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The Philosophical Foundations of Islamic Education in Malay Tradition: An Ontological, Epistemological, and Axiological Analysis

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations of Islamic education in Malay cultural traditions and examine their relevance to contemporary educational practices. Employing qualitative library research with a philosophical hermeneutic approach, the study analyzes Tunjuk Ajar Melayu and Gurindam Dua Belas, supported by scholarly literature on Islamic educational philosophy and comparative cultural traditions. Data were examined through textual coding, contextual interpretation, philosophical mapping, and comparative synthesis involving Minangkabau, Javanese, and Bruneian traditions. The findings identify five interconnected educational values: divinity, adab, mutual cooperation, deliberation, and the integration of knowledge, faith, and practice. These values constitute three distinctive philosophical foundations. Ontologically, Malay identity is normatively articulated through Islamic faith, positioning religion as central to personal and cultural identity formation. Epistemologically, knowledge is guided by faith and cultivated through sensory awareness, moral reflection, aesthetic expression, and exemplary relationships. Axiologically, budi, tuah, and marwah establish moral conduct, social benefit, and dignity as criteria for evaluating knowledge and education. The study proposes an integrated philosophical framework connecting identity formation, ethical knowledge acquisition, and socially responsible conduct. Its contribution lies in interpreting Malay cultural teachings as a coherent philosophical foundation rather than merely a collection of character values, offering conceptual guidance for educational objectives, teaching methods, and evaluation.

Kata kunci:
Filsafat Pendidikan Islam; Tradisi Melayu; Tunjuk Ajar Melayu; Ontologi, Epistemologi, dan Aksiologi; Ta'dib.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis landasan ontologis, epistemologis, dan aksiologis pendidikan Islam dalam tradisi budaya Melayu serta merumuskan relevansinya bagi pendidikan Islam kontemporer. Penelitian menggunakan metode kepustakaan kualitatif dengan pendekatan filosofis-hermeneutik terhadap teks Tunjuk Ajar Melayu dan Gurindam Dua Belas, didukung literatur filsafat pendidikan Islam dan kajian budaya komparatif. Analisis dilakukan melalui pengodean teks, interpretasi kontekstual, pemetaan filosofis, serta sintesis perbandingan dengan tradisi Minangkabau, Jawa, dan Brunei. Hasil penelitian mengidentifikasi lima nilai pendidikan yang saling berkaitan, yaitu ketuhanan, adab, gotong royong, musyawarah, serta kesatuan ilmu, iman, dan amal. Nilai tersebut membentuk tiga landasan filosofis utama. Secara ontologis, identitas Melayu dirumuskan secara normatif melalui keimanan Islam sebagai dasar pembentukan identitas pribadi dan budaya. Secara epistemologis, pengetahuan diarahkan oleh iman dan dikembangkan melalui pengindraan, penyaringan informasi, penyucian hati, keindahan bahasa, serta keteladanan. Secara aksiologis, konsep budi, tuah, dan marwah menempatkan akhlak, kemanfaatan sosial, dan martabat sebagai ukuran kebermaknaan ilmu. Penelitian ini menghasilkan kerangka konseptual yang menghubungkan

pembentukan identitas, pemerolehan pengetahuan berlandaskan nilai, dan perilaku sosial yang bertanggung jawab. Kebaruan penelitian terletak pada penafsiran ajaran budaya Melayu sebagai struktur filosofis pendidikan Islam yang utuh, bukan sekadar kumpulan nilai karakter. Kerangka tersebut memberikan dasar konseptual bagi pengembangan tujuan, metode pembelajaran, dan evaluasi pendidikan Islam yang mengintegrasikan keimanan, pengetahuan, dan pembentukan akhlak dalam kehidupan peserta didik.

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Introduction

Education is concerned not only with the mastery of knowledge but also with the formation of attitudes, values, and behavior. Every educational practice therefore rests on particular views of human nature, the sources of knowledge, and the criteria of value. In the philosophy of Islamic education, these three views are commonly discussed through the dimensions of ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Bahrudin et al., 2025; Luthfiyah & Khobir, 2023). The ontological dimension emphasizes that human beings are created with a purpose and exist in unity with their Creator; the epistemological dimension seeks to bridge the dichotomy between religious and general knowledge; and the axiological dimension affirms the transcendental values that underlie the curriculum and direct the formation of a complete Muslim personality (Afifuddin & Ishak, 2022).

