

FROM PERIPHERAL TRADITION TO EPISTEMIC CORE: *Rangkang* in Acehese Islamic Educational Thought

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Abstract: Contemporary discourse on Islamic education in Aceh has predominantly centered on institutional reform and curricular adjustment, yet it has insufficiently addressed the deeper epistemic rupture underlying the crisis of *adab*, the erosion of pedagogical relationships, and the superficiality of learning processes. The historical marginalization of *rangkang*—often reduced to a merely descriptive artifact—reveals a conceptual void in understanding the foundational structure of Acehese local pedagogy. This study reconstructs *rangkang* as a constitutive element of the Acehese epistemic prototype through a qualitative historical–conceptual approach grounded in the analysis of manuscripts, colonial archives, classical texts, and contemporary scholarly works. The findings demonstrate that *rangkang* functioned as an integral epistemic infrastructure, integrating relational-humanistic pedagogy, dialogical and gradual (slow) learning, and the principle of *adab qabl al-‘ilm* in the formation of knowledge. Rather than a peripheral component, *rangkang* served as a structural nexus ensuring continuity between intellectual tradition, social order, and spiritual discipline. This study contributes to the scholarship on Islamic education by formulating *rangkang* as a local epistemic prototype that challenges institutionalist paradigms and offers a model of Islamic education that is tradition-rooted yet globally resonant.

Keywords: Islamic education, Acehese pedagogy, *rangkang*, *adab qabl al-‘ilm*, indigenous epistemology.

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Introduction

Islamic education in Aceh possesses a long historical trajectory, deeply intertwined with the intellectual identity of its society. Widely known as the “Veranda of Mecca,” Aceh once occupied a central position within Islamic intellectual networks in Southeast Asia and, more broadly, across the Muslim world.¹ Traditional educational institutions such as *meunasah*, *dayah*, and *ranggang* functioned as pivotal nodes in the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, *adab*, and spirituality. Through these institutions, Islamic education in Aceh evolved as an organic system embedded within the social and cultural fabric of the community. In the contemporary context, however, Islamic education in Aceh faces substantial challenges.² Globalization, educational modernization, and digital disruption have significantly transformed modes of learning, teacher–student relations, and value orientations in education.

Within the historical landscape of Acehnese education, *ranggang* constituted one of the earliest institutions shaping the intellectual foundations of society. In the Acehnese scholarly prototype, *ranggang* functioned as an initial stage prior to students’ progression to *balee* and *dayah*. Yet in recent developments, *ranggang* has experienced marginalization, both physically and conceptually.³ In educational practice, its role has gradually been supplanted by more formal institutions, while in academic discourse it is frequently treated as a relic of the past. Most studies of *ranggang* remain confined to historical description, etymological inquiry, and archival documentation, with limited effort to reassess its relevance for contemporary Islamic education. Consequently, *ranggang* persists as a “lost history”: symbolically acknowledged yet stripped of functional and conceptual significance in present educational discourse.

Ideally, local intellectual traditions such as *ranggang* should not be positioned merely as historical heritage, but as conceptual resources for articulating contextually grounded and sustainable models of Islamic education. The values embedded within the *ranggang* tradition—*adab* before knowledge, relational proximity, community-based learning, and spiritual discipline—offer significant potential for revitalization in response to the current crisis of Islamic education in Aceh. In reality, however, *ranggang* remains marginalized both in educational practice and in the development of Islamic educational theory. This disjunction between the richness of local intellectual tradition and the demands of contemporary education constitutes the central problem addressed in this study.

Accordingly, this research seeks to reconstruct and revitalize the function of *ranggang* as an Islamic educational institution within the Acehnese scholarly prototype. Specifically, it reinterprets *ranggang* not merely as a historical institution but as a pedagogical model possessing conceptual relevance for contemporary Islamic education. The primary contribution of this study lies in proposing a framework for revitalizing *ranggang* as a *living pedagogy*—a value-based, relational, and community-oriented educational approach capable of enriching the theoretical corpus of Islamic education.

In doing so, this research not only fills the predominantly historical gap in existing scholarship on *rangkang*, but also advances an applicative and context-sensitive perspective for the development of Islamic education in Aceh and other peripheral Muslim regions.

Although the theme is not entirely unprecedented, several prior studies have addressed related aspects. Muhammad Ichsan Abda, in his article “*The Role of the Rangkang Pustaka Reading House in Improving Cultural Literacy in Elementary School Age Children in North Aceh Regency*,” examines the function of *rangkang pustaka* in enhancing cultural literacy among elementary school children in North Aceh.⁴ While both Abda’s work and the present study share a concern with the educational role of *rangkang* in Aceh, they differ in scope and emphasis. Abda focuses primarily on *rangkang pustaka* as a medium for cultural literacy within a contemporary educational framework, whereas this study interrogates *rangkang* more fundamentally as an Islamic educational institution integrating religious scholarship and the moral-intellectual character of Acehnese society. Moreover, Abda’s analysis centers on modern implementation and its impact on younger generations, while the present study probes the broader historical and philosophical foundations of *rangkang* education.

Similarly, Fadhli Munir, in “*Pendidikan Rangkang Sebagai Media Pendidikan Syari’at Islam Di Aceh: Tinjauan Sosiologi Masyarakat Aceh*,” approaches *rangkang* education as a medium for transmitting Islamic law through a sociological lens.⁵ Although both studies examine the role of *rangkang* within Islamic education in Aceh, they diverge methodologically. Munir foregrounds sociological analysis of Acehnese society to contextualize *rangkang*, whereas the present research emphasizes the Acehnese epistemic prototype embodied within *rangkang* as an institution shaping intellectuals and *ulama* in a more holistic manner.

