PROCEEDINGS
International Conference on Literature
Himpunan Sarjana-Kesusastraan Indonesia (HISKI)
E-ISSN 2988-4357

Manakib Saman and the *Nimbang Bunting* pregnancy rite: Literature's interdisciplinary role in Palembang children's character formation

Izzah[1], **Hani Atus Sholikhah**[2*], **Muhammad Rizqy Al-Mubarok**[3]
[1,2,3]Universitas Sriwijaya, Indonesia
Email: [1]izzahzen@fkip.unsri.ac.id, [2]haniatussolihah@fkip.unsri.ac.id,
[3]m.rizqy.a@fkip.unsri.ac.id

Abstract: *The Manakib Saman manuscript is a religious textual heritage of the Palembang community, traditionally chanted during the Nimbang Bunting pregnancy rite held in the seventh month of gestation. As younger generations increasingly disengage from classical manuscripts and oral traditions, this study examines the relationship between the literary text and customary ritual practice. A qualitative design combined philological analysis of the manuscript, comparative literature across arts and disciplines, and ethnographic methods, including participant observation of three ceremonies and interviews with 14 informants. Data were analyzed through content analysis and hermeneutic interpretation. The findings show that the text presents exemplary conduct, perseverance, and ascetic piety through the hagiography of Sheikh Muhammad Samman; that its recitation functions both as an apotropaic prayer and as a medium of moral instruction; that rhythmic chanting (taranum) and material symbols extend its meaning; and that the ritual affirms the socio-religious status of mother and fetus. However, generational understanding of the text's philosophical meanings is eroding. The study recommends manuscript transliteration and local wisdom-based curriculum development.*

Keywords: *Manakib Saman, Nimbang Bunting, pregnancy rite, comparative literature, character formation*

INTRODUCTION

In the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, classical religious texts have long functioned as dynamic, lived performances tied to communal life-cycle rites rather than remaining static scripts. In Palembang, South Sumatra, the integration of Islamic Sufism (*tasawwuf*) and local Malay customs (*adat*) has shaped a syncretic heritage designed to sanctify major life transitions (Azra, 2004; Peursen, 1988). A prominent example is *Nimbang Bunting*, a liminal rite (Turner, 1969; Van Gennep, 1960) performed during the seventh month of a woman's first pregnancy. Within this setting, reading shifts into an active, communal chant centered on the *Manakib Saman*. This eighteenth-century hagiography honors Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Karim al-Samman al-Madani (1718–1775 CE), whose Sammaniyya Sufi order fundamentally shaped the spiritual framework of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate (Abdullah, 2018; Andaya, 1993).

For the Palembang community, the *Manakib Saman* serves as more than a theological record; it acts as a moral benchmark and a protective medium. Written largely in Jawi script, the manuscript details the life, piety, and miracles (*karamat*) of Sheikh Samman to offer a tangible ethical model (Saputra, 2024; Drewes & Voorhoeve,

*Corresponding author.

How to cite (APA 7th):
Izzah, Sholikhah, H. A., & Al-Mubarok, M. R. (2026). *Manakib Saman* and the *Nimbang Bunting* pregnancy rite: Literature's interdisciplinary role in Palembang children's character formation. *Proceedings 35th KIK, 35,* 1150–1163. https://doi.org/10.68634/kik.v35i.199

1958). Families specifically choose to recite this text during pregnancy rites under the belief that the saint's spiritual presence shields and purifies both the mother and the fetus. The communal chanting transforms typical domestic spaces into sacred acoustic environments, facilitating deep moral reflection and spiritual grounding (Bowen, 1993; Gade, 2004).

Today, however, rapid urbanization and digital media have largely alienated younger generations from this textual tradition. As Jawi literacy declines across urban Sumatra, these manuscripts are increasingly viewed as obscure relics rather than living cultural documents (Ricklefs, 2008). Even though families continue to observe the *Nimbang Bunting* ceremony, the practice has grown increasingly commodified. The ritual often functions more as an aesthetic display or social formality than a genuine vehicle for ethical and spiritual instruction. Without systematic documentation and critical analysis, the profound pedagogical and literary frameworks underlying these recitations risk complete obsolescence.

This shift highlights an urgent need for research that merges philology, cultural anthropology, performance studies, and moral pedagogy. The present study addresses this gap through an integrated, cross-disciplinary lens. Instead of approaching the *Manakib Saman* as a mere historical artifact or the *Nimbang Bunting* as a basic ethnographic event, this research frames the rite as a multimodal literary performance. It argues that classical hagiography acts as a dynamic pedagogical tool within Palembang culture, utilizing the interplay of text, chant, and material symbols to mold maternal awareness and foster early moral development in the unborn child.

