The role of education in supporting village women's empowerment in Aceh in the context of local social, religion, and culture

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	This study aims to explore the role of education in supporting women's empowerment in rural Aceh, understand the challenges they face, and see how education can be a tool to strengthen their position in the social structure without bumping up against traditional and religious values. Through a qualitative approach, this study explores the main factors that influence women's access to and participation in formal and non-formal education, including socio-cultural and economic barriers. This conceptual model identifies key components such as the role of local educational institutions, local values (such as mutual cooperation and religious teachings), and community and family support in improving access to education for women. The findings show that education has an optimal impact on women's involvement in social and economic life, allowing them to play a greater role outside the domestic sphere. However, various challenges such as conservative views and the lack of inclusive policies are still obstacles. With the existence of supportive policies and the integration of local values in education, it is hoped that women's empowerment in Aceh can be realized sustainably. This study is expected to contribute to the formulation of more inclusive education policies for women in rural Aceh.

INTRODUCTION

Women in rural Aceh have an important yet challenging position within deep-rooted social and cultural structures. In Aceh society, women's position is often viewed through the lens of customary values and Islamic religious teachings that form the foundation of social norms and expectations. These values define women's dominant roles in family life, such as responsibility for the household, childcare and support of the husband. Aceh culture highly values women in their domestic and social roles, but these roles are often limited to the family and local community, so their access to opportunities outside of these domains can be limited. This norm indirectly shapes the mindset of the community, which tends to limit women's access to education and wider economic participation.

Despite this, Aceh's women have long demonstrated resilience in living their lives amidst the demands of custom and religion. The history of Aceh records the important role of women, such as Sultanah Safiatuddin, in leading and managing the government, demonstrating that women can also play a significant role in the public sphere. At the rural level, Aceh's women are actively involved in economic activities through agriculture and petty trade. However, despite their history and work, women in rural Aceh still face limitations in gaining equal access to formal education. Traditional views that see women's education as a secondary priority are still common, although more and more parents are beginning to realize the importance of education for girls.

In recent decades, a growing awareness of the importance of education for women has begun to shift this view, although the change has been uneven across rural areas. Education is beginning to be seen as a means to expand women's knowledge, strengthen their role in the family and enable them to contribute more significantly to society. Women who have access to education are better able to

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understand their rights, make better decisions for their personal and family lives, and have greater opportunities to participate in economic activities (Daly et al., 2023). However, challenges still remain, especially as conservative values still influence views on women's roles in many villages in Aceh.

With inclusive and sustainable education, women in rural Aceh can empower themselves without losing their cultural and religious identity. Education that is appropriate to the local social and cultural context can not only enrich women's horizons but also help them deal with evolving social dynamics. Empowering rural women in Aceh through education is an important step towards reducing the gender gap and increasing their contribution to social and economic development. However, strong cultural and religious challenges require sensitive and inclusive approaches. Empowerment, Gender and Development (GAD), and socio-cultural theories provide relevant frameworks in understanding these conditions as well as effective empowerment strategies.

According to Kabeer, empowerment occurs when individuals have access to resources that enable them to develop themselves and achieve their life goals (Fitri et al., 2015). For rural women in Aceh, education is key to developing their potential. It provides them with knowledge, skills and the ability to think independently, which supports domestic roles while encouraging economic and social participation. Education improves women's ability to make decisions related to personal and family life, such as health, children's education, and economic participation (Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2014). With access to education, Aceh women have more control over their lives, which strengthens their autonomy and capacity to make decisions, a key element of empowerment. In addition, education also helps to change social perceptions of women's roles. When women start contributing outside the domestic sphere, society slowly recognizes their value and potential (Jaya et al., 2022). Through education, women can prove their competence in economic, social, or even community leadership, thus gradually influencing societal views that previously limited women's roles.

However, in practice, cultural and religious factors often limit women's access to education and decision-making. Norms that emphasize domestic roles can inhibit women's participation in education and other empowerment activities. Therefore, the government and community need to support women's education in a sustainable manner with a contextualized approach, so that women's empowerment can be accepted without creating cultural resistance. With this step, women can actively and equally participate in the development of their communities.

Gender and Development (GAD) theory emphasizes the importance of gender equality in development. According to this theory, sustainable development can only be achieved if women have equal access to resources, including education (Symaco & Tee, 2019). Education is considered an important tool to reduce gender disparities, improve women's skills and open up their opportunities to contribute to economic and social development. In the context of rural Aceh, women's education has a major role to play in overcoming traditional boundaries that have limited their role to the domestic sphere.

Education also strengthens women's position in society, especially socially and economically. Educated women are better equipped to work, earn their own income, and support their families and communities economically. They are also more likely to understand their human rights, reproductive rights, and health, and can make more independent decisions. (Amri et al., 2022). In Aceh's rural communities, where traditional values often limit women's roles, education paves the way for them to contribute to the public sphere. With greater involvement in the economic and social sectors, stereotypes about women's roles can slowly change, supporting the creation of gender equality. In addition, women's education has a positive impact on future generations, by creating families that are more inclusive of gender equality.