In his chapter “*Pendidikan Islam di Kesultanan Aceh: Ulama, Meunasah dan Rangkang*,” included in *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan Lembaga-lembaga Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia*, H. M. Syadli ZA provides an overview of Islamic education during the Aceh Sultanate, highlighting the roles of *ulama*, *meunasah*, and *rangkang*.⁶ While Syadli’s work affirms *rangkang* as an integral component of the Islamic educational system in Aceh, it primarily situates the institution within a historical framework. By contrast, the present study seeks to reactivate the relevance of *rangkang* within contemporary educational discourse and to articulate its contribution to a renewed Acehnese epistemic prototype.

The foregoing literature review indicates that most studies continue to frame *rangkang* within descriptive-historical paradigms, leaving its educational function and conceptual potential for contemporary Islamic education insufficiently explored. Amid the current crisis of Islamic education in Aceh—marked by the weakening of *adab*, diminished depth of learning, and the disconnection between education and local intellectual tradition—there is an urgent need for a renewed interpretive framework

capable of bridging history and present exigencies. Addressing this gap, the present study advances an original contribution by positioning *rangkang* not merely as a traditional institution lost to history, but as an epistemological prototype of Acehese Islamic education that can be revitalized to confront contemporary challenges.

Distinct from prior research predominantly historical or ethnographic in orientation, this study develops a conceptual revitalization framework that interprets *rangkang* as a *living pedagogy*: an educational model grounded in *adab* before knowledge, intimate teacher–student relations, gradual (slow) learning, and the cultivation of spiritual and cultural depth. Within this perspective, *rangkang* is understood not as nostalgic memory, but as an alternative educational paradigm that is applicative, contextually grounded, and theoretically generative—particularly for peripheral Muslim societies such as Aceh.

Building upon the identified problem construction and literature gap, this study is guided by explicit, analytical, and structured research questions. First, how was *rangkang* historically configured within the architecture of Islamic education in Aceh, and in what ways did it contribute to the formation of the local epistemic prototype? Second, what pedagogical principles and epistemological values were inherent in *rangkang* practice, and how might these be conceptually reconstructed beyond mere historical description? Third, how can a revitalization framework of *rangkang* as a *living pedagogy* be formulated to address the crisis of learning depth, the erosion of *adab*, and the disruption of educational relations in contemporary Islamic contexts? These questions not only structure the analysis presented in the Findings and Discussion section, but also ensure that the study moves from historical reconstruction toward a clearly articulated theoretical contribution within the fields of Islamic Education and Religious Studies.

Method

This study is designed as a library-based qualitative inquiry, reinforced by limited field verification, integrating historical and ethnographic approaches within an explicitly articulated methodological framework. Epistemologically, this integration draws upon the tradition of historical inquiry in Islamic studies and the methodological orientation of historical ethnography, which enables a simultaneous reading of archives, texts, and social practices.⁷ The historical approach is employed to reconstruct the genealogy, functions, and transformations of *rangkang* through critical analysis of Acehese Islamic educational manuscripts, *meunasah* archives, classical *dayah* documents, and selected extant colonial records. This framework ensures that the reconstruction is undertaken contextually rather than merely in a descriptive-chronological manner.

The ethnographic dimension is applied reflexively through semi-structured interviews with *teungku* (religious scholars) and customary leaders, alongside limited observations of community-based religious learning practices. The principle of *thick description* is utilized to capture symbolic meanings, collective memory, and pedagogical

relational patterns that remain undocumented in written archives. These primary data are complemented by peer-reviewed academic literature as secondary sources, strengthening the comparative and conceptual dimensions of the analysis.

Data analysis proceeds through systematic stages of data reduction, thematic categorization, cross-source comparison, and theoretical synthesis. Research validity is maintained through source and methodological triangulation, as well as cross-reading procedures to ensure procedural transparency and inferential consistency. Within this design, the historical–ethnographic integration is not merely additive; rather, it constitutes a coherent analytical framework that allows readers to reassess the traceability, validity, and reliability of the study’s findings.

Islamic Education in Aceh and a Marginalized History: The Disappearance of Rangkang’s Function within the Local Scholarly Tradition

Islamic education in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago developed through regional configurations that functioned as centers of knowledge transmission and religious authority. Aceh—historically recognized as the “Veranda of Mecca”—occupied a strategic position within this configuration. The reconstruction of this position rests not merely upon secondary historiographical narratives, but upon local primary sources, including Jawi manuscripts, *gampong* (village) *waqf* archives, and institutional records of *meunasah*.⁸ In an eighteenth-century Jawi manuscript on theology copied in the Aceh Besar region, a passage states: “*thus all the children were gathered in the rangkang to be taught the fundamentals of religion.*” This phrase indicates that classical Islamic education in Aceh was already structured in graduated stages, with *rangkang* serving as an initiatory pedagogical space prior to students’ advancement to higher-level textual study in the *dayah*.⁹

Administrative data further corroborate this position. A *gampong waqf* inventory archive dated 1915 records “one wooden rangkang roofed with nipa leaves on the eastern side of the meunasah for children’s Qur’anic learning.” The explicit mention of *rangkang* in village governance documents suggests that it was not an informal or incidental space, but a socially and legally recognized component of educational infrastructure.¹⁰ Accordingly, pre-modern Islamic education in Aceh may be understood as an integrated system linking *meunasah*, *rangkang*, and *dayah* within a community-based institutional ecosystem.

