

## The Cultural Survival of Traditional Islamic Education: Dayah Ulee Titi in Modern Aceh, Indonesia

Sabirin<sup>1</sup>, Mohamad Yusuf<sup>2</sup>, Irwan Abdullah<sup>2</sup>, Mujiburrahman<sup>1</sup>, Zaenuddin Hudi  
Prasojo<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta

<sup>3</sup>IAIN Pontianak

sabirin@ar-raniry.ac.id, myusuf@ugm.ac.id, irwan.fib@ugm.ac.id,  
mujib\_net@yahoo.co.id, zaestain@yahoo.com

### ABSTRACT

*Studies of traditional Islamic educational institutions have tended to show these institutions playing a less prominent social role as society has modernized. This research seeks to show a different phenomenon, namely one in which a traditional Islamic educational institution (dayah) has been able to endure and maintain its important role in society. The socio-cultural dynamics of Aceh have had a contribution to the continued existence of the dayah in the new media era. Analysis shows that, even as other traditional educational institutions have been marginalized, Dayah Ulee Titi has grown significantly. It recommends a more in-depth study into the dynamic relationship between traditionalism and modernism to explore how the two co-exist in the field of education.*

**Keywords:** Dayah; Boarding School; Traditional Islamic Education; Survival Strategy; Aceh

## 1. Introduction

Islamic educational institutions have occupied an important position and played a central role in the historical journey of the Indonesian nation. They have not only served to educate the populace, but also produced important national leaders, revolutionaries, and even some of the founding fathers (El-Ibrahimi, 1986; Dhofier 1994; Hasjmy, 1997; Saby, 2000; Pohl, 2006; Thalal, 2010). Abdul Wahab Chasballah, Agus Salim, and Daud Beureueh are all examples of national leaders who were raised in this culture. However, today the position of Islamic educational institutions is seen as being eroded. Modernization has driven traditional educational institutions to transform into modern ones, abandoning the education systems that once characterized them (Rahardjo, 1974; Madjid, 1997; Sulthon, 2005; Fealy and Bush, 2014). The euphoria for modernization that is common in Indonesian society has driven traditional educational institutions to show new faces and produce new curricula and orientations. Traditional educational institutions have replaced their curricula and teaching methods, sought to introduce the latest educational instruments, and adapted information technology (Yusuf, 2016).

Yusuf and Sterkens (2015) have argued that the general decrease in student populations at traditional educational institutions can be attributed to their uninteresting teaching methods

and use of curricula that are seen as unable to meet the demands of the times. Similarly, research conducted by Fahrurrozi (2018) has found that the charismatic leadership that has long been the main draw of traditional Islamic educational institutions is being abandoned. The charismatic *ulama* (Islamic leaders) who have long been the faces of traditional Islamic educational institutions have, over time, been replaced by *ulamas* using social media (Fealy & Bush, 2014; Hefner, 2010). The popular rise of Ustad Abdul Somad, Ustad Arifin Ilham, Aa Gym, and Ustad Wijayanto illustrates this shift. A depth of understanding of Islam, which was long considered a prerequisite for the title of *ulama*, has been replaced by fame on social media.

This research seeks to understand how a traditional Islamic educational institution—in this case, Dayah Ulee Titi—has endured and grown in Aceh. Have the dynamics of Aceh's society and culture influenced the endurance of the *dayah* in the new media era? Undertaking this research is important, keeping in mind Aceh's unique cultural model and system, including its implementation of Islamic sharia through the Law on the Governance of Aceh (UUPA) in 2006. Furthermore, this research will invite readers to re-examine the continued survival of the Islamic education model in Indonesia in general, as well as the traditional Islamic education model in the local context.

More specifically, this research seeks to map the continued survival of the *dayah* based on four aspects: the increased student population as Aceh has modernized, the reinforcement of the education method and curriculum, the charismatic leadership of the *ulama*, and the role of alumni in Aceh's social and religious life. Examination of these four aspects, which is provided in detail below, is intended to promote an understanding of the continued survival of the *dayah* in Aceh.

## 2. The *Dayah* in the Literature

*Dayah*, which have traditionally served as institutions of religious education (Hasjmy, 1980; Syamsuddin, 1980; Idris, 1998; Mujiburrahman, 2010), now face numerous changes. These changes have not only included the formalization of religious education, which is intended to improve and structure the education system, but also new physical infrastructure in response to developments in information technology. The curricula that regulate education in the *dayah* have similarly become more structured. These changes have had fundamental consequences for traditional religious education (Ilyas, 2016).

### 2.1. Definition and History of the *Dayah*

The *dayah* are known as traditional educational institutions in Aceh (Faza, 2016, Hamdan, 2017,

Fakhrurrazi, 2017, Muhajir, 2012), as well as the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia (Azra 2005). Etymologically, the word *dayah* comes from the Arabic *zawiyah* (Faza, 2016; Hamdan, 2017; Fakhrurrazi, 2017; Muhajir, 2012); while the word *dayah* is often pronounced *deyah* by the local people of Aceh Besar (Faza, 2016), the pronunciation *zawiyah* is still regularly used by the *dayah* community (Idris, 1998). Initially, the word *zawiyah* referred to the corner of a building, and was frequently linked to mosques. It was in the corner of the mosque that educators and educated, that teachers and students, would conduct learning activities. Over time, *dayah* became known as educational institutions that only provide religious education, with subjects including *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *tauhid* (basic Islamic principles), *tasawuf* (Islamic philosophy), and the Arabic language. Education at these institutions was equivalent to that in formal junior high schools, senior high schools, and even universities, depending on the amount of time students spent in the *dayah*. Saputra (2012) explains that the *dayah* served many roles in society, being used not only as centers of religious education, but also as fortresses for fighting against colonialism and as schools for local communities.

The *dayah* have a lengthy history. In the 18th century, they and the *surau* (small mosque) were already established as mature institutions (Faza,

2016). Through the *dayah* and the *surau*, Islam grew strong roots in the Indonesian archipelago. However, when the colonial government began offering westernization and modernization, the continued survival and adaptability of the *dayah* became threatened. Such great was the threat faced by traditional Islamic educational institutions at the time that several were lost to the currents of history.

