



## Traditional Islamic Education in Kerinci: Historical Reconstruction and Adat-Islam Integration

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**Abstract:** This study examines the traditional Islamic education system in Kerinci, Sumatra, a region that has remained relatively overlooked in Indonesian Islamic education scholarship compared to areas such as Java, Aceh, and West Sumatra. Despite Islam's profound influence on the culture and social structure of Kerinci society, historical documentation of its educational practices remains limited. This research aims to reconstruct the history of traditional Islamic education in Kerinci during the 18th and 19th centuries, analyze its curriculum, and explore the integrative role of local customs (adat) in its development. Employing a multidisciplinary approach, this study combines historical, philological, and anthropological methods to examine the topic. Primary data were collected through the examination of Malay-Arabic manuscripts, oral traditions, and in-depth interviews with religious and customary leaders. Secondary sources include colonial archives and previous studies. The analysis follows a heuristic approach, incorporating data collection, source verification, critical interpretation, and historiographic writing. The findings reveal two main educational models: *ngajai* (informal community-based teaching) and *ngajai di umah syiak* (instruction at the homes of religious leaders), both of which integrated Quranic literacy, moral education, and local customary values. This research makes a significant contribution by providing the first comprehensive documentation of Islamic education in Kerinci and offers a methodological innovation for studying oral tradition-based Islamic education systems in local contexts.

**Keywords:** customary institutions; islamization; kerinci; ngajai; traditional islamic education

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## INTRODUCTION

Research on traditional Islamic education in Indonesia remains limited, with most studies focusing on the Java region. Research on Sumatra, particularly outside Aceh and West Sumatra, is notably underexplored. For example, West Sumatra and Aceh are the regions in Sumatra that have been most frequently studied in the context of Islamic education history (Arjunaita, 2020; Ismail, 2014). The traditions of Islamic education in these areas are manifested in institutions such as the rangkang or meunasah in Aceh and the transmission of traditional Islamic knowledge through the surau institutions in Minangkabau (Abbas & Afifi, 2022; Rivauzi, 2019). These observations highlight the need for further in-depth studies on traditional Islamic education, particularly in Kerinci. Existing studies on this subject in Kerinci are virtually nonexistent. Preliminary observations by researchers, based on articles, books from Indonesia's National Library, and Dutch sources (Leiden University, 2022; Watson, 1985), reveal a significant gap in historical and educational documentation. While Java and Sumatra have received considerable scholarly attention, Kerinci remains largely unexplored. This lack of research limits our understanding of how Islamic teachings were integrated with local customs in the region. The limited availability of written sources underscores the importance of integrating historical, philological, and anthropological methods (El-Amady, 2015; Shokheh, 2011).

Oral traditions and cultural practices must also be carefully documented to reconstruct educational patterns. Therefore, focused research on Kerinci's traditional Islamic education is essential to fill this gap and contribute to the broader narrative of Indonesia's diverse Islamic educational heritage. Historically, traditional Islamic education has been passed down through generations in various times and places within the Islamic world. This form of education has always been an integral part of Islamic teachings. The genealogy of traditional Islamic education can be traced back to the early periods of Islam (Nasir, 2024). This theory is particularly relevant to the context of Islam's arrival in Indonesia, where traditional Islamic education developed organically in various forms, including *pesantren*, *rangkang*, and *surau*. However, in Kerinci, no manuscripts have been discovered that detail the existence or development of traditional Islamic education. Manuscripts relating to Islamic education in Kerinci appear only during the period of formal Islamic education with institutions like *Madrasah Tarbiyah Islamiyah* and *Madrasah Tawallib* in the 20th century (Iskandar et al., 2021). Similarly, the concept of *pesantren* in Kerinci emerged only in the 20th century (Nasrun & Hamzah, 2013) and adopted modern characteristics during this period.

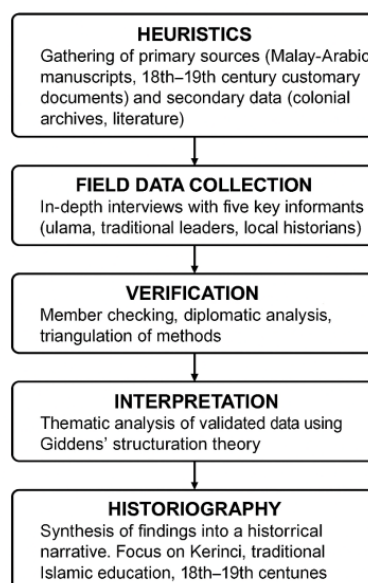
These facts suggest that the Islamic education system in Kerinci was primarily documented in the form