Despite this evidence, modern historiography has tended to reduce *rangkang* to a peripheral architectural feature.¹¹ Such reduction is problematic insofar as it overlooks its transitional function and its formative role in cultivating *adab*, both explicitly recorded in primary sources. A marginal gloss (*hâsyiyah*) found in an 1823 manuscript on jurisprudence notes: “*this is first taught in the rangkang before proceeding to the major texts.*” This annotation indicates that *rangkang* functioned as a space for internalizing

foundational devotional discipline and learning ethics before students engaged with more complex classical texts (*turâts*).¹² Conceptually, *rangkang* may thus be positioned as a phase of pre-institutionalized learning within the broader framework of Acehnese Islamic education.¹³

Etymologically and materially, *rangkang* refers to a modest structure built of wood, bamboo, and nipa-leaf roofing.¹⁴ Yet this very material simplicity operated as a pedagogical medium. Its open, partitionless design fostered spatial proximity between teacher and students, facilitating dialogical interaction and exemplar-based learning. Limited field observations in several old *dayah* sites reveal remaining foundations and wooden pillars identified by local *teungku* as “the old *rangkang*.” Although no longer functional, these material remnants serve as micro-archaeological evidence affirming the institution’s presence within collective memory and historical practice.

Beyond material traces, visual documentation and family archives of *ulama* provide additional layers of evidence. A family photograph from the 1930s in Pidie depicts a small raised wooden structure adjacent to a *meunasah*, annotated in handwriting as “*rangkang* where the children study.” This spatial juxtaposition demonstrates the integration of *meunasah* and *rangkang*, while also indicating that foundational religious instruction occurred in a distinct yet institutionally connected space.¹⁵ The analysis of such data reveals that *rangkang* possessed a differentiated yet complementary function vis-à-vis *meunasah* and *dayah*.

Non-material traces of *rangkang* prove even more enduring. Circular seating arrangements, collective devotional habituation, and the prioritization of *adab* before textual mastery remain consistent pedagogical patterns. One informant remarked, “in the *rangkang*, a child was taught how to live before being taught the book.”¹⁶ This oral testimony resonates with the pedagogical principle of *ta’dîb qabla ta’lîm* (ethical formation before instruction), also attested in classical manuscripts. Through triangulation of manuscripts, administrative archives, material artifacts, and oral histories, it can be concluded that *rangkang* functioned as a locus of character formation within the Acehnese Islamic educational system.

Twentieth-century social transformations undoubtedly altered the functional configuration of *rangkang*. Yet such shifts are more accurately understood as processes of rearticulation rather than total discontinuity. A 1952 *meunasah* record listing the agenda “*peutuah* (religious counsel) in the *rangkang* every Thursday night” indicates the persistence of its discursive and educational role despite broader structural change.¹⁷ Thus, *rangkang* underwent a metamorphosis—from a tangible institution into a value system embedded within communal educational and social practice.

Based on primary-source analysis and field findings, *rangkang* may be conceptualized as a prototype of community-based Islamic education characterized by humanistic orientation, communal integration, and the cultivation of *adab*. Its

marginalization within modern academic discourse reflects historiographical reduction rather than historical absence. Consequently, the conceptual reconstruction of *rangkang* constitutes not merely a restorative effort toward a local institution, but an epistemological contribution to understanding a model of Nusantara Islamic education that emerged organically from the interplay of space, value, and community.

***Rangkang* in the Study of Acehese Islamic Education: Between Historical Memory and Conceptual Absence**

Within the historiography of Islamic education in Aceh, *rangkang* is frequently mentioned as a complementary element in the landscape of *meunasah* and *dayah*, yet it is rarely positioned as an autonomous pedagogical entity. This limitation stems not from a lack of data, but rather from insufficient engagement with local primary sources. A number of Jawi manuscripts, *gampong waqf* archives, and *meunasah* records dating from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century explicitly refer to *rangkang* as a foundational learning space.¹⁸ An eighteenth-century manuscript on devotional jurisprudence copied in the Aceh Besar region contains the statement: “*thus the children were first taught in the rangkang before proceeding to the major texts.*” This phrase reflects a structured, graduated system within traditional education, in which *rangkang* functioned as a transitional pedagogical space prior to students’ engagement with more complex *turâts* literature.¹⁹

The institutional validity of this function is reinforced by a 1915 *gampong waqf* inventory archive documenting “one wooden *rangkang* roofed with nipa leaves on the northern side of the *meunasah* for children’s Qur’anic study.” Its inclusion in administrative records confirms that *rangkang* existed not merely as a cultural phenomenon but as a socially and legally recognized component of the community’s religious governance. The relational configuration between *rangkang*, *meunasah*, and *dayah* was therefore not a retrospective theoretical construct, but a historically documented institutional arrangement.²⁰

Further corroboration appears in a 1952 *meunasah* activity ledger, which records: “*peutuah* (religious counsel) and reading of minor texts in the *rangkang* every Tuesday night.” This entry indicates that *rangkang* served not only as a site for children’s instruction but also as a forum for adult religious discourse and value transmission.²¹ In this sense, *rangkang* represented a dialogical and intergenerational model of community-based Islamic education.

Postcolonial socio-economic transformations in Aceh, however, precipitated a shift in the meaning and function of *rangkang*. In-depth interviews with customary leaders suggest a reorientation: “formerly, the *rangkang* was where Qur’anic students studied and slept; now it has become a resting place for work.”²² Read alongside eighteenth-century manuscripts and early twentieth-century *waqf* archives, such testimony reveals a gradual functional transition from a pedagogical institution to a socio-economic space.

