

PRESERVING ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION KNOWLEDGE THROUGH NUSANTARA HANDICRAFT HERITAGE: A TACIT KNOWLEDGE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *Preservation of traditional handicraft heritage in the Nusantara region extends beyond the maintenance of physical artifacts to encompass the transmission of Islamic values, cultural identity, and civilizational knowledge. Processes of modernization, commercialization, and rapid digitalization have disrupted traditional, experience-based methods of knowledge transfer. This study investigates the preservation and transmission of Islamic civilizational knowledge through handicraft practices by analyzing tacit knowledge transfer within Malaysian heritage craft communities. A qualitative multiple case study approach was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis with artisans, protégés, and heritage agency officers. The findings indicate that handicraft practices function as embodied knowledge systems, wherein Islamic principles such as niyyah (intention), adab (ethical conduct), amanah (responsibility), and ihsan (excellence) are implicitly transmitted through mentorship, observation, and hands-on practice. These processes exemplify the concept of tarbiyyah, which emphasizes guided, value-based learning within community contexts. The study further identifies key challenges, including the diminished spiritual dimensions in digital documentation, generational discontinuities in knowledge transmission, and structural limitations in institutional support. In response to these challenges, the study proposes an enhanced Islamic Tacit Knowledge Transfer Framework for Heritage Preservation. This framework integrates traditional apprenticeship models with digital tools while maintaining Islamic epistemological foundations. It highlights spiritual intention, ethical transmission, and socio-cultural context as essential components for sustaining heritage practices. The research positions handicraft heritage as a dynamic medium for the preservation and transmission of Islamic knowledge, providing practical guidance for*

policymakers, heritage institutions, and the global ummah in addressing contemporary cultural and identity challenges.

Keywords: *Tacit Knowledge Transfer, Islamic Civilization, Handicraft Heritage, Nusantara, Digital Preservation, Hybrid Knowledge System.*

Introduction

Preserving Islamic civilisation in the Nusantara region is not just about saving monuments or manuscripts. It is also found in daily cultural practices, especially traditional handicrafts. Crafts such as wood carving, pottery, embroidery, metalwork, and calligraphy in Malay-Muslim communities are more than just art. They are living knowledge systems that pass on worldview, ethics, spirituality, and identity from one generation to the next.

This transmission aligns with the Islamic emphasis on seeking and sharing knowledge. As narrated in Sahih Muslim (No. 2699), the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

مَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَلْتَمِسُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا، سَهَّلَ اللَّهُ لَهُ بِهِ طَرِيقًا إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ

"Whoever follows a path in pursuit of knowledge, Allah will make easy for him a path to Paradise."

When it comes to handicraft heritage, this "path" is about more than just formal religious education. It also means learning inherited skills, ethical discipline, and cultural wisdom from mentors. Passing down craft knowledge in Nusantara is a hands-on way of learning that is based on adab (etiquette), patience, and responsibility.

In Islam, these crafts are important for more than just their physical creation. Art is valued when it follows divine principles and ethical limits. The use of natural and geometric designs in Malay crafts shows the artisan's view of nature as a sign of Allah (Susilasari et al., 2024; Hussin et al., 2016). In the end, making beautiful objects fits with the Quran's view that beauty is an important part of life. The Muslim artisan acts as a khilafah (trustee), someone who keeps technical skills, local memory, and ethical practices alive. Still, keeping this heritage alive for future generations depends on ongoing intergenerational learning and strong community support (Syauky et al., 2025; Samsidar et al., 2024).

Literature Review

Islamic Civilisation and Nusantara Handicraft Heritage

Islamic civilisation in Nusantara region is kept alive not only through religious texts but also through cultural practices, material objects, and artistic traditions. Handicrafts like wood carving, pottery, embroidery, metalwork, and calligraphy manifest Islamic values by blending technical skill, cultural heritage, and spiritual meaning within Malay-Muslim communities (Kusuma & Pepilina, 2024).

However, these traditional handicrafts face pressure from modernisation, commercialisation, and rapid digitalisation. Digital records and online promotion enhance heritage visibility but often miss the tacit, spiritual, and ethical dimensions of craftsmanship. Craft knowledge transmission relies on observation, hands-on experience, and long-term apprenticeship. This process passes on vital spiritual and ethical values such as niyyah (intention), adab (etiquette),

amanah (trust), and ihsan (excellence) which are difficult to codify or digitise (Budiman et al., 2025; Syakhrani et al., 2026).

In Nusantara, this civilisational knowledge has a unique local character. Malay art uses floral, arabesque, and geometric patterns to showcase an Islamic aesthetic that avoids living figures and focuses on divine order, beauty, and unity. Malaysian crafts like labu sayong, tekak benang emas, and traditional metalwork were produced from local inspiration, inherited skills, and community involvement, rather than simply copying nature (Malulana, 2025). These designs express tawhid (the oneness of God) and invite reflection on nature as a sign of Allah's creation.

