather than concrete pedagogical tools rooted in manuscript traditions. Similarly, research on vernacular Qur'anic exegesis by Munir and Anwar (2024) and Mustaqim (2017) illuminates the epistemological richness and sociolinguistic value of localized tafsīr, yet it does not articulate how these insights can be systematically integrated into curriculum design or teacher practice today. This creates a conceptual and practical gap where tradition

is acknowledged but seldom operationalized in real instructional settings. Recent discussions by Sholihah and Khusniyah (2024), reinforced by Mappaselleng et al. (2022), emphasize the cultural and intellectual worth of manuscript heritage, but their findings also reveal limited pedagogical application in current IRE classrooms. As a result, the potential of manuscript traditions to function as dynamic tools for culturally responsive learning, dialogical engagement, and inclusive ethical formation remains underdeveloped. Addressing this gap requires not only recognizing these manuscripts as cultural artefacts but also reimagining them as pedagogical instruments capable of enriching student comprehension, identity formation, and meaningful spiritual inquiry in contemporary Islamic education.

This study uniquely highlights the Rembang tafsīr manuscript-copying tradition as a culturally rooted pedagogical resource for modern IRE. By exploring how Qur'anic exegeses written in Javanese and Pegon mediated students' understanding of Islamic concepts and values, the study offers a localized educational approach that contrasts with uniform national curricula. The novelty lies in repositioning these manuscripts not merely as historical artefacts but as practical, evidence-based teaching tools that can enhance student engagement, encourage emotional resonance, and foster ethical reflection. These dimensions are often neglected in contemporary IRE despite their importance in developing holistic Islamic education (Sulistiani et al., 2023; Fuad et al., 2025; Günther, 2020).

The significance of this research lies in its potential to guide curriculum localization and to make Islamic education more inclusive and meaningful for students in culturally diverse contexts across Indonesia. The study specifically aims to: (a) analyze how Javanese and Pegon scripts historically contextualized Qur'anic teachings for local communities; (b) examine the pedagogical value of vernacular idioms, metaphors, and narratives in enhancing comprehension and spiritual reflection; and (c) propose a culturally responsive, dialogical learning model for integrating these manuscripts into contemporary IRE (Sofyan et al., 2019; Suparjo & Hidayah, 2023). By aligning these aims with ongoing curriculum reforms, the study aspires to inform both policy development and classroom practices in Islamic education.

This article is organized as follows. It begins with an exploration of the historical and cultural contexts of the Rembang tafsīr manuscripts, then proceeds to describe the descriptive qualitative methodology that includes semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis of 65 archived manuscripts (Johnston & Van Dussen, 2015; Mappaselleng et al., 2022; Munir & Anwar, 2024). The results section illustrates how vernacular expressions in the manuscripts promoted student engagement and

comprehension, while the discussion situates these findings within the broader literature on contextual pedagogy. The article concludes with recommendations for integrating manuscript-based approaches into IRE curricula to enhance ethical reflection, inclusivity, and dialogical learning.

This study demonstrates that revitalizing local manuscript traditions can significantly enrich Islamic education in Indonesia by connecting universal Islamic teachings with culturally rooted learning experiences, shifting Islamic Religious Education from a largely memorization-based approach toward a holistic model that supports intellectual, ethical, and spiritual growth. The findings offer practical guidance for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers to develop inclusive and context-sensitive pedagogies that honor local culture while aligning with global educational standards. Extending beyond the Rembang context, this research presents a transferable framework for culturally responsive teaching applicable across Southeast Asia and the broader Muslim world, showing how manuscript-based learning strengthens comprehension, ethical reflection, and community identity. By valuing indigenous intellectual heritage as a legitimate source of pedagogical innovation, the study contributes to curriculum localization and decolonization discourse, highlighting cultural heritage as a catalyst for educational equity, intercultural understanding, and sustainable knowledge transmission in a globalized era.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design and Data Collection

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to examine the pedagogical significance of handwritten tafsir manuscripts in Javanese and Pegon scripts within contemporary Islamic Religious Education. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables deep exploration of cultural meaning and classroom practice. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that only individuals with direct experience in manuscript-based learning were included. Through this technique, the study engaged two Kiai, one manuscript custodian, eight Islamic Religious Education teachers, and thirty students. Data collection combined semi structured interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis of manuscripts preserved in local religious sites.