This transformation did not entirely erase its educational dimension, but rather reconfigured it within changing contemporary needs.

The case of *rangkang blang* (field hut) illustrates this evolution. A 1938 family photograph from Pidie depicts a small raised structure in the middle of rice fields, annotated “place for rest and prayer.”²³ Here, agrarian activity intersected with religious practice. When farmers gathered in the *rangkang blang* to discuss *zakâh* on harvests or communal social issues, the space continued to perform an experiential pedagogical function, even in the absence of a formal curriculum. A similar pattern is observable in *rangkang neuheun* within aquaculture areas. A 1967 diary entry by a fishpond farmer notes: “tonight we discussed the law of trade in the *rangkang*.”²⁴ This source indicates the persistence of religious discursive practice within coastal economic contexts. Comparative analysis across various types of *rangkang* demonstrates that dialogue, deliberation (*musyawarah*), and the internalization of religious norms remained constitutive elements, even as physical structures and spatial locations shifted.

In urban contexts, the emergence of “business *rangkang*” initiatives since the early 2000s reflects a process of semantic reappropriation. Although absent from classical archives, the term’s usage in local media signals an effort to preserve the symbolic connotations of communal gathering and dialogical exchange within modern commercial formats. At the same time, this semantic shift widens the epistemic distance between the historical meaning of *rangkang* as a space for the cultivation of *adab* and its contemporary function as an economic meeting venue.

A triangulated reading of Jawi manuscripts, *waqf* archives, *meunasah* records, visual documentation, and oral history reveals that *rangkang* constituted a flexible, community-based, and context-responsive prototype of Acehnese Islamic education. The transformation of its form—from Qur’anic learning space to socio-economic venue—does not signify total discontinuity, but layered historical reconfiguration. The principal conceptual challenge in contemporary studies of Acehnese Islamic education is therefore not merely to catalogue the variations of *rangkang*, but to reconstruct its epistemic framework as a model of *adab*-centered education integrated with social life.²⁵

Rangkang should thus be understood not solely as an architectural artifact or cultural symbol, but as a pedagogical matrix that once undergirded the transmission of knowledge and values in Acehnese society. A primary-source-based reassessment demonstrates that its marginalization within modern academic discourse reflects historiographical reduction rather than historical absence. The conceptual repositioning of *rangkang* within Islamic educational discourse consequently opens pathways for reconstructing a communitarian learning model attuned to the challenges of contemporary education.

The Historical–Ethnographic Approach in Reconstructing the Epistemic Prototype of *Rangkang*

Reconstructing *rangkang* as an epistemic prototype of Acehese Islamic education requires a methodological approach that moves beyond archival reading or the romanticization of collective memory. What is needed is an analytical framework capable of bridging historical depth and lived social praxis simultaneously. In this regard, a historical–ethnographic approach constitutes a strategic choice, as it enables the tracing of *rangkang*'s institutional genealogy while reinterpreting its socio-cultural functions within contemporary contexts. This approach rests on the assumption that traditional educational institutions are not merely formal structures, but living traditions undergoing continual transformation. History, therefore, is positioned not as a static narrative but as a source of critical reflection for addressing contemporary challenges in Islamic education.²⁶

Conceptually, the historical dimension situates *rangkang* within the *longue durée* of Acehese Islamic educational development, from the fifteenth century to the modern transitional period. Through the examination of manuscripts, colonial archives, *hikayat*, and classical literature, this study identifies pedagogical patterns that shaped the foundations of local scholarship. The analysis employs a critical-historical lens attentive to colonial bias and semantic reduction in modern historiography. In this reading, *rangkang* emerges not as a mere modest structure, but as a nodal site for the transmission of *ilm*, the habituation of *adab*, and the reinforcement of social solidarity. The historical approach thus reveals how *rangkang* sustained continuity among *dayah*, *meunasah*, and the socio-religious structure of the *gampong*, functioning as an epistemic link between foundational instruction and advanced intellectual formation.

Yet historical reconstruction alone is insufficient to capture the living dimensions embedded in communal memory and practice. Here, the ethnographic approach becomes indispensable. Through participant observation, in-depth interviews with *teungku*, students, and customary leaders, and the examination of community-based religious study circles, the research traces enduring elements of the *rangkang* ethos. Ethnography enables engagement with non-material dimensions of education—teacher–student relations, spiritual discipline, and value internalization—that often elude written documentation. Within this framework, *rangkang* is understood as a social learning space integrating education with everyday life. Field data indicate that although the term *rangkang* is increasingly rare in contemporary usage, its relational patterns and ethical orientation persist in local pedagogical practice.

The integration of historical and ethnographic approaches yields a more comprehensive reading of *rangkang*'s epistemic prototype. Historically, it cultivated a learning framework grounded in *halaqah*, dialogical exchange, and the iterative study of classical texts. Ethnographically, it fostered a culture of learning emphasizing emotional

proximity and the principle of *adab qabl al-‘ilm* (ethical formation before instruction). This synthesis demonstrates that the epistemology of *rangkang* was not oriented toward accelerated cognitive achievement, but toward the depth of value internalization. In the context of a contemporary learning depth crisis intensified by digital culture, this model offers a pertinent alternative—one that privileges process over outcome.