Existing research shows these practices sustain culture, support regional identity, and benefit local livelihoods. However, it is crucial to recognize that Nusantara handicraft heritage also reinforces the core values of Islamic civilisation. Artisans do not merely manufacture material products; they participate in a living tradition that unifies technical practice, spiritual purpose, and ethical conduct (Darwis et al., 2024; Abdullah et al., 2023; Kamarudin et al., 2013).

Art, Craft and Beauty from Islamic Perspectives

The Islamic approach to art and craft holds that beauty, ethics, and truth are inseparable. This is rooted in the hadith, "God is beautiful and He loves beauty." In Islam, beauty extends beyond appearance to include moral refinement, spiritual awareness, and recognition of Allah as Creator. As a result, creating beautiful handicrafts is meaningful when guided by niyyah, adab, amanah, and ihsan (Abdullah et al., 2021; Esseghir, 2023; Hasanah et al., 2025; Kamarudin et al. 2013).

Table 1: Islamic Concept Embedded in Nusantara Heritage

Islamic Concept	Meaning	Manifestation in Handicraft Practice	Tacit Knowledge Dimension
Tawhid	Consciousness of Allah's oneness	Use of non-figurative motifs, geometry, flora abstraction, and calligraphy	Learners understand that beauty reflects divine order, not egoistic self-expression.
Niyyah	Spiritual intention	Crafting with sincerity, respect for inherited knowledge, and awareness of purpose	Intention is modelled by the master artisan through conduct, not written instruction.
Adab	Ethical conduct and proper manners	Respect for master, tools, materials, motifs, and sacred inscriptions	Transmitted through observation, correction, discipline, and workshop etiquette.
Amanah	Responsibility and trust	Preserving authentic motifs, meanings, and techniques for future generations	Artisan becomes custodian of heritage knowledge.
Ihsan	Excellence and beauty in action	Precision, patience, finishing quality, proportion, and refinement	Developed through repeated practice and embodied correction.
Tarbiyyah	Guided value-based formation	Mentorship that shapes skill, discipline, identity, and spirituality	Apprenticeship becomes moral and spiritual education.
Dhikr	Remembrance of Allah	Calligraphy, Asmaul Husna, Quranic inscriptions, repetitive craft practice	Craft object and craft process become reminders of Allah.

The table shows that Islamic values in handicraft are often learned through observation, imitation, repetition, discipline, mentorship, and the example set by master artisans, rather than through formal instruction or written documentation. This supports the view that Nusantara handicraft heritage represents an embodied Islamic knowledge system, not merely decorative art or a cultural product.

Tawhid forms the philosophical foundation of Islamic artistic expression. In handicrafts, this is reflected through non-figurative motifs, geometric patterns, abstracted flora, and calligraphy. These elements demonstrate that beauty in Islamic craft is rooted in the recognition of divine order and the oneness of Allah, rather than personal ego or unrestricted artistic expression. This aligns with Malay Islamic traditions, in which flora, geometry, and calligraphy express Islamic values and avoid the direct imitation of living forms in certain crafts (Ahmad, 2025; Sulisari et al., 2024).

Niyyah, or spiritual intention, emphasizes that the true value of craft lies in the artisan's inner purpose, not just its outward appearance. While a craft object may be visually appealing, its deeper value in the Islamic worldview is shaped by sincerity, humility, and respect for inherited knowledge. This principle is seldom taught formally; instead, apprentices learn by observing the master artisan's approach, material handling, respect for motifs, and discipline throughout the process (Abdullah et al., 2021; Esseghir, 2023).

Adab highlights the ethical dimension of craft learning. In Nusantara handicraft traditions, apprentices gain not only technical skills but also proper conduct, including respect for the master and tools, patience in practice, careful handling of sacred inscriptions, and humility when corrected. This transforms the workshop into a space for moral learning. Adab is conveyed tacitly through behavior, correction, and repeated participation, rather than written manuals (Hasanah et al., 2025; Kamarudin et al. 2013).

Amanah refers to the responsibility to preserve inherited knowledge. In handicraft heritage, artisans serve as custodians of cultural and spiritual memory. They are tasked with maintaining authentic motifs, techniques, meanings, and ethical standards, ensuring that future generations inherit both the physical craft and its deeper significance. Studies on Malay traditional craftsmanship confirm that craft sustainability relies on the continuity of techniques, local identity, community involvement, and artisan commitment (Kamarudin et al. 2013; Abdullah et al., 2024).

Ihsan represents beauty and excellence in action. In craft, it appears through precision, patience, refinement, proportion, quality finishing, and disciplined repetition. Ihsan develops over time through sustained practice and direct guidance from the master artisan. Islamic concepts of beauty are closely linked to the hadith that Allah is beautiful and loves beauty, providing a theological foundation for viewing craftsmanship as more than technical production (Esseghir, 2023; Hasanah et al., 2025; Kamarudin et al. 2013).

