The Relationship between Pegon Buton Arabic Script Comprehension and Religious Literacy Interest of Grade VIII MTs Alkhairaat Students in Gorontalo City

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	Understanding the Arabic Pegon Buton script is one of the local Islamic literacy skills that is believed to influence students' engagement in reading and comprehending religious texts. This study aims to analyze the relationship between students' understanding of the Arabic Pegon Buton script and their interest in religious literacy among eighth-grade students at MTs Alkhairaat, Gorontalo City. This research employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design involving 60 students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using Likert-scale questionnaires for both variables and analyzed through descriptive statistics, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression using SPSS. All instruments were validated by experts, and the research procedures followed ethical standards. The findings show a very strong and significant linear relationship between Pegon script comprehension and religious literacy interest, indicated by a correlation value of $r = 0.847$ and a determination coefficient of 71.7%. These results conclude that the higher students' mastery of the Pegon script, the greater their tendency to engage in religious literacy activities. This study contributes new empirical evidence regarding the strategic role of Nusantara traditional scripts in strengthening religious literacy motivation within Islamic educational settings.

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Introduction

The Pegon Buton Arabic script is one of the traditional writing systems that has developed in the treasures of Islamic literacy in the archipelago, especially in the Buton, Southeast Sulawesi, and Gorontalo regions. This script has long been used as a medium for writing religious texts, prayers, verses, and oral traditions that have been passed down through generations, making it an important part of the formation of the identity and religious literacy skills of the local community.[1] In the madrasah environment, especially at MTs Alkhairaat Gorontalo City, the introduction of the Pegon script is still maintained as one of the means that helps students read and understand religious texts based on local traditions. The Pegon tradition is also seen in various local religious literacy practices in Gorontalo, such as in the dikili manuscript that contains spiritual, moral, social, and cultural values in the reading of the Prophet's Birthday.[2]

Research and educational observations show that the ability to understand a form of religious writing affects students' interest in accessing and studying religious sources.[3] The easier it is for students to understand a text, the more likely they are to engage in reading and delving into Islamic teachings. In this context, the understanding of the Pegon Buton Arabic script is believed to be a factor that strengthens the interest in religious literacy because the texts they encounter, both in school and in the social environment, use the script as a medium of conveying values.[4]

In addition, it has previously been known that madrasah students who have a close relationship with local literacy traditions tend to show higher involvement in religious activities, such as reading Maulid, copying prayers, or studying simple books.[5] Empirically, the descriptive results in this study also show that the majority of students have a high understanding of the Pegon script and are supported by religious literacy interests which are both in the high category. This condition provides the initial basis that there is a tendency to have a positive relationship between the mastery of the Pegon script and the motivation of students to read and understand the religious texts they encounter on a daily basis.[6]

Although the Pegon Buton Arabic script holds an important position in the local Islamic literacy tradition and is taught in some madrasas, quantitative research that specifically examines the relationship between the understanding of this script and students' interest in religious literacy is still very limited.[7] Most previous studies have focused on the historical, philological, or preservation aspects of the Pegon script, while empirical studies that link the ability to read traditional scripts with students' motivation to access religious texts have not been widely done, especially in the context of formal education at the MTs level.[8]

In Gorontalo, the learning of the Pegon script is still taking place traditionally and has not been widely evaluated from the perspective of educational psychology and modern literacy. There is no empirical evidence yet to show the extent to which students' understanding of the Pegon script actually contributes to their high interest in religious literacy. In fact, the descriptive data from this study shows that both variables are in the high category, so a deeper analysis is needed to find out whether the relationship stands significantly or is just a statistical coincidence.[9]

In addition, there has been no study that uses a correlational approach with a measured sample to prove how much Pegon's understanding contributes to the religious literacy interest of madrasah students. It is also not known whether the relationship is strong, moderate, or weak, or whether the relationship is linear and statistically significant. The absence of empirical evidence presents an important research gap to be filled through this study, especially with the support of more accurate and standardized SPSS data analysis.[10]

Given the lack of empirical evidence regarding the relationship between the understanding of Pegon Buton Arabic script and students' religious literacy interests, this study is needed to provide a measurable picture of how traditional script reading skills can affect students' motivation and interest in accessing religious texts.[11] Filling this gap is important because understanding Pegon is not only related to linguistic aspects, but also directly related to the cultural and religious identity of students at MTs Alkhairaat Gorontalo City. Thus, this study seeks to answer whether these skills are really able to encourage an increase in interest in religious literacy.[12]