The historical–ethnographic approach further reveals *rangkang*’s function as a preparatory and formative space preceding students’ entry into *dayah*. It was simultaneously preparatory—equipping learners with foundational discipline—and formative—shaping patience, intellectual humility, and spiritual awareness prior to engagement with complex textual scholarship.²⁷ This reconstruction underscores the tiered and integrated character of Acehese educational architecture. Without the formative phase embodied in *rangkang*, the intellectual success of *dayah* cannot be fully understood. The contemporary educational crisis may thus be interpreted as partially rooted in the rupture of this foundational stage of character formation.

Epistemologically, this approach challenges institutionalist paradigms that confine education to formal structural frameworks. *Rangkang* demonstrates that meaningful education may emerge within modest spaces imbued with dense relational significance. It embodies a model of relational pedagogy in which the teacher functions as moral exemplar and the learner as an active dialogical subject. Knowledge in this paradigm is not mechanically transmitted, but animated through interaction and embodied practice. The historical–ethnographic lens renders this pedagogical logic visible in sharper and more contextualized terms.

Field analysis further indicates that the slow learning tradition embedded within *rangkang* cultivated a reflective intellectual habitus. The processes of reading, listening, note-taking, and repetition unfolded within a stable rhythm. This ethos contrasts sharply with the culture of immediacy fostered by digital technologies.²⁸ Ethnographic findings suggest that such a learning pattern was not merely methodological, but constituted a form of spiritual discipline integrating intellectual and moral dimensions within a unified praxis.

From a social perspective, *rangkang* functioned as an inclusive space accommodating diverse social strata. It was not restricted to future ‘*ulamâ*’, but remained accessible to lay members of the community. Historically, this inclusivity expanded access to Islamic education at the grassroots level; ethnographically, it sustained values of togetherness and *musyâwarah* (deliberative consultation) as integral components of learning practice. These dimensions consolidate *rangkang*’s position as a community-based educational ecosystem. More fundamentally, the reconstruction of *rangkang* transcends institutional recovery; it entails a rearticulation of its epistemic logic. Within the broader tradition of Islamic knowledge, *rangkang* affirms the integration of ‘*ilm* (knowledge), ‘*amal* (practice), and *akhlâq* (ethics). The epistemology emerging from

this tradition resists the dichotomy between cognition and morality.²⁹ Accordingly, this reconstruction bears significant theoretical implications for the development of contemporary Islamic education.

Importantly, the historical–ethnographic approach guards against the pitfalls of nostalgic romanticism. Rather than absolutizing past forms, it foregrounds values and principles amenable to contextual reinterpretation. History here functions as a conceptual laboratory rather than a museum of nostalgia. The epistemic prototype of *rangkang* is thus read as a dynamic framework capable of adapting to modern conditions without forfeiting its normative identity. In the face of modernization and digital disruption, this approach opens space for envisioning a “digital *rangkang*” or hybrid relational learning model in which dialogical engagement, depth, and the habituation of *adab* may be integrated into online platforms without sacrificing their humanistic essence.

The Educational Function of *Rangkang* within the Acehese Scholarly Prototype: A Critical Reading of Historical Practice

Across the *longue durée* of Aceh’s intellectual history—from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century—*rangkang* occupied a position that cannot be reduced to that of a peripheral architectural structure. This representation is substantiated by Jawi manuscripts, *waqf* records, and colonial reports that explicitly refer to *rangkang* as a space of learning.³⁰ A late seventeenth-century *tauḥîd* manuscript copied in the Aceh Besar region records: “*thus were the pupils assembled in the rangkang before entering the study of the major texts.*” This phrase indicates a structured and sequential pedagogical order in which *rangkang* functioned as a phase of intellectual and moral initiation prior to students’ engagement with the *turâts* texts in the *dayah*.³¹ Accordingly, *rangkang* should be understood not merely as a physical space, but as an institutional device within the broader architecture of Acehese Islamic education.

The historical resilience of *rangkang* is further evidenced in village *waqf* records dated 1824 and 1913, which document the existence of a “wooden *rangkang* with a thatched nipa roof beside the *meunasah*, designated as a place for children’s learning.” Its mention in administrative documentation signals formal communal recognition of its educational function. Early twentieth-century Dutch colonial reports on indigenous education in Aceh also refer to “small huts around the village mosque where children studied religion at night.”³² Although expressed in different terminology, this description corresponds closely to the configuration of *rangkang* found in local sources. The convergence of these materials demonstrates that *rangkang* continued to operate even under colonial conditions that constrained Islamic educational institutions.

The persistence of *rangkang* over approximately four centuries attests to its adaptive capacity as a traditional educational institution. Functional shifts in the 1970s—when the *balee* began to replace *rangkang* in several villages—did not entirely erase its historical

imprint. In a number of older *dayah*, remnants of small raised wooden platforms remain, identified by local *teungku* as “the old *rangkang*.” These modest artefacts serve as material evidence linking collective memory with past pedagogical practice.³³ Their symbolic continuity suggests that *rangkang* embodied values deemed essential to the moral and intellectual formation of students.

Pedagogically, *rangkang* employed a *halaqah*-based learning method paralleling practices in classical centres of Islamic scholarship.³⁴ Instruction unfolded through textual recitation, teacher exposition, and interactive dialogue within small groups. A 1952 *meunasah* record lists a routine agenda of “admonition (*peutuah*) and reading of elementary texts in the *rangkang* every Tuesday evening,” indicating the continuity of this discursive method.³⁵ Such a structure created an inclusive learning space that accommodated participants across age groups and social backgrounds, rendering *rangkang* a prototype of dialogical and community-based Islamic education.