## 2.2. Problems in the Dayah

The *dayah*, as traditional Islamic institutions, have offered an effective basis for social movements and taken a central role in Acehese society. As community-based educational institutions, the *dayah* have become integral parts of their communities and of community activities. The central power in the *dayah* is held by the *teungku*, a devout individual with deep religious knowledge. In every Acehese community, the *teungku* became social actors involved in various social engineering efforts (Hanafiyah, 2018). The *teungku* have even become involved in practical politics. However, as argued by Barulwalidin (2017), their involvement in practical politics through local political parties—such as Partai Daulat Aceh (Sovereign Aceh Party), Partai Nasional Aceh (National Aceh Party), and Partai Aceh (Aceh Party)—has eroded their legitimacy in the public eye. At the same time, many *teungku* in Aceh have remained committed to

continuing traditional models of Islamic education, thereby perpetuating the local traditions and values that they have used for decades.

Since the fall of the New Order regime in 1998, the moral crisis of the *teungku* in Aceh has continued. Social resistance to their involvement in politics has become increasingly open, taking four forms: *first*, through satire and traditional proverbs; *second*, through nicknames with satirical implications; *third*, through physical actions that provide symbolic resistance; and *fourth*, through open rejection in the regional elections (Nirzalin, 2012). The open involvement of the *teungku* in politics, rather than in the *dayah*, has led to a broad-reaching crisis of morals in Islamic education.

Nonetheless, a number of traditional *dayah* have endured despite the numerous hardships they face (Amiruddin, 2017; Hamdan, 2017; Sabirin, 2018; Saiful, 2018). Despite the weaknesses in their management systems (Saiful, 2018), the *dayah* continue to provide significant benefits to their communities, particularly their students (*santri*). Saiful writes that this moral success can be seen in the students' attitudes and communication patterns, in which they are always humble and obeisant, be it with their teachers, their parents, or their communities (Saiful, 2018). Others have seen the *dayah* as being capable of shaping students' spiritual and emotional intelligence

through habituation, practice, religious doctrine, and through interaction with community members (Sabirin, 2018).

In his study, Saputra (2018) finds that parents in the Sigapang, Kuta Cot Glie, Aceh Besar, prefer sending their children to *dayah* over sending them to formal schools. This is because the parents in this *gampong* (village) are motivated by religious considerations. They desire for their children to understand and deepen their knowledge of religion, as well as for their children to grow into better people and serve their parents. At the same time, parents are concerned that interactions between youths are becoming too open, and as such religious education—through the *dayah*—offers them a means to ensure their children become exemplary members of society. Parents also believe that the *dayah* are capable of shaping children's character, ensuring they are honest, trustworthy, and able to live simply. *Dayah* education is also seen as more accessible to families who are economically vulnerable.

### 3. Methods

This research is a case study conducted at Dayah Ulee Titi which is located in Siron Village, Ingin Jaya District, Aceh Besar Regency. Dayah Ulee Titi has been selected for three reasons. *First*, although Dayah Ulee Titi is located close to the center of government and political power, the

*dayah* has continued to position itself solely as an educational institution, and as such avoided involving itself in political and state affairs. *Second*, the leader of the *dayah* is greatly honored by the people of Aceh, such that many national leaders have visited him and sought his advice. *Third*, the *dayah* has served as a model for developing traditional Islam in Aceh. One of 793 *dayah* in Aceh, Dayah Ulee Titi is one of only 50 *dayah* to receive "excellent" (A) accreditation (DPDA, 2018).

This ethnographic research was conducted between January and June 2018 and involved library research, participant observation, and in-depth interviews. In the early phases of the research, library research was conducted; this involved analysis of documents on *dayah*, particularly on Dayah Ulee Titi, including those that came from internal archives and published research reports. This was followed by direct and participatory observation of the activities conducted at Dayah Ulee Titi, including the learning process, religious activities at the mosque, and its social activities outside the *dayah*. In-depth interviews were also conducted with five *teungku* who have taken a central role in the development of Dayah Ulee Titi to collect information regarding the history and growth of the *dayah*, its everyday activities, and its role in social life. In-depth interviews were also conducted with residents living near the *dayah* to

collect information on the role of its alumni in their community.

#### 4. Profile of Dayah Ulee Titi

Before describing everyday life in Dayah Ulee Titi, this section will provide a profile of the *dayah*. As the oldest traditional Islamic educational institutions in the Indonesian archipelago, *dayah* have had an important role in Aceh's social history. This is similarly true for Dayah Ulee Titi. This traditional Islamic educational institution was established with the goal of helping students learn, understand, and deepen their knowledge of Islam by emphasizing the importance of religious morality in everyday life. Dayah Ulee Titi was founded by Syeikh H. Abu Ishaq al-Amiry Bin Ismail (1903-1997) in 1927 and is located at Jalan Blang Bintang Km 1.5 in Siron, Ingin Jaya, Aceh Besar (Sabirin, 2018). Initially, the *dayah* was located on the banks of the Krueng Aceh, but was moved to avoid the frequent flooding of the river. Institutionally, the *dayah* is under the Dayah Ulee Titi Foundation, part of the Islamic Education Union (Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah) (Dayah Ulee Titi document, May 6, 2018).

The roots of the Dayah Ulee Titi lie in a group of youths who would frequently visit Abu Ishak al-Amiry to study religion under him. As the number of *santri* increased, Abu Ishak al-Amiry's home was insufficient, and thus a simple *dayah* was established. The name 'Dayah

Ulee Titi' was taken from its first site: the word *ulee* means 'head/tip', while *titi* means 'bridge'. 'Ulee Titi', thus, may be understood as the 'the end of the bridge', as the *dayah* was initially located at the end of the bridge connecting Jalan Lambaro-Sultan Iskandar Muda Airport and Banda Aceh (Dayah Ulee Titi document, May 6, 2018). After Syeikh H. Abu Ishaq al-Amiry Bin Ismail died on July 14, 1997, he was replaced by his son Abu Attaillah Ishaq al-Amiry, who has continued to lead the *dayah* until today.