of formal education. Consequently, the nature of traditional Islamic education in Kerinci remains ambiguous. Despite this lack of documentation, Islam played a significant role in Kerinci's history as early as the mid-14th century, as noted by Watson (1985). Archaeological evidence, such as ancient mosques—the Grand Mosque of Pondok Tinggi and the Keramat Mosque of Pulau Tengah, among others—supports this (Syaputra, 2020; Sukardi, 2022). The assumption that the spread of Islam, or Islamization, in Indonesia was always accompanied by education is well-founded. Education served as a medium for disseminating Islamic teachings, whether in informal or formal forms. However, in the case of Kerinci, this assumption is challenged by the absence of manuscripts or artifacts documenting traditional Islamic education. Although the records of traditional Islamic education in Kerinci remain unclear, cultural assimilation between Kerinci traditions and Islamic teachings had occurred before the 20th century. *This interaction gave rise to the adage: adat bersendi syara', syara' bersendi Kitabullah, syara' mengata adat memakai, iya kata syara', benar kata adat, adat tumbuh dari syara', syara' tumbuh dari Kitabullah* (Ali et al., 2005; Thamrin, 2018). This proverb reflects how Kerinci's cultural practices were ideally rooted in Islamic teachings, a tradition that continues to this day.

The ambiguity surrounding traditional Islamic education in Kerinci and the strong assimilation between Islamic teachings and Kerinci traditions suggest that traditional Islamic education existed alongside the spread of Islam in the region. In other words, traditional Islamic education was likely integrated into the customary practices of local communities. This assumption is further supported by the incorporation of religious figures (*syiah* or *kiai*) into Kerinci's adat structures. While previous research has generally focused on traditional Islamic education in Indonesia, studies specifically examining Kerinci remain scarce. However, there are some exceptions, such as Jamin's (2017) study titled "Character Education Values in the Traditional Government System of Pulau Tengah Society, Kerinci: Between Local and Islamic Traditions." This research focused on identifying character education values within the traditional governance system. The scarcity of prior studies on traditional Islamic education in Kerinci represents a significant research gap, providing an opportunity for further investigation. Using a historical, anthropological, and philological approach, this study aims to address the central question: What role does adat play in traditional Islamic education in Kerinci? The objectives are to reconstruct the history of traditional Islamic education in Kerinci, examine its curriculum patterns, and assess the role of adat in shaping Islamic education. It is hoped that the findings will provide valuable insights into traditional Islamic education in Kerinci and serve as a guide for future educational development. To achieve these objectives, this study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining observations, primary data collection through manuscripts and interviews, and secondary data analysis from historical documents and articles. Qualitative analysis is validated through triangulation and cross-referencing with historical records.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative narrative methodology, grounded in Creswell's perspective, combined with a historical approach to reconstruct the development of traditional Islamic education in Kerinci during the 18th and 19th centuries (Creswell, 2015; Moeleong, 2005; Sugiyono, 2015). The research process unfolds in four interconnected stages: data collection, verification, interpretation, and the construction of a historical narrative. The following figure illustrates the methodological flow of the study:



**Figure 1.** Historical Methodology

The heuristics phase involved gathering various primary sources, including Malay-Arabic manuscripts

sourced from local customary groups and the Kerinci Museum, as well as customary documents from the 18th to 19th centuries (Ravico et al., 2023). Secondary data were drawn from colonial archives and relevant literature. Field data collection entailed in-depth interviews with five key informants, comprising ulama (Islamic scholars), traditional leaders, and local historians. These informants were selected based on specific criteria: their extensive knowledge of Islamic traditions in Kerinci and active involvement in preserving manuscripts or customary practices.

Verification was rigorously conducted using multiple validation techniques. Member checking was applied to verify the interview findings with the informants (Pranoto, 2010; Wasino & Hartatik, 2018). Diplomatic analysis was employed to assess the authenticity of ancient manuscripts, with a focus on materials, ink, and writing styles. Triangulation of methods involved comparing data from interviews, manuscripts, and colonial archives to ensure consistency in the findings. The validated data were then interpreted through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008) to identify key patterns, such as the role of the guru tuo (senior religious teachers) in traditional education and the process of Islamic acculturation with local customs in Kerinci. Giddens' structuration theory served as the analytical framework for exploring the interplay between religion and culture within the context of traditional Islamic education.