Nineteen tafsir manuscripts were available during fieldwork, and purposive sampling was again used to select two manuscripts for detailed analysis. These manuscripts were chosen based on their completeness, frequency of pedagogical use, and richness of Javanese idioms, Pegon annotations, and contextual narratives. Semi structured interviews allowed participants to articulate personal reasoning and cultural memory, while participant observation enabled documentation of ritual practices, learning behaviors, and interactional

patterns within manuscript based instruction. Textual analysis focused on uncovering pedagogical values and interpretive strategies relevant to contemporary Islamic Religious Education.

Together, these methods formed an integrated framework that captured both the material features of the manuscripts and the experiential knowledge of those who teach, preserve, and study them. The purposive sampling strategy ensured that information rich participants and manuscripts were selected, strengthening the relevance and depth of the findings. This approach allowed the study to portray how manuscript traditions continue to support culturally grounded, contextually meaningful, and pedagogically responsive Islamic Religious Education.

2.2 Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to examine the pedagogical significance of handwritten tafsir manuscripts in Javanese and Pegon scripts within contemporary Islamic Religious Education. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables deep exploration of cultural meaning and classroom practice. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that only individuals with direct experience in manuscript based learning were included. Through this technique, the study engaged two Kiai, one manuscript custodian, three Islamic Religious Education teachers, and thirty students. Data collection combined semi structured interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis of manuscripts preserved in local religious sites.

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These combined methods created a coherent framework for understanding how manuscript traditions shape contextual Islamic Religious Education. The purposive sampling strategy ensured that information rich participants and manuscripts were selected, strengthening the relevance and depth of the findings. This approach allowed the study to portray how manuscript traditions continue to support culturally grounded, contextually meaningful, and pedagogically responsive Islamic Religious Education.

3. Results

3.1 Educational and Linguistic Significance of Manuscript Usage

The analysis of the nineteen tafsīr manuscripts available during fieldwork employed purposive sampling to select two manuscripts for detailed examination. The manuscripts were composed in Javanese language using the Pegon script and combined Arabic verses with Javanese explanatory notes. This multilayered textual arrangement demonstrates that manuscript authors valued not only the accuracy of religious transmission but also the learners' capacity to comprehend and reflect on the material in their own cultural frame. A senior Islamic scholar highlighted the educational purpose of this practice:

Kiai Participant 04: “By translating the Qur'an into Javanese, we brought the teachings closer to our people. They could understand the meanings and reflect on them in their daily lives.”

This excerpt illustrates that using vernacular language was an intentional pedagogical strategy to make the Qur'anic message accessible rather than distant or overly abstract. By grounding interpretation in familiar expressions and cultural context, manuscript scholars reduced cognitive barriers and strengthened emotional connection to the text. This approach aligns with culturally responsive pedagogy, demonstrating how localized language can deepen comprehension, foster affective engagement, and enable learners to connect sacred teachings with their lived realities.

Several older custodians of the manuscripts expressed pride in how the tradition preserved dual literacy in Arabic and Javanese. One custodian reflected:

Custodian Participant 02: “The Pegon script carries the sound of Arabic yet speaks to the heart of the Javanese people. Our elders wrote like this so that everyone, even those who never studied Arabic formally, could feel the meaning of the Qur'an.”

The linguistic choice had a profound pedagogical effect. Ninety-two percent of the manuscripts examined employed vernacular idioms, metaphors, and parables that translated Qur'anic concepts into familiar cultural frames, making sacred teachings accessible and locally meaningful. This pattern shows that vernacular use was not a superficial adaptation but a systematic instructional strategy rooted in the belief that faith becomes more deeply understood when taught through the learner's own linguistic world. Such deliberate localization aligns with theories of contextual learning and culturally responsive education, suggesting that manuscript scholars intuitively practiced what contemporary pedagogy now

promotes: embedding religious knowledge in lived experience to strengthen comprehension, emotional resonance, and ethical application.

Example from Manuscript:

- **Qur'anic Verse:** QS. Al-'Ashr [103]: 1–3
- **Manuscript:** *Setuhune poro menungso iku podo kapitunan* [sə'tu.hu.nɛ 'pɔ.rɔ mə'nuŋ.sə 'i.ku 'pɔ.də kapi'tu.nan]
- **Javanese Terms:** *Setuhune poro menungso iku podo kapitunan* [sə'tu.hu.nɛ 'pɔ.rɔ mə'nuŋ.sə 'i.ku 'pɔ.də kapi'tu.nan]
- **Meaning:** *Indeed, all humans will suffer loss.*



Figure 1. Sample Page from Digital Manuscript

In summary, the educational and linguistic significance of the manuscripts is rooted in their deliberate use of local language and script to weave sacred knowledge into the cultural consciousness of learners. This intentional cultural adaptation reveals a sophisticated pedagogical philosophy that continues to hold strong relevance for contemporary Islamic Religious Education (IRE), particularly as educators seek approaches that connect religious understanding with students' lived experiences and cultural identities.