The distinctiveness of Islamic education is also evident in its terminology. Studies of Islamic education recognize the terms *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib*. *Tarbiyah* refers mainly to the process of nurturing in the early phase of human life, whereas *ta'dib* is considered broader because it already encompasses instruction, knowledge, and nurturing (Rachmadianti & Haryanto, 2025). Al-Attas (1999) chose *ta'dib* as the most appropriate term because the core of Islamic education is the inculcation of *adab*, namely the recognition and acknowledgment of the proper place of everything in the order of creation, which culminates in the recognition and acknowledgment of the proper place of God. Recent studies affirm that the concept of *ta'dib* requires educators to cultivate noble character grounded in true knowledge (Mohd Yusop & Mohd Arshad, 2026), with a scope of content that consists of the recognition and acknowledgment of reality in its relation to God (Nuryamin, 2022). Consequently, educational success cannot be measured merely by mastery of subject matter but also by learners' ability to place knowledge properly in their lives.

The philosophical foundations of Islamic education do not grow in a vacuum; they are related to the culture in which learners live. This relationship is clearly visible in Malay society, which developed through a long interaction with the teachings of Islam. Islam has shaped the customs, language, social life, and education of the Malay community (Arsya & Badrun, 2022). In Jambi, for example, the arrival of Islam transformed the mindset, beliefs, religious practices, and everyday culture of the Malay people (Saputra & Siregar, 2024). Al-Attas (1990) even argues that the coming of Islam fundamentally changed the Malay worldview, from one grounded in art and myth to one that is rational and knowledge-based, while elevating the Malay language into a language of learning and religion. In Riau, the long dialectic between Islam and local culture has led to being Malay being understood as being Muslim (Nuh et al., 2024). The principle "*adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah*" (custom is founded on the shariah, and the shariah is founded on the Book of God) affirms that custom is judged and directed by Islamic law, although the relationship between the two continues to unfold dialogically in social practice (Munawar et al., 2025).

A number of studies have examined the relationship between Malay tradition and education. Most of them are practical in nature, such as the development of teaching materials based on Tunjuk Ajar Melayu in elementary schools (Aini et al., 2022), the implementation of *tunjuk ajar* values in early childhood character education (Suharni et al., 2026), and the revitalization of Malay local wisdom for university students' character education in the digital era (Faqrurrowzi, 2025). Other studies identify educational values in the text of Tunjuk Ajar Melayu (Sofiani & Sugiarto, 2022; Zupi et al., 2025), moral education values in the Gurindam Dua Belas (Soraya et al., 2022), and *tunjuk ajar* values in Malay oral traditions (Persada & Arianti, 2026). A recent study has also proposed a model of Islamic education based on coastal Malay culture that positions Islamic values as the foundation, tradition as the medium, cultural transmission as the mechanism, and Islamic identity as the outcome (Liriwati et al., 2026).

At the philosophical level, two recent studies are closest to the present research. The first examines the epistemology of Islamic educational philosophy in the Malay world with a focus on the concepts of *tauhid* and *adab* (Nopita et al., 2026). The second systematizes the Minangkabau principle of *Adat Basandi Syara', Syara' Basandi Kitabullah* into an ontological, epistemological, and axiological framework for Islamic education (Wandi et al., 2026). Nevertheless, two problems remain. First, the values commonly identified, such as piety, courtesy, mutual cooperation, and deliberation, are also found in Islamic education based on other cultures, so it remains unclear what philosophically distinguishes the Malay tradition. Second, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no study has directly read the primary Malay cultural sources, namely Tunjuk Ajar Melayu and the Gurindam Dua Belas, through all three dimensions at once and compared them with other Islamic-cultural traditions. This gap constitutes the research gap of the present study.

Based on these problems, this study addresses three questions: (1) how the philosophical values of Islamic education are expressed in primary Malay cultural sources, particularly Tunjuk Ajar Melayu and the Gurindam Dua Belas; (2) what the ontological, epistemological, and axiological distinctiveness of the Malay tradition is compared with other culture-based approaches to Islamic education; and (3) how these foundations are relevant to contemporary Islamic education. This article aims to analyze the ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations of Islamic education contained in the Malay tradition and to formulate their relevance for contemporary Islamic education. The unit of analysis is the text of Malay *tunjuk ajar* as a representation of the worldview of the Malay-Muslim community, particularly the Malays of Riau and the Riau Islands. The contribution offered is a conceptual formulation of the philosophical foundations of Islamic education based on the Malay tradition that can be distinguished from approaches based on other cultures and can be used as a framework for designing Islamic education.

Methods

This study is qualitative library research with a philosophical-hermeneutic approach. The hermeneutic approach was chosen because the interpretation of philosophical texts is always bound to the social, historical, cultural, and biographical contexts that shape how a text is understood and received by its readers (Saumantri & Saefuddin, 2025). Accordingly, customary expressions are read not merely as collections of moral advice but also as statements about human nature, the nature of knowledge, and the criteria of value in the Malay worldview.