In addition, filling the gap in this research has strategic value in the context of modern learning. Teachers and madrasah educational institutions need scientific evidence that can be the basis for curriculum development based on local wisdom. Through a correlational quantitative approach, this study can show how much Pegon's understanding contributes to the interest in religious literacy in an objective and measurable manner. Statistical analyses such as Pearson correlation and simple linear regression are becoming important tools for scientifically validating these relationships.[13]

By analyzing the relationship between the two variables using a sample of 60 students and SPSS data, this study is expected to be able to make a significant contribution to religious literacy theory as well as pedagogical practice in madrasas. The results of the research will not only answer the existing academic gap, but can also be used as a basis for teachers to optimize Pegon's text-based learning, so that students' religious literacy interests can be maintained and improved continuously.[14]

Based on this urgency, this study aims to analyze the relationship between the understanding of the Pegon Buton Arabic script and the religious literacy interest of grade VIII students of MTs Alkhairaat Gorontalo City. This goal is also the basis of the research hypothesis, namely: "There is a positive and significant relationship between the understanding of the Pegon Buton Arabic script and students' religious literacy interests." By testing this hypothesis through Pearson correlation analysis and simple linear regression, the research is expected to provide strong empirical evidence regarding the role of the Pegon script in shaping students' religious literacy behavior.[15]

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Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational research design that aims to test the relationship between the understanding of the Pegon Buton Arabic script and the religious literacy interest of grade VIII students of MTs Alkhairaat Gorontalo City. The correlational design was chosen because it can describe the relationship between variables without direct manipulation of the conditions of the research subject. The research was carried out in odd semesters of the current school year, coinciding with active learning activities in the madrasah, so that the data obtained reflected the academic condition of students naturally. As a correlational research, the main focus of the analysis is to identify the strength, direction, and significance of relationships between variables with the support of inferential statistical techniques.

The research population was all grade VIII students of MTs Alkhairaat Gorontalo City, and based on considerations of availability and student involvement in Pegon learning, 60 students were selected through purposive sampling techniques. The selection of this sample was based on their involvement in religious literacy activities and access to learning the Pegon script in madrasas. The study used two main instruments in the form of a Likert scale questionnaire that measured the variables of understanding the Pegon Buton Arabic script and the variables of religious literacy interest. Each instrument is developed based on relevant theoretical indicators and has gone through a content validation process by experts, thus ensuring its suitability in measuring the constructs of each variable.

Data collection was carried out directly by distributing questionnaires to students in a controlled classroom atmosphere. Before filling out the questionnaire, the researcher provided an explanation related to the purpose of the research, the filling procedure, and the guarantee of confidentiality of respondents' data as a form of compliance with research ethics. All responses are then scrutinized to ensure that there are no blank or invalid items. After the data is collected, the researcher performs the coding process and inputs the data into the SPSS software for further processing. This stage includes checking completeness, data consistency, and initial reliability tests to ensure the stability of the instrument.

Data analysis was carried out through two main techniques, namely descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics are used to obtain an overview of the score distribution, including the minimum, maximum, average, and standard deviation values of each variable. To ensure that the data met the assumptions of the correlational analysis, a normality test was performed using Kolmogorov–Smirnov, which showed that both variables were normally distributed. Next, the Pearson Product Moment correlation test was carried out to determine the relationship between the understanding of the Pegon script and religious literacy interest. The analysis was followed by a simple linear regression test to identify the contribution of the free variable to the bound variable, which in this study showed a correlation value of $r = 0.847$ and an R^2 value of 0.717, indicating a strong and significant contribution. The entire analysis process is carried out based on standard statistical procedures to produce objective, measurable, and replicable findings.

Results

The results of the descriptive analysis showed that the level of comprehension of the Pegon Buton Arabic script in 60 grade VIII students of MTs Alkhairaat Gorontalo City was in the high category.[16] The minimum value of this variable is 66, the maximum is 91.3, with a mean value of 80.920 and a standard deviation of 6.185. Meanwhile, interest in religious literacy also showed a high trend, with a minimum score of 69, a maximum of 95, an average of 83,763, and a standard deviation of 6,407. Both variables have a relatively homogeneous distribution of data, and the majority of students are in the high category of both variables, thus providing an early indication of a tendency for positive relationships between variables[17].