To systematically elucidate this intersection, the present study addresses three central research questions: (1) What core moral, spiritual, and philosophical values are codified within the textual units of the Manakib Saman manuscript? (2) How does the written literature intersect with, and translate into, vocal artistry (taranum) and material semiotic symbols during the Nimbang Bunting performance? (3) In what manners do these interrelated literary and ritual elements function collaboratively as a medium for prenatal character formation (tarbiyah qabliyyah) within Palembang customary practice? By addressing these questions, this study aims to recover the pedagogical vitality of classical Malay-Islamic texts and offer theoretical insights for incorporating indigenous wisdom into modern character-building frameworks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Philological and sociological approaches to Nusantara manuscripts

Within existing scholarly discourse, Nusantara manuscript studies have predominantly been governed by formal philological approaches. Previous inquiries have largely restricted their focus to textual stemmatics, orthographic variations, recension histories, and manuscript cataloging (Fathurahman, 2015; Robson, 1988). While these philological contributions remain foundational for historical preservation and textual integrity, they often treat manuscripts in isolation from the fluid performative traditions that animate them. Conversely, sociological and anthropological accounts of Malay life-cycle rites (e.g., Abdullah, 2018; Peletz, 1996) frequently describe ceremonial structures, kinship interactions, and material offerings

while passing cursorily over the specific literary architecture of the recited texts. Consequently, the dynamic ontological relationship between the literary narrative and its performative execution remains underdeveloped in regional scholarship.

Comparative literature and inter-art analysis

Furthermore, within contemporary literary theory, the comparative literature paradigm has progressively expanded beyond the juxtaposition of national textual traditions to investigate the interrelation of literature with other artistic forms and diverse academic disciplines (Zepetnek, 1998). Literature is recognized as an interactive medium that intersects symbiotically with musicality, kinetic performance, and visual semiotics (Finnegan, 2007). In the context of indigenous Malay ceremonies, the recitation of hagiographical narratives does not occur in an acoustic or sensory void; it is woven into rhythmic vocal melodies (taranum), physical postures, and material symbols. Despite this theoretical opening, few literary scholars have applied an inter-art and interdisciplinary framework to classical Malay religious literature, leaving an analytical vacuum regarding how oral performance transforms a written hagiography into a multimodal pedagogical experience.

Prenatal character education and fetal responsiveness

Equally underexplored is the direct nexus between Nusantara ritual literature and prenatal character education (tarbiyah qabliyyah). While developmental psychology and educational philosophy widely acknowledge that character education begins in early childhood (Lickona, 1991; Nucci et al., 2014), indigenous Islamic pedagogical philosophies historically postulated that moral formation commences in utero through spiritual exposure, maternal mindfulness, and sensory habituation (Al-Attas, 1995; Al-Ghazali, 1993). Contemporary neurodevelopmental and psychobiological studies affirm that the human fetus exhibits sensory responsiveness to external acoustic and rhythmic stimuli from the late second trimester onward, directly influenced by maternal autonomic and emotional states (DeCasper & Spence, 1986; Kisilevsky et al., 2003). Despite these multidisciplinary parallels, there is an acute research gap connecting traditional manuscript recitations in Indonesian rites of passage to early childhood moral cultivation.

Hermeneutics and textual performance

Interpretation in this study follows Ricoeur's hermeneutic model, which treats the relation between text and action as dialectical: a written text acquires its meaning through the way it is appropriated and enacted by readers in concrete contexts (Ricoeur, 1981). This framework is particularly suited to a manuscript composed to be chanted. Its meaning is realized in performance, so the interpretive task must include the reciter's and the community's acts of appropriation rather than the written words alone. Geertz's (1973) interpretive approach to culture supports the same orientation, treating ritual and symbol as systems of meaning that must be read in their local settings.

