

“Seek Knowledge from the Cradle to the Grave”: Islamic Educational Philosophy as a Driver for Community-Based Early Childhood Education

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Abstract. Despite growing recognition of early childhood education's (ECE) importance, rural communities in post-conflict settings often lack access to quality ECE services. This study examines how Islamic educational philosophy inspired and sustained a community-driven ECE initiative in rural North Aceh, Indonesia, following decades of conflict and natural disaster. This research investigated the sources of inspiration that motivated a rural Muslim community to establish and operate a community-based early childhood education centre, with particular focus on how religious values catalysed collective action for educational development. An ethnographic case study approach was employed in Gampong Blang, North Aceh, involving observations, interviews, and document analysis with 27 participants including community members, village stakeholders, and educators. Data were analysed through Al-Attas' concepts of *ta'dib* (ethical education) and *adab* (proper conduct reflecting social consciousness). The Islamic principle “seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave” served as a powerful catalyst for community mobilisation, inspiring villagers to transform their traditional *meunasah* (Islamic community centre) into a modern ECE facility. Al-Attas' educational philosophy, emphasising the balance between *ilmu* (knowledge) and *adab* (moral character), resonated with local aspirations for holistic child development. The community successfully integrated religious values with contemporary educational practices, creating culturally responsive pedagogy that honoured both Islamic teachings and local traditions. This study demonstrates how religious educational philosophy can effectively motivate grassroots educational initiatives in Muslim communities. The findings suggest that ECE development in Islamic contexts benefits from approaches that integrate spiritual and academic learning, challenging purely secular early childhood education models. The research offers insights for developing culturally responsive ECE programs that respect local values while meeting contemporary educational standards

Keywords: *Islamic education, early childhood education, community-based education, ta'dib.*

Abstrak. Meskipun signifikansi pendidikan anak usia dini semakin diakui, masyarakat pedesaan di daerah pasca-konflik seringkali tidak memiliki akses terhadap layanan PAUD yang berkualitas. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana filosofi pendidikan Islam menginspirasi dan mendukung inisiatif PAUD berbasis masyarakat di pedesaan Aceh Utara, Indonesia, setelah berhadapan dengan bencana alam serta konflik selama beberapa dekade. Penelitian ini mengkaji sumber inspirasi yang memotivasi masyarakat Muslim pedesaan untuk mendirikan dan mengoperasikan pusat pendidikan anak usia dini berbasis masyarakat, dengan fokus khusus pada bagaimana nilai-nilai agama mengkatalisasi aksi kolektif untuk pengembangan pendidikan. Pendekatan studi kasus etnografi diterapkan di Gampong Blang, Aceh Utara, melibatkan observasi, wawancara,

dan analisis dokumen dengan 27 partisipan termasuk anggota masyarakat, pemangku kepentingan desa, dan pendidik. Data dianalisis melalui konsep Al-Attas tentang *ta'dib* (pendidikan etis) dan *adab* (perilaku yang mencerminkan kesadaran sosial). Prinsip Islam “tuntutlah ilmu dari buaian hingga liang lahat” berfungsi sebagai katalisator yang kuat untuk mobilisasi masyarakat, menginspirasi warga untuk mengubah *meunasah* tradisional (pusat komunitas Islam) mereka menjadi fasilitas PAUD modern. Filosofi pendidikan Al-Attas, yang menekankan keseimbangan antara *ilmu* (pengetahuan) dan *adab* (karakter moral), beresonansi dengan aspirasi lokal untuk perkembangan anak yang holistik. Masyarakat berhasil mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai agama dengan praktik pendidikan kontemporer, menciptakan pedagogi yang responsive dan adaptif terhadap ajaran Islam dan tradisi lokal. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bagaimana filosofi pendidikan agama dapat secara efektif memotivasi inisiatif pendidikan akar rumput di komunitas Muslim. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pengembangan PAUD dalam konteks Islam mendapatkan manfaat dari pendekatan yang mengintegrasikan pembelajaran spiritual dan akademik, menantang model pendidikan anak usia dini yang murni namun sekuler. Penelitian ini menawarkan wawasan untuk mengembangkan program PAUD yang responsif budaya dan menghormati nilai-nilai lokal sambil memenuhi standar pendidikan kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Islam, pendidikan anak usia dini, pendidikan berbasis masyarakat, *ta'dib*.