To ensure the feasibility of the data before the inferential analysis, a normality test was performed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov. The results showed a significance value of 0.200 for both variables, so it can be concluded that the data is normally distributed ($p > 0.05$). The linearity test through scatterplots also showed a distribution pattern that followed a linear regression line, thus meeting the linearity assumption. Furthermore, Pearson's correlation was used to test the relationship between Pegon script comprehension and religious literacy interest. The correlation value obtained was $r = 0.847$ with a significance value of $p = 0.000$, so that the relationship between the two was significant at the 99% confidence level. This very strong correlation value strengthens the suspicion that the higher the student's understanding of the Pegon script, the higher the interest in religious literacy.[18]

The results of simple linear regression analysis showed that the understanding of the Pegon script contributed 71.7% to the variation in religious literacy interest (R^2 = 0.717). The resulting regression equation is Y = 12.772 + 0.877X, which means that every one unit increase in the Pegon comprehension score will increase religious literacy interest by 0.877 points. An F-value of 147.065 with a significance of 0.000 confirms that the regression model used is significant and can explain the influence of the independent variable on the strongly bound variable. These findings show that there is a linear, positive, and significant relationship between the understanding of the Pegon Buton Arabic script and students' interest in religious literacy.

Table 1… **Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables**

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
Understanding Pegon (X) Script	60	80.920	6.185	66.0	91.3
Religious Literacy Interest (Y)	60	83.763	6.407	69.0	95.0

Table 2... **Pearson Correlation Test Results**

Variable	r	Sig. (p)	Information
X ↔ Y	0.847	0.000	Significant (Very strong relationship)
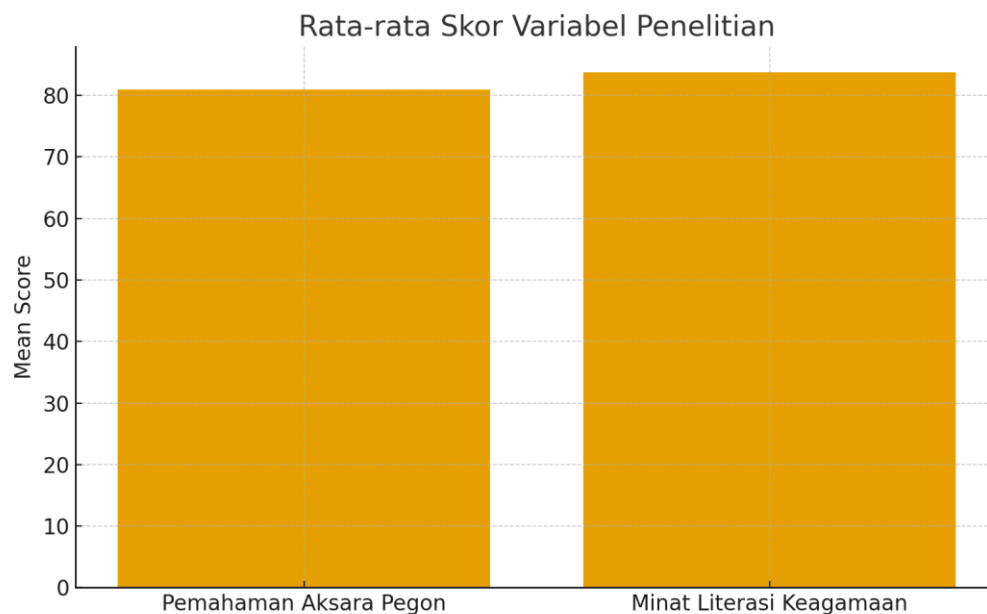
Graph 1 … Average Score Graph of Research Variables

This graph shows that the average value of the two variables is in the high category, with a mean understanding of the Pegon script of 80,920 and a mean interest in religious literacy of 83,763. Both showed a tendency for scores to be relatively close together, thus visually strengthening the indication of a positive relationship between the two variables. This difference in mean that is not far away reflects that students who have good ability to read the Pegon script also tend to show higher interest in religious literacy activities. This equally high average pattern is consistent with the frequency of categories found earlier in the descriptive analysis.

In addition, low standard values of deviation on both variables indicated that students' responses tended to be homogeneous and did not show large deviations from the mean scores. This reinforces the reliability of the data patterns seen on the graph, where the majority of students are in the medium-high score range and there are no extreme differences between individuals. This consistency of data provides a solid basis for correlational analysis, so that the relationships found are not generated by data anomalies or outliers.[19]

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   The upward trend in line with the graph also supports the results of the Pearson correlation test which obtained a value of r = 0.847 with a significance of 0.000. This value shows a very strong linear relationship between understanding the Pegon script and religious literacy interest. When the graph shows a high and balanced mean position on both variables, statistical analysis confirms that the relationship is not only visual, but also mathematically significant. Thus, the mean graph serves not only as an illustration, but also as a visual reinforcement of the results of more in-depth statistical analysis.[20]