The data sources consist of two groups. The primary data are Malay cultural texts, namely the expressions, *pantun*, and *syair* of Tunjuk Ajar Melayu by Tenas Effendy as documented by Sofiani and Sugiarto (2022), and the verses of the Gurindam Dua Belas by Raja Ali Haji (Raja Ali Haji, 2007). The secondary data are works on the philosophy of Islamic education (al-Attas, 1999; Bahrudin et al., 2025) as well as national and international journal articles on Islamic education, Malay culture, local wisdom, and character education.

Secondary literature was selected based on four inclusion criteria: (1) it discusses the philosophy of Islamic education, the relationship between Islam and local culture, or tradition-based values education; (2) it is published in a scholarly journal or as an academic book; (3) it was published between 2022 and 2026, except for foundational works such as those of al-Attas and editions of primary texts that are academically necessary; and (4) it is available in full text so that its content can be verified. The search was conducted through Google Scholar, Garuda, and journal websites using the keywords "tunjuk ajar Melayu", "Gurindam Dua Belas", "pendidikan Islam budaya Melayu", "filsafat pendidikan Islam", "kearifan lokal pendidikan agama Islam", and "Melayu Islam Beraja". Literature that only mentioned Malay culture in passing or whose full text could not be accessed was excluded. For comparison, studies on the Minangkabau, Javanese, and Bruneian traditions were selected because all three also integrate Islam and custom, albeit in different ways.

Data analysis was carried out in four stages. The first stage was inventory and coding, in which relevant expressions and verses were collected and coded into five value themes: divinity, *adab*, mutual cooperation, deliberation, and knowledge and practice. The second stage was contextual interpretation, in which each expression was read in the context of its social function as advice passed down from parents to children, teachers to students, and leaders to the community. The third stage was philosophical mapping, in which the results of interpretation were placed into the categories of ontology, epistemology, and axiology based on al-Attas's *ta'dib* framework (1999). The fourth stage was comparison and synthesis, in which the findings were compared with the Minangkabau, Javanese, and Bruneian traditions to identify distinctive elements, which were then organized into a conceptual formulation. An element was considered distinctive if it appeared consistently in the primary Malay sources but was not formulated in the same way in the comparative traditions. This procedure follows the pattern of integrative literature review, which includes identification, classification, comparison, interpretation, and conceptual synthesis (Liriwati et al., 2026).

The validity of the findings was maintained through source triangulation, namely by matching the same expression across more than one documentation (Persada & Arianti, 2026; Sofiani & Sugiarto, 2022). In addition, each interpretation was referred back to the context of the text and compared with the interpretations of previous researchers to avoid subjective readings. The primary sources in this study are limited to Tunjuk Ajar Melayu expressions documented in previous studies and the twelve chapters (*pasal*) of the Gurindam Dua Belas. A limitation of this method is that the Tunjuk Ajar Melayu text was accessed through secondary documentation rather than the complete edition of Tenas Effendy's work.

Result and Discussion

Results

Tunjuk Ajar Melayu and the Gurindam Dua Belas as Sources of Educational Values

Tunjuk Ajar Melayu comprises all kinds of counsel, guidance, advice, trust, teaching, and example that are beneficial to human life and aim to lead people to the path pleasing to Allah. Its values encompass both Islamic education and Malay culture, including morals toward God, parents, fellow human beings, and oneself (Sofiani & Sugiarto, 2022). The values in Tunjuk Ajar Melayu are also considered highly relevant to Islamic Religious Education in terms of its foundations, functions, and objectives (Zupi et al., 2025). The meaning of *tunjuk ajar* itself is formulated in the following expression.

yang disebut tunjuk ajar,
menunjuk kepada yang elok
mengajar kepada yang benar
yang disebut tunjuk ajar,
mencelikkan mata
menyaring telinga

membersihkan hati
menyempurnakan budi
membaikkan pekerti

(Effendy, as cited in Sofiani & Sugiarto, 2022)

(That which is called tunjuk ajar / points toward what is fine / teaches what is true / that which is called tunjuk ajar / opens the eyes / filters what the ears hear / cleanses the heart / perfects one's budi / improves one's conduct)

This expression already contains a concept of education. *Tunjuk ajar* involves two movements, namely "pointing" (*menunjuk*) toward what is fine and "teaching" (*mengajar*) what is true, so that truth and beauty are not separated. Its targets are also graded: it begins with the senses (eyes and ears), proceeds to the heart, and culminates in *budi* (character) and conduct.