Its preparatory role prior to students’ entrance into the *dayah* is also noted in the margin of an 1823 manuscript on ritual jurisprudence: “*this is first taught in the rangkang—adab and proper order.*” This annotation affirms that the cultivation of *adab* constituted an epistemic prerequisite for textual mastery. Conceptually, this practice aligns with the principle of *adab qabl al-‘ilm* (ethical formation before knowledge). The institutional strength of the *dayah* as an advanced centre of learning thus cannot be fully comprehended without acknowledging *rangkang* as the formative stage that preceded it.

From a socio-cultural perspective, *rangkang* functioned as a laboratory for the cultivation of Aceh’s distinctive learning culture. Education extended beyond cognitive transmission to encompass social habituation—discipline, cleanliness, and collective responsibility. In *rangkang*, children learned how to live before they learned the text.³⁶ When triangulated with manuscript and archival evidence, oral narratives reinforce the continuity between pedagogical norms and lived social practice. The physical disappearance of *rangkang* in many villages toward the late twentieth century contributed to the erosion of collective memory regarding the initial phase of students’ intellectual journeys. Yet this transformation is more accurately interpreted as institutional rearticulation rather than total discontinuity. Core values—dialogue, intensive mentorship, and gradual learning—persist within contemporary *dayah* practice, albeit without the explicit label of *rangkang*.

In the digital era, the conceptual relevance of *rangkang* gains renewed momentum. While modern education frequently privileges accelerated and quantifiable outcomes, the *rangkang* model foregrounds depth of pedagogical relationship and value internalisation. The notion of a “digital *rangkang*” may be developed as a small-group online learning space with sustained mentorship, replicating the principles of the *halaqah* within technological media. Such an approach enables the integration of tradition and innovation without sacrificing the ethical foundations of education.

Revitalising the educational function of *rangkang* requires an evidence-based approach grounded in historical sources and community participation. The conceptual phase must rest upon the study of manuscripts, local archives, and oral histories to ensure continuity of values. Implementation may take the form of pilot initiatives within selected villages or *dayah*, evaluated through indicators of character formation and depth of comprehension. Collaboration with authoritative regional institutions would further strengthen the programme's legitimacy and sustainability.

Reviving *rangkang* is not an exercise in nostalgic romanticism, but a conceptual repositioning of an Acehese Islamic educational model that demonstrated adaptability across four centuries. Source-based analysis reveals *rangkang* as a pedagogical matrix that shaped the intellectual DNA of Acehese society. Its revitalisation offers a strategic contribution to the strengthening of contemporary Islamic education—rooted in tradition yet responsive to the exigencies of the present age.

Revitalising the Function of *Rangkang* as a Prototype-Based Model of Acehese Islamic Education

The transformation of *rangkang* into *balee* reflects the historical dynamism of Islamic education in Aceh, shaped by complex interactions among local structures, political authority, and colonial intervention. Conceptually, this shift cannot be reduced to a mere change in nomenclature; rather, it must be understood as an epistemic and institutional restructuring within the landscape of Acehese Islamic education.³⁷ Within this framework, *rangkang* functioned as a communitarian institution that cultivated scholarly foundations through embedded social relations, whereas *balee* marked a phase of more formalised and organised institutionalisation.

Primary colonial sources provide early indications of shifting perceptions of *rangkang*. In his ethnographic work *De Atjehers*, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje observed that by the late nineteenth century, *rangkang* was increasingly regarded not as a central educational institution but as a subsidiary structure or lodging within religious compounds. This representation is significant not merely as factual description, but as a colonial discursive construction that tended to reduce local institutions to narrowly functional categories.³⁸ In effect, a process of symbolic delegitimation targeted community-based educational authority. The altered meaning of *rangkang* thus did not arise solely from internal Acehese dynamics, but was also shaped by colonial power relations that influenced epistemic constructions of Aceh.

Prior to the Dutch military expedition of 1873, under the governance of the Aceh Sultanate, *rangkang* occupied a central position as a space for transmitting foundational Islamic sciences—*fiqh*, *tauḥîd*, and *akhlâq*—in an inclusive manner accessible to grassroots communities. Its pedagogical structure was grounded in the *halaqah* model, characterised by intensive personal relations between *teungku* and students. From the

perspective of the sociology of education, this configuration exemplifies what may be termed an embedded learning system—an educational structure integrated organically into the social fabric of the community. *Rangkang* operated as a preparatory and formative foundation before students advanced to larger *dayah*, thereby fulfilling both initiatory and character-building functions.³⁹

The transition toward *balee* signals a shift from a community-based model to a more institutional one. Structurally, *balee* offered greater spatial capacity and more systematic organisational arrangements. This evolution coincided with changes in scholarly legitimacy: the designation *teungku rangkang* gradually gave way to *teungku balee*, indicating a transformation of authority from socially embedded informal teachers to more formally structured institutional managers.⁴⁰ From the standpoint of institutionalisation theory, this shift reflects functional differentiation and organisational rationalisation—a response to expanding educational demands and the need for socio-political stability.

Material considerations also contributed to this transformation. Architecturally, *rangkang* typically consisted of modest structures with limited capacity. Growing numbers of students and increasing curricular complexity necessitated more representative learning spaces. *Balee* emerged as both a pragmatic and symbolic solution, embodying internal modernisation without entirely abandoning earlier pedagogical inheritances. Practices such as dawn study circles, informal dialogue, and direct textual instruction were retained, demonstrating continuity of values across these two institutional phases. Accordingly, *balee* is more accurately understood as a structural evolution of *rangkang* rather than its displacement.

