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Reorienting Islamic Education in Aceh Paradigm and Strategies of *Dayah* Leaders in the Last Two Decades

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Abstract: This article aims to shed light on *Abu's* (a *Dayah* leader in Aceh) paradigm and strategy in reorienting Islamic education inside the *dayah* educational framework in the last two decades. Even now, the Acehnese people's socio-religious life still accepts and includes the traditional Islamic educational institution known as *dayah*. However, *Dayah* must adapt to the dynamics of the changing times to ensure its graduates to participate more fully in society. The *Dayah* in West-South and East-North coasts of Aceh are the subjects of this qualitative study using a multi-site case study. They are *Dayah* Asasul Islamiyah in East Aceh, *Dayah* Madinatuddiniyah Nurul Huda in North Aceh, *Dayah* Madinatuddiniyah Darul 'Ulumiddin in Southwest Aceh, and *Dayah* Darussalam Labuhan Haji in South Aceh. The research data was gathered through purposeful-snowballing in-depth interviewing techniques with a variety of informants, including *Abu* as the *dayah*'s leader. After that, the data is processed using interactive analytic procedures, which include condensing, presenting, and concluding. According to the study's findings, Aceh's *dayah* leaders' (*Abu*) paradigm has shifted from being exclusive and orthodox to being inclusive and flexible during the *dayah*'s current period of development. The Mua'dalah programme and the higher education programme *Ma'had Aly* were both implemented as part of *Abu's* strategy to reorient Islamic education in *dayah*, as well as the training of human resources to become educators

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INTRODUCTION

Dayah is one of the Islam archipelago's treasures (Hadi, 2017; Raya, 2021; Riza & Mistar, 2022; Syarifuddin, 2021). Its presence is directly related to the process of entering and developing Islam in the early days of this region (Mashuri, 2013; Subakat, 2017). The method of spreading Islam which is estimated to take place in the 8th century AD in the Peurlak area is also supported by the tradition of learning Islamic teachings in the corners of the mosque, which in Arabic is called *zawiyah* (Handriawan, 2016; La Moane et al., 2023; Nanti et al., 2018). This tradition is a legacy of the practice of teaching Islam carried out by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions while in Medina (Baiza, 2018; Sahin, 2021; Suyanta, 2012). In the development of Islam in Aceh through the Peurlak kingdom, this *dayah* later became an educational institution that functioned to answer human resource development needs at that time. On this basis, it is not surprising that many of the graduates of the *dayah* at that time became *Qadhi* and even became kings like *Teungku* Muhammad Amin, who is known as a figure who contributed to the birth of one of the

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oldest *dayah* at that time, *Dayah* Cot Kala (Erawadi & Setiadi, 2024; Fakhrurrazi et al., 2021a; Hadi, 2017; Mizaj, 2018; Wildan, 2022).

In subsequent developments, *dayah* became an inseparable part of the socio-religious life of the Acehnese (Alkaf et al., 2022; Kadir et al., 2021; Nirzalin, 2018). According to Mashuri (2013); Riza (2020), educational institutions across history have at least four functions; 1) as a centre for the spread of Islam, 2) as a centre for Islamic learning, 3) as a centre for resistance to colonialism and finally 4) as a centre for community development. Based on the functions mentioned, the development of the *dayah* moves dynamically in the times that occur in Acehnese society. *Dayah*, as the formal education in the Aceh kingdom era, produced several scholars that significantly contributed to the Islamic treasures in the archipelago through their works that can still be seen today, such as Hamzah Fansuri, Syamsyuddin As-Sumatrani, Nuruddin Ar- Raniry and Abdur Rauf As-Singkily (Iswandi, 2019; Muslim, 2021; Wildan, 2022). The pattern of *dayah* education during the Aceh Darussalam kingdom was arranged in stages, from the lowest level at the *Meunasah* institution in the villages to the higher education level called *dayah Manyang*, which was listed in a royal rule called *Qanun Meukuta Alam* (Erawadi & Setiadi, 2024; Riza & Mistar, 2022; Syafieh et al., 2022).

