



LIBRARIES AS CULTURAL AGENTS IN PRESERVING ISLAMIC VALUES: THE CASE OF PACU JALUR

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Abstract

This article analyzes how a regional library in Indonesia functions as a cultural agent in preserving Islamic values embedded in the Pacu Jalur tradition. Grounded in a cultural literacy framework, this study employs a qualitative case study approach, with primary data collected through in-depth interviews with 12 key informants (librarians, community leaders, and users), participatory observation, and document analysis at the Kuantan Singingi Library and Archives Office. The findings reveal that the library implements three-pronged strategy: curating specialized collections, organizing community-based literacy activities, and utilizing digital media for wider dissemination. The study's core novelty lies in its effort to bridge library science and local cultural studies, offering an alternative model for how institutional actors can systematically safeguard living traditions as expressions of Islamic civilization. The analysis also affirms the role of libraries in sustaining values such as *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood), discipline, and spirituality, while noting challenges related to limited resources and digital infrastructure. The article concludes by proposing practical strategies—including digitization, cross-sector partnerships, and librarian capacity building—to strengthen libraries as custodians of local Islamic heritage.

Keywords: Library science; Cultural Literacy; *Pacu Jalur*; Local Islamic Civilization; Tradition Preservation; Cultural heritage.

Abstrak

Artikel ini menganalisis peran perpustakaan daerah sebagai agen budaya dalam melestarikan nilai-nilai Islam dalam tradisi Pacu Jalur. Berlandaskan kerangka literasi budaya, studi kualitatif kasus ini mengumpulkan data primer melalui wawancara mendalam dengan 12 informan kunci (pustakawan, tokoh masyarakat, dan pengguna), observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen pada Dinas Perpustakaan dan Kearsipan Kabupaten Kuantan Singingi. Hasil penelitian mengungkap tiga strategi utama: penyediaan koleksi khusus, penyelenggaraan kegiatan literasi berbasis komunitas, dan pemanfaatan media digital untuk diseminasi. Kebaruan inti penelitian ini terletak pada upaya menjembatani ilmu perpustakaan dan studi budaya lokal secara empiris, menawarkan model alternatif tentang bagaimana aktor kelembagaan dapat secara sistematis menjaga tradisi hidup sebagai ekspresi peradaban Islam. Studi ini juga menegaskan peran perpustakaan dalam menjaga nilai-nilai seperti ukhuwwah, disiplin, dan spiritualitas, sekaligus menyoroti keterbatasan sumber daya dan infrastruktur digital. Artikel ditutup dengan menawarkan sejumlah strategi praktis—termasuk digitalisasi, kemitraan lintas sektor, dan peningkatan kapasitas pustakawan—untuk memperkuat perpustakaan sebagai penjaga warisan Islam lokal.

Kata Kunci: Ilmu Perpustakaan; Literasi Budaya; *Pacu Jalur*; Peradaban Islam Lokal; Pelestarian Tradisi; Warisan budaya.

Background

Islamic civilization has profoundly shaped local cultures across the Muslim world, giving rise to distinctive traditions in the Indonesian archipelago that embody core Islamic values.¹ The Pacu Jalur tradition in Kuantan Singingi, Riau, is a clear example: not merely a cultural performance,

but a living expression of spirituality, solidarity, discipline, and communal honor.² In the context of globalization, preserving such living traditions is vital for maintaining the dynamic and localized fabric of Islamic civilization, underscoring the need for active institutional roles in cultural transmission.

¹ Ahmad Baso, “Angajawi”, or, On Being Muslim Nusantara: The Global Argument for Islam (Ic) Nusantara’, *Heritage of Nusantara: International Journal of Religious Literature and Heritage*, 8.1 (2019), pp. 18–46, doi:10.31291/hn.v8i1.478.

² Ismail R. Al-Faruqi, *Islam Religion, Practice, Culture & World Order* (International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2012); Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1978).



Existing scholarship reveals two robust yet largely separate discourses relevant to this preservation imperative. First, within library and information science, libraries have evolved from passive repositories into active community hubs and custodians of collective memory.³ Research highlights their growing role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage through digital preservation⁴ and in positioning librarians as mediators of indigenous knowledge.⁵ In the Indonesian context, several studies confirm that managing local content collections has become a strategic function of public libraries in efforts to preserve regional culture.⁶

³ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Allen & Unwin, 2004); Rafiq Ahmad and Muhammad Rafiq, 'Preserving Cultural Heritage: Digital Preservation in Small Community Libraries', *Library Hi Tech News*, 41.3 (2023), pp. 17–18, world, doi:10.1108/LHTN-07-2023-0113; Josiline Chigwada and Patrick Ngulube, 'Librarians' Role in the Preservation and Dissemination of Indigenous Knowledge', *IFLA Journal*, 50.2 (2024), pp. 242–56, doi:10.1177/03400352231217270.

⁴ Mohammad Taufiq Rahman, Paelani Setia, and Asep Iwan Setiawan, 'The Strategies of Ajengans in Mediating Islam and Local Traditions in Rural West Bandung Regency', *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas*, 3.1 (2023), pp. 99–108, doi:10.15575/jis.v3i1.24108.

⁵ Kartika D. Mahajan, 'Preserving Indigenous Knowledge: The Role of Libraries in Safeguarding Cultural Heritage', *Journal of the Oriental Institute*, 73.1 (2024), pp. 235–42, doi:10.8224/journaloi.v73i1.725; Shailaja Bhalchandra Vaidya, 'The Role of Libraries in Preserving Indigenous Knowledge and Culture', *International Journal of Advanced Research and Multidisciplinary Trends (IJARMT)*, 1.2 (2024), pp. 151–61 <<https://ijarmt.com/index.php/j/article/view/185>> [accessed 13 July 2025]; Juan Jose Prieto Gutierrez and Francisco Segado Boj, 'The Role of Libraries in Cultural Centres Abroad: An Insight', *New Library World*, 117.7/8 (2016), pp. 475–84, world, doi:10.1108/NLW-03-2016-0018.