Tarbiyyah addresses the learning aspect of apprenticeship. In this context, craft mentorship is seen as value-based formation rather than solely skill training. The master artisan guides the apprentice's technical skills, discipline, identity, ethical awareness, and spiritual understanding, making apprenticeship a form of moral and spiritual education. This supports the argument that preserving Nusantara handicrafts requires safeguarding the relationship between master and learner, not just the crafted object (Esseghir, 2023; Hasanah et al., 2025).

Dhikr demonstrates that handicraft can serve as a means of remembering Allah. Crafts featuring calligraphy, Asmaul Husna, Quranic inscriptions, or repetitive symbolic patterns can remind individuals of the divine presence. It introduce Islamic values, reinforce religious understanding, and act as spiritual reminders in daily life. Both the craft object and the making process become vehicles for Islamic remembrance (Kamarudin et al. 2013; Abdullah et al., 2021).

Theoretical Foundation for Islamic Tacit Knowledge Transfer in Handicraft Heritage

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the understanding that Islamic handicraft heritage is not merely a material or decorative tradition, but a knowledge system that carries spiritual, ethical, aesthetic and communal meanings. Islamic aesthetics explains how beauty in craft reflects external form and inner meaning. Tacit knowledge theories explain how such meanings are transmitted through observation, imitation, mentorship and repeated practice (Abdullah et al., 2024; Abdullah et al 2021).

Previous studies show that Malay-Islamic art integrates visual elements such as calligraphy, geometry, floral motifs, and traditional forms with deeper values of tawhid, morality, remembrance, and cultural identity. Therefore, the theoretical frameworks presented in Table 2 provide the conceptual basis for analysing the preservation and transfer of Islamic civilisational knowledge through the handicraft heritage of Nusantara.

Table 2: Theoretical Foundations for Islamic Tacit Knowledge Transfer in Handicraft Heritage

Theory / Perspective	Core Idea	Application to This Study
Imam Al-Ghazali's Aesthetic Values	Beauty has external and inner dimensions. External beauty refers to form, colour, material, and design; inner beauty refers to moral and spiritual meaning.	Helps distinguish between visible craft form and invisible Islamic meaning. Digital preservation may capture external beauty but not inner beauty.
Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Islamic Art Philosophy	Islamic art is a spiritual path that shapes morality, contemplation, and awareness of the Divine.	Supports the argument that craft mentorship transmits moral and spiritual knowledge.
Tawhidic Aesthetic Framework	Islamic art reflects unity, order, balance, and divine reality through abstraction, geometry, flora, and calligraphy.	Explains why Nusantara motifs function as visual carriers of Islamic worldview.
SECI Model	Tacit knowledge is transferred through socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization.	Socialization explains master-apprentice learning through observation, imitation, and practice.
Transactive Memory Theory	Knowledge is distributed across members of a community.	Explains how artisans, protégés, elders, and institutions collectively preserve Islamic craft knowledge.

The philosophy of Islamic aesthetics allows analysis of both the material form and spiritual meaning of handicraft heritage, drawing on Imam Al-Ghazali's distinction between external and inner beauty (Abdullah et al., 2024; Abdullah et al 2021). Seyyed Hossein Nasr's philosophy further supports this view, presenting Islamic art as a spiritual path that fosters morality, contemplation, and awareness of the Divine. The literature agrees that calligraphy, geometry, architecture, and craft serve as reflective and meditative media connecting individuals to Allah (Hasanah et al., 2025).

The tacit knowledge theory explains how craft knowledge is transferred through embodied experience. The SECI model, particularly the socialisation phase, describes tacit-to-tacit knowledge transfer via shared experience, observation, imitation, and practice (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). This process mirrors craft heritage, where apprentices learn from masters through repeated physical engagement rather than abstract instruction.

Transactive Memory Theory explains knowledge sharing within a community (Wegner, 1987).. In heritage craft communities, knowledge is distributed: senior artisans hold motif philosophy and technical mastery, protégés contribute digital skills, heritage officers manage records, and elders preserve cultural memory. Preservation relies on the strength of this collective memory system. As trust, proximity, and intergenerational interaction decline, the community risks losing both technical skill and civilisational continuity. This strengthens the main argument of this paper that the Nusantara handicraft heritage is an Islamic tacit knowledge system. Preserving it is not just a matter of artefact conservation or digital archiving. It necessitates the protection of embodied practice, spiritual intent, ethical guidance, and community-based transmission.

Gap in the Literature

The gap analysis in Table 3 shows that current studies have advanced knowledge in Malay-Islamic art, traditional craft sustainability, Islamic art education, digital preservation, and knowledge management. However, these areas remain fragmented. While each provides some insight, none fully explains how tacit, embodied, and value-based practices in Nusantara handicraft heritage transmit Islamic civilisational knowledge.