The second primary source is the Gurindam Dua Belas by Raja Ali Haji. Studies of this text show that the moral education values in the Gurindam Dua Belas, found mainly in the third, fourth, sixth, and tenth chapters, are relevant to moral education in the Islamic perspective (Soraya et al., 2022). From these two sources, coding produced five themes of Islamic educational values, which are described below.

The Values of Divinity and Faith

The value of divinity occupies the most fundamental position in *tunjuk ajar*. The value of creed (*akidah*) in Tunjuk Ajar Melayu appears in an attitude of closeness to Allah, such as reliance on God (*tawakal*), remembrance (*zikir*), and obedience to His commands (Sofiani & Sugiarto, 2022). One of the most explicit expressions reads:

Apa tanda Melayu jati, bersama Islam hidup dan mati,
apa tanda Melayu jati, Islam melekat di dalam hati
(Effendy, 2004, as cited in Sofiani & Sugiarto, 2022, p. 92)
(What is the sign of a true Malay? With Islam he lives and dies; / what is the sign of a true Malay? Islam is fixed within the heart)

This expression does not merely encourage Malays to be religious. It defines Malayness itself in terms of Islam: the sign of a "true Malay" (*Melayu jati*) is Islam fixed in the heart and held until death. A similar idea opens the first chapter of the Gurindam Dua Belas by Raja Ali Haji: "*Barang siapa tiada memegang agama, sekali-kali tiada boleh dibilangkan nama*" (whoever does not hold to religion shall by no means be counted as having a name) (Raja Ali Haji, 2007). Without religion, a person is not considered to have a "name", that is, honor and social existence. In family education, this value of divinity is passed down from an early age through lullabies. A study of the Onduo oral tradition in Rokan Hulu found that 28 Onduo lyrics contain fifteen types of *tunjuk ajar* values, including devotion to the One Almighty God (Persada & Arianti, 2026). This is in line with the view that the development of Islamic education must be grounded in the continuity of the teachings of the Qur'an and hadith (Prastika & Fathoni, 2023).

The Values of Morals and Adab

The moral values in *tunjuk ajar* include morals toward Allah, parents, others, and oneself (Sofiani & Sugiarto, 2022). The distinctiveness of the Malay tradition lies in its emphasis on *budi* and language as the measure of a person's dignity. The fifth chapter of the Gurindam Dua Belas states, "*Jika hendak mengenal orang berbangsa, lihat kepada budi dan bahasa*" (if you wish to know a person of noble standing, look at their character and language) (Raja Ali Haji, 2007). The third chapter teaches *adab* as the guarding of the bodily senses:

> *Apabila terpelihara mata,*
> *sedikitlah cita-cita.*
> *Apabila terpelihara kuping,*
> *khabar yang jahat tiadalah damping.*
> *Apabila terpelihara lidah,*
> *niscaya dapat daripadanya faedah.*
> (Raja Ali Haji, 2007)
> (When the eyes are guarded, / few are the base desires. / When the ears are guarded, / evil tidings will not come near. / When the tongue is guarded, / surely benefit will come from it.)

Adab in these verses is not merely outward courtesy but a self-discipline that guards the entrances of knowledge (the eyes and ears) and the exit of speech (the tongue). This message is relevant amid a flow of digital information filled with hoaxes and hurtful speech. This view is in line with the finding that the moral education values in the Gurindam Dua Belas are consistent with moral education in the Islamic perspective (Soraya et al., 2022).

The Values of Togetherness and Mutual Cooperation

The value of togetherness is expressed in *tunjuk ajar* through the formulation of "*adat hidup*" (the custom of living), that is, the proper way for human beings to live with others. One of its expressions reads:

> *Adat hidup Melayu terpuji, sesama makhluk bersuci hati,*
> *kepada orang bertanam budi, memberi tidak mengharap ganti,*
> *menolong tidak mengharap puji, membantu tidak minta dihormati*
> (Effendy, 2004, as cited in Sofiani & Sugiarto, 2022, p. 96)
> (The praiseworthy custom of Malay life: among fellow creatures, keep a pure heart; / plant budi in others, give without expecting return; / help without expecting praise, assist without asking to be honored)

This expression shows that mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) in the Malay tradition is not understood as an exchange of interests but as "planting *budi*" grounded in sincerity. Help given without expecting reward, praise, or honor reflects the value of sincerity (*ikhlas*) in Islamic teachings. This social character also appears in *tunjuk ajar* values such as civility and exemplary conduct, which are aligned with the profile of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* students (Zupi et al., 2025). In the school context, Malay culture-based values of togetherness have been developed through teaching materials and habituation (Aini et al., 2022; Suharni et al., 2026).