Generally speaking, the students of Dayah Ulee Titi come from financially vulnerable families who have limited economic capital. Such parents send their children to study religion at Dayah Ulee Titi because its tuition fees are low. Nonetheless, some students do come from financially well-to-families. This was mentioned by Teungku Yusrizal, a teacher and administrator of Dayah Ulee Titi:

"*yang jak beut disinoe ramee ciet* (yang belajar di sini ramai juga) dari keluarga kurang mampu, dan juga ada dari keluarga orang yang berada. Namun lebih banyak dari keluarga kurang mampu, karena pendidikan di *dayahtanyoe memang murah that-that*" (the ones studying here, there are many from less well-to-do families, and there are also those from wealthy families. However, most of them are from

less well-to-do families, because education at Dayah Ulee Titi is very cheap in terms of tuition)

The increased number of students, as well as the distribution of alumni, has led to the establishment of new *dayah* and prayer halls in Aceh. This can be seen, for example, in the rise of new Islamic educational institutions in Aceh. Presently, Dayah Ulee Titi has no less than 29 branches established by its alumni throughout Aceh and managed independently/ autonomously. Dayah Ulee Titi, which only receives male students, now has forty classes that are involved in prayer groups and discussions, which are held five times a day following the prayer (*shalat*) schedule.

Aside from rooms for students to sleep/rest, known as *bilek*, Dayah Ulee Titi provides various facilities, including sanitation (bathrooms, toilets, and washrooms), a shared kitchen, and a canteen where students can buy their personal needs without leaving the *dayah* complex. Dayah Ulee Titi has continued to adapt itself by building new facilities and improving existing ones to ensure students' needs are met. This includes, for example, the ongoing construction of a new, larger mosque that can hold all students simultaneously. It can be seen that, physically, the buildings used by Dayah Ulee Titi are far more advanced than those used ten years previously. Its buildings are now permanent, with cement walls and aluminum roofs.

Nonetheless, when field research was conducted, some of the older, wooden buildings were still being maintained and used (field observations, May 20–25, 2018; Dayah Ulee Titi document).

*Dayah*, traditional institutions of Islamic education passed from generation to generation in Aceh, are led by *teungku* who usually take such *lakab* (titles) as Abu, Abon, Abi, Waled, or Abah. The *dayah* leader holds the highest authority in the *dayah*, and as such is among its most influential figures. At Dayah Ulee Titi, Abu Athaillah Ishaq Al Amiry is a central figure, one who has an important and influential role in determining the school's direction and policy.

According to the institutional structure of Dayah Ulee Titi, the highest authority is held by the Dayah Leader, who is supported in running the school by the General Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer; all of these are supported by deputies. To support the learning process, there are six further sections under the Dayah Ulee Titi Foundation: the Education Section, the Prayer/Worship Section, the Fines/Punishment Section, the Security Section, the Human Resources Section, and the Electricity and Water Section. The number of *teungku* who are supporting Dayah Ulee Titi, either as administrators or as teachers, has increased over time to meet the demands of the growing student body. Between the 2014/2015 and 2018/2019 school years, the number of *teungku* increased from 140 to 164; in the same period, the

number of *santri* increased from 806 to 1,468 (Dayah Ulee Titi document).

The facilities and infrastructure of Dayah Ulee Titi have changed, having been adapted to meet the demands of the times. This can be seen, for example, in the use of loudspeakers and the replacement of some wooden buildings with cement ones. However, the teaching methods have not changed since the *dayah* was established. It continues to use the classical (traditional) learning method, centered on sermons by the *teungku* and relying on memorization. In general, the prayer halls continue to be used for learning activities; this distinguishes Dayah Ulee Titi from modern institutions of Islamic education, which tend to use classrooms for learning activities. Dayah Ulee Titi has consistently used the classic curriculum for Islamic learning, one that refers primarily to books written by authors from the *syafi'i* school.

The number of Dayah Ulee Titi alumni has not been recorded by the *dayah* secretariat or by the administrators of the Dayah Ulee Titi Alumni Association, as mentioned by the association's administrator Teungku Mukhlis Abdullah:

"tidak ada data yang pasti berapa jumlah alumni Dayah Ulee Titi, namun data yang kami miliki berdasarkan absensi kehadiran pertemuan alumni tahun 2017 yang lalu sekitar 5000 orang yang terdata, dan itupun tidak lengkap datanya, meskipun kami

telah edarkan formulir data alumni, dan hanya sebagian yang terisi secara sempurna" (There are no certain data regarding the number of alumni who have completed studies at Dayah Ulee Titi. However, we do have data on the number of people who attended the alumni meeting in 2017; there were 5000 people recorded. Even that is not complete; even though we distributed a sheet to collect alumni data, only a few people filled it correctly.)

This illustrates how the data on Dayah Ulee Titi's alumni are not recorded clearly, a situation also reflected in a search of the documents held by the Dayah Ulee Titi secretariat. According to school records, Dayah Ulee Titi alumni work as merchants, husbanders, craftsmen, and prayer leaders; most work as farmers (Dayah Ulee Titi document, May 7, 2018). This further emphasizes the characteristics of the *santri* who study at Dayah Ulee Titi.

## 5. Results

To understand everyday life in the traditional Islamic educational institution Dayah Ulee Titi, the following section presents the findings of this research. It is divided into four sub-sections, covering the growth of the student body and infrastructure development, teaching methods and curriculum, legitimacy and



role of the *teungku*, and role of alumni in social life. This analysis will be used to answer the research question and understand the continued survival of traditional institutions of Islamic education.

### 5.1. Increase in Number of Students and Development of *Dayah* Infrastructure

Evidence that parents continue to choose Dayah Ulee Titi to educate their

children can be seen in Table 1. This table shows a sustained growth in the number of students. In the 2014/2015 school year, 806 students were studying at Dayah Ulee Titi; this number had almost doubled by the 2018/2019 school year, when 1,468 students were enrolled. To support this growth, Dayah Ulee Titi has increased the number of teaching staff. Table 1 shows this rapid growth in available teaching staff, increasing from 140 teachers in the 2014/2015 school year to 165 teachers in the 2018/2019 school year.