⁶ Adri Seprian Saputra, Aang Gunaidi, and Fransiska Timoria Samosir, 'Management of Local Content Collections as an Effort to Preserve Regional Culture at Public Library', *Record and Library Journal*, 9.1 (2023), pp. 66–76, doi:10.20473/rlj.V9-I1.2023.66-76.

⁷ Desti Kumala Sari, 'Unsur Magi Tukang Tari Pada Seni Tari Tradisi Pacu Jalur Di Kabupaten Kuantan Singingi Provinsi Riau', *Imaji: Jurnal Seni Dan Pendidikan Seni*, 15.1 (2017), pp. 48–56, doi:10.21831/imaji.v15i1.17450; Aslati Silawati, 'Mengukur Nilai-Nilai Magis Pada Tradisi Pacu Jalur Di Kabupaten Kuantan Singingi', *Sosial Budaya*, 11.2 (2015), pp. 237–50, doi:10.24014/sb.v11i2.837; Sri Chairani, Ria Asmeri Jafra, and Dian Meliza, 'Tradition of Pacu Jalur in Kuantan Singingi', *Lakhomi Journal Scientific Journal of Culture*, 3.3 (2022), pp. 122–31, doi:10.33258/lakhomi.v3i3.756.

Second, Pacu Jalur itself has been extensively studied from anthropological, artistic, and educational perspectives. Previous studies have explored its symbolic and magical elements,⁷ framed it as a cornerstone of communal identity,⁸ and explored its relevance for cultural literacy and character building.⁹ Other works have integrated Pacu Jalur into ethnoscience-based education¹⁰ and analyzed its performative artistic qualities¹¹. Together, these works offer rich insights into the tradition's internal logic and socio-cultural significance.

However, a notable research gap remains at the intersection of these two fields. Studies on

⁸ Erlisnawati, Hendri Marhadi, and Bedriati Ibrahim, 'Cultural Literacy: Understanding the Cooperation Value in Pacu Jalur Tradition', *Proceedings of the Fifth Sriwijaya University Learning and Education International Conference (SULE-IC 2022)*, 7 March 2023, pp. 122–27, doi:10.2991/978-2-38476-010-7_15; Z. Zulirfan and others, 'Ethnoscience in Pacu Jalur Kuantan Riau: Exploring Local Cultural Traditions as a Context of Teaching Physics in School', 17 November 2023, pp. 644–54, doi:10.2991/978-2-38476-142-5_57; Juma Afrison and Juju Masunah, 'Social Values in Jalur Dance', *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Arts and Design Education (ICADE 2020)*, 4 February 2021, pp. 227–31, doi:10.2991/assehr.k.210203.048.

⁹ Agus Firmanyah and Juju Masunah, 'Jalur Dance in the Opening Ceremony of Pacu Jalur Festival in Kuantan Singingi Regency of Riau Province, Indonesia', *Proceedings of the International Conference on Arts and Design Education (ICADE 2018)*, February 2019, pp. 81–84, doi:10.2991/icade-18.2019.18; Imelda Yance, 'Ekspresi Verbal Ritual Pacu Jalur dan Sistem Kognisi Pendukungnya', *representamen*, 6.01 (2020), pp. 34–48, doi:10.30996/representamen.v6i01.3514.

¹⁰ Annisa Rizki Ananda, Yohanes Kristianto, and Yaya Indrawati, 'Management Strategy for Pacu Jalur Event as a Cultural Tourism Attraction in Kuantan Singingi Regency, Riau Province', *Asian Journal of Management, Entrepreneurship and Social Science*, 4.04 (2024), pp. 231–46, doi:10.63922/ajmesc.v4i04.1079; Alta Febra, Sugiyanto Sugiyanto, and Agus Kristiyanto, 'Cultural and Traditional Sport Pacu Jalur Location In Regency Of Quantan Singingi Riau Province', *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 5.4 (2018), pp. 278–87, art. 4, doi:10.18415/ijmmu.v5i4.293.

¹¹ Juswandi Juswandi, Hermansyah Hermansyah, and Amanan Amanan, 'Pacu Jalur: Preserving Tradition and Cultural Values in Kuantan Singingi', *Social Sciences Review and Humanities*, 3.1 (2024), pp. 52–60 <<https://journal.haqipub.com/index.php/ssrh/article/view/363>>; Ahmad Bakri, 'Nilai Pancasila Dan Kewarganegaraan Dalam Tradisi Pacu Jalur Di Kabupaten Kuantan Singingi Provinsi Riau', *De Cive: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Pancasila Dan Kewarganegaraan*, 2.4 (2022), pp. 165–70, doi:10.56393/decive.v2i4.1665.



library-led cultural preservation tend to be conceptual or broadly framed, offering limited case-based analysis into how concrete library mechanisms—such as collection development, programming, and community outreach—actually sustain living traditions. At the same time, anthropological and cultural studies of Pacu Jalur rarely engage with institutional frameworks, specifically libraries, that have capacity to document, legitimize, and transmit this cultural knowledge across generations. As a result, the operational nexus between institutional practice and cultural continuity remains insufficiently explored.

Furthermore, within the broader discourse of Islamic civilization—where the protection of knowledge and culture (*hijz al-ilm* and *hijz al-thaqafah*) is understood as a civilizational objective—the potential of modern institutions such as public libraries remains under-theorized. This points to the need for empirical inquiry into how such institutions contribute to sustaining Islamic civilizational values within their lived, local contexts.