The Values of Deliberation and Consensus

Deliberation (*musyawarah*) and consensus (*mufakat*) are among the *tunjuk ajar* teachings that regulate communal life. A customary expression describes them as follows:

> *Adat hidup bermasyarakat, duduk berdiri dalam mufakat,*
> *yang jauh menjadi dekat, yang renggang menjadi rapat*
> (Effendy, 2004, as cited in Sofiani & Sugiarto, 2022, p. 96)
> (The custom of communal life: sitting and standing in consensus; / the distant becomes near, the estranged becomes close)

In this expression, consensus is not only a decision-making procedure but also a means of strengthening social bonds: the distant becomes near and the estranged becomes close. The value of deliberation has also been identified as one of the elements of Malay wisdom that can serve as a foundation for the character education of the younger generation (Faqrurrowzi, 2025). In education, this value can be practiced through group discussions that require learners to express their opinions politely and respect the views of others.

The Value of the Unity of Knowledge, Faith, and Practice

The Malay tradition accords knowledge a high position, but knowledge is not regarded as neutral. Tenas Effendy reminds:

> *mencari ilmu dengan ilmu,*
> *meluruskan ilmu dengan iman*
> *kalau mencari ilmu dunia*
> *luruskan olehmu dengan agama*
> *apa tanda orang bertuah*
> *sepadan ilmu dengan imannya*
> (Effendy, 2013, as cited in Sofiani & Sugiarto, 2022, p. 83)
> (Seek knowledge with knowledge, / straighten knowledge with faith; / if you seek worldly knowledge, / straighten it with religion; / what is the sign of a blessed person? / knowledge in balance with faith)

This expression positions faith as the corrector of knowledge and makes the balance between knowledge and faith the sign of a "blessed person" (*orang bertuah*). Knowledge must also be practiced so that it brings benefit. The three elements of knowledge, faith, and practice are thus regarded as a unity. This view is in line with studies on the epistemology of Islamic education in the Malay world, which position *tauhid* and *adab* as the foundation integrating theology, ethics, and education (Nopita et al., 2026).

Forms of Implementation in Education

Empirical studies show that these values have been implemented through several pathways. At the early childhood level, Riau Malay *tunjuk ajar* values are integrated into character education through habituation and teachers' exemplary conduct (Suharni et al., 2026). In elementary schools, *tunjuk ajar* values have been developed into teaching materials (Aini et al., 2022). In higher education, Malay local wisdom has been revitalized as a foundation for university students' character

education in the digital era (Faqrurrowzi, 2025). Outside school, the family and community serve as the main spaces for transmitting values through oral traditions (Persada & Arianti, 2026). At the level of models, Islamic education based on coastal Malay culture takes place through families, communities, and religious traditions as educational spaces (Liriwati et al., 2026). These findings indicate that the implementation of Malay traditional values requires integration between content, exemplary conduct, habituation, and the social environment. This is consistent with the finding that the successful integration of local wisdom into Islamic Religious Education requires careful planning, adequate teacher capacity, supporting learning resources, and cooperation among schools, parents, and the community (Wiguna et al., 2026).

Discussion

The results show that the educational values in the Malay tradition, when viewed one by one, are indeed similar to the values of Islamic education in general. However, the distinctiveness of the Malay tradition only becomes apparent when these values are read as a single philosophical structure, namely how the Malay tradition views human nature (ontology), the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired (epistemology), and the criteria of value (axiology). This section discusses these three dimensions, compares them with other traditions, and explains their implications for contemporary Islamic education.

The Ontological Dimension: Malayness as Islamic Identity

Ontologically, the philosophy of Islamic education views human beings as purposeful creations existing in unity with their Creator (Afifuddin & Ishak, 2022; Bahrudin et al., 2025). The Malay tradition accepts this view but gives it a distinctive formulation. The expression "*Apa tanda Melayu jati, bersama Islam hidup dan mati*" shows that cultural identity and religious identity are not treated as two things to be reconciled but as a single unity. To be Malay is to be Muslim (Nuh et al., 2024). Al-Attas (1990) explains the historical background of this view: Islamization in the Malay world was not merely a change of religion but a comprehensive transformation of worldview, including language and ways of thinking.