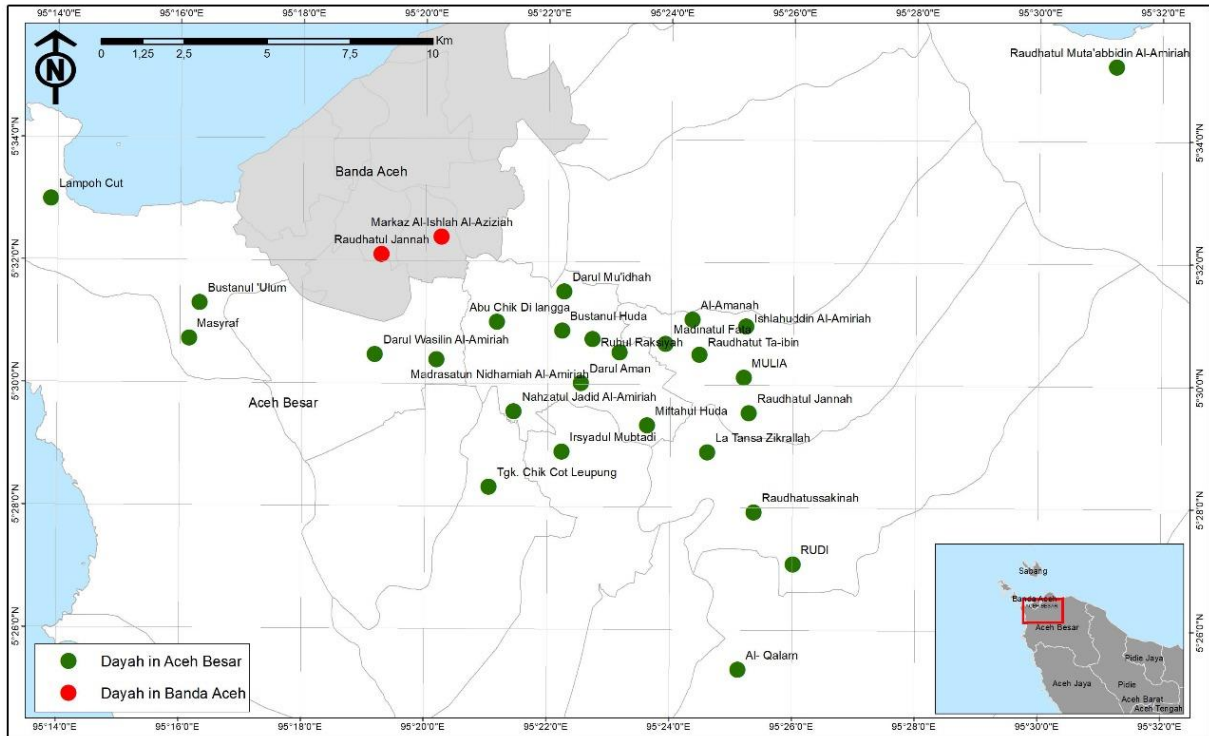
**Table 1: Number of students and teachers at Dayah Ulee Titi, 2014/2015 school year through 2018/2019 school year**

No	School Year	Number of Classes	Number of Teachers	Number of Students
1.	2014/2015	25 units	140	806
2.	2015/2016	28 units	157	1,004
3.	2016/2017	31 units	155	1,051
4.	2017/2018	35 units	159	1,259
5.	2018/2019	40 units	164	1,468

Source: Gathered through interviews

As a result of this increased enrollment, the number of Dayah Ulee Titi alumni has likewise increased. Some alumni have even taken the initiative to establish educational institutions similar

to their alma mater. As of 2017, a total of 29 *dayah* have been established by Dayah Ulee Titi alumni. Most of these are found in Aceh Besar Regency, while a few are located in Banda Aceh (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1: The Distribution of Dayah established by the Alumni of Dayah Ulee Titi. 2017**

Similarly, the condition of the buildings in the Dayah Ulee Titi complex is quite different than it was

previously. The following figures show the rapid and significant shifts in the *dayah's* facilities and infrastructure.

## 5.2. Teaching Methods and Curriculum

The legitimacy of *dayah* in Aceh is rooted in part in their use of classic texts, such as those that continue to be taught at Dayah Ulee Titi. Observations and interviews with the *teungku* indicated that Dayah Ulee Titi has continued to use

the classical model of Islamic teaching and refer to classical texts. In the classical teaching method, students are asked to memorize the contents of classical Islamic texts, ensuring that they remember and understand these texts. The

subjects studied by Dayah Ulee Titi students include *Nahwu* and *Sharaf* (Arabic language and grammar), *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *Ushul Fiqh* (methodology of Islamic jurisprudence), *Hadith* (the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), *Tafsir* (Quranic exegesis), *Tasawuf* (Islamic philosophy), dan *Tauhid* (basic Islamic principles). This reflects the findings of Yusuf and Sterkens, who write "the curriculum includes Islamic theology, moral education, and Arabic language and literature" (Yusuf & Sterkens 2014).

Abu Athaillah, the leader of Dayah Ulee Titi, explains the school's use of the classic model as follows:

*"meunoe, nyoe ibarat ureung meukat, lon ibarat ureung meukat meueh, kemudian lon meukat bawang, lon meukat kareng, lon meukat nyoe jeeh. Jadi, oeh lleuh dimat kareng dijakmat meuh, meu teubeuh teuk meuh lleuh nyan. Nyoe keneuk jaga kemurnian meuh nyan"* (So, I'm like a person selling something... like a person selling gold, and selling onions, and selling sardines, and selling this and that. So, if they touch the sardines and then touch the gold, the gold will be sullied. I want to keep the gold pure).

This statement clearly shows how the classical model of Islamic education is applied by Dayah Ulee Titi to maintain the *dayah's* tradition of religious education. Abu Athaillah is adamant that

the current model must be maintained to ensure religious education remains pure.

