



## **Being Human and Having Rights: Exploring Women's Education Under Sharia Law in Aceh**

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### **Abstract**

*This article presents a literature review on the right to education under Sharia law in Aceh, a territory in Indonesia with special autonomy and formal application of Islamic law. The research methodology used the qualitative method with the literature review approach, encompassing data collection and analysis from diverse sources such as journals, books, reports, and websites to identify key issues, challenges, and opportunities faced by Acehnese women in accessing and utilizing education. The author also analyzes the role and impact of various actors, such as the government, non-governmental organizations, clerics, and communities, in shaping and influencing education policies and practices in Aceh. The article found that women's education in Aceh has made significant progress but also faces several obstacles, such as discrimination, violence, poverty, and a lack of participation. The authors recommend several steps to improve the quality and equity of women's education in Aceh, such as increasing budget allocation, involving women in decision-making processes, developing inclusive and relevant curricula, and strengthening cooperation between various stakeholders. Then also for further efforts be made to assess the empirical and normative impact of sharia law in Aceh on women's right to education and to develop inclusive, sensitive, and sustainable strategies to improve access, quality, and equity of women's education in Aceh.*

**Keywords: Human Rights; Education; Women; Sharia Law; Aceh.**

### **Abstrak**

Artikel ini menyajikan tinjauan literatur tentang hak atas pendidikan di bawah hukum Syariah di Aceh, sebuah wilayah di Indonesia dengan otonomi khusus dan penerapan formal hukum Islam. Metodologi penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan tinjauan pustaka, meliputi pengumpulan dan analisis data dari berbagai sumber seperti jurnal, buku, laporan, dan

situs web untuk mengidentifikasi isu-isu utama, tantangan, dan peluang yang dihadapi oleh perempuan Aceh dalam mengakses dan memanfaatkan pendidikan. Penulis juga menganalisis peran dan dampak dari berbagai aktor, seperti pemerintah, organisasi non-pemerintah, ulama, dan masyarakat, dalam membentuk dan mempengaruhi kebijakan dan praktik pendidikan di Aceh. Artikel ini menemukan bahwa pendidikan perempuan di Aceh telah membuat kemajuan yang signifikan tetapi juga menghadapi beberapa hambatan, seperti diskriminasi, kekerasan, kemiskinan, dan kurangnya partisipasi. Para penulis merekomendasikan beberapa langkah untuk meningkatkan kualitas dan pemerataan pendidikan perempuan di Aceh, seperti meningkatkan alokasi anggaran, melibatkan perempuan dalam proses pengambilan keputusan, mengembangkan kurikulum yang inklusif dan relevan, serta memperkuat kerja sama antara berbagai pemangku kepentingan. Kemudian juga untuk upaya lebih lanjut dilakukan untuk menilai dampak empiris dan normatif hukum syariah di Aceh terhadap hak perempuan atas pendidikan dan untuk mengembangkan strategi inklusif, sensitif, dan berkelanjutan untuk meningkatkan akses, kualitas, dan kesetaraan pendidikan perempuan di Aceh.

**Kata Kunci: Hak Asasi Manusia; Pendidikan; Perempuan; Hukum Syariah; Aceh.**

## Introduction

Education is one of the human rights guaranteed by the constitution and international law (Maundu, 2021; Herawati & Ermakov, 2022; Tibbitts & Sirota, 2023). Education is also important for improving women's welfare, equality, and empowerment (Juwitasari 2021). In some parts of the world, barriers and challenges still hinder women's access to and quality education, especially in countries that adhere to the Sharia legal system (Buehler 2016; Qodir et al. 2022).

Indonesia, as a democratic country, has one of the provinces that applies Sharia law, namely Aceh Province, which is on the western tip of Indonesia (Ikhwan and Heikal Daudy 2019). Aceh has been an autonomous province that has had the privilege of adhering to Islamic sharia since 2001 as part of a peace agreement between the central government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). Since then, Aceh has issued regional regulations known as Qanun, which regulate aspects of Acehnese life based on sharia, including education (Suyanta and Ramdhan 2022).

The implementation of sharia in Aceh has caused various positive and negative impacts on women's education in Aceh province. Islamic Sharia in Aceh has created an environment where women can pursue education in alignment with their religious and cultural beliefs. Additionally, it serves as a safeguard against the various forms of violence

and discrimination that women often encounter in conflict-affected regions (Sumardi, Lukito, and Ichwan 2021).