The final stage of the research is historiography, which involves synthesizing the findings into a coherent historical narrative (Abdurahman, 2011; Sulasman, 2014). This study specifically focuses on the 18th–19th centuries, a period that represents the height of the Islamization process in Kerinci and the availability of the earliest Islamic educational manuscripts. The geographical focus on Kerinci is motivated by the concentration of active traditional educational institutions and the dearth of studies on Islamic education in the interior regions of Sumatra.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The process of Islamization in Kerinci has become the subject of various scholarly interpretations, with two dominant theories emerging that offer new perspectives on the region's historical and cultural development. The first theory posits that Islam entered Kerinci in the 9th century, facilitated by trade relations with the Sultanate of Jambi. This view is supported by evidence of early interactions between Jambi traders and Muslim merchants from the Arabian Peninsula and Persia, dating back to the 7th to 9th centuries. These interactions likely created indirect contact between Kerinci traders and Muslim merchants, contributing to the early spread of Islam in the region. This theory highlights the significant role of trade as a vehicle for the dissemination of Islam, offering a new perspective on how Islam may have spread through economic exchanges prior to the commencement of organized missionary efforts (Syaputra, 2020; Watson, 1985).

The second theory suggests that Islam was introduced more systematically to Kerinci in the 13th century by a group of missionaries from Siak, known as the Siak or Syekh. This theory highlights the role of missionary activities in formalizing and consolidating Islam in the region. Among these missionaries, Siak Lenggis, who settled in Koto Pandan, Sungai Penuh, played a crucial role in spreading Islamic teachings throughout Kerinci (Nasrun & Hamzah, 2013; Sukardi, 2022). A manuscript documenting the migration of descendants of Tuan Kadli Padang Ganting supports this view, illustrating how these missionaries contributed to the widespread acceptance of Islam in Kerinci. The manuscript states:

"...  
"Sebermula datang dari darat alam Minangkabau luak tanah Padang Ganting, anak cucu tuan Kadli Padang Ganting empat orang seperadik, yaitu: (1). Siak Lengih. (2). Siak Malindo. (3). Siak Bagindo. (4). Siak Ulas. Adapun Siak Ulas lalu ke batang Ulas wafat di situ dan Siak Bagindo Siak lalu ke Gunung Karang hulu Tapan wafat di situ berkubur di tanah tebing tanah runtuh di bawah pohon kayu menang, dan Siak Malindo lalu ke Gunung Tunggul Pengasi wafat di situ dan Siak Lengih lalu ke renah Emir Biru disebutkan orang sekarang Koto Pandan."

...  
Translation:

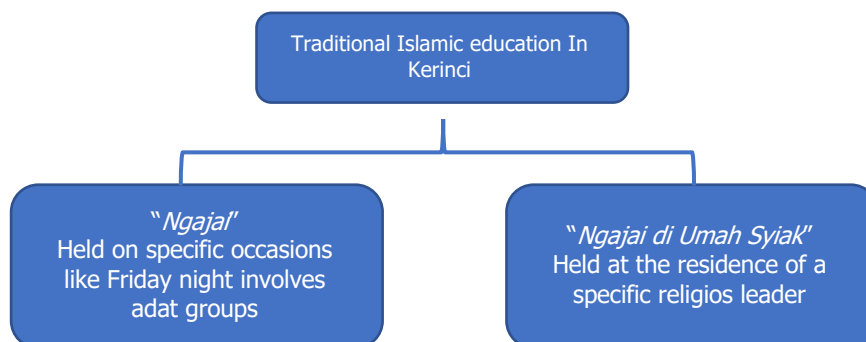
Initially, they came from the interior of Minangkabau, Luak Padang Ganting, the descendants of Tuan Kadli Padang Ganting, four siblings: (1) Siak Lengih, (2) Siak Malindo, (3) Siak Bagindo, (4) Siak Ulas. Siak Ulas went to Batang Ulas and passed away there. Siak Bagindo was buried at Gunung Karang Hulu Tapan. Siak Malindo moved to Gunung Tunggul Pengasi and passed away there. Siak Lengih settled in Renah Emir Biru, now known as Koto Pandan."

By the mid-14th century, Kerinci had established itself as a significant maritime trading center, with black pepper (*Piper nigrum*) as its primary export. The presence of Kerinci's pepper, renowned in regional and international markets, helped drive the region's economic dominance, particularly in the trade at Jambi's port (Sukardi, 2022; Watson, 1985). The convergence of these two perspectives—the 9th-century trade theory and

the 13th-century missionary theory—suggests that the Islamization of Kerinci was a complex, gradual, and multifaceted process. This study reveals that Islamization in Kerinci was not solely the result of religious missionary activities but was also influenced by economic factors related to trade. The dual roles of trade and religious mission underscore how economic and spiritual dynamics were interlinked to shape the religious landscape in Kerinci.