Oral performance and the textual domain

Oral performance has long been regarded as a legitimate object of literary study rather than a degraded form of the written text. Finnegan (2007) demonstrates that oral literature involves distinctive forms of composition, performance, and audience participation, and that these forms must be studied in action rather than in isolation. This perspective matters for Nusantara manuscript traditions, in which written texts were frequently composed for recitation. A manuscript such as the Manakib Saman therefore belongs to both the textual and the oral domains, and an analysis confined to either domain risks misrepresenting its function.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design with an ethnographic-interpretive orientation to examine the living relationship between literary texts, performing arts, and character formation. A qualitative approach was adopted because the phenomenon under investigation involves symbolic meanings, oral performances, and internalized cultural values that cannot be quantified. The research grounded its analytical framework on comparative literature across disciplines (inter-art and pedagogical intersections), exploring how a sacred written hagiography translates into lived acoustic and material performances within an indigenous lifecycle rite.

Data sources

The research drew upon three primary empirical sources collected across historical cultural enclaves in Palembang, South Sumatra (notably Seberang Ulu and Seberang Ilir):

Documentary Source (Manakib Saman Manuscript): The primary written text comprised the classical Manakib Saman manuscript transcribed from preserved local Arab-Melayu (Jawi) codices traditionally owned and utilized by Palembang reciters. The documentary data encompassed textual episodes, moral descriptions, invocations, and didactic narratives chronicling the life of Sheikh Muhammad Samman.

Observational Source (Ritual Procession of Nimbang Bunting): Field observations were conducted during three distinct Nimbang Bunting ceremonies staged in Palembang households. Observations focused directly on the sequential execution of the rite, the vocal chanting styles (taranum), kinetic body postures, spatial setups, and the material apparatus used throughout the event.

Informant Source (Interviews): Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were carried out with 14 purposively selected key cultural informants who possess authoritative knowledge of the tradition. Informants comprised: 3 Palembang customary leaders/elders (tokoh adat); 4 professional and traditional manakib reciters (pembaca manakib); 5 expectant mothers and immediate family members conducting the rite; and 2 local cultural and literary educators in Palembang.

Data collection

Data collection was structured along three triangulated techniques:

Documentary Analysis: The Manakib Saman manuscript was transcribed from Jawi script into Latin orthography and translated into Indonesian and English. Content

units containing ethical codes, spiritual virtues, and metaphorical instructions were cataloged systematically.

Participant and Field Observation: The researchers recorded observational protocols, fieldnotes, and audiovisual documentation during the actual seventh-month pregnancy rites. Special attention was paid to the acoustic transitions between text recitation and communal responses, as well as the handling of ritual artifacts.

In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews: Face-to-face interviews were conducted using an interview guide exploring themes of text comprehension, oral transmission, philosophical rationale behind material symbols, maternal emotional experiences, and perceived pedagogical outcomes for the unborn child.

Analysis and trustworthiness

The collected qualitative data were analyzed iteratively using Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2014) qualitative data analysis framework, which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Interpreting underlying cultural meanings was conducted using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic model (the interplay between written text and enacted action). Methodological trustworthiness was secured through source and technique triangulation (corroborating manuscript statements with observational evidence and informant testimony), prolonged engagement in the Palembang community, and member-checking with traditional reciters and customary elders.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The qualitative analysis of the triangulated data, manuscript documents, field observations, and informant testimonies reveals that the Nimbang Bunting ceremony constitutes a multimodal pedagogical space. The findings are structured into four interrelated thematic domains: (1) textual analysis of moral virtues within the Manakib Saman document; (2) observational and interview insights on literature's translation into vocal and material arts; (3) ethnographic synthesis of prenatal character education; and (4) contemporary socio, cultural shifts documented through fieldwork.

Textual analysis of moral virtues

Textual analysis of the primary Manakib Saman manuscript demonstrates that the document was deliberately engineered as an ethical guide (kitab adab) rather than a mere historical chronology. The narrative units systematically present Sheikh Muhammad Samman's life as a moral exemplar (uswah hasanah). Through iterative coding of the Latin, transcribed Jawi text, three principal moral virtues were identified: humility and benevolence (tawadu' and ithar), resilience and patient forbearance (sabr), and transcendent devotion (taqwa and continuous dhikr). Table 1 presents representative textual excerpts from the analyzed manuscript, illustrating how didactic themes are linguistically framed and what specific character traits they are meant to foster.