However, the application of GAD theory in Aceh faces cultural challenges that often prioritize male education. Overcoming this requires a culturally sensitive approach to education, which adapts programs to local norms so that they are accepted by the community. Thus, women's education can be an effective tool to reduce gender disparities without compromising cultural identity.

Socio-cultural theory helps to understand how cultural and religious norms in Aceh shape women's roles in society (Sin, 2010). Islamic values and Aceh customs often place women in domestic

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roles. Customary principles such as meupakat are usually led by men, limiting women's involvement in important decisions. Although Aceh has a history of women as leaders, today domestic roles are emphasized. However, this theory also shows that social norms can change over time. Globalization and modernization, especially through education, began to change society's view of women's roles (Fazeli et al., 2024). Education gives women the opportunity to contribute in the economic and social sectors, so slowly society began to accept women's roles outside the home.

Despite this, Aceh women often face challenges in balancing personal aspirations with inherent social responsibilities. Efforts to change social norms sometimes face obstacles due to community fears of losing cultural identity. Therefore, it is important to design empowerment programs that are aligned with cultural and religious values in Aceh. With a culturally sensitive approach, women's empowerment can be done gradually and effectively, so that it is not only accepted by the community, but also strengthens existing social values.

Education has great potential to change the perceptions of women in rural Aceh about their roles and abilities in society. Through education, women not only gain skills and knowledge, but also understand their rights and the ability to contribute beyond the domestic sphere. As access to education increases, more women see themselves as independent and empowered individuals (Begum et al., 2024). This understanding encourages them to explore new opportunities, both economic and social, that were previously inaccessible to rural women. However, these individual-level perceptual changes often trigger shifts in social norms that have long governed women's roles in rural communities.

On the other hand, education also plays a role in changing society's view of women's contributions. As women become more educated and acquire relevant skills, society begins to realize their potential to contribute positively in various areas, including the local economy and community welfare. The traditional view that women's roles are limited to the domestic sphere is slowly changing, especially among younger generations who are more open to education and innovation (Kim et al., 2019). However, this change in public perception does not happen instantly; it takes time and real examples of educated women who are able to demonstrate their added value in the community.

Nonetheless, cultural challenges remain a significant obstacle in the process of empowering women through education in rural Aceh. Customary values and religious norms governing social interactions often require women to prioritize their role in the family over personal interests or career aspirations. The view that higher education for women is not essential is still held by some rural communities. This leads to some families being reluctant to support further education for their daughters, fearing that it will interfere with women's traditional roles as wives and mothers. These cultural challenges often lead to structural barriers, where women find it difficult to pursue higher education (McCarthy, 2014).

In facing this challenge, there is a need for an educational approach that considers the social and cultural context of Aceh, so that education can be accepted as a tool for empowerment without ignoring traditional values. Education based on local values that emphasizes respect for women can help erode stereotypes and barriers that hinder their empowerment. Support from religious and community leaders is also important to strengthen the acceptance of education as an essential right for women. Thus, education can be an effective tool in encouraging changes in perceptions, both on the part of women themselves and society, towards a more inclusive environment that supports women's overall empowerment.

Previous studies have shown the importance of education as a tool for women's empowerment in various contexts. Ganiem (2017) highlights the success of empowering poor urban women through non-formal education that utilizes the social power of the community, with a positive impact on the relevance of the program to local needs and the altruistic motivation of volunteers. Sujarwo et al. (2017) revealed that community-based education for culinary entrepreneurs in tourist villages was able to increase the motivation, skills, and business management abilities of the participants, which ultimately contributed to women's economic independence. Tamba et al. (2020) research shows that sewing life skills-based education not only improves practical skills but also the economic welfare of participants' families, emphasizing the importance of education as a means of poverty alleviation. Furthermore, Sugitanata et al. (2024) highlighted the Progressive Islamic Education approach that successfully

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integrates modern values with Islamic principles to overcome socio-cultural barriers, expand access to quality education for women, and encourage social transformation towards gender equality.

However, none of these studies have specifically examined women's empowerment in rural Aceh, which has a unique socio-cultural context. Strong socio-cultural barriers, such as conservative views and traditional norms, require a more specific and sensitive approach to local values. Previous research has also not identified in depth the role of local education institutions, local values such as gotong royong and religious teachings, and community and family support in supporting rural women's education.

This study explores in depth the role of education in empowering women in rural Aceh, particularly in the context of local culture, religion and society. Using a qualitative approach, this study aims to explore the role of education in supporting women's empowerment in rural Aceh, understand the challenges they face and see how education can be a tool to strengthen their position in the social structure without bumping up against traditional and religious values. The findings are expected to contribute to the formulation of inclusive and sustainable education policies that integrate local values to support women's empowerment in Aceh.

RESEARCH METHODS

The qualitative approach in this study focuses on an in-depth understanding of the experiences of village women, teachers and community leaders in Aceh regarding education and empowerment. Through a case study or phenomenological approach, this research explores how rural women in Aceh understand and respond to their roles in a strict socio-cultural context (Maulana & Rosmayati, 2020). The phenomenological approach allows researchers to explore women's personal experiences related to education, the challenges they face, and their hopes for the future. The perspectives of village women open up space for them to voice their views and aspirations regarding empowerment and the role of education in achieving a more equal position in society (Maulana & Rosmayati., 2021).