Introduction

Aceh is an autonomous province (*otonomi khusus*) within Indonesia, located at the northern tip of Sumatra Island. According to Statistics Indonesia (Indonesian State Statistics Agency), Aceh has a population of 5,482,530, with approximately 98% of the population identified as Muslims (Statistics Indonesia, 2024). Aceh is historically the first region in Indonesia to embrace Islam and hence is referred to as the ‘Verandah of Mecca’ (*Serambi Mekkah*). Since 2001, the province has been granted special autonomy law that provides it with the right to enforce sharia law, albeit under limited circumstances. Sharia implementation has also reached the education sector through the LoGA (2006). The law elucidates that, although the Aceh Education System is part of the National Education System, it may incorporate Islamic values based on the holy Qur’an and Hadith. Because the community and the ECE are situated in a deeply Islamic context, it is not possible to ignore their local values when conceptualising them.

The province’s recent history has been marked by profound disruption. The Free Aceh Movement (GAM) rebellion (1976-2005) and the catastrophic 2004 tsunami that claimed over 221,000 lives created conditions that ultimately accelerated educational transformation initiatives (Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2014). In post-conflict Aceh,

education has emerged as a critical mechanism for social transformation, addressing historical inequities whilst fostering peaceful development.

Additionally, traditional Islamic education institutions such as *dayahs* and *meunasahs* have been tremendously influential in rural Aceh for centuries. These institutions teach Islam’s fundamental pillars and foster spiritual consciousness aimed at creating ‘good’ individuals (Alfian. I. T, 1977; Badruzzaman, 2022; Wahid, 2013). The *meunasah*—serving as a place of worship, community gathering space, cultural centre, dispute resolution venue, and centre for children’s religious education—has been integral to village life (Badruzzaman, 2022; Wahid, 2015). These principles align well with Al-Attas’ perspective of *ta’dib*. The notion of creating ‘good’ individuals entails the development of the full potential of human beings through the positive actualisation of the soul, desire, intellect, and heart (Al-Attas, 1989, 2023). Through Al-Attas’ concept of *ta’dib*, the researcher explains how the local community gains inspiration and aspiration for their early childhood education (ECE), particularly how the community endeavours to instil good moral values in children, as well as the concept of ‘good people’ they hope to achieve through ECE.

The Islamic education concept of Al-Attas, called *ta’dib*, represents the influence of Islamic traditions in teaching and learning, which views education as creating a balance between *ilmu* (knowledge) and *adab* (moral character and proper conduct) (Al-Attas, 1997). This concept aligns closely with traditional Islamic education philosophy in Aceh, where the fundamentals emphasise that knowledge alone is insufficient to build a sound and balanced individual. A perceived imbalance occurs when an individual has sufficient knowledge but lacks *adab*, or conversely, when an individual has *adab* but lacks knowledge. This philosophy is based on the Islamic Prophet Muhammad’s saying: “I have not been sent as a Messenger except to perfect character (*akhlaq*).”

Ta’dib education, rooted in the Qur’an, emphasises a balance between reasoning (*aqliyah*) and spirituality and faith (*ruhiyah*), aiming to create a civilised, humane, and moral human being through character development and the acquisition of moral and social manners (Al-Attas, 1979). Al-Attas identifies *adab* as the core concept of education in Islam and the purpose of seeking knowledge. According to Al-Attas (1997), *adab* as a framework focuses on character building and acquiring moral and social manners from within society whilst championing societal principles. Essential elements include concepts such as religion (*deen*), humanity (*insan*), knowledge (*ilm* and *ma’rifah*), wisdom (*hikmah*), justice (*‘adl*), and right actions (*‘amal*).