Table 1. Textual Excerpts, Hermeneutic Interpretation, and Character Dimensions in the Manakib Saman Manuscript

No.	Transliterated Manuscript Excerpt (Arab, Melayu/Jawi)	Hermeneutic English Translation	Virtue Domain	Intended Prenatal Character Attribute
1	“Adalah Syaikhuna Muhammad Samman tiada membedakan antara fakir miskin dan orang kaya, melainkan disandarkannya kasih sayangnya kepada sekalian hamba Allah...”	"Our Master Muhammad Samman made no distinction between the destitute and the wealthy, but bestowed his benevolence upon all servants of God..."	Social Altruism & Humility (Tawadu')	Egalitarian mindset, empathy, social sensitivity, and unpretentiousness
2	“Maka tatkala datang atasnya bala kesukaran dan kepicikan duniawi, tiadalah ia mengeluh melainkan bersabar dengan sabar yang indah...”	"When worldly afflictions, severe trials, and privation befell him, he uttered no complaint, but persevered with consummate patience (sabr jamil)..."	Fortitude & Self-Restraint (Sabr)	Psychological resilience, emotional stability, patience, and grit
3	“Sentiasa lisannya basah dengan zikrullah pada sekalian waktu malam dan siang, tiada lalai hatinya daripada memandang kebesaran Ilahi...”	"His tongue was perpetually moistened with the remembrance of God night and day; his heart was never heedless of Divine majesty..."	Transcendent Piety (Taqwa & Dhikr)	God, consciousness, moral integrity, spiritual self, regulation
4	“Adalah ia sangat merendahkan dirinya, memakai pakaian yang bertambal, tambal dan makan sekadar menegakkan tulangnya untuk beribadah...”	"He lowered himself in utmost modesty, wearing mended garments and taking only enough food to sustain his body for worship..."	Simplicity & Moderation (Zuhd & Qana'ah)	Contentment, temperance, anti-consumerism, and ecological humility

Table 1 pairs four manuscript excerpts with their hermeneutic translations and the virtue domains they express: social altruism and humility, fortitude and self-restraint, transcendent piety, and simplicity and moderation. The final column indicates the character attribute each domain is intended to cultivate, such as an egalitarian mindset, psychological resilience, moral integrity, and contentment. Read in sequence, the four excerpts move from the saint’s relations with others, to his response to adversity, to his inner devotion, and finally to his material conduct, outlining a complete ethical profile rather than a single virtue.

Observational and interview analysis

Field observations during the Nimbang Bunting processions revealed that the written literature does not remain confined to the manuscript page; it is performed

across artistic modalities. The reading of Manakib Saman is delivered through melodic vocalization (taranum), transforming a literary biography into an acoustic, contemplative performance. Reciters modulate their tempo and pitch: narrative episodes detailing the saint's trials are chanted in low, somber cadences, while passages describing spiritual triumphs or invocations rise into rhythmic choruses accompanied by collective salawat from the audience.

In-depth interviews with the reciters (pembaca manakib) highlighted the deliberate pedagogical and psychological purpose of this acoustic delivery. Informant R2 (62 years old, traditional reciter) emphasized that reciting the manakib is not merely reading letters, but intoning melodies with tranquil taranum to soothe the mother's heart, which subsequently resonates with peace in the fetal womb. Simultaneously, participant observation verified that physical ritual objects act as visual and tactile extensions of the literary text, concretizing abstract spiritual virtues into sensory forms, as mapped in Table 2.

Table 2. Triangulation Matrix: Manuscript Discourse, Observational Data, and Informant Exegesis

No.	Ritual Phase	Observational Field Data (Actions & Artifacts)	Informant Exegesis (Interview Insights)	Corresponding Textual Virtue in Manakib Saman
1	Phase 1: Mandi kembang	Mother is bathed with floral water (air bunga tujuh rupa) while draped in a simple white cloth (kain basahan).	Elder noted: Floral water symbolizes total inner and outer cleansing so the child will possess an aromatic, virtuous reputation.	Inner and outer purity (taharah); shedding worldly pretenses and spiritual blemishes.
2	Phase 2: Pembacaan Manakib	Manuscript placed on a wooden stand (rehal); incense burned; reciter and attendees sit cross-legged in a circle.	Reciter explained: Sitting in a circle with frankincense is the proper etiquette to honor sacred knowledge and invite angelic blessings.	Reverence for sacred knowledge (adab al, 'ilm); remembrance of spiritual lineage.
3	Phase 3: Penimbangan (Nimbang)	Mother sits on a traditional balance scale (dacin) layered with seven distinct traditional woven cloths (songket/lepat).	Elder explained: Weighing is not for physical mass, but a prayer for equity, balancing worldly life and the hereafter.	Moral moderation, justice (al, 'adl), and emotional balance under life pressures.