This formulation differs from other traditions that also integrate Islam and custom. In Minangkabau, the principle of *Adat Basandi Syara', Syara' Basandi Kitabullah* places custom on the foundation of the shariah and has been systematized into an ontological, epistemological, and axiological framework for Islamic education (Wandi et al., 2026). In practice, custom and Islam in Minangkabau appear as two interrelated identities that both serve as references for self-understanding and for establishing norms of behavior (Ashadi et al., 2025). However, the history of Minangkabau also shows that this integration was achieved through a long process marked by conflict, because some customary practices were considered inconsistent with Islamic teachings (Qisthi et al., 2025). In Java, local wisdom-based Islamic education has been developed by integrating Islamic teachings with pre-existing local cultural values, such as honesty, simplicity, steadfastness of principle, and non-violence in the Samin

culture of Blora (Al Ghofiqi, 2025). In both traditions, the relationship between Islam and culture tends to be understood as a relationship between two entities. In the Malay tradition, as expressed in *tunjuk ajar*, Islam instead becomes the very definition of identity itself.

A similar ontological formulation appears at the state level in Brunei Darussalam through the concept of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB). MIB is the national philosophy that integrates Malay culture, Islamic values, and the monarchical system, and it shapes the moral conduct of society through education, governance, the family, and religious guidance (Zur Raffar & Abdul Rahman, 2026). This comparison shows that the unification of Malay and Islamic identity is not merely a local phenomenon in Riau but a broader pattern of thought in the Malay world. The difference is that in Brunei this unification is institutionalized by the state, whereas in Riau *tunjuk ajar* it is transmitted through family and community counsel.

The ontological implication for Islamic education is that educational objectives cannot simply be formulated as the formation of good character in general. They need to be formulated as the formation of human beings with a complete identity, whose Islamic faith becomes the basis of their self-esteem and honor. The first chapter of the Gurindam reinforces this: without religion, a person "*tiada boleh dibilangkan nama*" (shall not be counted as having a name). Within this framework, religious education is not an addition to cultural education but the core of identity formation.

The Epistemological Dimension: Knowledge Straightened by Faith

The epistemology of Islamic education concerns the sources of knowledge and the ways of acquiring and testing it, while also seeking to narrow the dichotomy between religious and general knowledge (Afifuddin & Ishak, 2022; Luthfiyah & Khobir, 2023). The Malay tradition makes a distinctive contribution in three respects. First, the expression "*meluruskan ilmu dengan iman*" (straightening knowledge with faith) positions faith as the measure of the truth of knowledge. Worldly knowledge is not rejected, but it must be "straightened with religion". This is in line with al-Attas's idea (1999) that true knowledge is knowledge that places everything in its proper place and ultimately leads human beings to recognize the proper place of God.

Second, the Malay tradition describes the process of knowing as graded: "*mencelikkan mata, menyaring telinga, membersihkan hati, menyempurnakan budi*" (opening the eyes, filtering the ears, cleansing the heart, perfecting *budi*). Knowledge begins with the senses but does not stop there; it must be filtered, cleansed in the heart, and then become *budi*. The third chapter of the Gurindam Dua Belas on guarding the eyes, ears, and tongue affirms that the senses are not merely receivers of information but gates that must be guarded. Thus, in the Malay tradition, the process of knowing is also a process of self-purification. This shows that epistemology and ethics are not separated, just as *tauhid* and *adab* function as epistemic foundations in the philosophy of Islamic education in the Malay world (Nopita et al., 2026).

Third, the transmission of knowledge in the Malay tradition is aesthetic and relational. *Tunjuk ajar* is conveyed in the form of *pantun*, *gurindam*, and *syair* rather

than through direct commands. This form makes advice easy to remember and to accept without feeling patronizing. Its delivery is also bound to close relationships, such as those between parents and children and between teachers and students. The Onduo tradition shows that values are even passed down through lullabies, which serve as a means of forming the moral, ethical, and spiritual character of the younger generation (Persada & Arianti, 2026). This is what distinguishes the epistemology of *tunjuk ajar* from models of values education that rely solely on cognitive explanation. Values are instilled through the beauty of language, the closeness of relationships, and exemplary conduct.

This epistemological dimension also provides direction for Islamic education in the digital era. The rapid flow of digital information is considered to erode traditional values and cause the younger generation to lose their grip on their identity (Faqrurrowzi, 2025). The principles of "filtering the ears" and "straightening knowledge with faith" provide a philosophical basis for digital literacy: learners need to be trained to sort and verify sources rather than merely receive information.

The Axiological Dimension: Budi, Tuah, and Marwah

The axiology of Islamic education concerns the values and purposes of using knowledge, which culminate in the actualization of transcendental values in a complete Muslim personality (Afifuddin & Ishak, 2022). The Malay tradition formulates its criteria of value through three key concepts. First, *budi*: a person is recognized as "a person of noble standing" (*orang berbangsa*) not by lineage or wealth but by *budi* and language (Raja Ali Haji, 2007). Second, *tuah*, namely fortune or nobility obtained through the balance of faith, knowledge, and practice, as in the expression "*apa tanda orang bertuah, sepadan ilmu dengan imannya*" (what is the sign of a blessed person? knowledge in balance with faith). Third, *marwah*, namely self-respect preserved through conduct that brings benefit to others.