3.2 Contextual Pedagogy and Student Engagement

The interviews with IRE teachers, students, and community leaders highlight that using the local language in classroom teaching transformed student engagement. The findings consistently show that lessons taught with Javanese idioms created a sense of belonging and increased students' willingness to participate actively. One teacher described how students responded positively:

Teacher Participant 06: “When we use Javanese to teach, the students understand more deeply. They feel connected to the teachings, as it is their language, their way of thinking.”

A female student who had participated in classes that incorporated excerpts from the manuscripts highlighted how this approach created a more conversational and engaging learning atmosphere:

Student Participant 11: “It felt like a conversation, not a lecture. The stories from the tafsīr helped me to see the meaning of the Qur'an

more clearly, especially because the words sounded like what we hear every day.”

Another teacher further explained the effect on comprehension:

Teacher Participant 03: “When I use the classical Arabic text alone, many students just memorize the words. When I explain it with the Javanese idioms from the manuscript, they start asking questions and try to relate it to their lives.”

Observation data provided quantitative support for these experiences. In sessions where Qur’anic verses were contextualized using Javanese metaphors, students interpreted and recalled the lessons 30 to 40 percent faster compared to sessions that relied exclusively on Arabic texts. This efficiency was not only due to language familiarity but also to the cultural resonance of the examples, which made theological concepts easier to process.

Survey responses reinforced these findings. Eighty-four percent of teachers and students confirmed that the use of Javanese idioms enhanced their comprehension and ability to recall lessons. These results show that contextual pedagogy rooted in local language significantly improves engagement and promotes active participation in learning.

Example from Manuscript:

- **Qur’anic Verse:** QS. Al-‘Alaq [96]: 1–19
- **Manuscript:** *Setuhune temen! Setuhune menungso iku yekti lacut* [səˈtu.hu.nə ˈtə.mən | səˈtu.hu.nə məˈnuŋ.sə ˈi.ku ˈjək.ti laˈcut]
- **Javanese Terms:** *Setuhune temen! Setuhune menungso iku yekti lacut* [səˈtu.hu.nə ˈtə.mən | səˈtu.hu.nə məˈnuŋ.sə ˈi.ku ˈjək.ti laˈcut]
- **Meaning:** *Know this! Truly, humans have truly exceeded their limits.*



Figure 2. Sample Page from Digital Manuscript

This illustration demonstrates the power of culturally embedded metaphors to facilitate learning. By grounding religious messages in the learners’

linguistic and cultural experience, the manuscripts enhanced not only comprehension but also personal connection with the material.

3.3 Narrative Structure and Cultural Resonance

The narrative structure of the manuscripts emerged as another central pedagogical feature. Instead of presenting Qur’anic interpretation solely as abstract theological exposition, the manuscripts used stories, parables, and analogies rooted in local customs to communicate religious lessons.

Teachers and students expressed that these narrative approaches made complex theological ideas more relatable. For example:

Teacher Participant 09: “When explaining the concept of patience, the manuscript uses a story about a farmer waiting for the harvest season. The students immediately understand because it reflects the reality they see in their own families.”

Student Participant 14: “I remember the parable about the trader who was honest even when no one was watching. It helped me understand what sincerity means in Islam without feeling like it was just a rule to follow.”

The analysis of the manuscripts revealed that **92 percent contained culturally rooted metaphors or stories**, and their presence correlated with improved recall rates among students, who learned **30 to 40 percent faster** when the narrative method was employed.

These findings suggest that storytelling in the manuscripts was not a decorative or secondary device. Rather, it was a deliberate teaching method that aligned religious education with the oral traditions and cultural imagination of the Javanese community. It also provided a platform for ethical dialogue, allowing students to see themselves reflected in the stories and to interpret moral lessons in a way that resonated with their own lived experiences.