Table 2 follows the three phases of the rite that were observed: floral bathing (mandi kembang), recitation of the manakib, and the nimbang weighing. For each phase, the table juxtaposes the observed actions and artifacts, the explanation offered by an elder or reciter, and the textual virtue to which the phase corresponds. The consistency between action and explanation across phases suggests that participants read the ritual sequence as an enactment of the manuscript’s moral categories.

Pedagogical synthesis

Interviews with customary elders and participating mothers revealed a deeply held indigenous pedagogical conviction: moral education begins in utero (tarbiyah qabliyyah). Within the Palembang cultural perspective, the seventh month of pregnancy marks a critical threshold where the fetus is recognized as possessing active spiritual and sensory awareness. Expectant mothers reported that listening to the gentle rhythmic chanting relieved anxiety regarding their upcoming first labor and cultivated a profound bond with the unborn child, establishing a conscious intention to foster virtues of patience and piety.

Contemporary sociocultural shifts

Despite the enduring practice of Nimbang Bunting, ethnographic data from observations and interviews identify significant generational fissures. Fieldwork across urban Palembang revealed that the transmission of Jawi manuscript literacy has critically deteriorated among younger parents. To evaluate these contemporary transformations, Table 3 compares traditional customary practices with observed modern trends based on fieldwork data.

Table 3. Qualitative Comparison of Traditional Customary Baseline vs. Observed Contemporary Trends

No.	Observational Dimension	Traditional Customary Baseline (Informant Recall)	Observed Contemporary Field Practice	Primary Challenge / Sociocultural Impact
1	Manuscript Handling	Manuscript read directly from handwritten family Jawi codices by local elders.	Photocopies or typed Latin summaries used; heavy reliance on hired external reciters.	Severance of tactile and orthographic connection with historical Jawi manuscripts.
2	Participant Text Comprehension	Attendees understood classical Malay and followed the narrative with active reflection.	Attendees perceive recitation as purely ritual chanting; limited comprehension of archaic vocabulary.	Semantic dilution; shift from didactic narrative to passive acoustic background.
3	Ritual Staging & Agency	Intimate domestic event organized through mutual assistance (gotong royong) by extended kin.	Frequently managed by commercial event organizers; emphasis on aesthetic backdrops and catering.	Commodification of ritual; dilution of intimate kinship solidarity.
4	Pedagogical Intention	Explicit focus on spiritual and moral preparation for the unborn child (tarbiyah qabliyyah).	Often conducted as a familial obligation, customary preservation (ngikut adat), or social media event.	Weakening of intentional character, building objectives in favor of visual display.

Table 3 contrasts four dimensions of the rite, namely manuscript handling, text comprehension, ritual staging, and pedagogical intention, as recalled by informants from traditional practice and as observed in contemporary fieldwork. The contrast is most pronounced in comprehension and intention, the two dimensions that concern the moral

content of the text rather than its ceremonial form, which indicates that the erosion documented here is first of all an erosion of meaning.

Discussion

Read together, the findings indicate that the Nimbang Bunting rite operates as a performative literary system rather than as a set of separable textual and ritual components. The discussion interprets the findings in relation to the frameworks set out in the literature review, namely hermeneutic interpretation, liminality, and inter-art comparison, and then considers the limits of the present study.

Textual virtues as the moral blueprint

The textual evidence confirms that the manuscript provides the substantive moral foundation of the ceremony. However, as revealed in interviews with reciters, this text is rarely read in private isolation; its true social agency is activated when chanted aloud in the presence of the community.

The data in Table 2 demonstrate that the material artifacts and physical actions directly mirror the moral doctrines of the Manakib. The literature provides the theological narrative, the vocal chanting supplies the emotional vehicle, and the material objects provide sensory embodiment.

The three virtue domains identified in the manuscript (humility, patience, and piety) correspond closely to the ethical vocabulary of Islamic moral pedagogy, in which character is cultivated through the exemplary life of a model figure (uswah hasanah) rather than through abstract prescription. This explains why a hagiographical form suits a prenatal setting: the child is not instructed by argument but is exposed to a sustained image of conduct, mediated through the mother's attention. The interpretive weight of the text therefore lies in its narrative of exemplary life rather than in doctrinal propositions, a distinction that bears directly on how the manuscript should be taught to younger readers.

The emphasis on simplicity and moderation in Table 1 is consistent with the ascetic orientation of the Sammaniyya order, as described in the literature reviewed above (Azra, 2004; Andaya, 1993). Read in this light, the virtue of zuhd (detachment from worldly things) is not presented as withdrawal from the community but as an ethic of measured engagement, which is precisely the balance the nimbang rite stages through its symbolic weighing. This continuity between textual ethic and ritual symbolism suggests that the manuscript and the rite are closely integrated, and that the rite should not be understood as an independent custom attached to the text.