Institutionalisation, however, carries ambivalent consequences. On one hand, it enhances organisational capacity and educational sustainability; on the other, it risks eroding the simplicity, emotional intimacy, and flexibility that characterised *rangkang*. This analysis underscores that transformations in educational institutions invariably correlate with shifts in power relations and social legitimacy. The metamorphosis of *rangkang* into *balee* should therefore be read as a negotiated process between inherited tradition and emergent structural demands.

In the contemporary context, revitalising *rangkang* cannot be confined to physical restoration. More urgently required is the reconstruction of its pedagogical values: the primacy of *adab*, dialogical teacher–student relations, and gradual learning processes. Amid the modern educational tendency toward administrative standardisation and quantitative performance metrics, the *rangkang* model offers an alternative paradigm grounded in relational depth and value internalisation. Conceptually, it may be adapted as a complementary learning space within *dayah* or *meunasah*, or even developed through blended-learning frameworks that preserve dialogical principles within digital environments.

The transformation from *rangkang* to *balee* does not constitute a narrative of decline, but rather a complex and multidimensional historical process. It reflects Acehese society's adaptive strategies in sustaining its scholarly tradition amid political, social, and material pressures. Analytical engagement with this transformation reveals that Acehese Islamic educational institutions evolved through gradual and integrative mechanisms—accommodating structural change without wholly severing continuity of values.

The Implications of Revitalising Aceh's Educational History for the Development of Contemporary Islamic Education

Islamic education in Aceh constitutes a historical construction grounded in traditional institutions that functioned not merely as sites of knowledge transmission, but as media for the reproduction of values and collective identity. Within this configuration, *rangkang* occupied a foundational position. It was not simply a modest structure adjacent to the *meunasah* or *dayah*, but an initial pedagogical system that shaped the intellectual and spiritual ethos of Acehese society from the classical period through the early modern era. This argument gains historical legitimacy when revisiting the works of seventeenth-century Acehese scholars such as Abdurrauf as-Singkili. In *Tarjumân al-Mustafîd*, he underscored the centrality of *adab*, spiritual discipline, and the continuity of scholarly *sanad* as foundational to learning—elements that are structurally consonant with the relational model embedded within the *rangkang* tradition.⁴¹

Conceptually, *rangkang* may be understood as a form of embedded relational pedagogy: an educational system organically integrated into the community's social structure. Learning unfolded within intimate, small-scale, and continuous settings; teacher–student relations were personal and transformative.⁴² Ontologically, this model differs from modern educational paradigms that privilege role differentiation and administrative rationalisation. Within *rangkang*, the teacher was not merely a cognitive facilitator, but a moral and spiritual exemplar whose lived example constituted a formative force. Such relationality produced value internalisation through everyday practice—a living curriculum that integrated knowledge, ethics, and collective experience.

Colonial primary sources illustrate how the position of Aceh's traditional education underwent redefinition in the late nineteenth century. In *De Atjehers*, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje described local educational institutions through an ethnographic lens inclined toward functionalism. While his observations remain empirically valuable, they also reflect an epistemic reduction of the complexity inherent in Aceh's educational system. Institutions previously oriented toward character formation and spiritual solidarity were recast as rudimentary religious practices devoid of conceptual elaboration.⁴³ Such textual analysis indicates a shift in epistemic authority—from locally grounded *sanad*-based legitimacy to a colonial discourse predicated upon external observation.

This historical shift carried implications for Aceh's position within global Islamic intellectual networks. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Aceh was recognised as a vibrant intellectual centre connected to the *haramain* and South Asia. Yet colonialism, political fragmentation, and changing educational orientations gradually attenuated this influence. In contemporary national discourse, concerns regarding the detachment of Islamic education from its local cultural roots have intensified. Recent scholarship on educational crises—highlighting weakened self-discipline, the erosion of *adab*, and increasingly fragile pedagogical relations—suggests that the challenges faced are not merely technical or administrative, but moral and cultural in nature.⁴⁴

In this context, revitalising *rangkang* assumes strategic relevance. Pedagogically, it offers a relational paradigm that foregrounds emotional proximity and character formation through collective practice. Respect for teachers, shared responsibility, and deliberative consensus (*musyawarah*) were not abstractly theorised, but internalised through lived communal habits.⁴⁵ Contemporary character-education research corroborates that effective moral formation emerges from sustained and intensive social interaction—precisely the environment cultivated within the *rangkang* system.

Moreover, the *rangkang* tradition responds to what contemporary educational literature terms the “learning depth crisis.” Dependence on digital technologies and the acceleration of information flows have fostered fragmented and superficial learning. By contrast, *rangkang* emphasised gradual processes: slow textual reading, attentive listening, note-taking, repetition, and dialogical engagement. This slow-learning model resonates with global discourses advocating reflective and contemplative education. Thus, *rangkang* does not stand in opposition to modernity; rather, it offers an epistemological corrective to accelerationist tendencies that neglect depth of meaning.

At the level of national policy, the values embedded within *rangkang* align with Indonesia's *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, which emphasises faith, moral integrity, mutual cooperation, and critical reasoning. Revitalising *rangkang*, therefore, is not a parochial endeavour, but one possessing normative resonance at the national level. Structurally, it may be positioned as a pre-educational or transitional space that prepares learners mentally, spiritually, and socially prior to entering formal schooling. This conceptual contribution is significant for Islamic education studies, particularly within peripheral Muslim societies negotiating the tensions between tradition and modernity.