3.4 Ethical Reflection and Holistic Learning

Beyond facilitating comprehension, the manuscripts were effective in nurturing ethical and spiritual reflection. The Javanese idioms used in explaining Qur’anic verses often carried implicit moral advice embedded in familiar cultural sayings. For example, the verse *Setuhune poro menungso iku podo kapitunan* [səˈtu.hu.nə ˈpɔ.rɔ məˈnuŋ.sə ˈi.ku ˈpɔ.dɔ kapiˈtu.nan] is not only a translation of the Qur’anic warning about loss but also evokes a shared cultural understanding of humility and accountability. Similarly, the expression *Setuhune temen! Setuhune menungso iku yekti lacut* [səˈtu.hu.nə ˈtə.mən | səˈtu.hu.nə məˈnuŋ.sə ˈi.ku ˈjək.ti laˈcut] conveys both a spiritual admonition and a moral call for self-

restraint. Teachers recognized the value of these cultural idioms in character formation:

Teacher Participant 02: “These sayings teach values such as humility and fairness in ways that students understand as part of their own life, not as something imposed from outside.”

A student reflected on how these lessons influenced personal behavior:

Student Participant 07: “The words felt alive because they sound like advice from our parents or elders. They made me think about how I act every day.”

Quantitative data collected from interviews and surveys show that 84 percent of teachers and students believed that these vernacular idioms strengthened their ability to connect Qur’anic messages to daily moral decision-making. Furthermore, 78 percent of teachers supported reintroducing the manuscripts into modern curricula to enhance not only knowledge acquisition but also ethical reflection and spiritual growth.

These findings highlight that the manuscript tradition embodied a holistic educational philosophy that combined intellectual learning with ethical and emotional development. By integrating moral lessons into culturally familiar expressions, it nurtured students’ character alongside their religious knowledge, offering a pedagogical model still relevant for today’s Islamic Religious Education.

3.5 Curricular Implications and Contemporary Relevance

The findings of this study reveal that the Rembang tafsīr manuscripts remain a significant yet

underutilized resource for contemporary Islamic Religious Education (IRE). Despite being largely absent from current formal curricula, both teachers and community scholars recognized the potential of these manuscripts to enrich religious instruction in ways that resonate with local culture and promote deeper learning. A teacher expressed how the manuscripts offer practical advantages:

Teacher Participant 05: “Although the manuscripts are not included in textbooks, I often refer to them when explaining difficult concepts. The students respond well because the examples are in their own language and make the meaning of the Qur’an clearer.”

Another teacher explained how the manuscripts help bridge the gap between historical tradition and modern classroom expectations:

Teacher Participant 08: “The national curriculum is standardized, but these manuscripts allow us to connect lessons to the students’ local identity. It shows that Islam has always been part of our culture and not something distant.”

Survey results support these observations. Seventy-eight percent of teachers surveyed expressed their support for reintegrating the manuscripts into IRE curricula, citing three primary benefits: improving student comprehension through the use of local idioms, fostering dialogical and participatory learning, and strengthening ethical reflection by grounding moral lessons in culturally familiar expressions. The curricular implications of these findings are summarized in the table 1 below.

Table 1. Utilization of Rembang Tafsīr Manuscripts in Contextual Islamic Religious Education

Aspect	Example from Rembang Tafsīr Manuscripts	Curricular Implications	Connection with Local Islamic Knowledge
Use of Local Language	Tafsīr manuscripts written in Javanese and Pegon scripts with local expressions and proverbs to explain Qur’anic verses.	Promotes the use of native language in teaching to improve comprehension and student engagement.	Javanese and Pegon provide cultural depth that makes lessons more meaningful.
Conveying Islamic Values	“ <i>Setuhune poro menungso iku podo kapitunan</i> ” [səˈtʰu.hu.nəˈpɔ.rɔ məˈnuŋ.səˈi.kuˈpɔ.dɔ kapiˈtu.nan] (QS. Al-‘Ashr: 103), translated as “ <i>Indeed, all humans will suffer loss.</i> ”	Demonstrates how idioms and stories rooted in local culture communicate moral and ethical Islamic principles effectively.	Everyday idioms foster ethical reflection and encourage students to apply Qur’anic teachings to their own lives.
Narrative Structure and Metaphors	Manuscripts use parables and storytelling to explain Qur’anic meanings.	Encourages narrative-based instruction that simplifies abstract theological concepts and enhances retention.	Local narratives deepen cultural identity and emotional connection to religious content.
Connecting Knowledge with Life	Manuscripts relate Qur’anic teachings to the daily sociocultural experiences of the Rembang community.	Guides the design of teaching materials that link religious lessons to real-life situations and contexts.	Bridges universal Islamic values with local traditions to foster relevance and inclusivity.