Vocal and material mediation of meaning

Turner's (1969) account of ritual as a process that temporarily suspends ordinary social structure helps explain the role of taranum and material symbols. Vocal chanting slows temporal experience and draws listeners into a shared acoustic space, while the seven layered cloths and the balance scale make the abstract notion of moral moderation tangible. Van Gennep's (1960) tripartite model of rites of passage, separation, transition, and incorporation, offers a further lens. The seventh-month ceremony marks a transition in which the mother's status is re-articulated before the community, and the sequence of the rite (floral bathing, manuscript recitation, and the

nimbang) can be read as a movement from purification to instruction to social affirmation. Such a reading suggests that the literature does not merely accompany the rite but organizes its temporal and social structure.

Performance, emotion, and embodied learning

Gade (2004) argues that learning recitation in Indonesia involves emotion and bodily practice as much as cognitive understanding, a point that resonates with the observed role of taranum in the Nimbang Bunting. In the present study, the reciter's emphasis on soothing the mother's heart suggests that the affective quality of vocalization is itself regarded as pedagogical. Bowen's (1993) account of Gayo ritual discourse similarly shows that religious meaning in Indonesian communities is transmitted through recited and performed forms as well as through written doctrine. Finnegan's (2007) broader argument, that words which are spoken, sung, and performed do work their written form does not, supports the same conclusion. The findings therefore place the Manakib Saman within an embodied rather than purely textual pedagogy.

Prenatal character formation and maternal affect

This qualitative feedback aligns with educational and neurodevelopmental theories regarding maternal, fetal emotional contagion. The calming vocal environment reduces maternal stress, creating a physiological state conducive to fetal emotional equilibrium. The conceptual integration of the research findings is modeled in Figure.

Figure 1. Integrated Model of Prenatal Character Formation via Manuscript, Ritual Performance, and Communal Exegesis

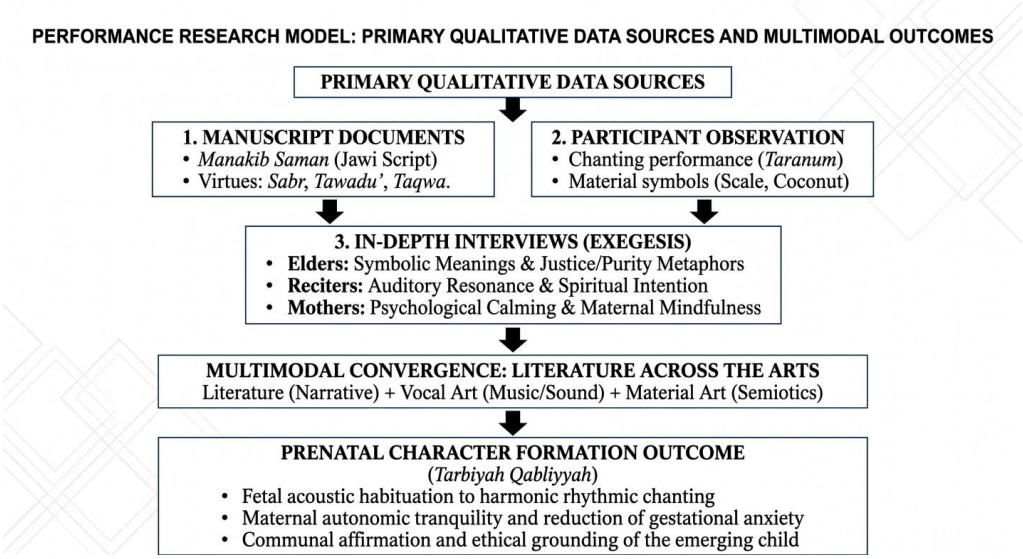


Figure 1 illustrates how the three qualitative data channels converge to explain the mechanism of character formation: the manuscript serves as the ethical blueprint, the ritual observation captures the sensory execution, and the informant interviews illuminate the internalized pedagogical effects.