These three concepts show that the axiology of the Malay tradition is both social and transcendental. The value of knowledge is measured not by personal gain but by its benefit to society ("*memberi tidak mengharap ganti*", giving without expecting return) and by its conformity with faith. This formulation is close to al-Attas's definition of *adab* (1999), namely the discipline of body, mind, and soul that ensures a person recognizes and assumes their proper place in relation to God, others, and nature. In al-Attas's framework, without *adab* instilled in the self-discipline of each individual soul, no collective reform can restore justice (Syed Ahmad Almahdaly & Denisova, 2026). The Malay tradition gives this concept a cultural form: *budi* is *adab* manifested in social interaction, consensus is *adab* in collective decision-making, and mutual cooperation is *adab* in sharing social burdens.

It should be noted that al-Attas himself is a Malay-Muslim thinker, and his ideas on *tauhid* and *adab* have become a principal reference in studies of the philosophy of Islamic education in the Malay world (Nopita et al., 2026). This connection strengthens the argument that the Malay tradition not only provides examples of value

implementation but has also produced a philosophical framework for Islamic education. A summary of the three dimensions is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Philosophical Foundations of Islamic Education in the Malay Tradition

Dimension	Key expressions in the Malay tradition	Philosophical formulation and educational implications
Ontology	"*Apa tanda Melayu jati, bersama Islam hidup dan mati*" (What is the sign of a true Malay? With Islam he lives and dies) (Tunjuk Ajar Melayu) "*Barangsiapa tiada memegang agama, sekali-kali tiada boleh dibilangkan nama*" (Whoever does not hold to religion shall by no means be counted as having a name) (Gurindam Dua Belas, Chapter 1)	*Ontology of identity*: Malayness is defined by Islam. Implication for objectives: education forms a complete Muslim identity, not merely good character in general.
Epistemology	"*meluruskan ilmu dengan iman*" (straightening knowledge with faith) "*mencelikkan mata, menyaring telinga, membersihkan hati, menyempurnakan budi*" (opening the eyes, filtering the ears, cleansing the heart, perfecting *budi*) "*Apabila terpelihara lidah, niscaya dapat daripadanya faedah*" (When the tongue is guarded, surely benefit will come from it) (Gurindam Dua Belas, Chapter 3)	*Epistemology of tunjuk ajar*: faith straightens knowledge; knowing proceeds from the senses to the heart and to *budi*; knowledge is transmitted through aesthetic language, close relationships, and exemplary conduct. Implication for methods: *pantun* and *gurindam*, teachers' exemplary conduct, and literacy and source verification.
Axiology	"*Jika hendak mengenal orang berbangsa, lihat kepada budi dan bahasa*" (If you wish to know a person of noble standing, look at their character and language) "*memberi tidak mengharap ganti*" (giving without expecting return) "*duduk berdiri dalam mufakat*" (sitting and standing in consensus)	*Axiology of budi*: the value of knowledge is measured by *adab*, social benefit, and dignity (*marwah*). Implication for evaluation: success is also assessed by learners' speech, social conduct, and social contribution.

Source: Researchers' analysis of (al-Attas, 1999; Raja Ali Haji, 2007; Sofiani & Sugiarto, 2022)

Table 1 shows that the distinctiveness of the Malay tradition lies in how the three dimensions are interconnected. The ontology of identity gives rise to an epistemology that positions faith as the corrector of knowledge, and this epistemology produces an axiology that measures the value of knowledge by *budi* and benefit. This framework complements the model of Liriwati et al. (2026), which explains the socio-cultural mechanism of value transmission. While that model answers the question of how values are transmitted, the framework in this study answers the question of why these values are regarded as true and valuable in the Malay worldview. This framework also complements the study by Nopita et al. (2026), which focuses on the epistemological dimension, by adding the ontological and axiological dimensions drawn directly from primary cultural texts.