This study addresses this gap by positioning the library as a central actor within both cultural preservation and Islamic civilizational discourse. It aligns with contemporary scholarship that views Islamic civilization not as a static historical phenomenon, but as a continuous process of value transmission and adaptation.¹² In this framework, a library's work in documenting and facilitating Pacu Jalur becomes a concrete contribution to sustaining the living legacy of local Islamic culture.

Methodologically, the study employs a cultural literacy framework as its primary analytical lens. Rather than viewing the library as a passive repository, this framework conceptualizes it as an active agent performing three core functions: (1) decoding (interpreting and documenting the

symbols and values of Pacu Jalur); (2) dissemination (educating the public about its meanings); and (3) empowerment (enabling community participation in maintaining its continuity). These functions are interpreted as a modern institutional form of *hijz al-thaqafah* (preservation of culture), allowing the study to offer a new model for how contemporary institutions can fulfill traditional civilizational roles.

Accordingly, this research is guided by the following research question: How does the Office of Library and Archives (*Dinas Perpustakaan dan Kearsipan*) of Kuantan Singingi Regency contribute to the preservation of the Pacu Jalur tradition as an expression of local Islamic culture through cultural literacy strategies?

To answer this question, the study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study strategy, allowing for an in-depth and context-sensitive exploration of the library's role. Primary data were collected from August 2024 to January 2025 through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 12 purposively selected key informants, including library officials, librarians, Pacu Jalur community leaders, and active library users. These interviews were complemented by participatory observation of library programs and cultural events, as well as document analysis of library reports, collection inventories, and digital media outputs.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman,¹³ involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Analytically, the process progressed from descriptive coding toward more interpretive categories informed by the cultural literacy framework. Research rigor was ensured through methodological triangulation (cross-checking interview, observation, and documentary data) and source triangulation by comparing perspectives from different groups of informants.

¹² Edi Susrianto, 'Tradisi Pacu Jalur Masyarakat Rantau Kuantan (Studi Nilai-Nilai Budaya Melayu Dalam Olahraga Tradisional Di Kabupaten Kuantan Singingi)', *Jurnal Olahraga Indragiri*, 2.2 (2018), pp. 27–56 <<https://ejournal-fkip.unisi.ac.id/joi/article/view/520>>

[accessed 15 July 2025]; Chairani, Jafra, and Meliza, 'Tradition of Pacu Jalur in Kuantan Singingi'.

¹³ Matthew B Miles and A. Michael Huberman, 'Drawing Valid Meaning from Qualitative Data: Toward a Shared Craft', *Educational Researcher*, 13.5 (1984), pp. 20–30, doi:10.3102/0013189X013005020.



Institutional Profile and Context of the Kuantan Singingi Library and Archives Office

To answer the research question regarding the library's role in preserving the Pacu Jalur tradition through cultural literacy strategies, this study focuses on the Library and Archives Office of Kuantan Singingi Regency as its primary locus of analysis. This locus was selected due to its dual strategic mandate: functioning as a local government agency that provides public information services while simultaneously serving as an institutional guardian of local cultural heritage, including the Pacu Jalur tradition imbued with Islamic values. Evidence drawn from document analysis and interviews with managerial staff¹⁴ indicates that the office was formally established as an independent organizational unit in 2016 under Regional Regulation No. 4 of 2016. This organizational restructuring—from its former position under the Department of Education—marks a pivotal institutional commitment to strengthening the library's autonomy and expanding its mandate beyond educational functions to include informational and cultural responsibilities. Such autonomy has been a key enabling factor, allowing the library to design and implement more flexible and responsive programs for cultural preservation, as detailed in the subsequent findings.

Situated within the Islamic-Malay geo-cultural context of Riau, the library's annual collection inventory data shows that out of more than 25,000 titles in its holdings, approximately 1,200 items (4.8 percent) are categorized as local content collections dedicated to Kuantan Singingi's culture and history. Within this category, the Pacu Jalur tradition is documented through forty-five specific items, including two monograph titles, three documentary compact discs, fifteen miniature *jalur* boats, and twenty-five historical photographs and manuscripts. While the proportion of local collections remains relatively small, the existence of a dedicated heritage shelf and these specific items—curated through collaboration with local

authors and community members¹⁵—constitutes initial evidence of the library's decoding and documentation role in preserving Pacu Jalur as a living cultural tradition.

Findings from program observations and analysis further indicate that since its institutional transformation in 2016, the library has actively organized an average of 12 cultural literacy activities annually related to Pacu Jalur and other traditions, such as workshops, exhibitions, and community discussion forums. Visitor statistics show an average of 3,500 annual visitors, with attendance increasing by around 40% during cultural festivals and Pacu Jalur events. This rise not only reflects strong community interest but also underscores the effectiveness of the library's dissemination strategy, particularly its practice of extending services and exhibitions beyond the physical building (through mobile libraries and literacy booths) to engage directly with the public during culturally significant moments. These patterns affirm the library's role not merely as a repository but as an active institutional agent that bridges collective memory with contemporary public discourse.

Taken together, this institutional profile reveals a foundational capacity for the library to function as a cultural agent within the local context. Institutional autonomy, the existence of specialized local collections, and a proactive, public-facing program pattern create an operational framework for implementing cultural literacy strategies. At the same time, these findings also hint at emerging challenges, including the relatively limited proportion of local content collections and a continued reliance on festival-based momentum to attract public engagement. These issues will be analyzed in greater depth in the following sections. Overall, this institutional context serves as a crucial starting point for understanding how the library interprets and enacts its role in preserving the living local Islamic civilizational values embodied in the Pacu Jalur tradition.

¹⁴ Informant P01, *interview*.

¹⁵ Informants P02, P03, *interview*.