Women's education in Aceh has undergone significant changes. Before the enactment of Sharia law, women had limited access to education. Several education initiatives began to develop after several policy changes. The implementation of sharia law in Aceh has brought significant changes to the education system, especially for women. This affects the curriculum, accessibility, and outlook on education for women.

Like the story of LS, a teacher in Aceh, when asked about her educational journey, she shared her tremendous struggles to become a teacher. She comes from a modest family, but her determination to learn never waned. She completed her primary and secondary education in her hometown, but when it came to pursuing higher education, she had to move to Banda Aceh, which was filled with challenges, from daily expenses to finding adequate housing. However, with the assistance provided by the Aceh government through the Aceh-Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction scholarship after the tsunami, she could complete her studies successfully. Finally, she became the teacher she aspired to be.

LS reflects many women in Aceh who see education as a bridge to equality and empowerment. Despite the challenges that still exist, their spirit to learn and grow never fades. They are living proof that women's education in Aceh is continually advancing, bringing hope and change to their communities. It must be admitted that the presence of sharia in Aceh also poses challenges for Acehnese women, such as the enforcement of sharia tends to be oriented towards disciplining women's bodies who seem to be looking for their faults, and even some of the enforcement of sharia is considered contrary to women's rights (Afrianty 2015; Qodir et al. 2022).

Although Indonesian law guarantees equal access to education for all, the reality is that many Indonesian women still do not have access to education. Illiteracy is still a serious problem in Indonesia. Thus, providing equal access for all citizens, especially women, is an important responsibility of the government, including Aceh. Social stereotypes that harm women must be changed through education, empowerment, and awareness of the importance of gender equality. Education is the main key to changing people's views and building capacity, especially for women, who are often vulnerable (Adnan 2017).

It can be said that despite efforts to improve access to education for women under sharia law, there are still many challenges faced, such as policies that restrict access to education or culture that hinder gender equality. Nevertheless, several education initiatives and programs have contributed positively to the access and quality of women's education in Aceh. The study of the success of these programs is important to understand the potential for improvement in the education system.

Therefore, this study is considered important to examine women's education within the framework of sharia law in Aceh. The primary objective is to discern the key issues, challenges, and opportunities women in Aceh face regarding education. Additionally, it aims to analyze the roles and impacts of various stakeholders, such as the government, non-governmental organizations, clerics, and communities, in shaping and influencing education policies and practices in the region.

## **Method**

This research employed the qualitative paradigm as one of the predominant epistemological approaches, wherein data were meticulously gleaned through textual analysis, visual representations, and keen observations, eschewing reliance on numerical metrics. Citing Lexy J. Moleong's seminal work, *Qualitative Research Methods*, underscores the method's role as a procedural instrument for eliciting rich, descriptive data (Moleong 2012). The crux of this qualitative inquiry lies in its iterative investigative process, fostering a nuanced comprehension of social phenomena before their practical application, comparative analysis, reflective examination, and systematic categorization within the study's framework (Fiantika et al., 2022).

The research methodology employed is a comprehensive literature review. This method involves meticulous data collection and analysis from diverse sources pertinent to the research topic, including scholarly journals, authoritative books, official reports, and reputable websites (Nawab, Bissaker, and Dato 2021). The study of literature can be used to unearth, critique, and synthesize existing knowledge about a phenomenon, as well as to identify loopholes, contradictions, and opportunities for further research (Snyder 2019). The steps carried out in the literature study are as follows:

First, determine the research question: How is women's education under Sharia law in Aceh, especially regarding the rights, roles, and challenges they face and strategies and recommendations to improve them? Second, the inclusion and exclusion criteria must be determined. Namely, the source must be in Indonesian or English from 2010 to 2024.

Third, conduct a source search using an online search engine, *Google Scholar*, *Garuda Portal*, *Moraref*, *Crossref*, and *Publish or Perish* with keywords such as "Women's education, Sharia law, and human rights.". Fourth, selecting sources, namely filtering sources based on inclusion and exclusion criteria and reading titles, abstracts, and keywords to determine relevance to the research topic.