This purity is the "gold" that Dayah Ulee Titi seeks to protect, as stated by one advisor, Teungku M. Ali: "*Kondisi ini merupakan satu keunggulan yang tidak dimiliki oleh pesantren modern, dan inilah kekhususannya yang dianggap lebih memiliki keberkahan*" (This is a strength that modern Islamic schools lack, and it is this special character that brings greater blessing"). The use of the traditional model by Dayah Ulee Titi was also recognized by Teungku Marbawi Yusuf, representing the All-Aceh Association of Dayah Students (Rabithah Thaliban Aceh/RTA):

"Beberapa kebiasaan Abu (pimpinan dayah) juga diikuti oleh para santrinya dalam keseharian mereka di dayah, namun nilai dan ukurannya berbeda. Para alumni Dayah Ulee Titi umumnya juga sangat konsisten dengan tradisi pembelajaran Islam klasik, juga cukup sederhana dalam kehidupannya" (Some of the habits of Abu (the leader) are also followed by his students in their everyday activities in the *dayah*, albeit with different values and degrees. Dayah Ulee Titi alumni tend to consistently uphold the classical model of Islamic education, and live their lives simply")

The above statement details the situation in the Dayah Ulee Titi community, which has consistently applied the classical model in teaching Islam—both at the *dayah* and in the community. The *teungku* have made themselves exemplary figures, including by upholding traditional teaching methods, and thus passed these traditions to their students and to alumni.

### 5.3. The Legitimacy of the *Teungku* (Teacher)

As a traditional institution of Islamic education, Dayah Ulee Titi relies on the charisma of its leaders and teachers. This is a key strength of the institution, as its leaders are readily accepted by all members of society, and their opinions are sought when mediating between people with different ideas or solutions to problems. This leadership is one of the *dayah's* main means of attracting people from the outside, either to study or to find solutions to their problems.

The importance of this leadership can be seen in the involvement of the *teungku* in various community and social activities. The *teungku* have continued to occupy strategic positions in Acehese society, and they remain central to social activities such as thanksgiving ceremonies (*slametan*) and religious rituals. Religious activities in the surrounding community, including prayer

meetings and Ramadhan prayers, are routinely led by the *teungku*.

Some hold that studying at Dayah Ulee Titi is more honorable than studying elsewhere, a situation strongly influenced by the personal charisma of its leaders. Teungku Marbawi Yusuf said:

*"Sesuatunya yang menarik yang ditemukan terutama dari Abu Athaillah adalah di antaranya kesufian Abu sendiri yang memang disukai dan disenangi oleh semua orang, seperti kesederhanaan beliau, menjadi pimpinan dayah pun sangat luar biasa. Beliau tidak terlalu mengikuti kehidupan duniawi atau lebih bersifat qana'ah. Abu tidak terlena dan tidak terlibat dalam kegiatan politik-pemerintahan maupun partai politik, dan juga tidak menjadi orang yang makar, ini menjadi satu nilai lebih yang dimiliki oleh Abu. Karena ada sebagian lainnya yang juga tidak mau terlibat dalam politik dan partai politik, namun mereka menjadi makar atau melakukan perlawanan".* (Something

interesting that we can see, particularly in Abu Athaillah, is the Sufism of Abu himself, which everyone likes and enjoys, and his simplicity and his exemplary leadership of the *dayah*. He does not really follow worldly affairs, but tries more to be satisfied with what God has

given him. Abu is not complacent, and he is not involved in political or government activities, or in political parties. He is also not insidious. This is a key strength of Abu, because some other people avoid becoming involved in politics and political parties, but they end up insidious or treasonous.)

Aside from being involved in religious rituals, the *teungku* are also actively involved in the practice of Islamic education outside the *dayah*. These *teungku* are asked to conduct routine prayers as well as community development initiatives.

The legitimacy of the *teungku* and his charisma is particularly interesting to consider given how focus has shifted from religious leaders to public/political figures (i.e. away from the *dayah*) and again from public/political figures to religious leaders on social media who have different ideologies. This phenomenon in social and media space has transformed how ulama are understood. In the *dayah*, however, the ulama continue to gain their legitimacy not because they are public figures shaped and popularized by social media, but because their deep knowledge and significant charisma is recognized by their community. This is the situation enjoyed by Abu Athaillah. As one community figure explained:

*"Masyarakat sangat suka mengikuti pembelajaran agama yang diadakan oleh Abu Athaillah, karena baik alumni dayah atau masyarakat sendiri ketika mereka mengikuti pembelajaran tersebut mereka menemukan sosok panutan pada diri Abu Athaillah, di mana hal tersebut tidak dimiliki oleh figure publik lainnya".* (The community really enjoys participating in the religious sermons held by Abu Athaillah, because both the *dayah* alumni and the local community, when they join these sermons, they can find an exemplary figure in Abu Athaillah, something not true of other public figures)

The above quote illustrates the public acceptance of the *teungku* and the values of the Acehnese people, which Abu Athaillah is seen as exemplifying.

#### 5.4. The Role of Alumni in Society

After completing their studies at Dayah Ulee Titi, in general alumni return to their home villages and go about their own activities. A few of them have established their own *dayah* or prayer halls, while others have been made the *imam meunasah* of their home villages. Those of above-average capacity have often been made *imam mukim*<sup>1</sup> or the

---

<sup>1</sup> A *mukim*, which may also be referred to under another name, is an administrative unit within Aceh that consists of various *gampong* that

*imam masjid*. In Acehese society, many *imam meunasah*, *imam mukim*, and *imam masjid* are *dayah* graduates, having studied at Dayah Ulee Titi or another such institution.

The attitudes and behaviors of the *teungku* are regularly referenced by the local community, as these men are generally seen as exemplary figures with exemplary and admirable comportment. As stated by M. Ali, representing the common view:

"Hal yang menarik adalah cara berfikir alumni Teungku Dayah Ulee Titi bahwa mengajar masyarakat sebagai sebuah kewajiban dan istiqamah dengan itu, meskipun seorang tetap datang untuk suemeubeut (pengajian). Lebih ikhlas dalam mengajar, tidak mengutamakan uang atau imbalan dari masyarakat". (It is interesting to note that the alumni of Dayah Ulee Titi perpetuate their teachers' view that teaching society is an obligation, and they continue doing so. They are more sincere in their teaching, rather than prioritizing money or income.)