This study makes a significant contribution to the academic discourse on Islamization in Indonesia by presenting an integrated view of the processes facilitating the spread of Islam in Kerinci. While previous studies have primarily focused on trade or missionary activities as separate factors, this research highlights the synergistic relationship between the two, providing a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of how Islamization unfolded in the region (Fitrah & Sadzali, 2018; Sartika & Zulmuqim, 2022). The findings of this study offer new insights into the interaction between local economic activities and religious processes in the dissemination of Islam. Furthermore, it enhances our understanding of broader patterns of Islamization across Indonesia, particularly in regions that have been historically less studied compared to more prominent areas, such as Java and Sumatra.

The impact of this study is twofold: first, it enriches our knowledge of the development of Islamic history in Kerinci, and second, it provides valuable methodological insights for the study of Islamization in regions with limited written records. By synthesizing historical, anthropological, and economic factors, this study offers a comprehensive framework for future research on Islam in regions where Islamic history is still being uncovered. Traditional Islamic education in Kerinci before the 19th century comprised two main models: *ngajai* and *ngajai di umah syiak*. Both models were informal and involved Islamic scholars, or *syiak*, who played a central role in transmitting religious knowledge to the local community—the key difference between the two lies in their setting and structure. *Ngajai* was typically held in public spaces, such as mosques, and often took place on specific nights, like Friday evenings. It was a communal gathering that included not only religious teaching but also the participation of the *adat* (customary) leaders, ensuring the integration of cultural values alongside Islamic teachings. In contrast, *ngajai di umah syiak* took place in the private residences of *syiak*, offering a more intimate and personalized form of education. This model primarily focused on religious studies, including Quranic reading, memorization, and basic Islamic jurisprudence, and involved one-on-one or small-group instruction (Andestuti, 2012; Nasrun & Hamzah, 2013). Both models were crucial in shaping the spiritual and social life of Kerinci, fostering a close relationship between the community and their religious leaders. The combination of these two educational systems created a holistic approach to learning, where religious, cultural, and moral values were seamlessly intertwined.



**Figure 2.** Traditional Islamic Education Models in Kerinci

This study demonstrates that the *ngajai* model of traditional Islamic education in Kerinci embodies an informal educational system characterized by a robust and layered socio-religious structure. The system was not led by a single figure but involved several key actors who complemented each other in transmitting, internalizing, and preserving Islamic values within the community. The three main groups in this educational process were the *ulama*, *tuan kadi*, and *pagawe* (consisting of imams, *khatibs*, and *bilals*) (Abbas & Afifi, 2022; Iskandar, 1984). This is also explained by Buya Faizin, a prominent *ulama* in Kerinci, who stated:

*"As an ulama, we not only teach religious knowledge but also serve as moral and spiritual guides for the community. The educational process in ngajai must touch the heart and provide a deep understanding of Islamic teachings, so that it shapes a community that is virtuous and united in truth."*

Within the *ngajai* structure, the *ulama* served as the primary spiritual and intellectual guides. They not only taught religious doctrine but also acted as moral exemplars. Through various forums such as study sessions, public lectures, group discussions, and personal teaching at homes or mosques, *ulama* disseminated Islamic knowledge with a communicative and adaptive approach (Sunliensyar, 2021). They functioned not only as

knowledge bearers but also as local religious authorities whose guidance significantly influenced the religious life of the Kerinci community. In contrast, the *tuan kadi* reinforced the teaching of Islamic law and religion in the social and communal context. Their role manifested in activities such as dawn lectures, Friday sermons, and small study groups in homes. In addition to teaching *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), the *tuan kadi* also acted as mediators in social conflicts and guardians of moral stability, ensuring the transmission of religious knowledge while maintaining social cohesion through a religious perspective. This view is echoed by Mr. Usman, an adat leader in Kerinci, who explained:

*"In Kerinci, adat and religion go hand in hand. As an Adat community, we always emphasize the importance of balancing local culture and Islamic teachings. Traditional education, such as ngajai, is one of the means to maintain harmony and strengthen both. It serves as a foundation for nurturing moral values and preserving our cultural identity."*

The *pagawe*—comprising *imams*, *khatibs*, and *bilals*—played a crucial role in the practical aspects of worship and increasing religious awareness within the community. The imam led prayers and provided religious advice at the local level, the *khatib* delivered sermons with educational and da'wah (preaching) content, and the *bilal* maintained the daily prayer schedule by calling the *adhan* (the call to prayer) and reminding the community of prayer times (Nasrun & Hamzah, 2013; Zuhdi et al., 2023). Collectively, they bridged the gap between religious practice, education, and community involvement. Their synergy strengthened the practical dimension of the *ngajai* system, making it not just normative but also functionally integrated into everyday life. Bapak Eka Putra, an adat leader in Kerinci, further explains this view:

*"As an Islamic educator, I see the importance of integrating religious values into community education. The ngajai system, based on direct interaction between teacher and student, forms a very strong foundation for developing character and noble morals. This system enables a personalized approach, promoting profound spiritual and ethical development. It also helps in strengthening community ties by promoting shared values and understanding."*

The curriculum of *ngajai* had distinct features. Although informally structured, the educational content encompassed core Islamic teachings such as *tajwid* (rules of Quranic recitation), *qira'ah* (recitation), *Quran* memorization, basic *tafsir* (exegesis), and *ngaji adat* (the study of local customs). The latter includes ethical teachings and conduct, which are encapsulated in locally Islamized cultural values (Anam et al., 2019; Habibi, 2022). This element strengthens the moral and social behavior of the students, beyond cognitive or textual memorization. Additional materials, such as daily prayers and *wird* (remembrance of God), also contribute to the spiritual formation of students from an early age. What makes the *ngajai* system particularly interesting is its holistic and relational approach. Continuous, direct interactions between teacher and student facilitate the deep internalization of religious values (Manik, 2021; Syaputra, 2019). Religious figures not only served as teachers but also as spiritual guides and role models in society. Therefore, *ngajai* was not just a place of learning—it was a space for character formation deeply rooted in the local culture.

**Table 1.** Educational Structure of *Ngajai*

| Curriculum Component        | Description                                             |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Tajwid &amp; Qira'ah</i> | Learning proper Quranic recitation rules and fluency.   |
| Quran Memorization          | Memorizing verses or chapters from the Quran.           |
| Basic Tafsir                | Understanding the meaning of Quranic verses.            |
| <i>Ngaji Adat</i>           | Studying local customs with Islamic ethical teachings.  |
| Daily Prayers & Wird        | Practicing daily prayers and remembrance of God.        |
| Teacher-Student Interaction | Continuous, personal interaction to internalize values. |

The findings of this study offer significant novelty compared to previous literature. While studies such as Watson emphasized the role of the *ulama* as the sole actor in traditional Islamic education, this research reveals a more complex and organized socio-religious structure within the *ngajai* system in Kerinci (Watson, 1985). The roles of the *tuan kadi* and *pagawe*, which are often overlooked, have proven to be critical components in the sustainability of informal Islamic education in this region. Furthermore, the integration of Islamic education with local culture through the concept of *ngaji adat* introduces another innovative dimension. Islamic teachings within the *ngajai* system were not separate from cultural life but were aligned through a continuous process of Islamization. This approach demonstrates that Islamic education can coexist with—and even strengthen—local cultural identity. This finding highlights the importance of developing Islamic educational models grounded in local wisdom to address contemporary challenges and preserve the continuity of traditional

values.

This study makes a significant contribution to academic discourse. Conceptually, it broadens our understanding of informal Islamic education models in Indonesia, which mainstream scholars often overlook. The study also shows that character and spiritual education can be effectively conducted outside formal institutions, provided there is a strong social structure and influential local figures. Theoretically, this research supports the idea that traditional Islamic education is not monolithic or uniform but highly adaptive to local socio-cultural contexts. These findings open up opportunities for further research in other regions to explore similar configurations, which may differ in form and approach but share essential characteristics (Priambodo et al., 2022; Sentosa, 2014). From a practical standpoint, the ngajai system presents a viable alternative model for character and spiritual education development in schools and madrasahs, particularly in rural areas. Values such as role modeling, emotional closeness, and the integration of religion and culture inherent in the ngajai system are highly relevant in addressing the demands of contemporary education, which increasingly emphasizes humanistic and contextual approaches.

"*Ngajai di umah syiak*" is a traditional Islamic education model specific to Kerinci, conducted in domestic spaces by local religious figures known as *syiak* (*ulama*). Although informal, this educational system is highly structured, relying on oral transmission and fostering a close pedagogical relationship between the teacher and the student. The system follows a fixed schedule and curriculum that integrates both scriptural teachings and moral values of Islam, serving as a mechanism to transmit religious knowledge across generations. According to Badrudin, this educational model functions as an intergenerational mechanism for preserving Islamic teachings. The *ulama* and "*ngaji*" teachers play not only the role of educators but also that of spiritual guides (Badrudin, 2014; Pratama et al., 2019). The teaching and learning process is closely linked to the rhythm of village life, with lessons held in the late afternoon and evening, structured around prayer times. Eka Putra provides an ethnographic description of this practice:

*"The most prominent form of informal Islamic education is 'ngajai di umah syiak.' In the past, children in the village learned from local teachers after the Asar prayer until Maghrib. In the evening, classes were held for adults. For children, the lessons focused on reading the Qur'an, while adults studied the Qur'an along with fiqh."*