Fifth, it evaluates sources and checks the quality and validity of sources using criteria such as objectives, methodologies, results, conclusions, and references and compares them with similar sources. Sixth, analyze sources: read critically and deeply the selected sources and record important points, findings, arguments, and evidence related to the research question.

And seventh, synthesizing sources, namely grouping, linking, and integrating key points, findings, arguments, and evidence from various sources; and eighth, compiling a framework and narrative that can be understood (Chris Hart 2018).

Define a topic
Addressing research question
Search for and acquire relevant literature
Selecting and evaluating literature
Read and summarize the main points
Analyze and critique selected literature
Synthesize selected literature
Write the result of a literature review

Table 1.1: Research Pipeline

Throughout this study, a continuous process of data synthesis and narrative analysis was meticulously carried out to ensure the achievement of research objectives. The collected data underwent thorough examination and thoughtful interpretation. This comprehensive model encompasses data reduction, strategic data presentation, rigorous verification, and, ultimately, the formulation of robust conclusions. Adhering to this stringent analytical approach makes the research findings credible and reliable (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 2019). Before this stage, discussions were conducted concurrently to distill research findings into practical formats, yielding perspectives on women's education under Sharia law in Aceh. Subsequently, a systematic compilation of information is presented, allowing for the derivation of conclusions. This process is essential because qualitative research data, often in narrative form, must be simplified without compromising its essence.

## **Result and Discussion**

In the complex interplay between cultural traditions, religious principles, and human rights, the realm of women's education under Sharia law stands as a critical intersection. Through an interdisciplinary approach, this article amalgamates sociological, cultural, and legal perspectives to comprehensively explore the multifaceted dimensions of women's education in Aceh. The following sections will unpack the findings, providing a detailed analysis of the lived realities and the intricate web of factors that shape the educational trajectories of women in this distinctive context. As we embark on this exploration, we aim to foster a nuanced understanding of the delicate equilibrium between being human and the assertion of rights within the framework of Sharia law in Aceh.

### **Result Understanding Human Rights to Education**

Education constitutes an inherent human right bestowed upon every individual from birth. This entitlement finds recognition in many international and national legal frameworks, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia. The essence of education as a human right lies in its universal applicability, ensuring that all individuals have the lawful entitlement to education

without any form of discrimination. Education is one of the human rights recognized by various international and national legal instruments (Sital, Getgen, and Koh 2017). Consequently, the state is responsible for safeguarding, honoring, and actualizing the right to education. This entails vigilant monitoring of any violations that may transpire and subsequent legal enforcement to address such infractions (Rowell 2020).

Education plays a pivotal role in fostering humanization, enhancing quality of life, and nurturing the well-being of nations. It also catalyzes unlocking human potential, promoting welfare, and advancing peace and social justice (Unterhalter 2012). Therefore, education should be guaranteed and accessible to everyone without exception. The right to education is the right of every citizen to develop themselves through the teaching and learning process by their needs, interests, talents, and abilities. This right includes the right to choose the type, level, and institution of education and the right to receive adequate assistance and educational facilities. The right to education also includes the right to get quality, relevant, effective, efficient, and quality education (Lee 2023).

Various international and national legal frameworks safeguard the right to education. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) from 1948 explicitly affirms that every individual is entitled to education to foster human development, uphold human rights, and ensure fundamental freedoms.

Articles 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966 affirm that every individual possesses the right to an education aimed at the holistic development of the human personality while respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. Furthermore, these articles emphasize that states must ensure compulsory and free primary education for all. Additionally, Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of 1989 underscore that every child is entitled to an education that fosters their full potential upholds human rights, and prepares them for responsible participation in a free society.

According to Articles 28C and 31 of the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia, every individual is entitled to education and the benefits derived from science, technology, art, and culture to enhance the quality of life and promote the welfare of humanity. Furthermore, the state prioritizes allocating at least 20% of state and local revenue budgets to education.

Articles 3, 4, 5, and 6 of Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System affirm that all citizens have the right to receive quality and equitable education. Both the government and local authorities are obligated to ensure the provision of such education.

### Violations of the Right to Education and Protection Efforts

Violation of the right to education encompasses any action or omission that impedes, obstructs, or jeopardizes the entitlement to education in alignment with international and national legal norms. Such violations may manifest as direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional, systemic or sporadic occurrences. They can involve various stakeholders, including the state, educational institutions, teachers, parents, communities, etc.