Table 3: Research Gap Matrix

Existing Literature Focus	Content	What Remains Underexplored
Malay-Islamic art studies	Motifs, visual symbolism, calligraphy, Islamic identity	Less focus on how Islamic meanings are transmitted through practice
Craft sustainability studies	Authenticity, livelihood, regional identity, continuity	Less focus on spiritual and ethical knowledge embedded in craft learning
Islamic art education studies	Islamic values through creative activities	Often focused on training or education, less on heritage apprenticeship
Digital preservation studies	Documentation, archiving, visibility	Risk of reducing heritage to visual data and losing inner meaning
Knowledge management studies	Tacit-explicit knowledge conversion	Often secular and organizational, less Islamic epistemological framing

Research on Malay-Islamic art has primarily examined visual elements such as motifs, calligraphy, symbolism, Islamic identity, mosque imagery, and flora-based designs (Abdullah et al., 2021; Sabri et al., 2022; Ahmad et al., 2025). These studies clarify the symbolic meanings in Malay-Islamic artistic expression (Abdullah et al., 2021). For instance, previous research shows that calligraphy, flora motifs, traditional objects, and visual compositions in Malaysian art reflect Malay and Islamic values. However, most focus on the final artwork rather than the process by which Islamic meanings are learned and transmitted between master artisans and learners (Abdullah et al., 2021). This study addresses this gap by exploring the tacit transmission of Islamic values through mentorship, observation, and hands-on practice.

Craft sustainability studies provide valuable insights into authenticity, livelihoods, local identity, regional continuity, and the survival of traditional industries (Kamarudin et al., 2013; Susilasari et al., 2024). For example, research on crafts in Kuala Kangsar shows that traditional craftsmanship endures through inherited techniques, local materials, and community-based production. However, most of the literature focuses on cultural and economic sustainability, overlooking the spiritual and ethical knowledge embedded in craft learning. This study contributes by framing handicraft as Islamic civilisational knowledge, not merely a cultural or economic product.

Studies in Islamic art education suggest that creative activity can be used to promote Islamic values, religious understanding and spiritual consciousness (Hasanah et al., 2025; Susilasari et al., 2024; Zaini & Rahmatullah, 2022). Handicraft activities can for example expose learners to tawhid, Islamic beauty, religious creativity and spiritual remembrance through direct engagement with the material, form and meaning. This is compatible with the Quranic perspective that nature is not simply a physical environment but a domain of signs that invite human beings to ponder the wisdom and purpose of Allah's creation (Kamarudin et al., 2013).

In Malay craft traditions, motifs are often taken from the natural environment because flora, geometry, rhythm and organic forms are understood to be reflections of divine order rather than mere decorative patterns (Hasanah et al., 2025). This is in line with the Quranic verse in Surah Ali 'Imran 3:191, which describes the people of understanding as those who remember Allah and ponder the creation of the heavens and the earth, affirming that creation was not without purpose.

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ
فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

“Those who remember Allah [while] standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], ‘Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You [above such a thing]’”

However, the majority of the literature on the education of Islamic art is focused on short-term training, creative workshops, or classroom-based activities. Heritage apprenticeships, which transmit Islamic values through repetition, discipline, correction, observation, and master–apprentice relationships, have received less attention (Abdullah et al., 2021; Hasanah et al., 2025; Kamarudin et al., 2013). This study addresses this gap by connecting learning in Islamic art to the transfer of tacit knowledge in heritage craft communities. Islamic craft learning, then, is not just about creating beautiful objects but about the progressive formation of adab, patience, responsibility, humility, and spiritual awareness through embodied practice.

Digital preservation studies are relevant to the extent that they concern documentation, archiving, visibility, and digital access to heritage materials. Digital preservation, however, usually treats heritage as images, videos, databases or visual records. Such methods may however preserve only the external appearance of the craft and not its inner meaning, spiritual intention, adab or embodied discipline. The research thus proposes a hybrid preservation model that harnesses digital technology to support documentation and access, while placing tarbiyyah, adab and human mentorship at the heart of the transmission of Islamic craft knowledge.

Digitisation, Digital Preservation and Digital Knowledge Transfer

Within the scope of this study, digitisation, digital preservation and digital knowledge transfer perform different functions. Digitisation concerns the conversion or capture of heritage knowledge into digital forms such as images, video documentation, 3D scans, motif databases and oral-history records. Digital preservation concerns retaining and organising these digital representations so that explicit, visual and procedural dimensions of the craft remain accessible. Digital knowledge transfer goes further by considering whether those digital representations actually support learning and the movement of knowledge between artisans, protégés, institutions and communities.

The distinction is important for tacit knowledge. The socialisation process of the SECI model represents tacit-to-tacit transfer through shared experience, observation, imitation and practice. Digital video and oral-history records can support this process by making demonstrations and narratives available for repeated observation, but they do not reproduce direct bodily engagement, sensory judgement, correction, workshop etiquette or the moral relationship between master and apprentice. By contrast, when artisans explain motif meanings, demonstrate production sequences or record narratives, selected parts of their tacit knowledge are externalised into explicit forms that can be stored in databases, archives, photographs, videos or 3D records.