The claim that prenatal experience contributes to character formation must be stated with care. The present study does not measure child outcomes; it documents how participants interpret the rite and how the rite structures maternal experience. Within that scope, the findings are consistent with research linking maternal emotional states during pregnancy to later child development (Glover, 2014; Monk et al., 2012), and with evidence of fetal auditory responsiveness to voice (DeCasper & Spence, 1986; Kisilevsky et al., 2003). The interpretive contribution of the study lies in showing that the indigenous framework already articulates a coherent pathway between these processes, one that places the mother at its center as mediator of ethical formation.

Disciplinary synergy and implications for character education

The research questions of this study are answered through an integration of disciplines that the comparative literature paradigm makes possible (Zepetnek, 1998). Philology supplies the textual basis, anthropology the description of performance and social meaning, and moral education the framework within which outcomes are evaluated. This integration is not merely additive. The findings on textual virtues gain their meaning only in relation to the ritual setting in which the text is chanted, and the ritual's pedagogical claims gain credibility only when grounded in the text. The synergy observed here is therefore a methodological argument as well as a substantive one: a literary tradition of this kind cannot be understood by any single discipline working in isolation.

For character education, the findings suggest three directions. First, moral curricula can draw on indigenous narrative texts as sources of exemplary models, consistent with the broader view that character is formed through repeated exposure to exemplary conduct (Lickona, 1991; Nucci et al., 2014). Second, the local-content curriculum (muatan lokal) proposed above offers an institutional channel for transmitting the manuscript's ethical vocabulary to students who may not read Jawi. Third, the study indicates that character formation does not begin at school age alone. The prenatal dimension of the tradition invites educators to consider character education across the entire life cycle, a perspective that Islamic pedagogical philosophy has long articulated (Al-Attas, 1995; Al-Ghazali, 1993).

Generational erosion and the question of revitalization

Interviews indicated that while modern families appreciate the cultural prestige of Nimbang Bunting, the inability to decode Jawi script creates a barrier to understanding the text's moral message. Informants acknowledged that without concerted revitalization, the ritual risks becoming an empty aesthetic exercise. To sustain both the textual and performative integrity of the tradition, several community-driven interventions are necessary: (1) creating annotated critical editions of Manakib Saman that pair original Jawi facsimiles with accessible Latin transliterations; (2) reintroducing brief vernacular explanations (syarah ringkas) of the saint's virtues prior to liturgical chanting; and (3) incorporating regional manuscript narratives into local school curricula (Muatan Lokal) across South Sumatra.

The erosion of Jawi literacy is a structural problem rather than merely an individual one. When the script that carries the moral text becomes inaccessible, the

performance retains its form while its content loses its addressee, a condition the study describes as semantic dilution. The revitalization measures proposed above should therefore be understood as attempts to reconnect form and meaning, rather than as additions to a tradition that already functions fully. Their feasibility, however, depends on the willingness of families and reciters to take part, which the present study has only begun to examine.

This study contributes to the study of Nusantara ritual literature in three ways. It extends the comparative literature paradigm by treating a ritually performed hagiography as a unit of analysis rather than as a static text. It links philological description with performance studies, a connection that regional scholarship has so far made only partially. And it applies Ricoeur's hermeneutic model to a tradition in which meaning is realized through speech, sound, and material form at once, showing how interpretive method can be adapted to a living rite as well as to a manuscript.

Limitations of the study

Several limitations shape the scope of these claims. The fieldwork covered three ceremonies in two districts of Palembang, and the informant sample of fourteen, although purposively selected, cannot represent the full range of practices across the city. The researchers' presence at observed ceremonies may also have influenced participants' conduct, and interview accounts of maternal experience are retrospective and self-reported. Finally, the analysis addresses the textual, performative, and interpretive dimensions of the rite but does not include acoustic analysis of the chanting itself. Future studies could address these gaps through longitudinal observation, recordings analyzed for vocal structure, and comparative fieldwork in other Palembang communities.

CONCLUSION

Through a qualitative inquiry combining manuscript document analysis, participatory observation, and in-depth interviews, this study demonstrates that the Nimbang Bunting pregnancy rite is a multimodal pedagogical system where classical Malay literature, vocal artistry, and material semiotics converge. The Manakib Saman manuscript provides the moral blueprint, advocating humility, patience, and devotion, which is delivered through rhythmic vocalization and embodied by symbolic ritual objects. This coordinated sensory performance creates a tranquil maternal environment and acoustic stimuli aimed at prenatal character formation (tarbiyah qabliyyah). Nevertheless, observed contemporary shifts reveal a critical disconnect between ceremonial staging and textual comprehension due to declining Jawi literacy and commercialization. Preserving this heritage requires systematic manuscript transliteration, vernacular contextualization during recitations, and the integration of local literary wisdom into institutional character education.