The perspectives of village women, teachers and community leaders are also important to gain a comprehensive picture of the role of education in empowering women in Aceh. Teachers often act as drivers of change, both through formal education in schools and in everyday social life. They have a deep understanding of the barriers to education faced by women, especially in rural areas, as well as valuable insights into how education can be tailored to local needs. Meanwhile, community leaders, such as religious leaders or village heads, provide insights into the application of cultural and religious values and their influence on views on education and the role of women.

Local policies on education and women's empowerment in Aceh were analyzed to understand the structural context that supports or hinders empowerment efforts. These policies include government programs aimed at improving access to education for women, as well as local initiatives that empower women in the social and economic spheres. The policy analysis helps identify the extent to which local governments recognize the importance of education as a means of empowering women and the effectiveness of existing policies. Local policies related to women's education provide an overview of the cultural values accommodated by the government, so that education can be adjusted without contradicting prevailing social norms (Hamidi, 2016).

By combining field perspectives and policy analysis, this research provides a holistic understanding of women's education and empowerment in Aceh. The perspectives of women, teachers and community leaders provide rich data on women's individual and social experiences, while policy analysis provides the broader structural context of government support for women's education. This method is expected to produce locally relevant recommendations for policies to promote Aceh women's empowerment through education, with strategies that are appropriate to the local social and cultural context. This culturally sensitive approach is important so that empowerment programs are not only beneficial for women, but also accepted by the community as a whole.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Identify the role of education in opening up women's access to more active participation in social and economic life. This outcome may include:

1. **Access to Education for Aceh Women**

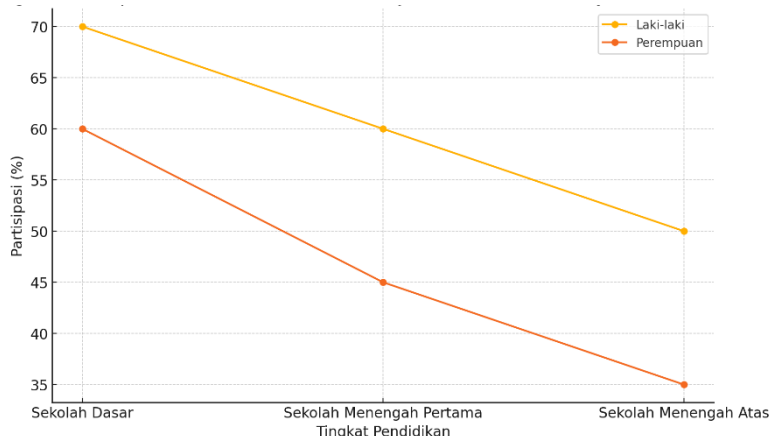The situation of women's access to education in rural Aceh.

Figure 1. Education participation rates by gender in rural Aceh

Education participation rates between men and women in rural Aceh show a significant gap. At the primary school level, 70% of boys participate in education, while the figure for girls is 60%. This gap is even more pronounced at the junior high school level, where male participation is 60% and female participation is only 45%. The disparity continues at the senior high school level, with 50% of males continuing their education while only 35% of females participate. This data shows that the higher the level of education, the lower the percentage of girls accessing it, illustrating the greater barriers for women at more advanced levels of education (Herr et al., 2019).
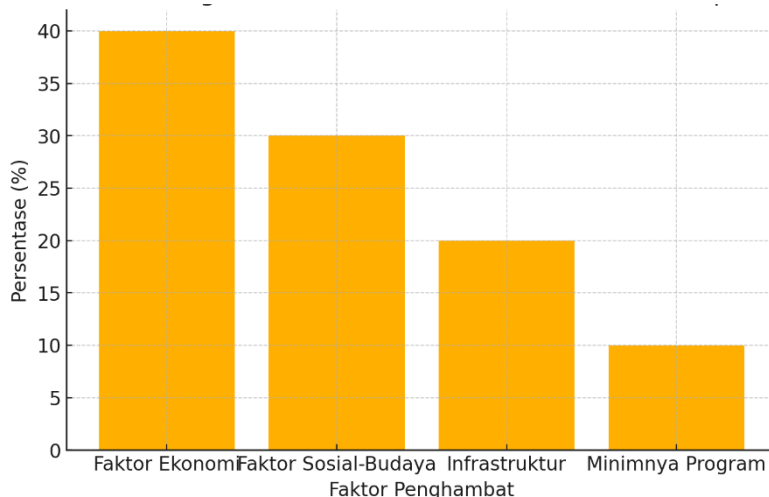