Forms of the Library's Role in Preserving the Pacu Jalur Tradition

As a public information institution, the Library and Archives Office of Kuantan Singingi Regency enacts its role as a cultural agent through integrated strategies of collection development, community engagement, and digital mediation. An interpretive analysis of data drawn from interviews, observation, and document analysis reveals how the library operationalizes cultural literacy—by decoding, disseminating, and empowering—to safeguard the Islamic civilizational values embedded in Pacu Jalur tradition. These efforts manifest in three interconnected domains: curation and documentation, participatory literacy initiatives, and digital dissemination coupled with community outreach.

1. Curatorial Praxis as Decoding and Value Articulation

The library's foundational role lies in its curatorial and documentation functions, which aligns with the broader understanding of libraries as custodians of collective memory.¹⁶ Yet its work extends beyond passive archiving to include active decoding, interpreting and selecting cultural artifacts in ways that best foreground the values underpinning the tradition. The establishment of a dedicated local heritage shelf, featuring forty-five Pacu Jalur-related items (including monographs, documentaries, miniatures, and photographs), exemplifies this approach and resonates with the strategic management of local content as a means of cultural preservation.¹⁷

The significance of this curatorial practice lies in its interpretive dimension. For instance, miniature *jalur* boats are displayed not simply as

decorative artifacts but as pedagogical tools. As one community elder noted, “These miniatures are visual reminders of our *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood) and *ta’awun* (cooperation)... values that Islam teaches us”¹⁸. Through such intentional selection and presentation, librarians transform static objects into dynamic carriers of Islamic values, performing an act of cultural *ikhlas* (sincerity) that bridges artifact preservation with value transmission. In this way, curation echoes as an act of cultural mediation, through which indigenous knowledge¹⁹ is interpreted, legitimized, and communicated to broader audiences.

2. Literacy Programs as Participatory Empowerment and Dissemination

Moving beyond the repository-centered model, the library actively creates participatory spaces that combine dissemination with community empowerment. Flagship programs, such as the miniature *jalur*-making workshops conducted under the Social Inclusion-Based Library Transformation program exemplify this approach. These workshops serve a dual purpose: they operate as hands-on literacy activities that transmit traditional craft knowledge while simultaneously fostering economic empowerment by creating marketable cultural souvenirs. More profoundly, they enable participants to internalize the ethical and spiritual meanings embedded in the tradition. As reflected by a youth participant, “I understand how the discipline in rowing reflects the Islamic values of *ittihād* (unity) and discipline in prayer,”²⁰ demonstrating how participatory engagement enables individuals to decode cultural practices into ethical and spiritual principles.

¹⁶ Mahajan, ‘Preserving Indigenous Knowledge’; Vaidya, ‘The Role of Libraries in Preserving Indigenous Knowledge and Culture’; Mhd Rasidin and others, ‘The Dimension of Religion in Political Conflict and Violence: An Experience In Indonesia’, *Islam Transformatif: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 7.1 (2023), pp. 1–14, doi:10.30983/it.v7i1.6146.

¹⁷ Saputra, Gunaidi, and Samosir, ‘Management of Local Content Collections as an Effort to Preserve Regional Culture at Public Library’; Sule Clement Akor, ‘The Role of Libraries and Librarians in the Promoting Nigerian Culture’, *NigerBiblio: Journal of National Library of Nigeria*, 33.1 (2023), pp. 143–54.

<<https://nigerbiblios.nln.gov.ng/index.php/nigerbiblios/article/view/106>> [accessed 13 July 2025].

¹⁸ Informant P05, *interview*

¹⁹ Chigwada and Ngulube, ‘Librarians’ Role in the Preservation and Dissemination of Indigenous Knowledge’; Solmaz Forutnani and others, ‘The Role of Rural Libraries in Preserving the Indigenous Knowledge of Rural Residents: The Case of South Khorasan Province’, *World Journal of Science, Technology and Sustainable Development*, 15.3 (2018), pp. 245–56, [world](https://doi.org/10.1108/WJSTSD-12-2017-0044), doi:10.1108/WJSTSD-12-2017-0044.

²⁰ Informant P08, *interview*.



This participatory strategy operationalizes the concept of social inclusion in heritage preservation, ensuring that the cultural safeguarding is community-centered rather than elitist.²¹ Complementary initiatives, such as exhibition booths during the Pacu Jalur festival and *nonton bareng* (communal viewing) sessions, further exemplify the library's proactive dissemination role. These activities create accessible, low-threshold spaces for intergenerational dialogue, effectively "reintroducing" the tradition to youth and the wider public. As one librarian stated, the goal is for every citizen to "feel ownership of this tradition as part of their Islamic identity."²² Such practices align with cultural literacy scholarship that highlights experiential and participatory learning as key to understanding communal values.²³

3. Digital Mediation as Extended Dissemination and Community Bridging

Responding to the demands of the digital age, the library strategically employs social media platforms (such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok) and digital content creation as tools for extended dissemination and community bridging. This engagement goes beyond mere promotion, constituting a deliberate practice of digital cultural heritage preservation.²⁴ By producing and sharing documentary videos of boat construction, race events, and community narratives, the library translates what is traditionally an oral and ceremonial tradition into a durable and widely accessible digital archive. As articulated by the Head of the Library, this initiative is framed as a form of "*amar ma'rif nahi munkar* by promoting good cultural values to the digital generation,"²⁵ thus framing digital mediation as a mode of

contemporary *da'wah* that conveys Islamic ethical values through modern technology.

The impacts of this digital strategy extend well beyond geographical confines. An online response from a member of the diaspora—"Watching the documentation connects me to my homeland's Islamic traditions despite being far away"—highlights its broader significance. Digital preservation fosters sustained spiritual and emotional connections across geographical distance, effectively maintaining communal bonds within a dispersed population. This finding aligns with broader scholarship on the evolving role of libraries in leveraging digital technologies to safeguard and share intangible cultural heritage, ensuring its relevance and continuity for globally dispersed communities.