Crucially, Al-Attas believes that *adab* must be possessed in an inclusive sense, encompassing both spiritual and material life. A good human being with *adab* must be conscious of their obligations to themselves, their family, and society. Through the actualisation of good natural disposition consisting of the soul (*ruh*), the desires (*nafs*), the intellect (*aql*), and the heart (*qalb*), individual perfection is achieved (*insan kaamil*). This *insan adabi* (good individual) is one who is conscious of the relationship between himself or herself and society (Al-Attas, 1985, 1997), and through this actualisation, can create a good and just society.

This study applies Al-Attas’ concepts of *ta’dib* and *adab* to explain how the local community in Gampong Blang gained inspiration and aspiration for their ECE initiative, particularly examining how the community endeavours to instil good moral values in children and the concept of ‘good people’ they hope to achieve through ECE. The influence of Islamic teaching, combined with local *adat* traditions, provides the framework for understanding the community’s actions in establishing their educational initiative.

This study highlights the values and beliefs of the community that become catalysts for ECE that respects the local context, specifically Islamic values. Therefore, highlighting East African experiences of ECE situated in an Islamic setting is relevant. In several East African countries, including Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, the Madrasah Early Childhood Development Program was launched in the 1980s. From its beginnings in Kenya in 1986, the Madrassa Resource Centres (MRC) program was expanded to Tanzania in 1990 and Uganda in 1993 (Mwaura et al., 2008). The madrassa ECE was developed to allow disadvantaged Muslim communities in East Africa to access ECE services. According to Mwaura and Marfo (2011), the design of *madrassa* ECE is tailored to meet the specific needs and expectations of local Muslim communities for education that provides children with academic skills for later schooling whilst incorporating cultural and Islamic values.

In the context of Aceh, following the tsunami disaster in 2004 that ended decades of conflict in Aceh, the Acehnese people looked to education to play a transformative role (Barron et al., 2013). Furthermore, with the introduction of the village budget policy in 2014—the government’s new policy that allows villages to receive and manage their own budgets—villages can now choose how to spend the budget. Interestingly, the researcher noted that more and more communities are investing in community-supported ECE initiatives. While studies on post-disaster educational initiatives in Aceh

exist (Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2014), a significant research gap remains regarding how rural communities have reconfigured traditional institutions to meet contemporary educational needs. Developing a better understanding of community-driven ECE, such as that in Gampong Blang (a pseudonym), North Aceh, is imperative. Understanding the drivers of community engagement in ECE programs is essential for the area’s future ECE development.

Methodology

This research employed an ethnographic case study approach in Gampong Blang, a village in North Aceh Regency. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis involving participants, namely community members, village stakeholders, and educators.

Based on Creswell’s definition of ethnographic case studies (Cresswell, 2013), ethnographic case studies examine individuals, events, activities, or processes from a cultural perspective. The study population is comprised of community members who are directly involved in ECE in Gampong Blang, North Aceh. These include village stakeholders, parents, and educators. A purposeful sampling method was employed for selecting participants in order to reflect diverse perspectives relevant to the research question. There were 27 interviews conducted with community members until saturation was reached and no new themes emerged.

This approach respected the context in its exploration of village community members’ sources of inspiration and aspirations for their ECE. Interviews and informal conversations were analysed to produce the findings. Additionally, the researcher observed various activities in the village and supported findings with relevant documents. To maintain confidentiality, participants are identified using pseudonyms and codes: SH (stakeholder) and CM (community member), with numbers indicating the interview sequence. Key community leaders are identified by pseudonyms (e.g., village chief). In this ethnographic case study, as the researcher, I was an integral part of the data collection.

My positionality as a researcher required careful consideration. As an Acehnese from a rural background with fluency in the local language, I occupied what (Subedi, 2006) terms a “halfie” researcher position—simultaneously insider and outsider. While my cultural background facilitated initial access, establishing trust and demonstrating

genuine research intentions remained essential. My insider status as an Acehnese Muslim provided cultural understanding and linguistic competence, yet also carried potential biases given my own Islamic upbringing. To address these concerns, I maintained reflexive awareness by regularly examining my assumptions and preconceptions. My outsider status as a university researcher initially created caution amongst participants, requiring time to establish rapport and demonstrate genuine rather than extractive research aims. I navigated this dual positioning by being transparent about my background whilst maintaining analytical rigour.