Another community member stated:

---

have their own territorial boundaries and their own wealth. Administratively, they are located below the *kecamatan* level and led by an *Imam Mukim*.

"Potensi santri dapat menjadi guru di Dayah Ulee Titi bagi santri merupakan penghargaan tertinggi dan kebanggaan tersendiri, meskipun gaji tidak ada tapi kebanggaan menjadi guru di DUT sudah cukup membuat mereka bertahan di sana. Dapat mengembangkan kemampuannya dalam mengajar ilmu agama kepada masyarakat, karena kepercayaan masyarakat terhadap Teungku dayah cukup tinggi dibandingkan dari lingkungan strata pendidikan lainnya seumpama dari kampus-perguruan tinggi, namun demikian ada juga kasus-kasus tertentu yang berbeda. Pada kasus-kasus tertentu boleh jadi yang dari kampus lebih baik, misalkan dalam hal hafalan Al-Qur'an". (For the *santri*, becoming a teacher at Dayah Ulee Titi is the greatest honor and pride. Even though they receive no wages, they are proud to be teachers at DUT, and this is enough for them to continue teaching there. They can develop their own capacity to teach religion, as the leader of the *dayah* is trusted more than other institutions of education, such as university.

However, some cases do differ. It's possible that campuses may produce some better results, such as in memorizing the Qur'an.)

Aside from gaining legitimacy through public trust in the *dayah*'s leadership, Dayah Ulee Titi alumni also have an important role in the social and religious lives of their communities. Many alumni serve as religious teachers in community institutions such as prayer halls and *meunasah*<sup>2</sup> throughout Aceh. Alumni are thus actively involved in the transfer of knowledge to the surrounding community. At the very least, they are involved in various ceremonies that commemorate Islamic holidays such as Maulid Nabi, Isra and Mi'raj, the Islamic New Year, and Nuzulal Quran. In these activities, community members will invite the *teungku* to give sermons; similarly, educational institutions will invite them to reinvigorate students' passion for Islam.

Religious education is generally conducted through prayer meetings, both with community members who travel to the prayer hall run by the *teungku* or during the *teungku*'s visits to the surrounding community. Such prayer meetings are often referred to as *draah*,

---

<sup>2</sup>Etymologically, the word *meunasah* comes from the Arabic *madrasah*, which means a school, place of learning, or educational institution. See Safwan Idris, *Perkembangan pendidikan pesantren/dayah, antara tradisi dan pembaharuan, dalam perkembangan pendidikan di Daerah Istimewa*.

and held at certain times and in certain places. Usually these *draah* are attended by adults of various educational and employment backgrounds. Nonetheless, there are some *draah* held exclusively for *dayah* alumni, in which participants come not only from Dayah Ulee Titi but also from other *dayah*; this was noted during observations of the *draah* held by Dayah Ulee Titi on May 6, 2018. These *draah* have varied schedules; some are held weekly, biweekly, or even monthly. At every *draah*, participants voluntarily bring an indefinite amount of money that they give the *teungku* who delivered the sermon while greeting him afterwards. They will generally kiss his hand as a sign of respect and express a desire to be blessed by his knowledge.

## 6. Discussion

The results of this research have shown that Dayah Ulee Titi has grown and developed in recent years, a situation that differs significantly from the results of previous research that show traditional institutions of Islamic education taking a less significant role in present-day Indonesia (Hefner & Zaman, 2010). Why has the number of students and quality of infrastructure grown significantly in the past five years, amidst the onslaught of modern educational institutions? Why have the classical methods and curricula continued to be used by Acehnese society and by the *dayah*? Why have the *teungku*, as religious leaders at the *dayah*, continued to be recognized by society?

Similarly, why do *dayah* alumni still play a central role in Acehese social life?

Even as modern educational institutions have expanded in recent years, Dayah Ulee Titi has continued to grow. Several factors have contributed to this. *First*, the habitus of the Acehese people has made religion a central pillar of everyday life. Zaman (2018) explains that the Acehese people have given religion in a prominent position in their everyday lives, and as such they have continued to rely on religion-based institutions for education. The elements of modernity that have entered Aceh have not simply eroded its religious values, as the religious habitus has laid a framework for judging new values. As argued by Abdullah,

"The social and cultural lives of the Acehese people are constructed on the basis of religion and adat, both of which are important sources of social order. The ulama (Islamic scholars) are essential manifestations of both the religious and adat pillar.... Even today, religion is considered the essential part of the lives of the Acehese...." (Abdullah, 2018: 43).

The connection between the Acehese people and Islam is illustrated by a saying that has become deeply entrenched in Acehese culture since the time of Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607–1636), namely: "*Adat Bak Poe Teumeureuhom, Hukom*

*Bak Syiah kuala, Qanun*<sup>3</sup> *Bak Putroe Pahang, Reusam*<sup>4</sup> *Bak Lakseumana*" (traditional affairs to be controlled by the *Poe Teumeureuhom*, legal affairs to be handled by the *Teungku Syiah Kuala, Qanun* to be handled by *Putri Pahang*, and *Reusam* to be handled by *Lakseumana*). Also widely known in Aceh is a proverb that describes the union of sharia (religious law) and Acehese tradition: "*Hukom deungon Adat lagee zat ngon sifeut*" (law and tradition are akin to substance and essence). The two are one, and cannot be separated (Sabirin, 2015; Sufi, 2002; Ismail, 2007).

*Second*, there is the leadership of the *dayah*. Many previous research projects have shown the importance of such figures in all traditional educational institutions, as their charisma can be used to mobilize human resources and thereby strengthen their institutions. Teungku Athallah, the central figure and administrator of Dayah Ulee Titi, and the other *teungku* (teachers) have gained public trust, particularly by providing religious lessons to their communities both within and without the *dayah*. Yusuf and Sterkens (2014) have argued that educational institutions emphasize normativity through their allocation and manipulation of symbols and respect, involvement in rituals, influence on distribution, and public reception. The

---

<sup>3</sup>A *qanun* is a law formulated by a legislative body that has its basis in religion and tradition.