Figure 2. Factors inhibiting access to education for women

The main barriers faced by women in accessing education include economic, socio-cultural, educational infrastructure and the lack of special support programs. Economic factors occupy the highest position with a percentage of 40%, where many families in rural areas cannot afford education for their daughters. Furthermore, socio-cultural factors contribute 30%, where there is still a strong view that women's main role is in the domestic sphere. Limited infrastructure, especially in remote rural areas, accounts for 20% as a hindering factor, followed by the lack of specific support programs for women in rural areas at 10% (Jurriëns, 2013).
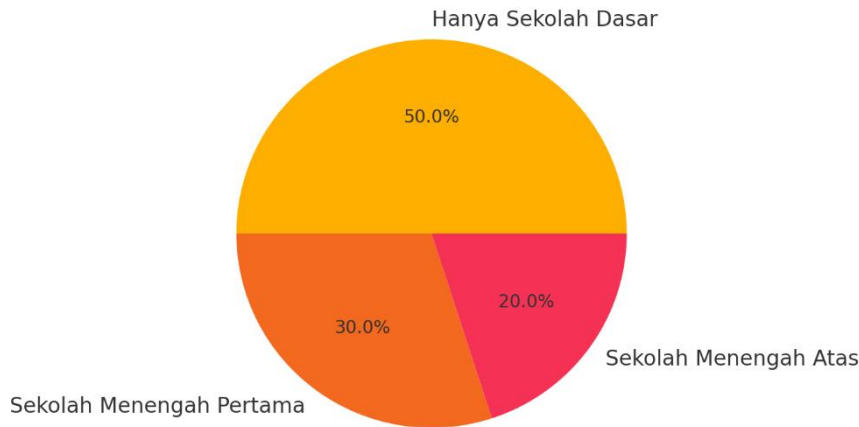
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Figure 3. Distribution of education infrastructure in rural areas

The availability of education infrastructure in rural Aceh also shows limitations that act as barriers to girls' access to education. Only 20% of rural areas in Aceh have access to senior high schools, while 30% have access to junior high schools. Around 50% of areas only have primary school facilities, forcing many children to travel long distances or even relocate to continue their education to a higher level. These limitations have a greater impact on girls because of concerns about their safety and mobility, which are often additional restrictions to economic constraints (Sina et al., 2019).
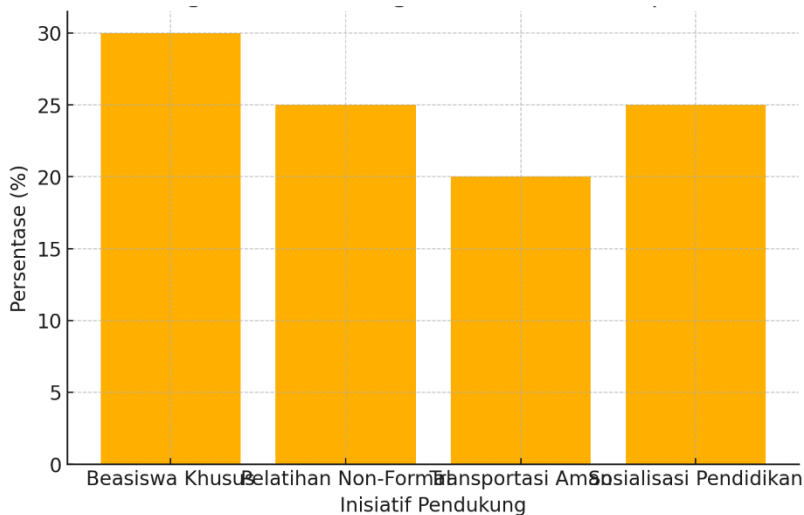

Figure 4. Initiatives and Supporting Programs for Women's Education in Rural Areas

There are several initiatives and programs that support women's education, although they are still limited and uneven. Scholarships specifically for women account for 30%, which is a significant effort to alleviate economic constraints. In addition, 25% of the support is in the form of non-formal training programs, which aim to provide practical skills that can be useful outside of formal education. Safe transportation programs and educational socialization for women account for 20% and 25% of support efforts, respectively. Nonetheless, these relatively small percentages indicate the need for more support in order to continue reducing the gap in access to education (Béné et al., 2016).

Access to education for women in Aceh, especially in rural areas, still faces challenges despite improvements in recent years. Data shows that the number of women accessing formal education, such as primary to secondary school is lower than that of men. The main barriers to access include economic factors, where many families cannot afford higher education for girls, often prioritizing the education of boys who are considered future breadwinners. In addition, there are significant socio-cultural barriers, with a strong perception that women are better suited to domestic roles and higher education

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is seen as less relevant for them. Limited education infrastructure, especially in remote areas, exacerbates this gap; access to schools or non-formal education centers often requires long journeys that raise safety concerns for families and a culture that restricts women's movement without family accompaniment. These barriers are compounded by the lack of support programs, such as special scholarships for women in rural areas or safe transportation facilities. While there are some local initiatives to improve these conditions, their impact is limited, so the education gap remains high between women and men, especially in rural Aceh (Guarnacci, 2016).

2. The Effect of Education on Social and Economic Participation

Access to education for women in Aceh, particularly in rural areas, still faces complex challenges despite a slight increase in recent years. Data shows that the number of women accessing formal education, such as primary to secondary school levels, is still lower than that of men, and this has an impact on the skills gap and economic opportunities later in life. The main barriers to access are economic; many low-income families cannot afford to educate their daughters to higher levels and often prioritize education for sons who are seen as potential breadwinners. In addition, socio-cultural barriers still play a large role, where the assumption that women are better off in the domestic sphere makes higher education for women less relevant. Limited educational infrastructure, especially in rural and remote areas, also exacerbates the situation; access to schools or non-formal education centers often requires long journeys resulting in family concerns regarding safety and social values that limit the mobility of unaccompanied women (Sharma et al., 2022). In addition, the lack of supporting programs such as special scholarships for rural women, safe transportation facilities, and broader community involvement are also hindering factors. Although some local initiatives have emerged to improve these conditions, such as skills training or empowerment classes aimed at women, the impact has not been significant enough to close the education gap between women and men, especially in rural Aceh which requires a more integrated and sustainable approach.