Using data from multiple sources ensures the rigor of the data (Cresswell, 2013). According to (von Benda-Beckmann, 2002), various sources, methods, theories and instruments ensure and enhance the validity and reliability of a study. Sources of data for this study included observation, field notes, interview recordings, and official documents obtained from teachers, parents, and village stakeholders. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 27 participants until saturation was reached and no new themes emerged. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Participant observations were conducted of various activities in the village, with detailed field notes recorded to capture community dynamics and educational practices. Document analysis examined relevant materials that supported the research findings.

Furthermore, the researcher used several strategies to enhance the validity of the research, including member checks (showing tentative interpretations to participants), long-term observations, peer review, and addressing researcher biases (Merriam, 1998). These validation strategies were implemented throughout the research process to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

The data analysis included the following activities: managing and organising the data, reading all of the texts (transcriptions, field notes, and documents), describing the case in context, developing themes, using direct interpretation, and presenting an in-depth picture of the case (Cresswell, 2013). The analysis process began with organising and familiarising myself with all collected data through careful reading of transcriptions, field notes, and documents. Categories obtained from the coding process were merged to establish relationships between different conceptual themes. Coding was conducted systematically to identify patterns and meanings within the data, with particular attention to how participants articulated their motivations and values regarding ECE

establishment. These themes were identified and analysed within the theoretical framework.

The data are analysed through Al-Attas' concept of *ta'dib* and *adab*. The Islamic perspective of Al-Attas is an apt lens for viewing the religious community in Aceh and its education institutions, particularly what drives the community to establish ECE. Al-Attas' concept emphasises the responsibilities that good Muslims have towards their families and society as a whole. *Insan adabi* (good individual) is one who is conscious of the relationship between himself or herself and society (Al-Attas, 1985, 1997). This theoretical framework guided the analytical interpretation of how religious educational philosophy manifested in the community's collective action toward establishing their ECE initiative.

Results and Discussion

This section provides insights into the ways values and norms shape individual and communal thought and behaviour within Acehnese society. In particular, it provides insights into how values shape the Gampong Blang community's thought and practice. Values and norms play an important role in shaping individual and communal behaviour. Particularly within Acehnese society, Islam plays a significant role (Adriany & Saefullah, 2015). In addition, Aceh, like other parts of the country, has a rich culture reflected in local traditions and customs called *adat*.

Across the world, Islam is embraced by very diverse and heterogeneous societies, allowing for a dialectical process between Islamic values and local contexts. Such contextualisation of Islam allows for proper religious understanding in those communities (Al-Attas, 1997; Ali, 2017; Roqib, 2011). Islamic civilisation did not develop in a vacuum or isolated from the local environment. Islamic philosophy encourages Muslims to engage with diversity and allows acculturation, as seen in Acehnese society. The Qur'an explains:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (Qur'an 49:13)

In Acehnese society, the philosophy '*Adat bak po teemeurehom, Hukom bak Syiah Kuala*' is the foundation of life view, attitudes, and values. According to this philosophy,

derived from the seventeenth-century Acehnesse Kingdom, the rulers are responsible for *adat*, whilst ulama are responsible for law. *Adat* constitutes norms, codes of behaviour, and guidance passed down over generations, and traditional institutions serve as a moral compass and law for the people. For Acehnesse, *adat* must be compatible with Islam and, therefore, all traditional laws in *adat* are primarily in accordance with Islam. As a result of the intertwining of Islam and local customs, Acehnesse society has a conception of values that is both consistent with Islam and *adat*. Another important Acehnesse philosophy is '*hukom ngeun adat lage zat ngeun sifeut*', which means that law and tradition are akin to the body and soul (Basri, 2010; Nazamuddin & Mahmud, 2010).