The colonialism that occurred in Aceh in 1872, particularly after the Aceh War had an impact on the *dayah*'s growth (Muntasir & Aminullah, 2020; Syamsuar et al., 2023; Usman et al., 2021). During that time *dayah* shifted its orientation from a centre of Islamic learning to combat colonialism by the Dutch. The period became a turning point in the decline of the development of the *dayah*, which was marked by the number of *dayah*s being burned by the colonialists. According to Dhuhri (2014) the *dayah* phase in Aceh may be divided into three phases, the first of which was characterised by the arrival of Islam in Aceh. The institutionalisation of the *dayah* inside the royal system and the ulama's prolific output of books on Islamic studies are what define the golden age of the *dayah*. The *dayah*'s stagnation from the time of colonialism until the present is a sign of the final declination period.

Since the *dayah* tends to be quite conservative and traditionalist and has a low literacy rate, one may say that the *dayah* is currently in a period of decline. As a result, the *dayah graduates*'s influence in society is very restricted (Anshari et al., 2023; Riska, 2016; Saputra, 2023; Srimulyani, 2013). On further review, there exists a significant correlation between the leadership style employed by *Abu* as a leader in a *Dayah*. Weber categorizes leadership styles into three models: traditional, charismatic, and rational. Moreover, traditional leadership derives its authority from the established customs and norms of a specific society, whereas charismatic leadership is rooted in the leader's exceptional qualities such as holiness, heroism, and extraordinary character. On the other hand, legal (rational) leadership is founded on the adherence to legal principles and procedures (Husin, 2013; Ilyas et al., 2023; Mubarak et al., 2023; Muhsin et al., 2023). Currently, the leadership of Aceh's *Dayah* institutions is predominantly characterized by conventional and charismatic approaches, which has led to a lack of progress in the growth of *Dayah* in response to contemporary advancements (Ilyas & Sibuea, 2019).

One issue that arises from this is the lack of formal recognition of the information that *dayah* students acquire in the contemporary disruptive age. However, during the past few decades, a number of Aceh *dayah*s under *Abu's* leadership have started to alter their paradigms in order to change the *dayah* educational system in order to get legitimacy and recognition from the government. With this, it is believed that the *dayah* would be able to

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fulfil its role in society on a large scale, as it did during its prime. In this case, it is crucial to see the leadership of *Abu Dayah* in responding to adjustments in the implementation of education in the *dayah*, especially at the higher education level, which is called *dayah Manyang*.

Several studies that have been carried out related to the adjustment efforts made by *dayah* in responding to current educational developments are the work of Nasution & Miswari (2019) in his research entitled "Preserving Identity Through Modernity: *Dayah* Al-Aziziyah and Its Negotiations with Modernity". This research was conducted with the type of case study on *Dayah* Al-Aziziyah. The results of this study indicate that *dayah* al-Aziziyah, as one of the traditional educations in Aceh, has taken steps to adapt to modern developments without abandoning the learning traditions that have existed and developed until now. Furthermore, Ilyas (2019); Ilyas & Sibuea (2019) in their research entitled "Leadership Transformation; Study of Islamic Boarding School (*Dayah*) in Aceh Province of Indonesia". This research was conducted using a qualitative approach with a phenomenological study design that examines the *dayah* institution in the context of its leadership management. The results of this study indicate that the tradition that developed before the *dayah* was led by a leader called *Abu* or similar titles. Nowadays, the leadership of the *dayah* has begun to evolve from being closed into one figure to *Abu* to collective leadership. In general, the two studies stated above have shown that the *dayah* have changed in response to the issues of our time. The study was done to demonstrate how *Abu*, the *dayah*'s leader, adopted a paradigm and strategy known as *Mua'dalah* and *Ma'had Aly* program as a continuation of the notion of changing the *dayah* education system.