Meanwhile, efforts to protect and fulfill the right to education are all forms of efforts made by various parties to guarantee, respect, and fulfill everyone's right to get an education under international and national legal standards. Efforts to protect and meet the right to education can be preventive or curative, formal or informal, individual or collective. Various parties, such as the state, educational institutions, teachers, parents, communities, or other individuals, can carry out them.

As for the illustrations of violations and protective efforts, I recommend organizing them in a tabular format for clarity and ease of reference:

Table 1.2: Illustration of Violations of the Right to Education and Protection Efforts

Forms of violation	Protection measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discrimination in educational access, processes, and outcomes based on sex, religion, ethnicity, race, social class, health status, disability, sexual orientation, or other factors irrelevant to academic ability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement policies and regulations that support access to quality, relevant, effective, efficient, and quality education, such as the National Education System Law, <i>Permendikbud</i>, and <i>Perpres</i>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical, psychological, or sexual violence in an educational setting that harms the health, safety, and well-being of students, teachers, or other educators.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide adequate and equitable educational assistance and facilities for all students, especially those from vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as poor children, children with</li> </ul>



	special needs, girls, children victims of conflict, and remote children.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of educational facilities and infrastructure that meet feasibility, safety, and comfort standards, such as buildings, classrooms, tables, chairs, blackboards, books, teaching aids, laboratories, libraries, toilets, clean water, electricity, internet, and others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supervise, complain, and enforce violations of the right to education through formal mechanisms, such as courts, commissions, or ombudsmen, or informal ones, such as mediation, arbitration, or advocacy.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of availability, affordability, and quality of educational services, such as curriculum, methods, media, evaluation, guidance, counseling, scholarships, assistance, and other facilities that support the teaching and learning process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct advocacy, education, and socialization about the importance of education as a human right and the state's obligation to protect and fulfill it, whether through mass media, social media, seminars, discussions, or campaigns.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of involvement, participation, and transparency from various stakeholders in the planning, management, supervision, and evaluation of education, such as governments, educational institutions, teachers, parents, learners, communities, and non-governmental organizations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage and support various stakeholders' active and critical participation in the planning, management, supervision, and evaluation of education, whether through formal mechanisms, such as deliberations, meetings, or surveys, or informal, such as forums, groups, or networks.</li> </ul>

### Education Policy in Aceh

In the aftermath of reforms within Indonesia, Aceh reclaimed its designation as a special region on October 4, 1999. This recognition aligned with the stipulations delineated in Law Number 44 of 1999, which specifically pertained to the Implementation of Aceh Authority as a Special Region (Zainal et al. 2021). The legislation, formally enacted by President Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie of the Republic of Indonesia, was meticulously documented in the State Gazette of Indonesia in 1999 under the precise reference number 172. This legal framework, accompanied by Supplement number 3893, confers upon Aceh a distinct jurisdiction over several critical domains:

Regulation of Religious Practices: Aceh exercises authority to oversee religious practices within its territorial boundaries. This encompasses religious rights, rituals, and adherence to religious norms. For example, implementing customary traditions: The legislation recognizes and empowers Aceh to uphold its rich cultural heritage, including customary traditions, local standards, and indigenous practices. Doing so acknowledges the significance of Acehnese customs in shaping the region's identity.

Educational Matters: Aceh has the prerogative to formulate and implement academic policies tailored to its unique context. This includes decisions related to curriculum, language of instruction, and educational institutions within the province. Involvement of Religious Leaders: Acknowledging the influential role of religious leaders (ulama) in Acehnese society, the legislation underscores their participation in shaping regional policies. Their insights and guidance contribute to decision-making processes at the local level.

Historically, Aceh's status as a special region was formally acknowledged as early as May 26, 1959. The comprehensive designation of the Special Region of Aceh is meticulously documented in the Decree issued by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Indonesia, specifically identified as Number 1/Mission/1959. This pivotal decree was signed by Mr. Hardi, serving as Deputy Prime Minister I and Head of the Government Mission to Aceh on the date mentioned above (Zainal 2022). As mentioned earlier, the decree confers authority upon Aceh in three critical domains: religion, education, and customs. However, despite this grant of authority, its optimal implementation faced challenges. The prevailing conflict situation in Aceh during that period significantly impacted the education sector within the region. This scenario persisted until the enactment of Law Number 11 of 2006, specifically addressing the governance of Aceh. Notably, this legislation was formulated after the devastating tsunami that struck Aceh on December 26, 2004. After that, efforts continue to be made to strengthen various parties to look forward to the future of Aceh more securely and peacefully, without conflict (Riezal, Joebagio, and Susanto 2018).