This study shows the deep interconnection between *adat* and Islam in Acehnesse rural communities. The term *adat* derives from Arabic and encompasses a mixture of cultures, traditions, and traditional law (von Benda-Beckmann, 2002). In Southeast Asia, *adat* refers to ethnic values, customs, and legal institutions relating to family, kinship, ritual, communal responsibility, and conflict resolution (Taufiki, 2020). As a result of Acehnesse adherence to Islamic laws, Islam and *adat* are an integral aspect of society, and *adat* is often considered part of local religious traditions (Srimulyani, 2010).

This interconnection also creates continuity and harmony within society, not restricted to religious rituals. For instance, *Peusijek*, derived from the Aceh language, literally means “to cool down” or “cooling down”. This is a procession that is part of most Acehnesse events, such as weddings, moving into a new house, migrating to Mecca or going on the pilgrimage, signing an end to hostility or reconciliation, or graduating or being promoted (Dhuhri, 2016).

The researchers contend that the amalgamation of Islam and local culture in ritual indicates successful acculturation between Islam and *adat*, leading to the continuity of peaceful rural Acehnesse lives. Islamic presence does not automatically result in the disappearance of local culture. In contrast, some of these cultural features are still practised by a society influenced by Islamic elements (Alfian. I. T, 1977).

As a result of this process, local cultures and Islam are assimilated, creating local religious traditions in Acehnesse society. The value system based on *adat* is in synergy with Islamic values, and this synergy shapes the pattern of social relations amongst individuals and between individuals and traditional institutions within Acehnesse society. According to Al-Attas (1997), through the actualisation of good natural disposition consisting of the soul (*ruh*), the desires (*nafs*), the intellect (*aql*), and

the heart (*qalb*), individual perfection (a good human being) is achieved (*insan kaamil*). A good human being will then be able to create a good and just society.

According to Al-Attas, *adab* as a framework should focus on the process of character building and the acquiring of moral and social manners from within society and for championing societal principles (Al-Attas, 1997, 2013). The influence of Islamic teaching can be put forward in understanding the actions of the community in Gampong Blang. As a result of their unique history and social reality, Acehnese values are derived from both Islamic teaching and local traditions (*adat*).

Islam stresses the pivotal role of education in personal development, and seeking knowledge is a sacred duty and obligation for every Muslim. As the Qur'an explains in various verses: "Read! In the name of the Lord" (Qur'an 96:1). "God will exalt those who believe amongst you, and those who have been granted knowledge to high ranks" (Qur'an 58:11). "And say: My Lord, increase me in knowledge" (Qur'an 20:114).

Human beings must possess a sense of piety whilst continually striving to improve all aspects of their lives (Al-Attas, 1995, 1999). The community in Gampong Blang acknowledges the importance of education in Islam. As stated by one of the village stakeholders, "The first verse of Qur'an to be revealed is the verse called *Iqra*, which means to read, so we need to learn throughout our life, and we need to honour people with knowledge" (SH6).

The village Imam also explained:

We need to be lifelong learners and to seek knowledge throughout our life. Seeking knowledge is a religious obligation to be conducted continuously, as we have always heard, a famous Muslim proverb said that says: "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave". (SH4)

In addition to encouraging young people to pursue education in *dayah* and university, the village community provides education initiatives in the village for adults and children, demonstrating its commitment to education. According to the village secretary:

Many of our young people are in Islamic boarding schools, and more and more young people enrol in university. We in Gampong Blang are also very eager to support education in the village from '*pengajian*' (religious lessons) for our adult population to the ECE in *meunasah* for our children. (SH03)