METHOD

This research is qualitative research with the type of case study conducted on several *dayah* sites located on the West-South and East-North coasts of Aceh province. The selection of several *dayah* as research sites was carried out purposively, considering that these *dayah*s had implemented the *Mua'dalah* and the *Ma'had Aly* program as higher education. The *dayah* used as the research site are *Dayah* Darussalam *Labuhan* Haji South Aceh, *Dayah Madinatuddiniyah Darul 'Ulumiddin Blang Pidie*, located on the West-South coast of Aceh. Meanwhile, for the East-North Aceh region, the *Dayah* Asasul Islamiyah in East Aceh and the Madinatuddiniyah Nurul Huda *Dayah* in North Aceh. Data were collected by conducting in-depth interviews with several *Abu* leaders of these *dayah*s and related figures in a purposive-snowballing manner. The data obtained were then processed using interactive-analysis techniques that included the process of data condensation, data presentation and conclusion (Ridder et al., 2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data of this research are the answers to two questions in formulating the problem of how the *Abu* paradigm is reorienting the *dayah* higher education and how the strategies are used to develop higher education in the *dayah* environment. Based on the data obtained in this case, the *Abu Dayah* in Aceh already has a discourse to carry out the process of adjusting the *dayah* education so that their graduates get recognition and legality from the government. *Abu* as a leader, is a central figure in determining the direction of *dayah* education (Nirzalin Armia, 2014). It is because *Abu* has charisma in the mastery of Islamic religious knowledge. Besides that, *Abu* is the founder, owner, and *waqf* of *dayah* itself. His struggle is not limited to ability, energy, and time, but also land and other

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materials that are given for the advancement of Islamic symbols (Silahuddin, 2016). In fact, the presence of an Islamic educational institution is set up to address the demands of human resources in accordance with the times (Fikri, 2017).

It should not come as a surprise that many *dayah* graduates in the golden phase went on to become kings, *qadhis*, commanders, and others during the Islamic kingdom in Aceh (Silahuddin, 2016). It is as conveyed by *Abu* the leader of the Darussalam La*bu*han Haji *Dayah*, as follows: "The history of the birth of the *dayah* in the early days of the development of Islam in Aceh was actually a center of Islamic learning to give birth to students to meet the needs of the people at that time as was the case during the Islamic kingdoms of Peurlak, Pasai and Aceh Darussalam so that some of its *graduates* became *qadhi*, commanders and even kings like *Teungku* Muhammad Amin in the *dayah* of Cot Kala and other kings."

In Aceh, *dayah* education places equal emphasis on learning outputs and outcomes to help the larger community as much as possible (Wirianto, 2017). It is due to the fact that the *dayah* educational system is based on ideas such as iman (faith), ilmu (knowledge), amal (charity), and nasyru (Riza, 2022). Suppose it can be understood that the essence of this concept is very focused on mastering Islamic religious knowledge in the idea of science and with this capacity. In that case, it must then be able to encourage its students to practice it in daily life, both in the form of ritual worship and social-community worship. Sahlan et al., 2019). It is as conveyed by *Abu Dayah Madinatuddiniyah Darul 'Ulumiddin Blang Pidie* below: "Education in the *dayah* is actually an answer to the needs of the wider community, therefore education in the *dayah* is built on a concept consisting of faith in which the effort to live in the *dayah* is driven by faith and in this way the students are encouraged to explore the science of Islam. What they know as a result of this learning must be able to be applied in everyday life. And after the knowledge is obtained, there are other obligations that must be carried out, namely teaching it to the wider community, that is what we call *nasyru*."