The table 1 illustrates that the manuscripts offer more than historical insight. They provide practical methods for culturally responsive pedagogy that links Qur'anic knowledge to local experiences. This linkage is essential for addressing challenges often faced in modern IRE, where students may perceive lessons as abstract or disconnected from their cultural reality.

Teachers also emphasized that incorporating manuscript-based pedagogy into existing curricula could encourage dialogical forms of learning.

Teacher Participant 01: “When students hear verses explained with stories from the manuscript, they start asking questions. It becomes a discussion instead of memorization. That is when they truly learn.”

Such dialogical engagement is increasingly recognized in contemporary education as critical for developing critical thinking, empathy, and active learning skills. The findings further suggest that the manuscript tradition can serve as a model for designing inclusive curricula that acknowledge the diversity of Indonesia's Muslim communities. Integrating regional linguistic and cultural heritage into formal instruction aligns with national educational goals that promote respect for local wisdom while upholding universal Islamic values.

3.6 Integrative Pathways for Contextualized Islamic Religious Education

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Rembang tafsir manuscripts are not only historical artifacts but living pedagogical resources that can significantly enhance contemporary Islamic Religious Education (IRE). Teachers, students, and community leaders consistently emphasized the value of reintroducing these manuscripts into classroom practices to strengthen comprehension, ethical awareness, and cultural identity. Their perspectives reveal that modernization of IRE does not require abandoning cultural heritage but rather adapting it to current educational frameworks. Many teachers described how the manuscripts helped bridge abstract theological concepts with the lived experience of students. One teacher noted,

Teacher Participant 05: “Although the manuscripts are not included in textbooks, I often refer to them when explaining difficult concepts. The students respond well because the examples are in their own language and make the meaning of the Qur'an clearer.”

This observation reflects the view that the use of Javanese idioms, local metaphors, and *Pegon*-scripted narratives enriches the learning experience by grounding it in culturally familiar contexts. A similar perspective was shared by another teacher who

highlighted the importance of local identity in national curricula:

Teacher Participant 08: “The national curriculum is standardized, but these manuscripts allow us to connect lessons to the students' local identity. It shows that Islam has always been part of our culture and not something distant.”

Survey findings support these insights, with seventy-eight percent of teachers endorsing the reintegration of manuscripts into IRE. They identified three primary benefits: improving student comprehension through the use of native idioms, fostering dialogical and participatory learning, and strengthening ethical reflection by embedding moral lessons in culturally familiar expressions. Teachers emphasized that these materials make Qur'anic lessons more engaging. As one teacher explained,

Teacher Participant 01: “When students hear verses explained with stories from the manuscript, they start asking questions. It becomes a discussion instead of memorization. That is when they truly learn.”

This emphasis on storytelling aligns with the findings that ninety-two percent of manuscripts contained vernacular narratives and metaphors that improved students' recall of lessons by thirty to forty percent. Such narrative-driven pedagogy transformed the classroom into a participatory space where students could relate abstract concepts to real-life situations.

The ethical value embedded in the manuscripts was another significant theme. By incorporating idioms such as *Setuhune poro menungso iku podo kapitunan* [sə'tu.hu.nə 'pɔ.rɔ mə'nuŋ.sɔ 'i.ku 'pɔ.dɔ kapi'tu.nan] and *Setuhune temen! Setuhune menungso iku yekti lacut* [sə'tu.hu.nə 'tɛ.mən | sə'tu.hu.nə mə'nuŋ.sɔ 'i.ku 'jɛk.ti la'cuŋ], the manuscripts translated Qur'anic teachings into moral guidance expressed in the familiar voice of elders and community traditions. One teacher reflected,

Teacher Participant 02: “These sayings teach values such as humility and fairness in ways that students understand as part of their own life, not as something imposed from outside.”

A student similarly described the influence of these lessons:

Student Participant 07: “The words felt alive because they sound like advice from our parents or elders. They made me think about how I act every day.”

Such statements underscore how ethical reflection was naturally integrated into religious lessons, supporting eighty-four percent of students and teachers who reported that local idioms made the lessons more practical and encouraged them to apply moral values in daily life.

In addition to pedagogical strategies, the study identified the need for institutional support to sustain the use of manuscripts. Teachers and administrators called for professional development to equip educators with skills in contextual pedagogy. Training in storytelling techniques and the use of vernacular materials can help teachers create inclusive lessons that bridge national standards with local traditions.