This value embedded within the Acehnese rural community is arguably one of the factors that contributes to their high regard for and interest in education. Despite the

tsunami disaster in 2004, the armed conflict between 1976 and 2005, and local political turmoil (after 2005), one tangible outcome remains a source of optimism (Naylor, 2014). Although Aceh is one of the most impoverished regions of Indonesia with an economic growth rate of only 1.65% in 2014, far below the national average growth rate of 5.02% (Badan Pusat Statistik dan Bappeda Aceh, 2004; World Bank, 2009), the literacy and school enrolment rates are consistently higher than most other regions as well as the national average rate (Naylor, 2014; Statistics Indonesia 2017). Participation in primary school reached 99.36% in 2012, 94.34% in secondary school, and 74.59% in high school, higher than the national average. The respective participation rates put Aceh at second, sixth, and fourth places out of 33 Indonesian provinces (Statistic Indonesia Aceh, 2017). The researchers have considered Islamic teaching about the importance of education as one of the motivations and contributing factors.

In addition, through the incorporation of Acehnese tradition and values, education must also create a balance between *ilmu* (knowledge) and *adab* (good behaviour, good etiquette, and morals) (Al-Attas, 1997). Al-Attas believes that *adab* must be possessed in the inclusive sense, encompassing spiritual and material life. As described previously, Islam also emphasises the need for social piety, in which Muslims must take responsibility for community issues. The Imam in Gampong Blang explained that their worship and preparation for the afterlife does not mean an individual can neglect family and community.

He stated:

Islam is a religion that seeks to balance life in this world and the afterlife. It guides us at every step of life, from the cradle to the grave. It guides our rituals and our *muamallah* (trade/the way to earn a living). It must go hand in hand. (SH4)

A good human being with *adab* must be conscious of their obligations to themselves, their family, and society. Al-Attas' *adab* concept emphasises that a good individual (*insan adabi*) is one who is conscious of the relationship between himself and his society (Al-Attas, 1985, 1997).

The village youth chief stressed:

As Muslims, we need to balance '*hablumminallah*' (relationship with God or religious matters) and '*hablumminnas*' (relationship with other people or social responsibilities) as we have learnt. I think we cannot only pray in *meunasah* but neglect our responsibilities as community members. We need to contribute to the community and develop our village as well. (SH9)

I argue that Al-Attas’ concepts of *ta’dib* and *adab* represent the influence of Islamic traditions that drive community members who are aware of community issues, such as the lack of ECE access in the village. This awareness is one of the catalysts that drives, motivates, and raises consciousness amongst community members in Gampong Blang because Islam is a religion based on solidarity (Engineer, 1987) . Through collective engagement as *umat* (derived from the Arabic word *ummah*, meaning Muslim community), Muslims enact Islamic faith by improving social conditions. This rural community attempted to improve their conditions, particularly for the future of the children, by establishing an ECE centre in their village, as stated by one of the community members: “This (ECE) is for the future of our children, we need it...” (CM6). The village ECE centre originated through the collective engagement of the entire community, as described earlier in this chapter.

Furthermore, embedded values within the community also act as a catalyst that raises people’s awareness of action. The amalgamation of concepts underpinning Islam and local traditions, such as the importance of education, the expression of social piety, and the solidarity of the villagers to improve their condition, is arguably the catalyst for the flourishing of the community’s consciousness that led to the ECE initiative in the village.

Tensions and Complexities

While this study focuses on community consensus around ECE establishment, it is important to acknowledge that the integration of religious and cultural values in Acehese society is not without tensions. The Sharia laws currently being implemented in Aceh have been the subject of lively discussions and debates within Acehese society (Fikri, n.d.; Parawati, 2025; Shadiqin, 2010). One of the issues pertains to the fact that the central government granted the current Sharia regulation to the province as part of its attempt to quell the separatist movement (Kholiq, 2016). The Acehese believe that they already have Sharia law dating back to their time as a kingdom in the sixteenth century, when Sharia law co-existed with the local culture and customs (Ali Geno Berutu, 2016; Astuti, 2017). Additionally, a previous study indicates that Sharia regulation can be mis-used by local politicians to push populist political agendas (Akmal, 2023). For example, a law prohibiting a man and woman from riding together was passed by the mayor of Lhokseumawe, and this law was met with public uproar (Taufiki, 2020).