So far, the education carried out in the *dayah* tends to be quite exclusive, so it seems to close itself off from the times (Srimulyani, 2014). Learning in the *dayah* is only oriented towards mastering the books of fiqh and the books of *tasawwuf* (Usman, 2021). This exclusivity then leaves the *dayah graduates* relatively behind other formal Islamic education *graduates* such as madrasas at the school level and IAIN, UIN and others. Islamic colleges (Kahar, 2021). Furthermore, this makes the role of *dayah graduates* very limited in the life of the people in Aceh. Currently, their position can only be seen in villages in small-scale activities such as being a recitation teacher at the TPA (Al-Qur'an Educational Center), doing *farhdu kifayah* when someone dies, becoming a *Meunasah* priest and others (Almuhajir, 2020). This phenomenon then became a reflection for several *Abus* in the *dayah* circles. They were called to make breakthroughs and adjustments to *dayah* education to get recognition and legitimacy from the government. One way to do this is by adopting the *mua'dalah* education model and formal *diniyah* education launched by the government through the ministry of religion. It is as stated by *Abu Dayah* Asasul Islamiyah as follows: "To get recognition and equalization from the government, the *dayah* party today inevitably has to follow government policies in the administration of pesantren, including in this case the *dayah*. At this *dayah*, we got permission to organize *mua'dalah* classes or also known as PDF, namely formal diniyah education. We do this so that students can get recognition from the government if they want to continue their education to the next level.

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In addition, we have also obtained permission to hold *Ma'had Aly* for higher education in the *dayah* environment."

Higher education in the form of the *Ma'had Aly* program, in this case, is very much in line with the vision of the *Abu Dayah*. One of the reasons is the continuity in efforts to preserve the *pesantren* or *dayah* learning tradition to the students so that the practice can be maintained and maintained (Hidayat, 2017). It is different if the students continue their education outside the *dayah* environment. It is feared that they will be eroded and influenced by an outside culture. It is as stated by *Abu Dayah Madinatuddiniyah Nurul Huda* as follows: "The current existence of *dayah* education on the one hand is in a fairly difficult choice on the one hand the learning tradition in this *dayah* must be preserved as much as possible on the other hand if *dayah* does not adapt to current developments, the *graduates* will continue to be left behind. There is concern from us when the *graduates* continue their higher education in campuses outside the *dayah* which can lose their distinctive colour as *dayah* students. Therefore, with the Ma'had Aly program which allows the implementation of higher education in the *dayah*, this is certainly very helpful for us people in the *dayah* to continue to maintain the tradition of learning the Islamic religion as it has developed here."

To follow up on the paradigm on the implementation of higher education, in this case, *Ma'had Aly* in the *dayah* environment in Aceh, the *Abu* are required to carry out specific strategies. In carrying out this strategy, *Abu* as the leader of the *dayah* is supported by his charisma so that he can quickly build interconnectivity with parties to achieve the desired goals (Nadlifah et al., 2020). Based on the data obtained, in this case, the strategy includes establishing a shared vision with the entire *dayah* community consisting of *Abu* as the leader of the *dayah*, senior *Teungku* and *graduates*. As referred to in this case, the idea opens itself to the current era's development. The exclusive-traditionalist attitude that has been taking root all this time is starting to shift towards a more open-minded attitude towards an inclusive-accommodative one. It does not mean that the vision adjustment made by the *dayah* will immediately leave the institutionalized tradition. It is as conveyed by *Abu Dayah Darussalam Labuhan Haji* below: "*Dayah* has now undergone several adjustments so that the educational goals implemented can be applied more broadly in society. There is a rule that says that preserving old traditions is good while taking new things to perfect existing traditions will be better."

In this case, it can be understood that the *dayah* conservative vision now has begun to have a collective awareness to re-position the *dayah* as a centre for Islamic learning and especially community development which is inherent in the lives of the Acehnese people (Zulkhairi, 2021). The vision built in the course of the action of the *dayah* is currently also strongly supported by the existence of a particular institution in charge of developing the *dayah*, namely the *dayah* department. It is a follow-up to the Aceh government law no. 11 of 2006 in the application of Islamic Law in Aceh, including in the field of Islamic education (Abee et al., 2019). In the last two decades, this condition has contributed a lot to the effort to build a vision of *dayah* education in a better direction.