The three research questions can be answered directly. The core moral values codified in the manuscript are humility and benevolence, patience and perseverance, and transcendent piety, each articulated through the saint's exemplary conduct. The written literature intersects with vocal artistry and material symbols through a coordinated performance in which taranum carries emotion and the ritual objects

embody virtues in sensory form. These elements function together as a medium of prenatal character formation by creating a tranquil maternal environment, reinforcing a shared moral vocabulary among participants, and affirming the status of mother and child within the community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors express their deepest gratitude to the customary elders (tokoh adat), traditional manakib reciters, and families in Seberang Ulu and Seberang Ilir, Palembang, who generously shared their knowledge and permitted observation of their sacred family ceremonies. We also acknowledge the institutional support provided by the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), Universitas Sriwijaya.

REFERENCES

Al-Attas, S. M. N. (1995). *Prolegomena to the metaphysics of Islam: An exposition of the fundamental elements of the worldview of Islam*. International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization.

Al-Ghazali, A. H. (1993). *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* [The revival of the religious sciences] (Vol. 3). Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.

Andaya, B. W. (1993). *To live as brothers: Southeast Sumatra in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*. University of Hawaii Press.

Azra, A. (2004). *The origins of Islamic reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'ulama' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*. University of Hawaii Press.

Bowen, J. R. (1993). *Muslims through discourse: Religion and ritual in Gayo society*. Princeton University Press.

DeCasper, A. J., & Spence, M. J. (1986). Prenatal maternal speech influences newborns' perception of speech sounds. *Infant Behavior and Development, 9*(2), 133–150. https://doi.org/10.1016/0163-6383(86)90025-1

Drewes, G. W. J., & Voorhoeve, P. (1958). *Adat Atjeh*. Martinus Nijhoff.

Fathurahman, O. (2015). *Filologi Indonesia: Teori dan metode* [Indonesian philology: Theory and method]. Prenadamedia Group.

Finnegan, R. (2007). *The oral and beyond: Doing things with words in Africa*. University of Chicago Press.

Gade, A. M. (2004). *Perfection makes practice: Learning, emotion, and the recited Qur'an in Indonesia*. University of Hawaii Press.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. Basic Books.

Glover, V. (2014). Maternal depression, anxiety and stress during pregnancy and child outcome; what needs to be done. *Best Practice & Research Clinical Obstetrics & Gynaecology, 28*(1), 25–35. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bpobgyn.2013.08.017

Kisilevsky, B. S., Hains, S. M. J., Lee, K., Xie, X., Huang, H., Ye, H. H., Zhang, K., & Wang, Z. (2003). Effects of experience on fetal voice recognition. *Psychological Science, 14*(3), 220–224. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.02435

Lickona, T. (1991). *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility*. Bantam Books.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Monk, C., Lugo-Candelas, C., & Trumpff, C. (2019). Prenatal developmental origins of future psychopathology: Mechanisms and pathways. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 15*, 317–344. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-050718-095539

Nucci, L. P., Narvaez, D., & Krettenauer, T. (Eds.). (2014). *Handbook of moral and character education* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Peletz, M. G. (1996). *Reason and passion: Representations of gender in a Malay society*. University of California Press.

Peursen, C. A. van. (1988). *Strategi kebudayaan* [Strategy of culture]. BPK Gunung Mulia.

Ricklefs, M. C. (2008). *A history of modern Indonesia since c. 1200* (4th ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

Ricoeur, P. (1981). *Hermeneutics and the human sciences: Essays on language, action and interpretation* (J. B. Thompson, Ed. & Trans.). Cambridge University Press.

Robson, S. O. (1988). *Principles of Indonesian philology*. Foris Publications.

Saputra, R. (2024). Tradisi pembacaan *Manaqib Syekh Samman* karya Syekh Azhari pada upacara nimbang bunting di Palembang [The tradition of reciting Syekh Azhari's Manaqib Syekh Samman in the nimbang bunting ceremony in Palembang]. *Jurnal Al-Azhar Indonesia Seri Humaniora, 9*(3), 184–192. https://doi.org/10.36722/sh.v9i3.3242

Tötösy de Zepetnek, S. (1998). *Comparative literature: Theory, method, application*. Rodopi.

Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Aldine.

Van Gennep, A. (1960). *The rites of passage* (M. B. Vizedom & G. L. Caffee, Trans.). University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1909)