Accordingly, the study does not treat all craft knowledge as equally suitable for codification. Motif names and meanings, materials, production steps, product images, cultural identity, oral histories and visible procedures can be documented where appropriate. Hand pressure, sensory judgement, rhythm, embodied correction, spiritual intention, adab, tarbiyyah and the relational dimensions of apprenticeship remain less fully representable in written or digital records. Digital technology is therefore positioned as support for documentation, access and selected tacit-to-explicit externalisation, while living apprenticeship remains central to tacit-to-tacit knowledge transfer.

Finally, the studies of knowledge management provide useful theories such as tacit-explicit knowledge conversion, SECI model, Transactive Memory Theory. However, these theories are mostly used in secular organisational settings and seldom integrated with Islamic epistemology. In this study, knowledge conversion is not understood as a mere process of converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge but as a reflective and ethical process through which artisans internalise skill, meaning, discipline and spiritual consciousness. The artisan can thus be placed as the *Ulul Albab*, or people of understanding, in the sense that they not only acquire technical skill, but also reflect on creation, preserve the inherited wisdom and embody the spiritual awareness in the craft practice. This is in line with Surah Az-Zumar 39:9 “Are those who know equal to those who do not know?” and affirms that only people of understanding will take heed.

أَمَّنْ هُوَ قَتَّ عَانَاءَ اللَّيْلِ سَاجِدًا وَقَائِمًا يَحْذَرُ الْآخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُوا رَحْمَةَ رَبِّهِ ۗ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ۗ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولَٰئِكَ أَلَّا يَتَذَكَّرُوا ۚ

Is one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night, prostrating and standing [in prayer], fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord, [like one who does not]? Say, “Are those who know equal to those who do not know?” Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding.

Overall, the reviewed literature suggests that Islamic art, digital preservation and knowledge management each offer useful insights into handicraft heritage, but not enough to be considered in isolation. Studies of Islamic art explain the spiritual and aesthetic meanings in craft, studies

of digital preservation aid documentation and access, and theories of knowledge management explain the transfer of tacit and explicit knowledge.

However, little attention has been paid to integrate the three domains into a culturally and spiritually grounded framework for the protection of Nusantara Islamic handicraft heritage. This paper fills this gap, advancing an Islamic tacit knowledge transfer perspective where the preservation of handicraft is not just the preservation of objects, motifs or digital records but the transfer of Islamic civilisational knowledge through mentorship, embodied practice, tarbiyyah, adab and reflective understanding across generations.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a qualitative multiple case study design to investigate how Islamic civilizational knowledge is preserved and transmitted through Nusantara handicraft heritage. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture tacit, embodied, spiritual, and value-based knowledge not accessible through quantitative methods. Participants, selected through purposive sampling, included master artisans, protégés, craft trainers, heritage agency officers, and Islamic art or cultural experts. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews addressed craft learning, mentorship, Islamic values, motif meanings, preservation challenges, and digital documentation.

Observations in workshops focused on hand movements, tool use, material handling, correction, repetition, workshop etiquette, and the tacit transmission of adab, amanah, ihsan, and tarbiyyah. Document analysis covered craft catalogues, institutional reports, training materials, photographs, motif descriptions, and heritage documentation. Data were analysed thematically using deductive and inductive coding. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, thick description, audit trails, and researcher reflexivity. Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, respectful documentation of sacred motifs or inscriptions, and secure data handling.

Data Analysis and Findings

Interview Excerpts

One source states that Muslim artisans should follow Islamic teachings in their craft skills, activities, and products, and that artistic skill cannot be separated from sharia-oriented values in craft production.

“When we make a craft, it is not only about making the object look beautiful... Before starting, the heart must be right... Correct your Nawaitu that you are going to produce a craft for legacy continuity. Not just for money... Then we must respect the material, the motif, and the knowledge given by our elders. If the work carries Islamic writing or traditional motifs, we cannot treat it carelessly..because we are using Quranic verse.. The hand must be patient, have adab. That is how the younger ones can learn... not only by listening, but by watching how we work.” (MA5)

This shows that craft knowledge is more than technical skill. The participant links beauty, intention, respect and proper behaviour, suggesting that Islamic values are embedded into the craft process. The reference to “watching how we work” supports the assertion that values such

as niyyah, adab and ihsan are transmitted implicitly through watching and apprenticeship rather than through formal teaching. This is in line with the argument that Muslim artisanship is not only utilitarian, but also carries Islamic visual and ethical meaning.

“At first, I thought I was only learning the technique... how to carve, shape, or arrange the pattern. But after learning with the master, I realized every motif has meaning. Some patterns remind us of nature, some remind us of Allah’s creation, and some teach patience. The master always says that if we rush, the work loses its soul. So, I learned that craft is not only skill... it is also discipline and remembrance.”(PR3)

This quotation supports the interpretation of the tacit knowledge transfer of handicraft learning as based on tarbiyyah. The protégé initially sees craft as technical training, but under mentorship, starts to see its symbolic, spiritual and ethical aspects. The phrase “the work loses its soul” is particularly useful in that it summarises the article’s main argument: that digital or technical reproduction may retain outer form, but not the inner meaning of the craft.