In summary, the library's role emerges as multidimensional and integrative. Through curation, it decodes and legitimizes cultural knowledge; through participatory literacy programs, it disseminates this knowledge while empowering community members as active cultural bearers; and through digital mediation, it extends the reach, durability, and adaptability of cultural memory. Together, these strategies demonstrate how a regional library functions as a vital cultural agent, systematically translating the Islamic civilizational values of *ukhuwwah*, discipline, and spirituality embedded in the Pacu Jalur tradition into sustained community practice and identity within the modern world.

²¹ Ahmad and Rafiq, 'Preserving Cultural Heritage'; Christian Mubofu and Henry Mambo, 'The Role of Libraries in Community Empowerment: A Systematic Review', *Indonesian Journal of Librarianship*, 2.1 (2021), pp. 1–16, doi:10.33701/ijolib.v2i1.1492.

²² Informant P02, *interview*

²³ Erlisnawati, Marhadi, and Ibrahim, 'Cultural Literacy'; Dedi Nofrizal and others, 'The Role of Traditional Sports in Maintaining and Preserving Regional Culture Facing the Era of Society 5.0', *Retos*, 60 (2024), pp. 352–61, doi:10.47197/retos.v60.108181.

²⁴ Ahmad and Rafiq, 'Preserving Cultural Heritage'; Muhammad Syafi'i, 'Peran Hak Kekayaan Intelektual Komunal Dalam Pengembangan Ekspresi Budaya Pacu Jalur Di Provinsi Riau', *JIPRO: Journal of Intellectual Property*, 21 June 2023, pp. 31–46, doi:10.20885/jipro.vol6.iss1.art4; Nana Najmina and Eny Kudarini, 'The Mitoni Tradition as Social, Cultural, and Spiritual Reinforcement of Javanese Society', *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies*, 6.2 (2020), pp. 181–91, doi:10.30983/islam_realitas.v6i2.3296.

²⁵ Informant P01, *interview*.



Islamic Civilizational Values in the Pacu Jalur Tradition: Preservation as a Library-Mediated Process

The Pacu Jalur tradition is not merely a vibrant boat race but a living vessel of Islamic civilizational values. This analysis, drawn from interviews with cultural custodians and community members, positions Pacu Jalur as a dynamic cultural text, one that is continuously interpreted, sustained, and transmitted with the mediation of the library. Values such as *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood), discipline, sportsmanship, aesthetic spirituality, resilience (*thabat*), and communal identity are not abstract principles but are enacted performatively and reinforced through collective participation. The findings indicate, however, that without institutional mediation these values are vulnerable to dilution over time. In this regard, the library plays a vital role in creating a sustainable bridge between lived cultural practice and future generations, transforming everyday communal expressions into preserved and accessible cultural heritage.

Historically, as noted by community elders, Pacu Jalur was closely aligned with the Islamic calendar, particularly celebrations such as the *Mawlid* and 1 Muharram.²⁶ Although its scheduling has since shifted, often coinciding with Indonesia's Independence Day in August, this earlier religious orientation underscores the tradition's roots as an act of collective gratitude and spiritual reflection. The library's effort to document this historical evolution through archival photographs, manuscripts, and curated collections serve a critical decoding function. By safeguarding narratives of the tradition's Islamic origins, the library ensures that contemporary celebrations do not sever Pacu Jalur from its spiritual genealogy. This practice aligns with broader scholarly arguments emphasizing the need of preserving the historical

layers of cultural practices in order to maintain their authentic meanings over time.²⁷

The value most frequently cited by interviewees is *ukhuwwah*, or togetherness. The very physics of the race—dozens of rowers moving in perfect synchrony within a single *jalur*—serves as a powerful, tangible metaphor for Islamic brotherhood. As one rower explained, “In the *jalur*, there is no T. Your strength must merge with the team's rhythm; if not, we sink. It is the same with *ukhuwwah* in our village.”²⁸ The library mirrors and reinforces this value not through abstract explanation, but by designing community-based literacy programs that require collaborative participation, thereby mirroring the cooperative praxis of the race itself.

Beyond togetherness, the tradition also institutionalizes discipline and responsibility through clearly specialized roles (*tukang concang*, *tukang onjai*, etc.). Success hinges on each member impeccably fulfilling a designated duty, a principle that one informant explicitly associated with Islamic work ethics: “Like in prayer where every movement has its order, in Pacu Jalur every rower has a role that must be perfected.”²⁹ The library translates this value into practice through its own structured programs, in which librarians, volunteers, and participants are assigned clear roles, modeling the disciplined cooperation they aim to preserve. This approach resonates with Islamic pedagogical teachings that emphasize excellence and sincerity in one's work as a form of worship.³⁰

The values of sportsmanship, honesty, and aesthetic spirituality emerge organically from the rules and artistic expressions of the Pacu Jalur tradition. The strict governance of the races cultivates *al-akhlāq al-karīmah* (noble character), while the ornate carvings on the *jalur* (such as snake or tiger heads) are far more than decorative elements. As one master carver stated, “We carve

²⁶ Informant P05, P07, *interview*

²⁷ Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia*; Muhiddinur Kamal, ‘Harmony in Diversity: Study on Potential Harmonious Multicultural Society “Pantara” Regions (Panti-Tapus-Rao) Northern Border of West Sumatra’, *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies*, 4.2 (2018), pp. 148–58, doi:10.30983/islam_realitas.v4i1.511.