Most pressing is the perception that Sharia-based regulations are being implemented by the government in a discriminatory manner. A previous research reveals that such implementation directly affects the poor, whereas the upper class, rich and well connected, are able to evade Sharia law’s punishment (Surbakti, 2010). Women appear to face greater discrimination in the current interpretation and practice of Sharia law in Aceh (Afrianty, 2015), although historical evidence shows that women are positioned with dignity and respect. For instance, Aceh reached the peak of its glory under women’s leadership during the sultanate era (Inayatillah et al., 2022).

These developments of state Sharia regulations also stand in stark contrast to Aceh’s long history of matrifocality (Srimulyani, 2010; Srimulyani, 2015). Moreover, the Acehese socio-political fabric has maintained a complex power balance within its society for centuries. In Aceh’s rural villages, power is held collectively by the village chief (*keuchik*), the council of eight elders and the Imam of *meunasah*, all of whom are democratically elected representatives of the people (Firdaus, 2025; Munandar, 2025). These three bodies share authority, working collaboratively in administrating the villages and maintaining their structures. Despite these broader tensions within Acehese society, the ECE initiative in Gampong Blang appeared to benefit from the traditional collaborative governance structure, where consensus-building across different village authorities facilitated the project’s success.

Implications for Early Childhood Education Practice

The discussion has shown that the values of the community and its everyday life are closely associated with Islam and *adat*, which are inseparable and compatible. This understanding is essential to comprehend the motivation behind ECE establishment in the village. This inspiration is also related to their aspirations to implement in the ECE teaching and learning process. The main point emerging is the need to incorporate character education into the teaching and learning process. Community members, including parents and educators, agreed that character education must focus on children’s behavioural development or Islamic values-based character education.

There are two categories of knowledge in the Islamic approach to education: revealed knowledge acquired through religious sciences and acquired knowledge obtained through rational, intellectual, and philosophical sciences. Knowledge is holistic from an Islamic perspective. Both types of knowledge contribute to faith strengthening.

Islamic beliefs hold that human beings have the intellectual capacity to comprehend the truth without neglecting divine guidance (Al-Attas, 1979). In Islam, Al-Attas explained that education in Islam is comprehensive and integrated in order to achieve a balance between human potential and practicality: “balanced growth of the personality...through training the 'human's' spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings and bodily senses...such that faith is infused into the whole of his personality” (Al-Attas, 1979, p. 158).

It is essential to consider the local context, tradition, and knowledge in education to avoid cultural impositions in the teaching and learning process. As noted by researchers examining ECE policy in Indonesia, there are concerns about imposing Western ECE models in diverse cultural contexts and over-regulating community-based initiatives (Adriany & Saefullah, 2015). Amongst the characteristics of cultural imposition is the propensity to view local knowledge as inferior whilst outsider knowledge is considered superior and thus attaining a status that requires its imposition on the local context (Taufiki, 2020).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the compatibility of Al-Attas’ ideas within a deeply religious community, like Aceh, which is well-known for its strong Islamic traditions and local values. In Al-Attas’ *adab* concept, a good Muslim is responsible for his family and society. In his view, an individual must possess *adab* in an inclusive sense, becoming genuinely conscious of his obligations to himself, his family, and society.

In this research, I argue that the drive and dedication shown by the villagers to be responsible community members who are also conscious of community issues, such as the need for ECE access in the village, represent Al-Attas’ concepts of *ta’dib* and *adab*. Their actions raised consciousness amongst community members in Gampong Blang.

This study illustrates a community in rural North Aceh that still upholds its traditional values and system whilst embracing development. The community hopes that ECE will develop children into balanced human beings who embody both academic competence and moral character. This research highlighted the driving factors and nature of community engagement in ECE initiatives in rural Aceh, which holds significant lessons for future ECE development in similar contexts. The integration of Islamic educational philosophy with local traditions offers valuable insights for

developing culturally responsive early childhood education programs that honour both religious values and local customs whilst meeting contemporary educational needs.

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