3. Role of Educational Institutions

Local educational institutions, such as formal schools and dayah in Aceh, play an important role in providing access and educational opportunities for women, although challenges still exist that limit their effectiveness. Formal schools in Aceh, both urban and rural, aim to equip women with the necessary basic academic and social skills so that they can participate more actively in social and economic life. However, formal education institutions are often constrained by limited infrastructure and a lack of specialized teaching staff who understand the local cultural context, especially in teaching women in rural areas. On the other hand, local dayah or pesantren play a unique role in women's education in Aceh, as in addition to providing religious education, they are also centers for character building and women's empowerment through approaches that are more contextual to the cultural and religious values accepted by the community (Habibullah, 2024). In the dayah, women are not only taught religious knowledge but also life skills that support them to play a role in the community independently and wisely. Some dayah even provide training in skills such as tailoring, farming or trading that give women the tools for economic independence. These institutions, both schools, and dayahs, have made efforts to promote more inclusive access to education for women, although they are still faced with traditional perceptions that limit women's roles in education and the public sphere. Limited support from local education policies has also played a role in hindering the development of gender-sensitive facilities and curricula for women's inclusion. Nevertheless, some schools and dayah in Aceh have begun to work with local organizations to run women's empowerment programs, such as special scholarship programs, skills training, and awareness campaigns on the importance of women's education in community development. These efforts show the potential of educational institutions as a means of empowerment that can narrow the gender gap in Aceh, provided that they are accompanied by stronger support from the government and the community so that the positive impact of education for women can be felt more widely and sustainably.

4. Enablers and Barriers

The factors influencing women's active participation in social and economic life in Aceh are diverse, ranging from push factors stemming from family, environment, and government policies that support women's education and empowerment, to inhibiting factors rooted in culture, economy, and

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policies that are not yet fully inclusive. On the one hand, the support of progressive families who prioritize higher education for women is a significant driving factor; supportive families tend to provide space for women to continue their education and develop skills, so that they are more confident and able to take an active role in society (Kenney et al., 2024).

In addition, environments that have a positive view of women's role in the economic sector, such as those that have been open to micro-enterprises or the role of women in local businesses, also encourage women to participate in economic activities. Supportive government policies, such as the provision of special scholarships, entrepreneurship training, and business credit facilities for women, also facilitate their opportunities to contribute to the socio-economic sector. However, constraining factors are still very real and often limit women's opportunities; among them are conservative views in society that still consider women's roles limited to the domestic sphere, so they tend to be considered less worthy of participating in the public sector. Economic barriers are also a major obstacle, especially for women in rural areas who find it difficult to access capital or relevant training for entrepreneurship, coupled with domestic burdens that often prevent them from engaging in activities outside the home. Policies that are not fully inclusive, such as the lack of support for childcare facilities or safe transportation for women, further narrow the opportunities for women to be actively involved in society. In addition, local regulations or policies that are not sensitive to gender issues are also a challenge, especially in terms of recognizing women's abilities and roles in social and economic development. Given these drivers and barriers, women's involvement in social and economic life in Aceh requires an integrated approach that not only changes conservative views but also strengthens inclusive policies that accommodate women's specific needs.

5. The Role of Local Values in Women's Education

Local values such as gotong-royong, customs and religious teachings play a big role in shaping people's views on women's education. In some communities in Aceh, the values of *gotong-royong* encourage for women to pursue education, as the community collectively supports the education of children, both boys and girls (Aguilar & Retamal, 2009). However, there are also traditional values that limit women's role in education, especially in environments that hold conservative views on gender roles. Some cultural views consider that women should focus on domestic roles and do not need higher education, especially if such education is seen to cause women to "lose" their local identity or become more independent. Religious teachings also have varying influence; while Islamic teachings encourage the pursuit of knowledge for all, strict interpretations of women's roles are sometimes a barrier to women's higher education.

6. Level of community awareness and support for women's education

Public awareness of the importance of education for women in rural Aceh has increased in recent years, although support is still limited and varies from community to community. Some families are beginning to realize the importance of education for women as a means to develop themselves and contribute to the family economy, so they provide support for their daughters to continue their education. However, in many cases, the level of family support for women's education stops at primary or secondary education, where they are more inclined to see higher education as less relevant for women's future roles (Sutton et al., 2022). At the community level, community support is often limited to basic education and life skills, with the view that further education is not necessary for women, as their primary focus is perceived to remain on domestic roles. Communities with more open perceptions, especially those that have seen the positive impact of educated women in society, tend to support higher education for women.