²⁸ Informant P04, *interview*

²⁹ Informant P08, *interview*

³⁰ Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*; Ismail Ismail and others, ‘Strategic Roles Applied by Minangkabau Local Leaders in Preventing Religious Radicalism in West Sumatra’, *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies*, 6.2 (2020), pp. 202–2017, doi:10.30983/islam_realitas.v6i2.3291.



these motifs as symbols of strength and protection, a reminder that our strength comes from Allah.”³¹ This intertwining of aesthetic beauty and spiritual meaning resonates with the Islamic maxim that “Allah is beautiful and loves beauty.” The library preserves and showcases this dimension through exhibitions of miniatures and visual materials, transforming Islamic artistry into an accessible medium of public education and appreciation, and reaffirming the place of beauty within faith.

In the context of globalization, perhaps the most significant value is cultural-spiritual resilience (*thabat*). The conscious choice to sustain Pacu Jalur amid the pressures of modern alternatives reflects, as scholars note, a commitment to preserving Islamic cultural heritage (*hijz al-thaqafah*) in accordance with the higher objectives of Islamic law.³² The library actively supports this resilience through digital preservation, ensuring that the tradition’s knowledge system survives despite technological change. This role is evident in the library’s social media documentation, which a diaspora member credited with helping to maintain a spiritual connection to homeland traditions.³³

Finally, Pacu Jalur reinforces local Islamic identity by acting as a venue for *mushāwarah* (consultation) and solidarity. Pre-race gatherings for prayer and collective strategy embody the Islamic principle of *shūrā*. The library facilitates this process of identity formation by providing both physical and digital forums (such as workshops and dialogue spaces) for intergenerational exchange on the tradition’s Islamic significance, thus functioning as a modern *majlis* (gathering) for cultural discourse.

In summary, the Pacu Jalur tradition constitutes a dense repository of Islamic

civilizational values enacted through performance. The library’s preservation efforts are effective precisely because they go beyond the mere archiving of artifacts and engage these values in a systemic way: fostering *ukhuwwah* through collaborative programs, instilling discipline through structured roles, promoting ethical conduct through inclusive access, curating aesthetic spirituality, bolstering resilience through digital tools, and hosting dialogue for identity formation. In this sense, the library does not simply conserve Pacu Jalur; it performs a vital hermeneutic function—interpreting, contextualizing, and revitalizing the living Islamic values at its heart for a contemporary context. This synergy between tradition and institutional practice demonstrates a replicable model for sustaining localized expressions of Islamic civilization.

Challenges and Obstacles in Cultural Preservation by the Library: An Analysis of Systemic Constraints

The efforts of the Library and Archives Office of Kuantan Singingi Regency to preserve the Pacu Jalur tradition are fundamentally constrained by a set of interrelated systemic challenges. Analysis of interview data, internal documents, and operational observations reveals that these obstacles are not isolated but mutually reinforcing, collectively inhibiting the library’s capacity to function optimally as a cultural agent. These challenges form a hierarchy of urgency, where foundational resource deficits exacerbate limitations on program output and collaboration, a dynamic well-documented in studies of regional cultural institutions.³⁴

³¹ Informant P06, interview

³² Rismen Bustamam and Hardivizon Hardivizon, ‘Implementing The Values Of Rahmatan Li Al-Ālamīn Through Maqāṣid-Based Exegesis To Achieve Social Justice’, *Jurnal Ushuluddin*, 33.1 (2025), pp. 1–21, doi:10.24014/Jush.v33i1.35703; Liauw Toong Tjieka, ‘Desa Informasi: The Role of Digital Libraries in the Preservation and Dissemination of Indigenous Knowledge’, *Bulletin of the*

American Society for Information Science and Technology, 33.5 (2007), pp. 37–42, doi:10.1002/bult.2007.1720330512.

³³ Informant P09, via social media comment

³⁴ Saputra, Gunaidi, and Samosir, ‘Management of Local Content Collections as an Effort to Preserve Regional Culture at Public Library’; Ahmad and Rafiq, ‘Preserving Cultural Heritage’; Arif Hidayat and Rahman Latif Alfian, ‘Perpustakaan Sebagai Pusat Dokumentasi Budaya Lokal’, *Al-Mamun Jurnal Kajian Kepustakawanan Dan Informasi*, 2.2 (2021), pp. 121–36, doi:10.24090/jkki.v2i2.5627.



1. Foundational Constraints: Human Resource and Budgetary Deficits

At the core of the library's operational constraints lie intersecting shortages in human resources and dedicated funding. Interviews with library management³⁵ confirm a critical shortage of staff possessing specialized expertise in cultural documentation and digital curation. As one librarian noted, "We are often assigned to manage cultural programs on top of our routine administrative duties, without specific training in ethnography or digital archiving."³⁶ This qualitative gap in competencies—coupled with quantitative understaffing—directly leads to the deprioritization of complex preservation work, as echoed in research on the challenges of preserving indigenous knowledge in under-resourced settings.³⁷

These human resource challenges are inextricably linked to chronic budgetary insufficiency. Financial records and informant accounts indicate that funding for cultural preservation is a minor, non-guaranteed line item within the operational budget. As the Head of Office explained, "Proposals for digitization equipment or commissioning new local content are often the first to be cut or deferred,"³⁸ This financial reality forces the library to adopt a reactive, short term, project-based approach, thereby preventing the development of a systematic, long-term preservation strategy. Existing literature similarly confirms that inadequate funding is a primary barrier for libraries attempting to transition from traditional repositories to active heritage stewards.³⁹

2. Derivative Challenges: Limited Collections and Digital Infrastructure

The primary constraints of limited manpower and funding directly give rise to a set of secondary challenges. One of the most visible outcomes is the scarcity of comprehensive and diverse collections on Pacu Jalur, which currently consist of only two core monographs supplemented by a small number of visual materials. Community informants⁴⁰ expressed concern over the lack of updated scholarly works or accessible oral histories, stating that much of the knowledge surrounding the tradition remains tacit, fragmented, or undocumented. This scarcity is further compounded by low levels of local author productivity, a common issue in regional publishing ecosystems. As one community elder pointed out, "The deep stories are in the memories of the old craftsmen and rowers, but they are not being written into new books."⁴¹ Such circumstances create a vicious cycle in which the lack of contemporary resources weakens the library's authority as a credible center for research and cultural reference.