In 2008, it became evident that a series of legislative reforms were necessary to align with the evolving educational landscape in Aceh. This realization emerged as a direct consequence of the enactment of several pivotal laws: Law Number 44 of 1999, which delineates the powers vested in Aceh as a Special Region; Law Number 20 of 2003, which

establishes the framework for the National Education System; and Law Number 11 of 2006, which outlines the governance structure of Aceh. These statutes collectively necessitated a comprehensive review and subsequent refinement of the educational policies and practices within the region to ensure their unity with the stipulated legal provisions and the unique administrative status of Aceh. This then resulted in the issuance of Aceh Qanun Number 5 of 2008 concerning education implementation. However, because it is considered ineffective and has not fully become an instrument for accommodating the character of the Acehnese people in 2014, Aceh Qanun Number 5 of 2008 was replaced by Aceh Qanun Number 11 of 2014 concerning education implementation.

Then, in 2018, Aceh Qanun Number 9 2018 concerning the Implementation of Dayah Education was issued, but it was still considered not to cover thoroughly the implementation of Dayah education. Along with changes in the authority of education delivery, as stipulated in the law, there is a need to change Aceh Qanun Number 11 of 2014 concerning education implementation to Aceh Qanun Number 9 of 2015 concerning Amendments to Aceh Qanun Number 11 of 2014 concerning Education Implementation (Amirul 2021).

The Qanun of Aceh is a regulatory framework for the educational sector, functioning with Law Number 44 of 1999 and Law Number 11 of 2011. This regulation elucidates that the essence of education within Aceh is a deliberate and systematic endeavor to foster an educational milieu and process. Such an environment empowers learners to actively cultivate their innate capabilities, encompassing spiritual fortitude following religious tenets, self-discipline, personal development, intellectual advancement, and the instillation of virtuous qualities. Additionally, it emphasizes cultivating competencies that benefit the individual, community, nation, and state.

Within the context of the Qanun of Aceh, it is articulated that the orchestration of educational initiatives is a collaborative responsibility involving the central government, the provincial government of Aceh, local governments at the district and city levels, and the community at large. This collective responsibility extends to providing both formal and informal educational opportunities. Furthermore, the Education Regulation delineates the distribution of duties concerning the execution of the national education system. It

encompasses the roles of the central government, the provincial government of Aceh, local governments, community-established educational institutions, and individual educational entities, ensuring that the educational proceedings are conducted in harmony with the overarching goals of the national educational agenda.

## **Discussion**

### **Women's Education Development Period in Aceh**

The development of women's education in Aceh can be traced to various literature sources that discuss Aceh's history, politics, social life, culture, and religion. Before colonialism, Acehnese women had a great role and contribution to Islamic education, especially in teaching religious values and shaping children's character. Some well-known Acehnese women figures in Islamic education are Datu Beru and Tengku Fakinah. Datu Beru was known as a female judge in the Linge kingdom in Central Aceh who had extensive knowledge of jurisprudence. Tengku Fakinah was an educator, scholar, and caretaker of *Dayah* Lam Diran, the leading Islamic educational institution of the time (Sri Astuti 2016; Djono, Sutiyah, and Zulfikar 2022).

In the latter half of the 20th century, we witnessed a resurgence of Islamic identity in Aceh, leading to Sharia law's implementation. During this period, we have also seen a renewed emphasis on Islamic education, providing a framework that simultaneously adhered to religious principles and accommodated the educational aspirations of Acehnese women. Integrating Islamic values into the educational system posed challenges and opportunities as women navigated evolving expectations while striving for academic pursuits.

During Dutch colonialism, Acehnese women experienced a decline in rights and opportunities in the field of education due to discriminatory and repressive policies from the colonial government. Acehnese women are only allowed to receive basic education, while secondary and higher education are only for men. Acehnese women were also forbidden to participate in nationalism and independence struggles, which were considered a threat by the Dutch (Hadi 2014).