7. Best study on increasing women's participation in education in rural areas

Some schools and empowerment programs in Aceh demonstrate successful good practices in increasing women's participation in education in rural areas. One example is the scholarship program aimed specifically at girls in rural schools, which provides financial assistance to underprivileged families so that they do not prevent their daughters from continuing their education (Murphy et al., 2018). In addition, dayah or pesantren in Aceh play a significant role in women's education, especially through programs that integrate religious education with practical skills such as sewing or farming.

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Some dayah even offer entrepreneurship training that gives rural women the opportunity to learn basic business skills useful for economic independence. Another good practice is seen in training programs in collaboration with local communities, where young women are encouraged to attend specific skills training and literacy education, providing them with new opportunities in employment and improving their socio-economic roles. These initiatives, although small in scale, have shown positive results in changing community views on women's education and empowering rural women to participate more actively in their social and economic lives.
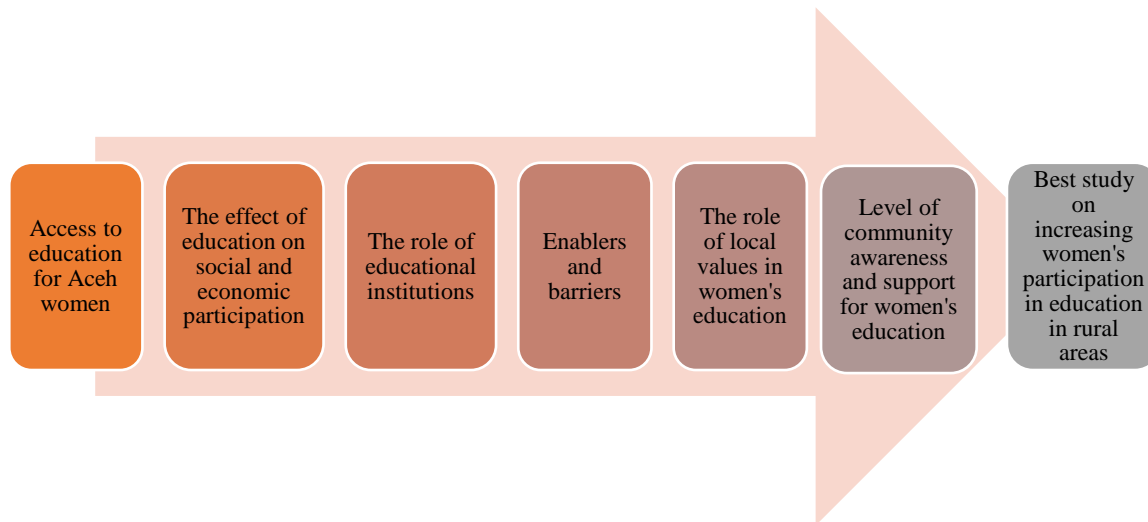
Access to education for Aceh women → The effect of education on social and economic participation → The role of educational institutions → Enablers and barriers → The role of local values in women's education → Level of community awareness and support for women's education → Best study on increasing women's participation in education in rural areas

Figure 5. Access to education for rural women and the application of local values in empowerment education

In Aceh, access to education for women remains limited, especially in rural areas, where economic limitations, infrastructure, and socio-cultural views are the main barriers for women to formal and non-formal education. However, education has significantly encouraged women's participation in socio-economic activities, such as community organizations, micro-enterprises, and religious activities, expanding their roles beyond the domestic sphere. Local educational institutions such as schools and dayahs play an important role in providing women with access to education and facilitating empowerment by providing life skills and culturally appropriate religious insights (Mondesir, 2023). The drivers and barriers to women's participation vary widely, including family support, community views, and government policies, with family support and inclusive policies proving instrumental in reducing barriers for women to play an active role in socio-economic life.

Discussion

In the discussion section, interpret the results that have been presented by relating them to relevant literature or theory.

1. Analysis of Access and Barriers to Education for Women

Access to education for women in Aceh has created significant new opportunities, particularly in terms of literacy and life skills, paving the way for them to engage in social and economic life. However, barriers remain and often stem from Aceh's strong cultural and religious context. On the one hand, education has encouraged women to be more confident and ready to participate in work or social activities outside the home. However, on the other hand, conservative cultural norms often view higher education for women as something that conflicts with their domestic roles, so many women are only allowed to pursue primary or secondary education. This view is reinforced by certain religious interpretations that emphasize women's primary roles as mothers and wives. Although Islam encourages all its followers to pursue knowledge, applying these values often still depends on family or community views, especially in rural areas (Hiwasaki et al., 2014).

In addition, infrastructure barriers and limited access to educational facilities in remote areas further narrow women's opportunities to obtain education on par with men, which in turn adds to gender inequality in education. These results are in line with the Novo-Corti et al. (2014) study, which found

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that barriers to internet penetration in women's social lives are mainly due to limited access and lack of ICT skills. Therefore, policies focusing on providing better internet access in rural areas are needed. In addition, it is important to raise public awareness, especially older age groups, about gender equality in technology access. These measures aim to reduce digital barriers for rural women and prevent social exclusion of the group.