Another recommendation is the preservation and digitalization of manuscripts to ensure broader access. A school principal expressed optimism about this initiative,

Principal Participant 02: “If we digitize these manuscripts, teachers from different regions could access them. It would inspire other schools to use their own local traditions in teaching religion.”

Digitization would allow educators from different parts of Indonesia to draw on these culturally rich materials, promoting regional diversity and inspiring similar localized approaches elsewhere.

The integration of these insights into curriculum reform demonstrates that contextualized pedagogy can coexist with standardized education while enriching it. The statistical evidence further strengthens this conclusion: ninety-two percent vernacular usage, eighty-four percent improved comprehension, thirty to forty percent faster recall, and seventy-eight percent teacher endorsement collectively illustrate the enduring relevance of manuscript-based learning for contemporary classrooms. A teacher captured this perspective succinctly,

Teacher Participant 07: “We often hear that modernization means leaving traditions behind. This study shows that our traditions have always been modern in their own way, because they speak to the students’ world.”

The evidence confirms that reintroducing the Rembang manuscripts into Islamic Religious Education can promote a more dialogical, culturally responsive, and ethically grounded form of learning. By combining traditional wisdom with modern teaching standards, IRE can evolve into a curriculum that respects historical continuity, supports character development, and enhances student engagement in a diverse and globalized society.

5. Discussion

This study explores the educational, cultural, and pedagogical significance of the Qur’anic tafsīr manuscript-copying tradition in Rembang, Central Java, for Islamic Religious Education (IRE). It shows that these manuscripts are living educational resources that remain relevant in contemporary classrooms, and the discussion links the findings to wider scholarship by clarifying key insights, implications, research gaps, novelty, and future research directions.

The strongest finding of this study is that vernacular Javanese idioms, Pegon-script explanations, and narrative metaphors significantly enhanced students’ comprehension, recall speed, and ethical reflection, with learners interpreting Qur’anic concepts 30 to 40 percent faster and 84 percent reporting deeper understanding when contextualized teachings were used. This effect appears most robust among students with strong Javanese cultural affiliation and teachers familiar with manuscript heritage, and among archived manuscripts containing dense marginal notes and interlinear explanations. However, the effect may be more variable in communities with weaker grounding in Javanese literacy or where manuscript archives lack extensive vernacular commentary, suggesting that cultural familiarity and script density shape learning outcomes. These contextual delimitations are consistent with [Sulistiani et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Mappaselleng et al. \(2022\)](#), who emphasize the role of local literacy ecologies in sustaining heritage learning.

The study contributes to key debates on culturally sustaining pedagogy, heritage literacy, vernacular exegesis, bilingual cognitive processing, and dialogic Islamic instruction by demonstrating that Javanese and Pegon manuscripts function not only as philological artifacts but as instructional mediators. Rather than listing traditions, the findings integrate [Sofyan et al. \(2019\)](#) on manuscript heritage, [Rohman et al. \(2023\)](#) on tradition-modernity integration, [Munir and Anwar \(2024\)](#) and [Mustaqim \(2017\)](#) on vernacular Qur’anic interpretation, and [Günther \(2020\)](#) on dialogic learning. Collectively, these works acknowledge indigenous Islamic intellectual traditions, yet they stop short of modeling how such manuscripts operate as contextual teaching devices in modern Islamic Religious Education (IRE). This study advances that conversation by empirically showing that local metaphors and idioms facilitate ethical internalization, emotional engagement, and dialogical participation, where verses contextualized through local analogies foster active meaning-making rather than memorization ([Azra, 2012](#); [Suparjo & Hidayah, 2023](#)).

The findings converge with Indonesian and wider Muslim-world literature recognizing the pedagogical value of localized Islamic literacy ([Azra, 2012](#); [Gusmian, 2016](#); [Trawina et al., 2024](#); [Fuad et al., 2025](#)), as well as global arguments for mother-tongue religious learning and culturally rooted epistemologies ([Johnston & Van Dussen, 2015](#); [Ganiyeva & Ergasheva, 2023](#)). Convergence is evident in similar benefits observed in pesantren traditions ([Sulistiani et al., 2023](#)) and West Kalimantan manuscript circulation ([Fuad et al., 2025](#)). Divergence appears in contexts where script traditions lack narrative marginalia or where learners have weaker first-language literacy, as seen in communities transitioning away from Pegon toward standardized Arabic and Indonesian ([Gusmian, 2016](#)).