Similarly, the underdeveloped digital infrastructure—characterized by the absence of a dedicated digital repository and ad-hoc digitization processes—stems from the same root causes. The lack of IT-skilled staff (a human resource issue) and funds for software, hardware, and secure data storage (a budget issue) severely limits the library's capacity for digital preservation, a function now considered essential for heritage sustainability.⁴² Observations confirm that digital efforts are confined to basic social media promotion rather than systematic archiving.

³⁵ Informant P01, P02, *interview*.

³⁶ Informant P02, *interview*.

³⁷ Chigwada and Ngulube, 'Librarians' Role in the Preservation and Dissemination of Indigenous Knowledge'; Steven Witt, 'Libraries at the Intersection of History and the Present', *IFLA Journal*, 50.4 (2024), pp. 691–95, doi:10.1177/03400352241299307.

³⁸ Informant P01, *interview*.

³⁹ Ahmad and Rafiq, 'Preserving Cultural Heritage'; Ibrahim Siregar and Suheri Sahputra Rangkuti, 'Universalism of Islamic Scholarly Tradition: New Directions for Islamic

Studies', *Islam Transformatif: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 7.2 (2023), pp. 202–25, doi:10.30983/it.v7i2.8050.

⁴⁰ Informant P05, P07, *interview*.

⁴¹ Informant P05, *interview*.

⁴² Ahmad and Rafiq, 'Preserving Cultural Heritage'; Intan Putri Kamilah and others, 'Nilai Sosial Dalam Tradisi Pacu Jalur Di Gunung Toar Kabupaten Kuantan Singingi', *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Budaya Indonesia*, 3.1 (2025), pp. 73–79, doi:10.61476/vzmy7003.



3. Structural Challenge: Ad-Hoc and Asymmetric Collaborations

The analysis further identifies a structural challenge in cross-sector collaboration. Although partnerships with tourism and education offices do exist, interview data reveal that these collaborations are predominantly event-based and informal. As one librarian noted, "Collaboration usually peaks during the festival month. We lack a joint, year-round agenda for cultural content development."⁴³ This ad-hoc nature reflects the library's relatively weak bargaining position, which stems from its internal resource limitations. In practice, effective and formalized partnerships require institutional capacity to contribute equitably—a capacity currently strained by the aforementioned constraints. In this sense, the challenge of collaboration is symptomatic of the more fundamental deficits, aligning with studies that identify the need for strong institutional agency in successful cultural partnerships.

Taken together, these challenges are not a mere list but an interdependent hierarchy. The qualitative data clearly shows that without first addressing foundational deficits in specialized human capital and sustainable funding (Challenges 1 and 2), subsequent efforts to enrich collections, build digital systems, or forge strong partnerships (Challenges 3, 4, and 5) are likely to remain superficial and unsustainable. The experience of the Kuantan Singingi Library thus exemplifies a broader predicament faced by many regional institutions tasked with cultural stewardship without commensurate resource allocation. Understanding this hierarchy is crucial, as it dictates that strategic solutions must be sequential and foundational, prioritizing capacity building and budget security before advancing toward more complex digital or collaborative ventures. This layered analysis provides the necessary diagnostic clarity to formulate the targeted recommendations that follow.

Strategies and Recommendations to Strengthen the Library's Role in Preserving the Pacu Jalur Tradition

In response to the systemic challenges identified, strategic and sequential interventions are essential to transform the Library and Archives Office of Kuantan Singingi Regency from a largely passive repository into an active and sustainable center of cultural literacy. These strategies should directly address foundational constraints related to human resources and funding, while systematically expanding the library's capacity in curation, digital preservation, and community engagement. The ultimate goal is to institutionalize the library's role as the primary guardian of the Pacu Jalur tradition, thereby ensuring the continuity of the Islamic civilizational values embedded within it.

1. Prioritizing Foundational Capacity: Human Resources and Budgetary Security

The most urgent strategy involves strengthening human resource capacity among librarians. Given the lack of specialized skills in cultural documentation and digital curation, the development of structured training programs is imperative. Such programs should include workshops on ethnographic methods, oral history recording, digital archiving standards, and the use of content management systems. Partnerships with university-based library and information science departments could facilitate the establishment of certification or short-course programs. Furthermore, librarians should be incentivized to actively participate in community events as cultural facilitators, gradually transforming their role from bookkeepers to active mediators of living cultural heritage.

Concurrently, strategic budget advocacy and planning must be undertaken. The library should develop a detailed, multi-year budget proposal specifically for cultural preservation, clearly itemizing needs for collection acquisition, digitization equipment, staff training, and public programs. This proposal should be actively presented to local government stakeholders,

⁴³ Informant P03, *interview*



framing the library as a key infrastructure for cultural sustainability rather than merely a supporting educational facility. Success in this area would be marked by the allocation of a dedicated annual cultural preservation fund, ideally comprising at least 15-20% of the library's total budget.

2. Enhancing Core Functions: Participatory Programs and Systematic Digitalization

Building on the progress already achieved, the Social Inclusion-Based Library Transformation program should be further deepened and diversified. The successful miniature *jalur* workshop model can be expanded into a wider range of initiatives, such as digital storytelling sessions in which elders narrate traditions to youth who document them; graphic design labs focusing on traditional motifs; and the development of "Pacu Jalur Literacy" modules integrated into local school curricula. These programs strengthen emotional ties to heritage while creating tangible community assets and micro-economies.