2. Impact of Education on Women's Empowerment

Education has proven to be one of the key factors in empowering women in Aceh, as it gives them the opportunity to play a more active role in social and economic life. With education, women gain basic knowledge and skills that can support them in employment or entrepreneurship. This positive impact is evident among women who have completed secondary or higher education, where they tend to be more independent and have the ability to help support the family economy. Some women have even begun to take on roles as micro-entrepreneurs, opening small businesses that suit their skills, such as handicrafts or culinary. This aligns with Tamba et al. (2020) research which shows that sewing-based life skills education implemented as a form of women's empowerment improved practical skills and the economic welfare of participants' families, affirming the importance of education as a means of poverty alleviation. Education has also increased women's awareness of their rights, including the right to participate in community or family decision-making. However, broader social transformation still depends on the level of societal acceptance of women's changing roles. If women's education continues to be encouraged, its impact can be sustained and create a more inclusive society, and foster deep and sustainable social change (Daly et al., 2023).

3. The Role of Education in Changing Gender Perceptions

Education plays a major role in changing people's perceptions of gender roles, especially in environments that were previously less accepting of women's active participation. In Aceh, education has given people a new understanding that women have equal potential to contribute to their families and communities. Women who receive education tend to have a broader view of their roles and have skills that enable them to play a role outside the domestic sphere. This has resulted in a change in societal perceptions, where families and communities that previously did not support women's education are now beginning to realize the positive value of education (Supadmi et al., 2024). In some communities, there is an increased appreciation of educated women, who are perceived to bring about positive changes both economically and socially. However, this change in perception has not occurred evenly across Aceh, especially in rural areas where traditional norms that limit women's roles are still maintained. By continuing to support education, it is hoped that society can fully accept women's participation as part of efforts to build a more equal and advanced society.

4. Implications for Education Policy and Practice in Aceh

Education policy in Aceh has major implications for women's empowerment but adjustments are still needed to truly improve access and quality of education for women across the region. While there are already policies that promote educational inclusion, their implementation still faces challenges, especially in remote areas. Policies such as providing special scholarships for women from low-income families and providing equitable education infrastructure in rural areas are essential to ensure that women have equal opportunities in accessing education (Begum et al., 2024). Educational institutions, both formal and dayah, also have an important role in empowering women, and practices such as more gender-responsive curricula or practical skills training can be strengthened to enhance women's role in the economy. In addition, collaboration between local government, educational institutions, and local communities can create educational programs that fit Aceh's cultural context, while still supporting women's empowerment goals. These inclusive policies and practices are expected to break down the cultural and economic barriers that have limited women, allowing them to contribute more broadly to society and reach their full potential.

5. Education Access Gaps and Social Implications

The gap in access to education for women in rural Aceh has a significant impact on their participation in social and economic life. When women have limited access to education, their opportunities to play a role in the economy or social organizations are severely limited. Without

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adequate education, women lack not only technical skills but also a basic understanding of their rights, so they are often marginalized in decision-making, both within the family and community. This condition exacerbates social inequality, where women tend to remain in domestic roles and find it difficult to develop themselves into economically independent individuals (Kim et al., 2019). In fact, education for women can be a catalyst for sustainable social change in rural areas, opening up opportunities for them to contribute in sectors such as entrepreneurship, public health and social advocacy. With inclusive education, women have a greater chance of becoming agents of change, contributing to improving the well-being of their communities and inspiring younger generations of women to continue their education.

In Hanis & Marzaman (2020) research, it was found that the family welfare empowerment program has not been implemented optimally. This is mainly due to the limited mastery of technology, especially among women in the village. This limitation reflects the low level of education received by women in the village, which in turn has an impact on the lack of knowledge and skills. If this condition is not addressed immediately, women are likely to remain limited to domestic roles, making it difficult to develop themselves into independent individuals.

6. Integration of Local Values with Empowerment Education

Local values such as gotong royong and the role of religion in Aceh have great potential to be integrated in women's education to support empowerment without ignoring local culture. Gotong royong, as a strong tradition of solidarity, can be adopted in a community education approach that involves all community members to support women's education. For example, the community can jointly build educational infrastructure, such as a shared learning space or skills training center, which can be utilized by women in the village. In addition, religious teachings that emphasize the importance of knowledge and goodness can be the basis for encouraging women's education, with local religious leaders providing strong support through progressive religious interpretations of women's rights and responsibilities in education (McCarthy, 2014). These local values not only strengthen the legitimacy of women's education in the eyes of the community but also ensure that education is not seen as a threat to existing social norms. The integration of these values in education allows the empowerment process to be culturally aligned, making it more easily accepted by the community and able to inspire deeper and more sustainable change.

7. The Role of the Community in Supporting Women's Education

Local communities and institutions have an important role in improving women's access to education, and their support can be a key factor in encouraging women's wider participation. Pesantren or dayah, for example, are not only centers of religious education but also places where women can develop social and economic skills. By providing access to education in an environment that is seen as safe and in line with religious values, pesantren help women overcome cultural barriers that limit their mobility. In addition, community and religious leaders have a major influence in changing gender perceptions through education, encouraging families to support girls' education. Village women's groups also play a very important role by providing a safe space for women to learn together and exchange experiences and motivating them to engage in socio-economic activities. The community's role in supporting women's education is crucial in breaking down gender stereotypes and encouraging women's active participation in various fields, creating a more inclusive and empowering society (Fitri et al., 2015).