Furthermore, to realize the implementation of higher education in the *dayah* environment, *Abu*, who *graduates* assist, builds communication and networks with related parties and the government. One of them, as mentioned above, is the *dayah* service, the leading partner in the development of the *dayah* in Aceh. Communication, in this case, is also built with the executive and legislative government to get support both materially and non-materially. This is as conveyed by *Abu Dayah* Madinatuddiniyah Darul 'Ulumiddin Blang Pidie below: "In order to realize the implementation of higher education in this *dayah*, we

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communicate a lot with related parties, especially in this case the *dayah* department which is given special authority to fix the *dayah*. On certain occasions, when we hold meetings with regents, governors and also several members of the DPRK and DPRA, we ask for directions and instructions so that our wishes can be carried out as they should be."

On other occasions, effective communication between *Abu* and the government provided doors to expand the *Teungku's* capacity as educators, allowing them to complete their studies at the post-graduate program. It aided *Abu* in putting other plans into action to make the *Ma'had Aly* initiative successful. The presence of qualified human resources who can join the program as teachers is one of the essential factors in this situation. The Acehnese government has given the *Dayah* community and Acehnese in general a lot of room to grow through the scholarship program by using the special autonomy money. It is as stated by *Abu Dayah Dayah Asasul Islamiyah* as follows: "In recent years, the *teungku dayah* have been greatly helped by the scholarships provided by the Aceh government to continue their education specifically in the postgraduate program. This really helps us to prepare lecturers who have a *dayah* background to work together to develop the Ma'had Aly program in our *dayah* environment."

The *dayah* has encouraged the *Teungku*, who serve as educators in the *dayah*, to apply for scholarships offered by the central government through the Ministry of Religion Affair in addition to using the scholarships offered by the Aceh government. It is as *Abu Dayah Madinatuddiniyah Nurul Huda* said below: "We are very grateful that the development of the *Ma'had Aly* program in our *dayah* environment has received a lot of support from various parties such as the Aceh government through the Aceh scholarship commission program and lastly through the human resource empowerment institution. Besides that, there are also scholarships given by the ministry of religion for the development of Islamic boarding schools."

From the description described above, *dayah* education in the current contemporary era has made innovations to answer the challenges and needs of the community, especially those within the province of Aceh. *Dayah*, which in recent decades, especially after the colonialism era, was considered quite conservative and orthodox, had made some adjustments (Fakhrurrazi et al., 2021b). In some instances, *dayah* educational institutions in Aceh seem very rigid in the development of education (Muhajir et al., 2021). The system of ownership of the *dayah*, which is controlled by the figure of *Abu*, on the other hand, makes it difficult for the *dayah* to follow the direction of government policies, especially related to curriculum development (Tabrani et al., 2021)

In the end, the educational system that seeks official approval and legitimacy has gradually altered the *dayah*s in Aceh's perspective on Islamic education. It is evident from the *Abu Dayah* leaders' perspective, which has modified the educational system to allow *Dayah* graduates to be welcomed and take an active part in society.

CONCLUSION

The *dayah* educational institution is an archipelago Islamic treasure that still exists and is accepted in the socio-religious life of the Acehnese people. *Dayah* in Acehnese society at least plays a vital role as a centre for Islamic learning and a centre for community development. In the last two decades, the part of the *dayah* through graduates has decreased along with the development of formal Islamic educational institutions such as madrasas at the school level and Islamic universities at the tertiary level. This phenomenon is possible because the education system run in the *dayah* does not get recognition and

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legitimacy from the government. Consequently, the movement of graduates in society is relatively narrow. *Dayah* is starting to open up to implement an education system that the government can recognize by implementing the *Mua'dalah* and *Ma'had Aly* programs at the higher education level. It was also followed by a change in *Abu Dayah*'s paradigm from an exclusive-conservative style to a more open paradigm, namely inclusive-accommodative. In developing this *dayah*, this paradigm was followed up by *Abu Dayah* through the strategies used for the implementation of the *Mua'dalah* and *Ma'had Aly* programs by preparing the *Teungku* as educators to be able to continue their education at the postgraduate level in addition to continuing to build relationships to partner with the government.

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