Buya Rasyidin, a local *ulama* in Kerinci, emphasizes the significance of this education, "Islamic education in umah syiak is an invaluable foundation for shaping the character of our children. Here, they not only learn to read the Qur'an but also learn how to apply religious values in their daily lives. This is an education that touches the heart and brings benefits to the community (Rasidin & Satria, 2025)." The dual time structure—"ngaji budak" (children's lessons) in the afternoon and "*ngaji dewasa*" (adult lessons) after *Maghrib*—illustrates an educational approach that is structured, inclusive, and accommodates various age groups. The pedagogical techniques employed focus on oral instruction, memorization (*talaqqi wa musyafahah*), and the narration of moral stories, fostering both cognitive and affective learning. This table highlights the methodological nature of the "*ngajai*" model, even within an informal context. The structured time allocation and sensitivity to age ensure intergenerational involvement without overlap.

**Table 2.** Educational Structure of Ngajai di Umah Syiak

| Component             | Description                                                                                 |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Time Allocation       | Children: After <i>Asr</i> to <i>Maghrib</i><br>Adults: After <i>Maghrib</i> to <i>Isha</i> |
| Instructors           | <i>Ulama</i> , Quranic teachers ( <i>guru ngaji</i> )                                       |
| Methods               | Oral instruction, memorization, repetition, and practical moral examples                    |
| Curriculum (Children) | Quranic reading, basic <i>tajwid</i> , memorization of short surahs                         |
| Curriculum (Adults)   | Quranic studies, <i>fiqh</i> , Hadith, moral values                                         |
| Values Emphasized     | Piety, discipline, respect for elders, cooperation, and responsibility                      |

"*Ngajai di umah syiak*" distinguishes itself from other informal Islamic education systems in Indonesia, such as the surau system in Minangkabau (Azra, 2015; Hakim et al., 2020) and village-based religious gatherings in Java (Bruinessen, 1994). One key difference lies in its home-based approach, which is more intimate and personal. The surau system in Minangkabau, for instance, is often conducted in larger community halls or suraus, with a primary focus on general education and social development. In contrast, village-based gatherings in Java are centered around mosques or formal places of worship. "*Ngajai di umah syiak*" emphasizes a direct, deeper interaction between the teacher and students within a family-like environment, fostering a strong emotional connection in the educational process. In the "*ngajai di umah syiak*" system, instruction extends beyond religious teachings and incorporates deeply rooted local cultural values. This sets it apart from other traditional Islamic

education models in Indonesia, where the integration of religion and local customs may not be as pronounced. In Kerinci, however, the "ngaji adat" becomes an integral part of the educational curriculum.

A distinctive aspect of "*ngajai di umah syiak*" is the integration of local ethical values (adat) into the Islamic education curriculum. "Ngaji adat" refers to the teaching of moral and social values rooted in the local customs of Kerinci, which are integrated into daily life. This integration shapes the character of the students not only in terms of religious matters but also in their social and cultural interactions within the community. This fusion of religious and customary values creates a unique epistemological blend, distinguishing "*ngajai di umah syiak*" from other Islamic educational models in Indonesia. While many Islamic education systems in Indonesia primarily focus on intellectual and moral aspects of religion, they often neglect the integration of local cultural dimensions (Pangeresa et al., 2023; Rasidin & Satria, 2020). In contrast, "*ngajai di umah syiak*" emphasizes moral teachings rooted in local customs, offering students a holistic understanding, not only of religious teachings but also of how to implement religious values within the social and cultural context of Kerinci. Buya Rasyidin stresses the importance of integrating both religious and customary values, stating:

*"Religion and custom must go hand in hand because both support one another in shaping a character-driven individual. In 'ngajai di umah syiak,' children are not only taught about Islam but also respected as part of a community that upholds noble customs. Such an education forms the foundation for building a quality society."*

Thus, "*ngajai di umah syiak*" is not merely a system of religious education, but also a process of character formation deeply connected to the social and cultural life of the Kerinci community. This educational model plays a significant role in fostering a society with strong moral values and high character. The absence of explicit records regarding the traditional Islamic education system in Kerinci prior to the 19th century is often seen as a major challenge in understanding the history of Islamic education in this region. However, indirect evidence found in various historical sources suggests that such a system had indeed existed, albeit not formally documented. This study emphasizes that the lack of written records does not imply the absence of Islamic education but rather indicates that knowledge was transmitted through oral traditions, customary practices, and religious institutions that played a significant role in shaping the community's social structure.