A Critical Stance toward Tradition

Positioning the Malay tradition as a philosophical foundation does not mean that all elements of the tradition can be accepted without consideration. The principle

that custom is founded on the shariah in fact contains an internal mechanism of critique: customs that are inconsistent with the shariah must be abandoned. The relationship between Islamic law and custom in West Kalimantan, for example, unfolds through dialogue and differs between the Malay heartland and other areas, rather than through one-sided acceptance (Munawar et al., 2025). Moreover, a survey of the Malay community in Pekanbaru shows that most respondents regard Malay custom and Islam as a unity, yet more than half acknowledge that customs are sometimes maintained even though they may conflict with Islam, and the integration of the two is changing due to modernization and social media (Monasari et al., 2026). Therefore, the formulation "to be Malay is to be Muslim" should be read as a normative ideal in *tunjuk ajar* rather than as a uniform sociological description. Some customary counsel also places strong emphasis on obedience, for example to parents and leaders. This emphasis needs to be balanced by the values of deliberation and openness so that it does not turn into unreasoning compliance. Thus, Islamic education based on the Malay tradition needs to teach traditional values as well as the ability to evaluate that tradition on the basis of Islamic teachings.

Contemporary education faces the demand to master technology as well as a crisis of identity and character amid the digital flow (Faqrurrowzi, 2025). Other Malay nations face similar challenges; Brunei, for example, uses MIB as a framework for building an ethical and resilient society amid globalization and digital influence, including by strengthening youth engagement through digital media (Zur Raffar & Abdul Rahman, 2026). In this situation, the framework of the ontology of identity, the epistemology of *tunjuk ajar*, and the axiology of *budi* provides more specific direction than a mere call to "preserve culture". At the level of objectives, education is directed at forming learners whose Islamic faith is the basis of their identity. At the level of methods, learning makes use of aesthetic language (*pantun* and *gurindam*), close relationships between teachers and students, and exemplary conduct. At the level of evaluation, educational success is measured not only by cognitive achievement but also by *budi*, namely the way learners speak, interact, and bring benefit to others.

This framework is in line with the idea that Islamic education must form civilized human beings through *ta'dib* rather than merely transfer knowledge (al-Attas, 1999; Mohd Yusop & Mohd Arshad, 2026). It is also in line with the model of Islamic education based on Malay culture, which positions Islamic identity as the outcome of education (Liriwati et al., 2026). While its forms of implementation may change with the times, for example mutual cooperation in collaborative projects and *adab* in digital communication, its core values can be preserved.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the main contribution of the Malay tradition to the philosophy of Islamic education lies not in its list of values, most of which are shared by other traditions, but in the philosophical structure that unites these values. This structure consists of three foundations. First, the ontology of identity, in which Malayness is defined by Islam, so that religious education becomes the core of identity

formation. Second, the epistemology of *tunjuk ajar*, in which knowledge must be straightened by faith, acquired through a process from the senses to the heart and *budi*, and transmitted through beautiful language, close relationships, and exemplary conduct. Third, the axiology of *budi*, in which the value of knowledge is measured by *adab*, social benefit, and dignity (*marwah*). The values of divinity, *adab*, mutual cooperation, deliberation, and the unity of knowledge, faith, and practice are manifestations of these three foundations.

Theoretically, this study shows that the Malay tradition can be read as a cultural articulation of the concept of *ta'dib* in the philosophy of Islamic education, while complementing existing socio-cultural models with a philosophical dimension. Practically, this framework can be used to design the objectives, methods, and evaluation of Islamic education in Malay communities. This study is limited in that it relies only on library sources, accesses the Tunjuk Ajar Melayu text through secondary documentation, and focuses on the Malay traditions of Riau and the Riau Islands. Future research is recommended to use the complete edition of Tunjuk Ajar Melayu, extend the study to Malay traditions in other regions, and test this framework through field research in educational institutions.

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Ethical Statement

Ethical approval was not required for this study because it employed qualitative library research using published cultural texts and scholarly literature. The research did not involve direct human participation, personal data collection, or experimental procedures. The interpretation and synthesis of the sources were conducted with due regard for academic integrity, accurate attribution, and responsible scholarly representation.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Statement

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely to assist with language editing, grammatical correction, and improving the clarity and readability of the manuscript. AI was not used to generate research data, select or fabricate references, conduct textual coding, perform philosophical interpretation, or develop the conceptual conclusions. All source evaluations, hermeneutic interpretations, comparative analyses, and scholarly arguments were undertaken and verified by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

Author Contributions

Popy Indar Sari contributed to the conceptualization, research design, literature investigation, textual analysis, and preparation of the original manuscript. Larasati contributed to the collection and organization of literature, textual coding, contextual interpretation, and manuscript drafting. Maryamah contributed to the theoretical framework, philosophical analysis, methodological validation, and critical revision of the manuscript. Zulhijra contributed to the comparative analysis of Malay, Minangkabau, Javanese, and Bruneian traditions, interpretation of findings, and manuscript review. Ali Imron contributed to the conceptual synthesis, evaluation of the ontological, epistemological, and axiological framework, scholarly supervision, and final manuscript revision. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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