On the other hand, the introduction of formal education during the colonial era significantly shaped the educational landscape for Acehnese women. The impact of Dutch colonial rule ushered in Western-style educational institutions, laying the groundwork for a

paradigm shift in traditional learning structures. The intersection of indigenous cultural practices and foreign educational paradigms set the stage for a dynamic fusion that continues influencing Acehese women's educational experiences.

After Indonesia's independence, Acehese women began to get greater opportunities to participate in education, both formal and non-formal. This is supported by affirmative policies from the central and local governments, such as providing scholarships, assistance, and facilities for Acehese women to continue their education. Acehese women also began to be involved in various social, political, and religious organizations, providing space for them to develop their potential and skills (Maskuri, Riza, and Subardi 2020; Inayatillah 2011).

In the contemporary landscape, Acehese women navigate a delicate balance between preserving cultural traditions and embracing modern educational opportunities. The coexistence of traditional Islamic education and formal schooling presents women with diverse choices, inviting them to negotiate their identities within a multifaceted educational framework. The discussion encompasses issues of access, curriculum content, and the role of women in shaping educational policies, encapsulating the ongoing dialogue between tradition and progress.

During the conflict, tsunami, and peace in Aceh, Acehese women experienced significant social and cultural changes, impacting education. On the one hand, Acehese women are victims of various forms of violence, poverty, and trauma due to conflict and natural disasters, which hinder their access to and quality of education. On the other hand, the Acehese women are agents of change and play an active role in Aceh's rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reconciliation process, including education. Acehese women also receive support and assistance from various national and international parties to improve their capacity and welfare (Lopes Cardozo et al. 2022; Lopes Cardozo and Srimulyani 2021). This resilience became a defining feature of their educational journey, symbolizing a determination to transcend historical constraints.

In the special autonomy and the implementation of Islamic Sharia in Aceh, Acehese women faced different challenges and opportunities in the field of education. On the one hand, Islamic Sharia provides space for Acehese women to receive education under their religious and cultural values and protects them from various forms of violence and

discrimination (Darmawan 2022). But on the other hand, some rules are oriented to discipline Acehese women. This discussion is expected to serve as a springboard for envisioning an inclusive educational future that recognizes the agency of Acehese women and strikes a harmonious balance between cultural heritage and Islamic values because women's education not only Encourages them to thrive but also contributes to the broader development of Acehese society.

Table 1.3: Women's Education Development Period in Aceh

Number	Period	Education Development
1.	Pre-Colonialism	Good
2.	Colonialism era	Not Good
3.	Post-Independence	Good
4.	Conflict era	Not Good
5.	Application of Islamic Sharia	Good

### Women's Education Within the Framework of Sharia Law

Women's education in Aceh has experienced significant development since the formal implementation of Islamic sharia in 2001. This can be seen from the increasing participation, access, and achievement of Acehese women in various levels and fields of education, both formal and non-formal (Wirianto 2020). Education in Sharia areas in Aceh provides space for Acehese women to receive education under their religious and cultural values, as well as offering protection from various forms of violence and discrimination often experienced by women in conflict areas (M. Nur 2009). Women's education in Aceh is influenced by multiple actors, such as the government, non-governmental organizations, clerics, and communities, who have different roles and impacts in shaping and influencing education policies and practices in Aceh.

As experienced by a woman named MR who lives in the city of Banda Aceh, when talking to her about education, she briefly recalled her complicated past in pursuing education. She lived alone after losing her parents to the 2004 tsunami, leaving her with no one to rely on for all her needs, including education, despite her strong desire to attend school. From elementary to high school, she was raised by a social orphanage institution in Banda Aceh. With her diligence in studying, she received a full scholarship from the Aceh

government to continue her studies at a university in Java. With this opportunity, she achieved her dream of becoming an architect, transforming her bitter experiences into something better. She realized that Aceh had changed, and attention to education no longer discriminates between men and women, the rich and the poor, as she had experienced.

However, in the journey of improving women's education in Aceh, it must also be noted that many women in Aceh still feel unfortunate because access to education does not favor them. For example, the story of a trader, identified as HS, who had to struggle hard to meet the needs of her life and her family. She only graduated from junior high school and had to drop out due to economic exclusion, needing to help her parents sell coconuts from morning until evening. Additionally, the difficult access roads and the long distance to the school made it hard to attend. Consequently, her unfortunate fate as an uneducated woman unable to secure a decent job is a reality she has to face.