<sup>4</sup> *Reusam* refers to the traditional and customary protocol/ceremonies held by persons considered experts in the field.



*dayah*, thus, have become important symbols in everyday Acehnese life. According to Bourdieu (1991), symbolic power is power that is made manifest through visualization and speech, which engender trust in all those who see and hear it. The widespread trust in the *dayah*, the main resources for Islamic education in Acehnese society (both among parents and their children), cannot be separated from the trust given to figures such as Teungku Athaillah and the other *teungku* (teachers).

The religious knowledge of the *teungku* is an important element of their strategic position in the Acehnese social structure, particularly given that the vast majority of the population is Muslim, and such knowledge is rarely found in the general populace. As *dayah* leaders, the *teungku* also occupy strategic positions in society, a situation that is caused by the reciprocal relationship between them and their communities. They provide religious guidance and education to society, and in return they receive obeisance and respect. This can be seen in the various *gampong* and *mukim* of Aceh. The *imam meunasah*, for example, play an important role in the social and religious affairs of their *gampong*, and will often represent their *gampong* in dealing with issues that fall under the scope of their duties; a similar position is held by the *imam masjid*, most of whom are *dayah* graduates. Their involvement and participation in resolving various community problems makes them viewed as pillars of their

community, and as such the *teungku* fill important functions in Aceh.

*Third* is the formalization of Islam in Aceh. The implementation of Islamic sharia in Aceh, supported by the Law No. 11 of 2006 on the Governance of Aceh (UUPA), has created space for the formalization of Islam in various aspects of social life. In 2008, following the passage of the UUPA, the government established the Acehnese Office for Dayah Education (Dinas Pendidikan Dayah Aceh, DPDA). This office has contributed to the development of *dayah* throughout Aceh, including the construction of infrastructure such as dormitories, study spaces, libraries, and sanitation facilities, as well as the provision of teaching media and training to *teungku* and to *santri*. Furthermore, the *teungku* also receive regular incentives, while scholarships are available to *santri* (DPDA, 2018).

The creation of the DPDA opened a new chapter in government involvement in religious education, one based on a number of regulations providing a legal umbrella for *dayah* education. Chapter XXX, Article 218, Paragraph (1) of the UUPA, states: "The government of Aceh and the regency/city governments are to regulate the provision of formal education, *dayah* education, and other non-formal education through the setting of core curricula and quality standards for all types and levels of education, in accordance with applicable law".

The formal implementation of Islamic sharia in Aceh has created a

significant opportunity for the *teungku* to actualize themselves as communities that understand religious teachings and disseminate said teachings within their communities. The spirit of Islamic sharia, taking many forms in Acehese society, offers the *teungku* a more strategic position in community activities. This is particularly true given the numerous Acehese religious ceremonies that involve the *teungku* as key figures. This can be seen, for example, in the celebration of Islamic holidays such as Maulid, where over three months there are many communal meals and religious sermons. Likewise, during Isra and Mi'raj, Nuzulul Qur'an, the Islamic New Year, and other holidays, the *teungku* are expected to deliver sermons. Meanwhile, in ceremonies that are held by members of the public, such as thanksgiving ceremonies for circumcisions or even the purchase of a new house or automobile, the *teungku* are central figures in the process. The formal implementation of Islamic sharia has reinforced these ceremonial practices, including their involvement of the *teungku*, in society.

## 7. Conclusion

The results of this research have shown that some traditional institutions of Islamic education, such as Dayah Ulee Titi, have been able to maintain their traditional identities, distinguishing them

from the majority of such institutions, which have had to modernize to ensure their continued survival. The *dayah's* success at ensuring its continued survival is evidenced in its increased number of students, maintenance of the classical religious education model, strong legitimacy within local society, and alumni's role in their communities.

This study has also underscored that the politicization of *dayah*, namely the intervention of the Acehese government through the passage of the UUPA and the establishment of the DPDA, has created a political space in which the *dayah* can take increasingly strategic roles in Acehese society. The concern that significant government intervention in traditional educational institutions will be detrimental to said institutions has not occurred here. Rather, the *dayah* has found new legitimacy and institutional support, thereby increasing its influence and social acceptance.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to undertake a historical study detailing the ebb and flow of traditional Islamic education in Aceh, from the time of Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607) through the present new media era, to explore the growth, development, and death of *dayah* with various institutional characters and socio-cultural settings. This study will prove a valuable source of lessons learned for the future development of the *dayah*.