Parallel to this, a comprehensive digital preservation initiative is non-negotiable. The library needs to move beyond sporadic social media posts and establish a dedicated digital repository for Pacu Jalur. This platform should host a curated collection of high-resolution photographs, scanned manuscripts, full-length documentary videos, audio recordings of oral histories, and academic works. Utilizing open-source digital library software (e.g., Omeka or DSpace) can make this initiative feasible. Such a digital archive would ensure long-term preservation, enable remote access for researchers and the diaspora, and form the basis for virtual exhibitions and educational packages.

3. Building Systemic Support: Formalized Partnerships and Strategic Advocacy

To mitigate institutional isolation, cross-sector collaboration needs to be formalized and institutionalized. The library should initiate and lead the creation of a Local Cultural Heritage Network, formalized through Memoranda of

Understanding (MoUs) with key stakeholders such as the Departments of Tourism and Education, local universities, cultural NGOs, and community leaders. This network would coordinate the annual cultural calendar, co-develop educational materials, and pursue joint grant applications. A specific partnership with a local university could establish a community-based research program to systematically document all aspects of Pacu Jalur, producing new scholarly content for the library's collection.

Finally, a proactive cultural advocacy and promotion campaign is needed to solidify public and political support. The library should produce high-quality, engaging content such as short documentary films, podcast series featuring community voices, and illustrated bilingual (Indonesian-Malay) publications for children. Launching a regular "Pacu Jalur Heritage Bulletin" would keep the tradition in the public eye. Crucially, the library should also institutionalize an annual Cultural Policy Dialogue Forum that brings together policymakers, scholars, and community leaders to discuss challenges and secure commitments, thereby embedding the tradition's preservation into regional development agendas.

A scattered approach is unlikely to succeed. The recommended strategies therefore follow a logical sequence: first, building internal capacity and securing core funding; second, enhancing core programs while developing robust digital infrastructure; and third, leveraging external partnerships and advocacy to ensure long-term systemic support. By following this pathway, the library can systematically overcome the hierarchical challenges it faces in a structured and effective manner. This process will not only help safeguard the Pacu Jalur tradition but also establish a replicable model of how regional libraries can serve as dynamic and indispensable custodians of localized Islamic civilization, ensuring that traditions are not merely remembered but continuously revitalized within their communities.



Conclusion

This study set out to examine the role of the Office of Library and Archives of Kuantan Singingi Regency in preserving the Pacu Jalur tradition as part of local Islamic culture through cultural literacy strategies. The findings demonstrate that the library enacts a threefold role as a decoder, disseminator, and empowerer of living heritage, thereby functioning as an indispensable cultural agent within the local Islamic civilizational ecosystem.

First, the library acts as a cultural decoder and curator. Through the strategic development of a specialized local heritage collection—including monographs, documentaries, and artifacts related to Pacu Jalur—it performs the critical work of identifying, interpreting, and systematizing the Islamic values embedded in the tradition, such as *ukhuwah*, discipline, and spiritual aesthetics. This curatorial praxis transforms living cultural practices into accessible knowledge and reflects the broader Islamic civilizational objective of preserving culture (*hifz al-thaqafah*).

Second, it serves as a dynamic disseminator and educator. By orchestrating participatory programs—such as craft workshops, festival exhibitions, and communal viewing sessions—the library moves beyond passive storage to active public engagement. These initiatives effectively translate the symbolic meanings and cooperative ethos of Pacu Jalur into experiential learning, fostering a deeper, community-owned understanding of the tradition's Islamic significance among diverse audiences, especially the youth.

Third, the library operates as a digital mediator and community connector. Its use of social media and digital content creation extends the reach and resilience of cultural memory. This digital mediation, framed by staff as a form of *da'wah*, ensures the tradition's relevance in the digital age and maintains vital spiritual connections with the diaspora, thus safeguarding the tradition against geographic and generational dislocation.

At the same time, this vital role is constrained by a hierarchy of systemic challenges, primarily rooted in limited specialized human resources and insufficient funding. These foundational deficits curtail the depth of collections, hinder the development of robust digital infrastructure, and weaken the library's capacity for formal, sustainable cross-sector partnerships.

Overall, the study concludes that the library's role is transformative yet contingent. It provides a replicable model for how regional libraries can systematically sustain localized Islamic civilization by integrating curatorial, educational, and digital strategies. To secure and enhance this role, strategic investment must follow the challenge hierarchy: prioritizing capacity building for librarians in cultural documentation and securing dedicated funding as the essential first steps, which will then enable effective digital ecosystem development and formalized institutional collaborations. By addressing these prerequisites, libraries like that in Kuantan Singingi can evolve from under-optimized repositories into fully realized, dynamic guardians of living tradition, ensuring that the Islamic civilizational values embodied in practices like Pacu Jalur endure for future generations.

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Declarations

Author Contribution Statement

Yanti Mulia Roza contributed to the conceptualization and design of the study, coordinated the research process, conducted data analysis and interpretation, and led the drafting of the manuscript. Zilvi Wazeva was responsible for data collection, assisted in data analysis, and contributed to drafting and revising the manuscript. Muhammad Fadhlil contributed to the literature review, supported data interpretation, performed critical revisions for important intellectual content, and approved the final version of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.



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The data generated and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to ethical and confidentiality considerations but are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial or non-financial interests that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

AI Use Statement

[1] During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used **Grammarly** solely for **language editing (grammar, clarity, and readability)**. The authors **reviewed, revised, and verified** the final text and **take full responsibility** for the content of the publication.

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