The analysis presented in this research integrates various historical documents and relevant manuscripts, such as Manuscript TK 86 (1305 H/1888 M) and the Royal Charter of the Jambi Sultanate (1794 M), which serve as primary sources for exploring the existence and development of Islamic education in Kerinci (Voorhoeve, 1942). The Manuscript TK 86 (Figure 2), dating from 1888, although not explicitly discussing the education system, provides important insights into the administrative practices of the time within the Sultanate of Kerinci. This document records letters from the Sultan reflecting the integration of Islamic law into the governance system. Through the Sultan's decrees, the role of religious scholars as intermediaries between the rulers and the people is evident, where they conveyed Islamic principles into daily life, including in matters of governance.



**Figure 3.** Manuscript TK 86 or No. EAP117/11/1/5

Additionally, the Royal Charter of the Jambi Sultanate dated 12 Zulhijjah 1208 H (1794 M) provides further information on the application of Islamic law in the Kerinci region. The text records the Sultan's order to local customary leaders to involve religious figures, such as hajis, scholars, jurists, and mosque imams, in aligning customary law with Islamic law. One part of the charter states:

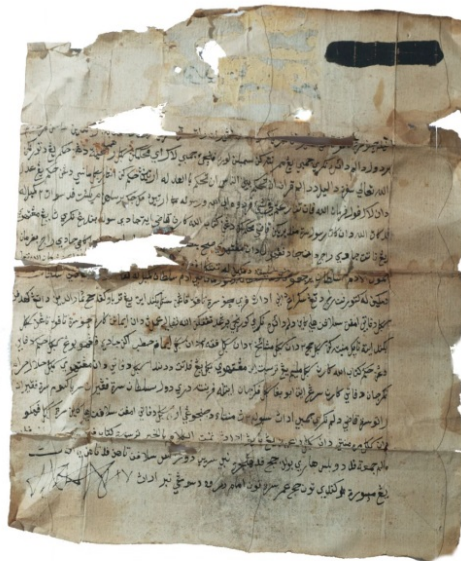
...

*Depati Empat Selapan Helai Kain dalam daerah Negeri Kurinci, yang ditetapkan Allah ta'ala amalnya dan imannya, karena cap serta tapak tangan segala bagian itu naik menitahkan segala haji-haji dan segala syaikh-syaikh dan segala Faqih-faqih dan segala imam khatib akan jadi penghubung segala hukum depati dengan hukum kitabullah, karena segala malim (muallim) yang tersebut itu mengetahui segala yang patut didenda segala depati, dan mengetahui segala halal haram pekerjaan depati, karena syarak itu ibu bapak segala pekerjaan."*

...

...

Depati Empat Selapan Helai Kain, within the territory of Kerinci, whose deeds and faith have been established by Allah Ta'ala, bearing the seals and signatures of the involved parties, are instructed to command the haji-haji, shaykh-shaykh, faqih-faqih, and imam khatibs to serve as intermediaries between the laws of the depati and the laws of the Book of Allah. This is because the aforementioned scholars (*muallim*) understand the penalties appropriate for the *depati*, as well as the lawful and unlawful deeds of the *depati*, for the Sharia is the parent of all actions."



**Figure 4.** Charter of the Jambi Sultanate

This document illustrates that customary leaders were not only responsible for governance but also acted as mediators in applying Islamic law in the lives of the Kerinci people. It demonstrates how Islamic teachings were integrated with customary law and social practices, becoming an integral part of the Islamic education system within the community.

Customary institutions in Kerinci played a crucial role in Islamic education, providing informal channels for the transmission of religious teachings. One of the most prominent forms of education was *ngajai*, a community-based study group that served as a means of learning about Islam (Jauhari & Putra, 2012; Pangeresa et al., 2023). Customary leaders, who were not only involved in political matters, also had responsibilities in facilitating religious and educational activities. In this regard, they played a crucial role in instilling Islamic principles, including *tawhid* (the oneness of God), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and *akhlak* (ethics). As expressed by Mr. Usman, a customary leader from Kerinci:

*"Islamic education in Kerinci is a tradition deeply rooted in everyday life. Since ancient times, religious scholars and customary leaders have worked together to maintain a balance between customary law and Islamic law, ensuring that the community can live in harmony both religiously and socially."*

This statement emphasizes that Islamic education in Kerinci was not limited to religious teachings but also played a role in strengthening the social structure, based on both custom and religion. Similarly, Bapak Eka Putra, a religious leader in Kerinci, remarked;

*"Customary institutions and Islamic education in Kerinci have always worked hand in hand. Ngajai is a prime example of how the people of Kerinci learn about Islam while still preserving their local values. This education is informal, taking place in small groups, which allows every member of society to understand Islam in a way that is relevant to their local context"*

This statement underscores the importance of a sustainable and contextual approach to Islamic

education in the region.