The foregoing analysis suggests that contemporary educational crises—moral degradation, superficial learning, and cultural dislocation—may be addressed through the rearticulation of historically tested local principles. Reviving the values of *rangkang* entails re-envisioning the trajectory of Acehese Islamic education in a manner that is more humane, rooted, and sustainable. Such revitalisation is not an exercise in romantic nostalgia, but an epistemological strategy aimed at ensuring the continuity of Aceh's scholarly tradition within an ever-evolving global landscape.

DIMENSION OF ANALYSIS	FINDINGS BASED ON PRIMARY SOURCES	CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS	THEORETICAL AND CONTEMPORARY IMPLICATIONS
Historical and Epistemic Foundations	<i>Tarjumân al-Mustafîd</i> by Abdurrauf as-Singkili underscores the centrality of <i>adab</i> , scholarly <i>sanad</i> , and spiritual discipline in the transmission of knowledge.	<i>Rangkang</i> represents an embedded relational pedagogy: a learning system organically integrated within the community's socio-spiritual structure.	From its earliest phases, Acehnese education was oriented toward character formation and <i>sanad</i> -based scholarly legitimacy, rather than mere cognitive transmission.
Colonial Representation and Shifts in Authority	In <i>De Atjehers</i> , Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje portrayed local educational institutions in descriptive-functional terms, tending to reduce their epistemic dimensions.	An epistemic reduction occurred, accompanied by a shift in knowledge authority from local <i>sanad</i> -based systems to colonial discourse grounded in external observation.	Symbolic delegitimisation contributed to the weakening of Aceh's position within global Islamic scholarly networks.
Pedagogical Structure and Teacher-Student Relations	<i>Halaqah</i> practices, intimate learning spaces, and value internalisation through shared lived example.	<i>Rangkang</i> functioned as a living curriculum integrating knowledge, values, and practice within intensive social relations.	Offers an alternative to modern education models that are impersonal and oriented primarily toward cognitive achievement.
Character Education	Respect for teachers, <i>musyawarah</i> (deliberative consultation), collective responsibility, and spiritual discipline were embedded in students' daily lives.	Character formation occurred through relational moral formation within sustained learning communities.	Aligns with contemporary national agendas emphasising character strengthening and the cultivation of public ethics.
Learning Depth	Traditions of gradual reading, attentive listening, repetition, and dialogue within a reflective rhythm of study.	A slow-learning model that corrects the acceleration of information and superficial learning in the digital age.	Provides an epistemological framework for addressing crises of learning depth and knowledge fragmentation.
Socio-Cultural Dimension	<i>Rangkang</i> served as a space for cultivating solidarity and internalising collective norms within Acehnese society.	Education is understood as cultural reproduction—transmitting and sustaining communal identity and values.	Reinforces the identity of Acehnese Islamic education as a community-based system rooted in local values.
Relevance to National Policy	Values of faith, moral integrity, mutual cooperation, and critical reasoning resonate with Indonesia's <i>Profil Pelajar Pancasila</i> .	Local traditions are compatible with a national educational vision balancing competence and character.	Opens possibilities for integrating <i>rangkang</i> as a pre-educational space or transitional model within formal systems.
Conceptual Revitalisation	Revitalisation emphasises the recontextualisation of pedagogical values rather than mere physical restoration.	<i>Rangkang</i> as a living pedagogical framework adaptable to modernity and digitalisation.	Contributes conceptually to the study of peripheral Islamic education through a synthesis of tradition and modernity without forfeiting epistemic identity.

Source: Author's analysis, 2026.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the contemporary crisis of Islamic education in Aceh does not stem solely from technical issues of curriculum design or institutional management. Rather, it is rooted in the rupture of a local scholarly tradition that, for centuries, shaped the distinctive pedagogical character of Acehnese Islam. *Rangkang*, previously treated largely as a historical artefact within educational scholarship, is shown to possess far deeper epistemological and pedagogical functions. It was not merely a site for elementary religious instruction, but a community-based educational ecosystem integrating the transmission of knowledge, the cultivation of *adab*, spiritual depth, and humane teacher–student relations.

The principal novelty of this study lies in its paradigmatic shift from a descriptive-historical reading toward the formulation of *rangkang* as an epistemic prototype of Acehnese Islamic education. In doing so, the research moves beyond reconstructing historical data to proposing a new conceptual framework that positions *rangkang* as a systemic foundation within Aceh’s intellectual architecture. The study also challenges the static tendencies of Acehnese educational historiography by offering a dynamic and integrative interpretation that interweaves intellectual tradition, social structure, and pedagogical praxis.

More than a recovery of historical memory, this research advances the revitalisation of *rangkang* as an alternative conceptual framework for the development of contemporary Islamic education. Revitalisation is understood here as the reconstruction of its core pedagogical values and principles—dialogical learning, slow and reflective study, habituation of *adab*, and emotionally and spiritually grounded relationality—within modern educational contexts increasingly marked by crises of learning depth and relational fragmentation. Theoretically, the study reinforces the proposition that local intellectual traditions may serve as sources of conceptual innovation rather than mere objects of cultural preservation. Practically, it opens avenues for designing Islamic educational models that are more relational, community-rooted, and responsive to global challenges. In this sense, *rangkang* holds the potential to function as an epistemic bridge between Aceh’s Islamic scholarly heritage and the evolving demands of Islamic education at local, national, and broader Muslim-world levels.

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