HS's story is one of many women experiencing the same recurring situation. Education as a citizen's right must indeed be a critical focus for the progress of a nation. Women's education in Aceh also poses many obstacles and problems for women's education, such as lack of budget allocation, lack of women's participation in decision-making processes, lack of relevance and inclusiveness of the curriculum, and the existence of sharia enforcement practices that sometimes conflict with women's rights (Jeumpa 2016; Rahmah 2019).

Several educational figures in Aceh have given special attention to the issue of women's education, such as UH, a female scholar in West Aceh who has contributed significantly to the continuity of women's education there. When approached to complete this research, she extensively discussed her efforts to provide education to women. This included providing housing and advocating for the issues faced by women in Aceh. She also speaks about the importance of education for women and their protection in various forums, despite often facing opposition, attacks, and obstacles in her struggle. Nevertheless, she has also received support from many who share her vision of the importance of education and protection for women.

A similar spirit is found in TR, a women's and children's activist in Aceh. Her advocacy work is extensive, collaborating with the government, non-governmental

organizations, and even international institutions to achieve education and protection for women and children in Aceh. She is often invited to give lectures on women's and children's issues at various institutions and universities to discuss these topics. Despite this, efforts to fulfill and protect women's rights must continue to be maximized because there are still many who are apathetic, and indifferent, and consider these issues unimportant.

Another figure, NS, who also focuses on women's issues and gender equality, emphasizes that the struggle to fulfill women's educational needs in Aceh must be prioritized. When viewed broadly, women in Aceh have not yet fully achieved equality with men, including in education. There are still religious and cultural doctrines that place women as second-class citizens, dominated by men in several aspects.

Women's education in Aceh is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that cannot be understood monolithically or homogeneously but must be viewed from various perspectives and contexts, both historical, political, social, cultural, and religious. Sharia education in Aceh has potential and challenges that must be balanced with the principles of human rights, democracy, and gender equality so as not to cause discrimination, marginalization, or oppression against Acehnese women, including in the field of education. Women's education in Aceh requires good cooperation and coordination between various stakeholders, including the government, non-governmental organizations, clerics, and communities, to create inclusive, relevant, and quality education policies and practices and respect the rights and interests of Acehnese women.

## **Conclusion**

Education stands as a cornerstone in the noble pursuit of human development, serving to enlighten individuals, elevate the collective quality of life, and nurture the intellectual fabric of society. Recognized universally as an inalienable human right, education empowers every individual, irrespective of background, under the protection of legal statutes that mandate non-discrimination. It is incumbent upon states to uphold, honor, and actualize the right to education, ensuring oversight against any infractions and enforcing legal remedies where necessary. The sanctity of this right is enshrined in a host of international and domestic legal frameworks, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International



Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the foundational 1945 Constitution.

In the context of Aceh, the regional government meticulously crafts and executes educational policies that resonate with the region's distinctive character as a special autonomous zone governed by Islamic Sharia law. These policies are grounded in the Aceh Qanun Number 11 of 2014 on the Implementation of Education and its subsequent amendment, Aceh Qanun Number 9 of 2015, which collectively operationalizes Law Number 11 of 2006 regarding the Governance of Aceh. The educational directives in Aceh are designed to foster an Islamic educational framework, one that is deeply rooted in Islamic values, aiming to promote the assimilation of these principles and the flourishing of Islamic cultural heritage.

Women's education in Aceh is influenced by the implementation of Islamic law, which has been in effect since 1999. This shows that women's education in Aceh has experienced different developments and challenges in each historical period, ranging from pre-colonial, colonial, independence, conflict, tsunami, and special autonomy. Women's education in Aceh has characteristics and peculiarities that are different from those in other regions because it is influenced by factors such as religion, culture, politics, economy, social, and environmental factors. Some suggestions and recommendations to improve the quality and equity of women's education in Aceh, such as increasing budget allocation, facilities and infrastructure, human resources, curriculum, methods, media, evaluation, guidance, counseling, and other education services, as well as involving various stakeholders in planning, managing, supervising, and evaluating education.

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