**Table 3.** Key Figures and Their Roles in Traditional Islamic Education

| Actor            | Role in Education                                                   | Activities                                                               | Social Impact                                                      |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Ulama</i>     | Teachers of Islamic doctrine and role models for religious behavior | Lectures (pengajian), group discussions, and personal teaching           | Spiritual and intellectual leadership, moral and social guidance   |
| <i>Tuan Kadi</i> | Informal teachers and moral advisors                                | Friday sermons (khutbah), dawn lectures (kuliah subuh)                   | Social cohesion through moral and legal guidance                   |
| <i>Pagawe</i>    | Religious practitioners facilitating daily worship and education    | Leading prayers, delivering khutbah, managing azan, and prayer reminders | Strengthened collective religious consciousness and daily practice |

The *Depati Empat Selapan Helai Kain*, as mentioned in the Royal Charter of the Jambi Sultanate, played a crucial role in overseeing the implementation of Islamic teachings through customary institutions. They selected and tasked religious scholars with teaching the fundamentals of Islam in prayer houses and private homes, making religious knowledge accessible to all social strata. Customary leaders also acted as mediators in resolving social conflicts and were responsible for ensuring that Islamic values were reflected in the daily lives of the community. Through the informal educational system supported by local leadership and religious figures, the people of Kerinci effectively preserved and transmitted religious knowledge, combining Islamic teachings with local traditions. This study presents a new perspective on Islamic education in Kerinci, highlighting the critical role of customary institutions in the educational process, which has often been overlooked in previous studies. Most research on Islamic education in Southeast Asia tends to focus on formal educational institutions, such as madrasahs (Junaidi, 2019; Ni'am, 2013). However, this study reveals that the Islamic education system in Kerinci heavily relied on informal educational models organized by customary leaders and religious scholars, which directly involved the community in the learning process.

This research also highlights the significance of social-religious integration in the Islamic education system in Kerinci, which is closely tied to customary law and local social structures. Through the involvement of ulama, tuan kadi, and pagawe in governance and religious practices, Islamic education in Kerinci not only served to transmit religious knowledge but also played a role in strengthening social and moral cohesion within the community. The use of Malay-Arabic script in documents and manuscripts from this period also highlights the growing importance of literacy in Islam in the region. While formal records of Islamic education are scarce, oral traditions and religious practices guided by customary leaders have contributed significantly to the development of Islamic education in the archipelago.

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the Islamization process in Kerinci developed through a complex, multi-dynamic pattern, as evidenced by two complementary pathways. First, the early Islam in the 9th century occurred through trade networks that involved intensive interactions between Kerinci, the Jambi Sultanate, and Arab-Persian merchants. Second, a more systematic Islamization process in the 13th century through Minangkabau missionaries from *Siak*. The convergence of these pathways demonstrates the distinctive characteristics of Islamization in the Malay Archipelago, which was not linear but rather resulted from the interplay of various economic, political, and religious factors. Regarding traditional Islamic education, this research identifies two primary models that developed organically in Kerinci. The communal ngajai model functioned as a collective learning space, while ngajai di umah syiak offered a more personalized and domestic approach. Both models exhibited a stratified yet complementary religious authority structure, with clear role divisions between the ulama as doctrinal authorities, the tuan kadi as norm guardians, and the pagawe as ritual practitioners. Analysis of key manuscripts, particularly the 1794 Jambi Sultanate Charter, reveals the central role of customary institutions in mediating the integration between Islamic law and local traditions through various institutional mechanisms. The findings of this study offer new insights into the dynamics of traditional Islamic education in the Malay Archipelago. First, it reveals a distinctive Islamization pattern that emphasizes the synthesis of spiritual and material dimensions. Second, it reveals the adaptability of traditional Islamic education systems in maintaining oral knowledge transmission while developing structured curricula. Third, it identifies a unique institutional configuration enabling Islamic education to function as a vehicle for socio-cultural reproduction. These findings not only enrich the historiography of Islamic education in the archipelago but also provide a theoretical basis for understanding knowledge transmission mechanisms in societies with strong oral traditions. Methodologically, this study demonstrates the critical value of interdisciplinary approaches in examining the history of Islamic education in regions with limited written sources. The combination of philological analysis of ancient manuscripts with anthropological approaches to surviving oral traditions and educational practices has

successfully reconstructed previously unmapped educational systems. These findings create opportunities for further comparative studies with other traditional Islamic education models in the archipelago, particularly regarding the Islamization patterns of inland regions, center-periphery dynamics in Islamic scholarly networks, and the resilience of community-based education systems. Thus, this study not only makes significant academic contributions but also offers new perspectives in understanding the diversity of Islamic education models in the Malay Archipelago.

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