Discussions

   The results of the study showed that there was a very strong linear relationship between the understanding of the Pegon Buton Arabic script and the interest in religious literacy in grade VIII students of MTs Alkhairaat Gorontalo City. The correlation value of r = 0.847 with a significance of 0.000 indicates that the higher the ability of students to understand the Pegon script, the higher their level of interest in reading religious texts.[21] The strength of this relationship is also strengthened by the results of a simple linear regression analysis which shows that Pegon understanding contributes 71.7% to the variation in religious literacy interests. This figure suggests that Pegon comprehension is not just the ability to recognize letters, but is one of the main factors that influence students' literacy behavior. Thus, it can be said that the results of this study provide clear empirical evidence that the Pegon script plays a strategic role in improving the culture of religious literacy in the madrasah environment based on local traditions.

   These findings are important to discuss further because they show that religious literacy is not only influenced by students' internal motivations, but also by their ability to access religious texts directly and authentically. The Pegon script is a medium that allows students to read religious texts in a form that is close to their cultural traditions. When students can read the text without linguistic barriers, they feel more confident and motivated to continue their literacy activities.[22] In cultural literacy theory, access to and emotional proximity to texts is considered to be a factor that encourages active engagement in reading practice. This means that understanding Pegon provides space for students to enter the world of religious literacy through doors that are familiar and culturally valuable. This condition explains why the average interest in religious literacy in students is in the high category in this study.[23]

Figure 1. **Buri Wolio Pegon Buton Manuscript**

   The connection between Pegon script comprehension and students' interest in religious literacy can also be understood through the long-standing manuscript tradition that developed in the Gorontalo and Buton regions. The displayed manuscript represents a concrete example of how religious texts, prayers, and Islamic poetic verses were written using the Arabic–Pegon script in a two-column format characteristic of Nusantara manuscripts. Its calligraphic structure, line arrangement, and modified letter forms illustrate that Pegon has long served as a primary medium for transmitting Islamic knowledge within local communities. Consequently, the ability to read such texts not only grants students access to their content but also connects them to the cultural heritage and religious practices preserved across generations. This explains why students who master Pegon tend to exhibit higher interest in religious literacy: they feel familiar, emotionally engaged, and culturally connected to texts that form part of their local tradition.[24]

In addition to functioning as a medium for conveying Islamic teachings, Pegon manuscripts also serve as instruments for internalizing religious and moral values through poetic forms, praises, and devotional narratives. The aesthetic and spiritual nuances embedded in these texts create a reading experience that is not merely cognitive but also affective and culturally meaningful.[25] When students are capable of accessing and understanding manuscripts of this kind, they experience a sense of continuity with the traditions inherited from their families, teachers, and communities. This experience strengthens their motivation to read other religious texts, whether written in Pegon or standard Arabic script. Therefore, Pegon manuscripts are not merely historical artifacts but an integral component of the literacy ecosystem that bridges technical reading skills with a deep, sustained interest in religious reading practices.[26]

If associated with the theory of learning motivation, the ability to read the Pegon script can be understood as *Initial success factor* which triggers intrinsic motivation in students. The theory states that when students succeed in conquering tasks that are considered challenging, there will be a sense of pride and achievement which then increases their interest in doing similar activities repeatedly.[27] Reading the Pegon script does have a certain level of difficulty, as some of the letters are adaptations of the standard Arabic script and require special practice. When students succeed in mastering it, this success gives rise to a sense of satisfaction that makes them more enthusiastic in studying religious texts. Thus, the understanding of Pegon is not only related to cognitive abilities, but also has an impact on affective aspects that strengthen the encouragement of religious literacy in students.[28]

In addition, these findings are also in line with various studies that state that local culture-based literacy has a positive influence on student engagement in learning. Many studies show that students will understand the subject matter more easily when the media or text used is relevant to their cultural experience.[29] The Pegon script is part of the identity of religious literacy in Buton and Gorontalo, so its use in learning creates a closeness of meaning between students and the material studied. In some studies of Islamic philology and education, the Pegon script has long served as a means of conveying moral values, creed, and worship. This historical and spiritual relevance is what makes students more interested in learning religious material through the Pegon script than modern texts that do not have the same cultural proximity value.[30]