## Bibliography

- Abdullah, I. (2018). Communalism shattered: Thirty years of conflict experiences in the province of Aceh, Indonesia, *Anthropological Notebooks*, 24(1), 41–52.
- Almuhajir, A. (2013). Manajemen dayah: problematika, realita, dan cita-cita. *Pemikiran Keislaman*, 23(2), 132-157.
- Amiruddin, H. (2007). *Ulama dayah pengawal agama masyarakat Aceh* (2nd ed.). Lhokseumawe, Aceh: Nadiya Foundation.
- Amiruddin, M. H. (2017). Kontribusi dayah dalam pengembangan intelektual di Aceh. *Kalam: Jurnal Agama dan Sosial Humaniora*, 5(2), 121-137.
- Armia, N. (2011). Krisis agensi politik teungku dayah di Aceh. *Doctoral dissertation*. Yogyakarta: Universitas Gajah Mada.
- Azra, A. (2005). *Jaringan ulama Timur Tengah dan kepulauan Nusantara abad XVII & XVIII; akar pembaruan Islam Indonesia* (revised edition). Jakarta: Kencana.
- Barrulwalidin, B. (2017). *Manajemen pendidikan pondok pesantren di Dayah Mudi mesjid Raya Samalanga* (Doctoral dissertation, Pascasarjana UIN Sumatera Utara).
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Dhofier, Z. (1994). *Tradisi pesantren: pengajian tentang pandangan hidup kiai*. Jakarta: LP3ES.
- DPDA (2018). *Tipe dayah*, in: <https://dpd.acehprov.go.id/index.php/page/7/tipe-dayah.html> accessed on December 11, 2018.
- El-Ibrahimy, M. N. (1986). *Teungku Muhammad Daud Beureueh: peranannya dalam pergolakan di Aceh*. Jakarta: Gunung Agung.
- Faza, A. M. D. (2018). Dakwah tarekat pada lembaga pendidikan. *Rekognisi: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kependidikan*, 1(1), 34-47.
- Fealy, G., & Bush, R. (2014). The political decline of traditional ulama in Indonesia: the state, umma and Nahdlatul Ulama. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 42(5), 536–560.
- Hasjmy, A. (1997). *Ulama Aceh mujahid pejuang kemerdekaan dan pembangun tamaddun bangsa*. Jakarta: Bulan Bintang.
- Hasjmy, A. (1980). Banda Aceh Darussalam pusat kegiatan ilmu dan kebudayaan, in: Ismail Suny (ed). *Bunga rampai tentang Aceh*. Jakarta: Bhratara Karya Aksara.
- Hefner, R. & Zaman, M.Q (2010). *Schooling Islam: the culture and politics of modern Muslim education*. Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics, Princeton University Press.
- Hefner, R. (2000). *Civil Islam: Muslims and democratization in Indonesia*. Princeton University Press.
- Idris, S. (1995). *Perkembangan pendidikan pesantren/dayah*,

- antara tradisi dan pembaharuan dalam perkembangan pendidikan di Daerah Istimewa Aceh. Banda Aceh: Majelis Pendidikan Daerah Istimewa Aceh.
- Idris, S. (1998). *Refleksi pewarisan nilai-nilai budaya Aceh, peta pendidikan dulu dan sekarang*. Banda Aceh: Ar-Raniry Press.
- Ilyas, M. (2016). Pendidikan Dayah setelah undang-undang pemerintahan Aceh. *Kanun Jurnal Ilmu Hukum*, 3(18), 32-44.
- Ismail, B. (2002). *Masjid dan adat meunasah sebagai sumber energi budaya Aceh*, Banda Aceh: Majelis Pendidikan Provinsi Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam.
- Ismail, B. (2007). *Pendidikan pelatihan, peradilan adat/hukum adat, adat istiadat bagi keuchik dan mukim dalam Provinsi Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam beserta qanun-qanunnya*. Banda Aceh: Majelis Adat Aceh.
- Madjid, N. (1997). *Bilik-bilik pesantren, sebuah potret perjalanan*. Jakarta: Paramadina.
- Mujiburrahman (2010). Pelaksanaan sistem pendidikan pondok dan perkembangannya di Aceh selepas peristiwa tsunami. *Doctoral Dissertation*. Kedah: Universiti Utara Malaysia.
- Nur, A. (1996). *Ramadhan dalam persepsi masyarakat aceh, sebuah interpretasi antropologi*. Banda Aceh: Balai Kajian Sejarah dan Kepurbakalaan Aceh.
- Pohl, F. (2006). Islamic education and civil society: reflections on the pesantren tradition in contemporary Indonesia. *Comparative Education Review*, 50(3), 389–409.
- Rahardjo, D. (1974). *Pesantren dan pernbaharuan*. Jakarta: LP3ES.
- Rizal, F. (2015). Peran Dayah Darul Fatah dalam pembinaan pendidikan Islam di Gampong Teungoh, Langsa Kota. *Doctoral dissertation*. Cotkala Langsa: IAIN Zawiyah.
- Sabirin (2015). *Pemberdayaan masyarakat berbasis kearifan lokal* (revised edition). Yogyakarta: Samudera Biru.
- Sabirin (2018). *Pemeriksaan potensi teungku dayah ke arah peningkatan kesejahteraan sosial masyarakat*. *Doctoral dissertation*. Malaysia: Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- Saby, Y. (2000). A profile of the 'ulama' in Acehnese Society. *Al-Jamiah Journal of Islamic Studies*, 38, 223-247.
- Saiful, S. (2018). Model pendidikan karakter pada dayah Darussalam Labuhan Haji, Aceh Selatan. *Jurnal Mudarrisuna: Media Kajian Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 8(1), 23–43.
- Saputra, A. (2018). Motivasi orang tua memilih dayah sebagai sarana pendidikan anak di Gampong Sigapang Aceh Besar. *Bachelor thesis*. Banda Aceh: UIN Ar-Raniry.
- Sufi, R. (2002). *Adat istiadat masyarakat Aceh*, Banda Aceh: Dinas

- Kebudayaan Provinsi Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam.
- Sulthon, M., & Khusnurdilo, M. (2005). *Pengurusan pondok pesantren*. Jakarta: Diva Pustaka.
- Syamsuddin, T. (1980). *Pasang surut kebudayaan Aceh*, in: Ismail Suny(ed.), *Bunga Rampai tentang Aceh*. Jakarta: Bhratara Karya Aksara.
- Thalal, M. (2010). *Ulama Aceh dalam melahirkan human resource di Aceh*. Banda Aceh: Yayasan Aceh Mandiri.
- Undang-undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 11 Tahun 2006 Tentang Pemerintahan Aceh, in: Lembaran Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 2006 No. 62.
- Weber, Max (1958). *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, New York: Scribner's.
- Yusuf, M. (2016). *Religious education in Indonesia: an empirical study of religious education models in Islamic, Christian and Hindu affiliated schools*. Munich: Lit Verlag.
- Yusuf, M., & Sterkens C. (2014). Religious education in religiously affiliated schools and the influence of the state and religious community on school politics. In: Küster, V., & Setio R. (eds.). *Christian-Muslim relations in Indonesia and the Netherlands*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 47–71.
- Yusuf, M., & Sterkens, C. (2015). Analysing the state's laws on religious education in post-New Order Indonesia. *Al-Jamiah Journal of Islamic Studies*, 53(1), 105–130.