In educational contexts where rich vernacular storytelling is absent or where first language (L1) proficiency is diminished, the effectiveness of dialogical learning may be significantly reduced. First person, trauma informed storytelling has demonstrated potential to enhance pedagogical effectiveness, transform classroom communities, and enrich the learning experience beyond conventional measures of engagement (Dutta & Keith, 2023). In settings where linguistic heritage remains vibrant, such storytelling approaches can foster deeper connections and contextual understanding, as they help learners use vocabulary and grammar accurately, thereby reinforcing language learning (Satriani, 2019).

However, when cultural and linguistic continuity is disrupted, thoughtful adaptation becomes crucial. Heritage language learners, with their distinct linguistic backgrounds, can help bridge these gaps but may face challenges in interpreting educational contexts, which necessitates pedagogical approaches informed by research on their specific needs and experiences (Mellinger & Gasca Jiménez, 2019). Ultimately, the effective integration of vernacular resources and storytelling methodologies is essential for sustaining meaning making processes in diverse learning environments.

This study offers three key contributions. *Empirically*, it provides evidence that localized Qur'anic manuscripts enhance comprehension, recall, and ethical reflection among contemporary learners in measurable ways, filling the gap left by studies that focus only on preservation. *Theoretically*, it reframes vernacular tafsir manuscripts as epistemic tools that mediate between sacred text and local meaning-systems, contributing to discourse on contextualized Islamic pedagogy, curriculum localization, and decolonial knowledge in Muslim education (Munir & Anwar, 2024; Mustaqim, 2017). *Practically*, it provides a model for integrating manuscript-based learning into curriculum design and teacher practice, aligning with educational reform goals seeking contextually grounded, ethically oriented, and dialogically rich instruction (Rohman et al., 2023; Suparjo & Hidayah, 2023).

Finally, the study underscores the curricular implications of these manuscripts. Despite their exclusion from contemporary curricula, the evidence suggests that they offer practical, contextualized teaching strategies that can enrich modern IRE. This reflects the call by Sholihah and Khusniyah (2024) to reconsider regional manuscripts not only as philological artefacts but also as dynamic pedagogical tools.

While the study contributes significantly to understanding the pedagogical potential of the Rembang manuscripts, certain gaps remain. Most prior research has focused on the philological or historical aspects of such manuscripts (Sholihah & Khusniyah,

2024; Febriyanti & Alawy, 2025), while neglecting their direct application in classrooms. Moreover, the initiative to reintegrate historical manuscripts into Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curricula warrants further empirical exploration, particularly given the diverse objectives that religious education seeks to fulfil, including the development of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours. Current literature indicates that rigorous evaluation of curricular interventions is often inadequately documented and frequently lacks clear methodological frameworks, which hampers the ability to measure outcomes effectively (Kasmawati et al., 2023; Amalia et al., 2025). Attention to curriculum design is therefore vital. Integrated curricula that embed character development within Islamic values can foster a holistic educational environment that aligns with contemporary pedagogical demands (Kasmawati et al., 2023). In addition, applying Total Quality Management (TQM) principles within Islamic education can enhance educational quality by ensuring that the curriculum responds to both internal and external expectations (Zakariyah, 2024). The literature also calls for more inclusive educational practices that incorporate religious moderation, thereby enabling a richer understanding and adaptation of IRE to modern societal needs (Imamah, 2023).

The present study positions itself within this broader empirical landscape by prioritising pedagogical value while recognising that robust contemporary empirical research is still required to quantify outcomes in current learning environments (Alharbi, 2024; Hamza et al., 2020; Varallyay et al., 2020). Its stance aligns with established guidance on curriculum development and evaluation, which recommends the use of structured frameworks such as the CIPP model and realist evaluation approaches, supported by explicit programme theory to clarify mechanisms of change and guide iterative refinement (Hamza et al., 2020). Contemporary implementation research likewise emphasises embedding evaluation within change processes through co production of evidence, sustained engagement between researchers and stakeholders, and deliberate enactment of programme changes to illuminate not only effectiveness but also the conditions under which interventions function (Varallyay et al., 2020). Collectively, these perspectives provide a rigorous methodological foundation for assessing manuscript reintroduction in IRE contexts.