In addition to having cultural value, the Pegon script also has a significant pedagogical impact because it helps students develop more varied reading skills. Mastery of the Pegon script strengthens students' competence in recognizing modified Arabic writing patterns, which can ultimately make it easier for them to learn standard Arabic texts or the yellow book. This means that Pegon-based learning has a chain effect on the development of students' religious literacy.[31] By studying religious texts in a variety of script formats, students gain greater literacy flexibility. This development also contributes to an increase in reading intensity, as students are no longer hindered by the constraints of letter forms or writing structures that are unfamiliar to them.[32] Thus, Pegon learning can be considered an instrument that comprehensively expands students' religious literacy competencies.[33]

In the context of madrasah education, the findings of this study provide new opportunities to develop more contextual curricula and learning strategies.[34] Teachers can use Pegon-based texts as a teaching medium in various classroom activities, such as reading prayers, understanding religious verses, or rewriting traditional texts. The use of this media not only revives the local Islamic literacy tradition, but also increases the attractiveness of learning for students. The results of this study show that when learning media has cultural relevance, students become more enthusiastic and actively involved.[35] Therefore, the integration of Pegon in the curriculum can be a strategic step to strengthen religious literacy while preserving the region's cultural heritage. This development is in line with the goal of Islamic education which not only forms cognitive competence, but also provides spiritual and cultural meaning for students.[36]

The findings of this study also open a discussion on the importance of a holistic literacy approach in religious education. Religious literacy is not only the ability to read texts, but also the depth of students' involvement in understanding, feeling, and internalizing religious values.[37] The Pegon script provides a space for students to experience religious literacy through a medium that is not only informative, but also emotionally and identity-close.[38] Thus, the results of this study reinforce the idea that literacy cannot be separated from the cultural context and life experiences of students. If educational institutions can create a literacy ecosystem that combines cognitive, affective, and cultural aspects, then students' religious literacy interests can develop more naturally and deeply.[39]

Although this research makes a significant contribution, there are a number of limitations that need to be considered. First, this study only focuses on one madrasah with a limited number of samples, so the generalization of results must be done carefully.[40] Second, this study did not measure other factors that might affect students' literacy interests, such as the influence of the family environment, access to religious books, or involvement in religious activities outside of school.[41] Advanced research can use a blended approach to delve deeper into the psychological and cultural dynamics behind the relationship between the two variables. By expanding the scope of research, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the Pegon script in strengthening religious literacy in the younger generation will be obtained.[42]

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Conclusions

This study confirms that the understanding of the Pegon Buton Arabic script has a very strong and significant relationship with the religious literacy interest of grade VIII students of MTs Alkhairaat Gorontalo City. With a correlation value of r = 0.847 and a determination contribution of 71.7%, it can be concluded that the ability to read and understand the Pegon script is not just a linguistic competence, but is a strategic factor that affects students' interest in learning religious texts. These results fill the void of previous research that has never empirically assessed the relationship between the two variables, especially in the context of madrasah education in Gorontalo.

Pedagogically, these findings show that the Pegon Buton script can be used as an effective learning medium to strengthen students' religious literacy. The Pegon script is not only culturally relevant, but also provides a learning experience that is closer to the archipelago's Islamic literacy tradition. Students who are able to read Pegon texts tend to be more confident and feel familiar with religious materials written using these scripts, thus increasing their motivation to read. These findings are proof that the integration of local wisdom in religious education can enrich the literacy experience and encourage students' active participation.

From a cultural literacy perspective, this research reinforces the idea that emotional and historical proximity to a text can trigger higher interest in reading. The Pegon script, which has been used in family, community, and religious traditions, has proven to have its own attraction for students. Tradition-based literacy not only preserves local cultural heritage, but also acts as a bridge that connects students with the teachings of Islam that are authentically packaged. Thus, this research provides a scientific basis for the importance of revitalizing the Pegon script in religious learning in madrasas.

This research also provides practical implications for teachers and educational institutions. Teachers can use Pegon texts as teaching materials in reading, copying, or understanding religious texts, thus providing contextual and interesting variations. Madrasah can develop Pegon-based religious literacy programs, both through extracurricular activities, Maulid reading, and the habit of reading local texts. By utilizing the results of this research, the development of a curriculum based on local culture can be carried out in a more targeted manner and based on strong scientific evidence.

Although it makes a significant contribution, this research has limitations that open up opportunities for further research. Other variables such as family environment, reading habits at home, access to digital media, and the ability to read standard Arabic texts may also affect students' religious literacy interests. Subsequent research can use a mixed approach or expand the sample to other madrasah regions and levels to obtain a more comprehensive picture. Overall, this study confirms that the Pegon Buton Arabic script has strategic value both culturally and pedagogically in strengthening the religious literacy of madrasah students in the modern era.

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