It also resonates with the literature of Islamic art education that reveals how craft activities can serve as a way to introduce tawhid, Islamic beauty, spiritual remembrance and religious understanding through hands-on creative practice

Observations Analysis

Three major patterns were revealed in the observation of craft practice. First, handicraft knowledge was transferred through embodied learning. Apprentices learned by watching, imitating, repeating and being corrected by the master artisan. Second, Islamic values were embedded in the craft process through adab, amanah, and ihsan, as exemplified by the respectful treatment of tools, materials, motifs, and sacred inscriptions, and by an emphasis on patience, precision, and refinement. Third, mentorship was an important mechanism for the preservation of tacit Islamic knowledge, the master artisan instilled not only technical skill, but also discipline, ethical conduct, and understanding of meaning.

Digital documentation can record visual procedures, but, cannot fully capture hand sensitivity, spiritual intention, workshop etiquette, or the moral relationship between master and apprentice. Hence, the observation supports the argument that the heritage of Nusantara handicrafts requires digital preservation and the continuation of tarbiyyah-based apprenticeships.

Table 4: Observations Analysis

Observation Theme	Key Observation	Interpretation
Embodied craft learning	Apprentices learned through observation, imitation, repetition, and correction.	Craft knowledge is tacit and requires direct practice.
Islamic values in practice	Respect, patience, careful handling of materials, and pursuit of refinement were observed.	Adab, amanah, and ihsan are embedded in the craft process.
Mentorship and preservation	Master artisans guided both skill and attitude, while digital tools captured only visible procedures.	Tarbiyyah-based mentorship remains essential for preserving Islamic tacit knowledge.

Islamic values were embedded in the practice of handicraft in both the visible and invisible dimensions as demonstrated in Table 4. The visible dimensions were motifs, tools, materials, calligraphy, and craft objects. The unseen dimensions were intention, respect, discipline, correction, patience and the moral relationship between master artisan and apprentice. The observation affirms that the heritage of Nusantara handicrafts cannot be confined to physical artefacts or technical procedures. Rather, it functions as a living system of Islamic tacit knowledge in which the practice of craft serves as a medium for the transmission of worldview, ethics, spirituality, and civilisational memory.

Document Review Analysis

Selected heritage-related materials were analysed, including craft catalogues, institutional brochures, training documents, exhibition descriptions, visual records, product labels, and digital promotional materials. The analysis, shown in Table 6, showed that these documents often addressed visible and explicit aspects of handicraft heritage, such as types of craft, motifs, materials, production steps, product images, and cultural identity. The Islamic elements were often presented in the form of calligraphy, geometric shapes, floral motifs, Jawi, Asmaul Husna, Quranic verses, and non-figurative decoration.

Table 5: Document Review Analysis

Document Analysed	Element	What Was Commonly Found	What Was Less Visible	Interpretation
Craft catalogues and brochures		Craft types, product images, motif names, cultural identity	Spiritual meanings, Islamic values, tacit learning process	Documents preserve visible heritage but less of inner meaning
Training materials		Tools, materials, basic techniques, production steps	Adab, niyyah, mentorship, correction, embodied discipline	Formal training captures explicit knowledge more than tacit knowledge
Visual records and photographs		Motifs, tools, artisan activities, finished products	Hand pressure, sensory judgment, workshop atmosphere	Visual data supports documentation but cannot fully capture embodied knowing
Digital/social media materials		Promotion, visibility, branding, market appeal	Sacred meaning, tarbiyyah, Islamic epistemological context	Digital platforms may increase visibility but risk simplifying heritage meanings
Product labels/descriptions		Material, design, price, function, origin	Motif philosophy, Islamic symbolism, ethical transmission	Commercial language may reduce craft to product value
Calligraphy and sacred inscriptions		Quranic phrases, Asmaul Husna, Jawi/Arabic script	Explanation of reverence, dhikr, spiritual responsibility	Sacred elements are visible but need contextual interpretation

Table 5 shows that the documents related to heritage primarily capture the visible and explicit dimensions of Nusantara handicraft heritage, such as craft types, motifs, materials, techniques, product images, and cultural identity. However, the implicit and spiritual aspects of craft knowledge, such as niyyah, adab, amanah, ihsan, tarbiyyah, dhikr, hand pressure, sensory judgement, mentorship and workshop etiquette are less explicitly represented. This suggests that documentation is useful for preserving external craft knowledge but inadequate for preserving the deeper Islamic meanings embedded in craft practice. The findings affirm the necessity of a hybrid preservation model that combines digital and institutional documentation with hands-on apprenticeship and value-driven mentorship.