Empirical evidence from related educational domains reinforces expectations regarding potential outcomes and appropriate measurement strategies. Research on pedagogical interventions in clinical and multidisciplinary education shows that observable changes in teaching practices and organisational routines can emerge when programmes incorporate structured teacher development and reflective enactment, with such changes documented through direct observation and higher level evaluation

indicators (Bergl et al., 2020). This suggests that reintegrated manuscripts, when supported by purposeful trainer development, curricular alignment, and coherent assessment practices, may yield measurable effects at classroom and institutional levels, including shifts in instructional practice and student engagement. Literature on curriculum inclusion and culturally responsive pedagogy similarly highlights the importance of carefully designed content and governance structures to ensure inclusion and equity, which is particularly relevant for IRE settings that integrate diverse cultural voices and local knowledge (Ali et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2020). Studies from various religious education contexts also indicate that character and ethics oriented integration can foster positive behavioural and community connected outcomes, provided there is ongoing professional development and alignment with broader academic objectives (Mau, 2024; Muttaqo et al., 2025).

Accordingly, future research should clearly articulate and justify evaluation models, link evaluation plans to programme theory, and capture outcomes across multiple levels of impact, including learner development, instructional practice, and organisational change (Alharbi, 2024; Hamza et al., 2020; Bergl et al., 2020). Attention should also be given to cultural relevance, content governance, and teacher preparation to support meaningful integration (Taylor et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2019). In sum, although reintegration of historical manuscripts into IRE curricula holds strong pedagogical promise, its success depends on rigorous, theory informed, and multi method evaluation embedded within curriculum reform processes, supported by longitudinal and multi site research designs that can generate robust evidence of learning gains, instructional transformation, and broader educational impact (Mau, 2024; Muttaqo et al., 2025).

The novelty of this research lies in repositioning the Rembang tafsir manuscripts as pedagogical resources rather than historical relics. By documenting how Javanese idioms, Pegon script, and narrative structures enriched comprehension and moral engagement, the study offers an innovative contribution to contextual pedagogy in Islamic education. Unlike much of the literature that emphasizes modernization and digitalization (Azra, 2012; Ganiyeva & Ergasheva, 2023), this research demonstrates that tradition and modernity are not mutually exclusive. Instead, traditional resources can actively inform culturally responsive learning in a globalized context.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it advances the discourse on curriculum localization by showing that manuscripts can provide a framework for dialogical, reflective, and inclusive pedagogy. Practically, the findings suggest that reintegration of such manuscripts can enhance student engagement, accelerate

comprehension, and nurture ethical reflection. This has direct relevance for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to align national standards with local cultural identities. Furthermore, the call for digitization of manuscripts highlights a way to expand accessibility while preserving cultural heritage, as noted by Mappaselleng et al. (2022).

Future research should expand the scope to include comparative studies of manuscript traditions in other regions of Indonesia or across the Muslim world. Such studies would enrich understanding of how localized Qur'anic exegesis shaped diverse pedagogical practices. It would also be valuable to empirically test the integration of manuscript-based learning in contemporary classrooms, evaluating its effects on comprehension, ethical development, and critical engagement. Another promising area lies in exploring how digital platforms can incorporate traditional materials, allowing broader use of manuscripts for distance learning. Finally, teacher training programs should be studied to determine effective strategies for equipping educators with skills to utilize local traditions within modern curricula.

5. Conclusion

This study affirms that revitalizing the local Qur'anic tafsir manuscript tradition in Rembang meaningfully enriches Islamic Religious Education by showing that contextual, vernacular, and narrative-based pedagogy can deepen comprehension, enhance recall, and encourage ethical and spiritual reflection among learners. The findings demonstrate that the use of Javanese idioms, Pegon script, and culturally familiar metaphors strengthens students' intellectual engagement and emotional connection to religious teachings, transforming classroom practice from memorization-centered routines into a reflective, dialogical, and culturally grounded learning experience.

The novelty of this research lies in repositioning regional manuscripts not merely as historical records but as living pedagogical resources that can support curriculum innovation, teacher development, and policy advancement in contemporary Islamic education. These insights provide significant implications for the creation of learner-centered and culturally sustaining educational models that honor indigenous Islamic scholarship, promote meaningful character formation, and contribute to broader conversations on educational equity and knowledge heritage. Future studies are encouraged to apply manuscript-based learning in diverse educational environments, including pesantren, madrasah, and public schools across Java, South Sulawesi, Aceh, and the Malay cultural sphere, while also exploring digital archiving, teacher training, and bilingual cognition research to further build a comprehensive and culturally responsive framework for Islamic learning.

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