8. Potential and Challenges of Empowerment Education Programs in Rural Areas

Empowerment education programs in rural Aceh have great potential to deliver wide-ranging socio-economic benefits, but are also faced with challenges. On the one hand, these programs have the potential to directly empower women through life skills training, health education, and financial literacy, enabling them to contribute to the family economy and expand their social roles. On the other hand, the biggest challenge lies in the traditional social and cultural context, where higher education for women is seen as less important. In addition, limited facilities and the lack of specific policy support for women's education in rural areas are barriers to optimal program implementation. In addition, transportation costs and travel safety for women are also obstacles to their participation in educational

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activities held outside the village. However, with support from the government and close collaboration with local communities, these education programs can be adapted to be more sensitive to local social and cultural conditions, making them more acceptable and providing positive long-term impacts for rural women's empowerment (Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2014).
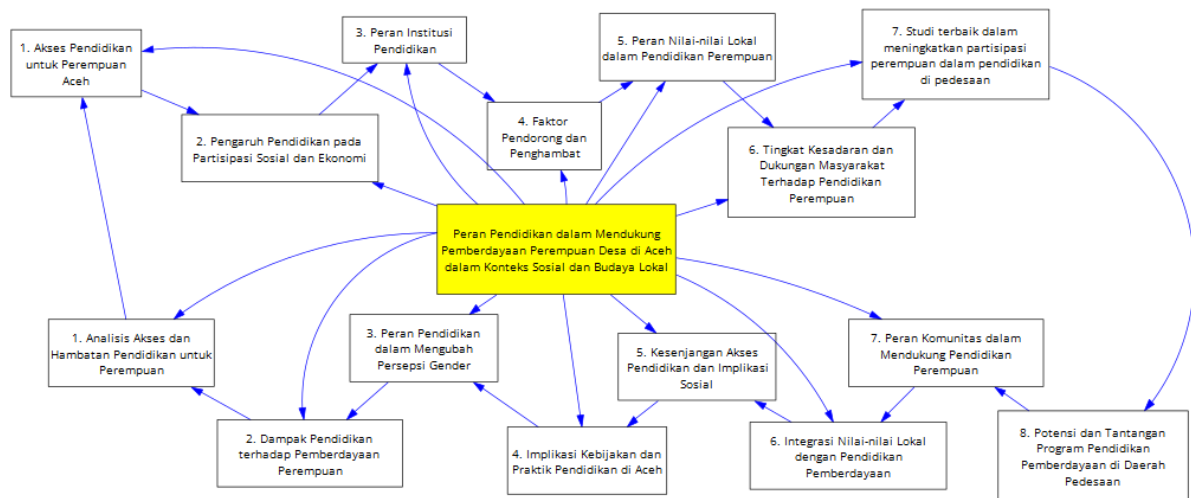

Figure 6. Education Model to Support Village Women Empowerment in Aceh in the Context of Local Social and Culture

The model illustrates the role of education in supporting rural women's empowerment in Aceh by considering the local social and cultural context (Jaya et al., 2022). At the center of the model is the main objective of increasing women's empowerment through inclusive and sustainable education. The model links key influencing factors such as access to education for Aceh women, the influence of education on social and economic participation, and the role of local education institutions such as schools and dayah in providing access and opportunities. In addition, family, social environment and government policies also influence women's participation. The model also highlights the importance of integrating local values, such as gotong-royong and the role of religion, in empowerment education to ensure cultural appropriateness. Local communities and institutions, including community leaders and women's groups, have a role in supporting changes in gender perceptions through education. Finally, the model acknowledges the challenges and potential of empowerment education programs in rural areas and the importance of best practices that have been successful in increasing women's participation in education. These interactions demonstrate the comprehensive efforts needed to create a social transformation that supports the role of women in Aceh.

CONCLUSION

Education has proven effective in supporting the empowerment of rural women in Aceh, particularly through increasing women's access to and participation in social and economic life. With education, rural women have greater opportunities to play an active role in society, acquire relevant skills and break down socio-cultural barriers that have limited their participation. Education also serves as a means to strengthen gender awareness and self-reliance values, helping women build networks and skills that improve their position in various fields. However, the effectiveness of this relies heavily on supporting education infrastructure, inclusive policies, and synergies between education and local values that promote equality. By integrating approaches based on local wisdom, education can become a foundation for sustainable empowerment, enabling village women to contribute more meaningfully to Aceh's social and economic development.

Suggesting policies that can support the inclusion of women's education in rural areas while integrating local values: development of education infrastructure covering primary to advanced education in remote areas with government and private sector support to overcome physical barriers; provision of scholarship and incentive programs specifically for rural women to reduce the economic burden of accessing education; teacher training to integrate local values in learning, such as character

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education and entrepreneurship based on local wisdom; collaboration with local communities, including community leaders, religious leaders and customary institutions, in formulating and supporting education programs that are inclusive of women in order to have cultural legitimacy; gender and education awareness campaigns in rural areas to change perceptions that limit women and highlight the economic and social benefits of their education; and life skills education programs that teach practical skills and entrepreneurship to empower women's economies in accordance with local values and conditions, which overall will enable sustainable and community-based recommendations and support increased women's participation in education while respecting relevant local values.

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