But the documents gave less attention to tacit and spiritual dimensions of craft knowledge. Usually, values such as niyyah, adab, amanah, ihsan, tarbiyyah and dhikr were implied and not explained explicitly. Similarly, it was difficult to capture embodied aspects such as hand pressure, sensory judgement, rhythm, patience, correction and workshop etiquette in written or digital documents. This implies that institutional and digital documentation can be used to preserve the visible form of handicraft heritage, but not fully preserve the Islamic tacit knowledge embedded in apprenticeship and lived practice. The analysis of the documents, therefore, supports the need for a hybrid preservation model that combines digital documentation with tarbiyyah-based mentorship and community-based learning of the craft.

Thematic Analysis

Both deductive and inductive approaches were used in the coding process for thematic analysis. Deductive coding relied on concepts from the literature, such as tawhid, niyyah, adab, amanah, ihsan, tarbiyyah, dhikr, tacit knowledge, mentorship, socialization, and community memory. Inductive coding made it possible for new themes to come from the participants' own experiences. The coding structure of the study was listed in the table below:

Table 6: Themes, codes generated for the study

Main Theme	Codes
Embodied craft knowledge	Hand movement, repetition, sensory judgment, tool handling, material feeling
Islamic value transmission	Niyyah, adab, amanah, ihsan, dhikr, respect, humility
Mentorship and tarbiyyah	Master correction, apprenticeship, modelling behaviour, discipline
Heritage continuity	Authenticity, motif meaning, generational transfer, community identity
Digital preservation limits	Loss of spiritual meaning, visual documentation only, weak transmission of adab
Hybrid preservation	Digital archive, video documentation, oral history, community workshop, institutional support

Table 6 shows the thematic coding structure in this study. The table indicates that the qualitative data were categorised into six broad themes namely embodied craft knowledge, transmission of Islamic values, mentorship and tarbiyyah, continuity of heritage, limits of digital preservation and hybrid preservation. These themes were developed using a combination of inductive and deductive coding. Deductive coding was informed by concepts from the literature, while inductive coding allowed new meanings to emerge from participants' own experiences, field observations and document analysis.

The first theme, embodied craft knowledge, reflects the hands-on and sensory aspect of craft learning. Codes such as hand movement, repetition, sensory judgement, tool handling and material feeling demonstrate that craft knowledge is not just intellectual but also bodily and experiential. This supports the idea that handicraft knowledge is tacit in that it is acquired through doing, observing, correcting and repeating. This is consistent with studies on crafts which show that traditional methods of production require skilful hands, creative judgement and knowledge of materials, especially in crafts such as labu sayong and tekak benang emas.

The second theme is Islamic value transmission. This theme is about the spiritual and ethical values embedded in craft practice. Values such as niyyah, adab, amanah, ihsan, dhikr, respect

and humility suggest that Islamic values are conveyed not only through verbal teaching but also through behaviour, discipline and attitude of the artisan to the craft. This theme is important because it supports the main argument of the study that the Nusantara handicraft heritage preserves Islamic civilisational knowledge, not just technical skill. This view is also corroborated by the literature on Islamic art, which explains that Islamic art has a spiritual meaning, internalises divine and moral values and links visual expression with tawhid and remembrance of Allah .

The third theme, mentorship and tarbiyyah, deals with the role of the master artisan in moulding the apprentice's learning. Codes of master correction, apprenticeship, modelling behaviour and discipline show that craft transmission is through guided practice. The master teaches techniques, but also models patience, respect, responsibility and proper conduct. This makes apprenticeship a form of tarbiyyah, in which learning is not only a matter of skill acquisition but also of moral and spiritual formation.

The fourth theme, heritage continuity, addresses the way craft knowledge is maintained across generations. The codes of authenticity, meaning of motifs, generational transfer and community identity point to the fact that the preservation of handicraft is based on the continuity of meaning, practice and cultural identity. This theme is closely linked with the Malay-Islamic arts traditions, where motifs, calligraphy, floral designs and traditional cultural symbols are the representation of Malay-Muslim identity and world view .

The fifth theme, digital preservation limits, describes the weaknesses of relying only on digital documentation. Codes such as loss of spiritual meaning, visual documentation only and weak transmission of adab indicate that digital tools may capture the external form of craft but are unable to fully document the internal meaning, workshop discipline, spiritual intention and embodied correction involved in apprenticeship. This is important because the study argues that digital preservation should not replace human mentorship.

The last theme and proposed solution is hybrid preservation. Preservation should blend digital tools with traditional apprenticeship, as suggested by codes such as digital archive, video documentation, oral history, community workshop, and institutional support. Digital technologies in the model support documentation and visibility, while tacit knowledge, Islamic values and embodied craft practice are maintained through community-based mentorship.

Table 6 shows, in general, how the study progressed from raw qualitative data to meaningful analytical categories. The coding structure supports the statement that the Nusantara handicraft heritage should be understood as a living system of Islamic tacit knowledge. It also provides the analytical basis for the proposed Islamic Tacit Knowledge Transfer Framework that integrates Islamic values, craft knowledge, mentorship, heritage continuity and hybrid preservation.

Results

Proposed Islamic Tacit Knowledge Transfer Knowledge

Traditional heritage preservation often emphasizes conserving physical objects, visual documentation, institutional support, and commercial sustainability. However, preserving Nusantara handicraft requires a framework beyond artifact conservation and technical training. Traditional handicraft functions as a living Islamic knowledge system embodying spiritual

intention, ethical discipline, embodied skill, and civilizational identity. To ensure deeper Islamic values are transmitted alongside physical techniques, an integrated approach is needed. The proposed framework explains how Islamic civilizational knowledge is embedded and sustained through tacit knowledge mechanisms built on five interconnected components, as illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1: The Proposed Islamic Tacit Knowledge Transfer Framework

At the core of this framework are the worldview and values giving craft practices their foundational meaning. Handicraft is deeply rooted in key Islamic concepts such as tawhid (unity), niyyah (spiritual intention), adab (ethical conduct), amanah (trust), ihsan (excellence), tarbiyyah (formative education), and dhikr (remembrance of Allah). For example, tawhid shapes how artisans conceptualize beauty through non-figurative motifs, geometric patterns, and arabesque forms reflecting divine order. Similarly, ihsan frames craftsmanship as a pursuit of disciplined excellence and spiritual beauty rather than superficial decoration. These values are not separate from the craft; they provide its civilizational significance.

The core mechanism for transmitting this civilizational heritage is the tacit knowledge transfer process. Craft mastery cannot be fully acquired from books, photographs, or videos. It relies on direct bodily engagement, sensory experience, repetition, and master-apprentice interaction. In an Islamic context, this apprenticeship is a form of tarbiyyah where learners absorb patience, humility, responsibility, and excellence through shared participation. This aligns with the socialization stage of the SECI model and Transactive Memory Theory, highlighting tacit transfer as both an embodied learning process and a vital system for community memory.

To navigate modernization and digitalization, a hybrid preservation model is necessary. Digital tools such as 3D scans, motif databases, oral history archives, and video documentation effectively preserve explicit, visual, and procedural dimensions of crafts. However, digital preservation without spiritual grounding risks reducing heritage to mere visual data, stripping it of inner meaning. Therefore, digital tools should strengthen access and institutional memory (explicit knowledge), while living apprenticeship remains the primary vehicle for preserving tacit knowledge, workshop etiquette, and the moral relationship between master and apprentice.

From the digital knowledge management perspective reflected in the findings, the same tools serve different roles depending on the knowledge process. Images, 3D scans and databases primarily digitise and preserve visible or explicit representations. Video documentation and oral-history archives can also support tacit-to-explicit externalisation when artisans demonstrate procedures or articulate meanings and narratives. They may assist tacit learning through repeated observation, but the tacit-to-tacit process remains dependent on shared practice, correction, sensory engagement and master-apprentice interaction. Consequently, codification is most appropriate for visible and articulable elements such as motifs, materials, production steps, product information and recorded narratives, whereas hand sensitivity, sensory judgement, spiritual intention, adab, tarbiyyah and relational workshop knowledge remain dependent on lived practice.

Preservation Outcomes When Islamic civilizational values, tacit transmission, and hybrid support are successfully integrated, handicraft preservation evolves from simply saving objects from disappearance to sustaining an entire knowledge ecology. The ultimate outcomes of this framework include the preservation of Islamic identity, the continuity of Nusantara handicraft knowledge, the transmission of ethical craftsmanship, and a meaningful contribution to the cultural identity and civilizational memory of the global ummah.

Conclusion

The research concluded that the Nusantara handicraft heritage is not only a cultural product or art tradition, but a living system of Islamic tacit knowledge. Through mentorship, observation, repetition and hands-on practice, artisans pass on not just technical skills but Islamic values such as tawhid, niyyah, adab, amanah, ihsan, tarbiyyah and dhikr. The findings demonstrate that these values are embedded in the visible dimensions of craft (motifs, materials, calligraphy and artefacts) and invisible dimensions (intention, discipline, sensory judgement, ethical conduct and spiritual meaning). Digital documentation is useful but not sufficient, the research also suggests. Digital tools can archive images, procedures, motifs and product information, but they cannot fully present the embodied, ethical and spiritual dimensions of learning craft. Accordingly, this study proposed an Islamic Tacit Knowledge Transfer Framework that integrates digital preservation with tarbiyyah-based apprenticeship and community-based mentorship. The main contribution of this study is to re-conceptualise the Nusantara handicraft heritage as a medium to preserve the Islamic civilisational knowledge. So preservation must protect not only craft objects but the relationships, values, practices and meanings through which Islamic knowledge is passed down through generations. The proposed framework can be utilised to different Nusantara craft traditions in future research and explore how digital tools can be designed to support, not replace, the transmission of Islamic tacit knowledge.

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